

7Summits of Systematic Theology

Adam Powers

Table of Contents

Foreword: Tanner Cline	5
Preface: Adam Powers	7
Foundations	
1) What is Theology?	8
2) How Does God Reveal Himself?	14
3) What is the Bible?	19
Summit 1 – Theology Proper: The Doctrine of God	
4) The Holy One	25
5) Ever Three and Ever One	33
6) The Independence of God	38
7) God’s Hidden and Revealed Will	42
8) The Providence of God	46
9) Incomprehensible Yet Knowable	50
10) Immutable Yet Mobile	54
11) The Wrath and Jealousy of God	58
12) The Mercy and Grace of God	63
13) The Wisdom of God	66
Summit 2 – Anthropology: The Doctrine of Man	
14) Man in His Original State	71
15) Man in His Fallen State	75
16) Man in His Redeemed State	79
17) The Doctrine of Depravity	82
Summit 3 – Christology: The Doctrine of Christ	
18) The Nature of Christ	88
19) The Names of Christ	92
20) The States of Christ	96
21) Christ’s Offices: Prophet	100
22) Christ’s Offices: Priest	104
23) Christ’s Offices: King	108
Summit 4 – Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Spirit	
24) Delighted Among the Trinity	113
25) The Pentecost Outpouring	117
26) Revealed and Illumined	123
27) Applied	127
28) Sanctified	130
29) Nourished	135
30) Gifted	140
31) Ripened	144
32) Kept	148

Summit 5 – Soteriology: The Doctrine of Salvation	
33) Covenant Theology	152
34) Common Grace	156
35) Election	160
36) Calling	164
37) Repentance	169
38) Faith	173
39) Justification	176
40) Adoption	180
41) Union With Christ	184
42) Glorification	188
Summit 6 – Ecclesiology: The Doctrine of the Church	
43) The Church as True Israel	193
44) The Images of the Church	196
45) The Marks of the Church	200
46) The Worship of the Church	204
47) The Sacrament of Baptism	208
48) The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper	213
49) The Members of the Church	217
50) The Officers of the Church	222
51) The Mission of the Church	226
Summit 7 – Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things	
52) Introduction to Eschatology	230
53) Death	235
54) The Immortality of the Soul	239
55) The Intermediate State	243
56) The Second Coming	247
57) The Millennium	251
58) The Final Judgment	255
59) Eternal Punishment in Hell	259
60) Eternal Reward in Heaven	263
Appendix: For Further Reading	267
Notes	269

Foreword

Imagine! Imagine a room filled with young families and friends singing hymns at the top of their lungs. Imagine a room filled with young adults smiling from ear to ear excited to hear the Bible taught, explained, and applied to their lives. Imagine in this same room adults with more miles on their tires joyfully worshiping alongside these young couples. You smell no scent of annoyance among them. Rather, you smell the warm, fresh aroma of Christ's love. You see first-hand how the body of Christ grows stronger with strands of mixed demographics. Can you imagine such a church? Can you imagine the excitement? Can you imagine the Holy Spirit blowing in such a beautiful way in this day and age? Is this scenario simply a pipe dream? No! This is no dream. I witnessed this dream come true. This beautiful picture makes no mirage. I have stood among such smiling, joyful, and loving faces. I thought to myself, "What a joy it must be to pastor these people." Adam Powers embraces the privilege of pastoring such a group.

What brings all of these people to such a place in life? The Holy Spirit's drawing power makes this dream a reality. God has gathered a group of people hungry for God's word. They rush to church ready to receive! They run to church knowing a great feast will be placed before them. Their faithful shepherd, Adam Powers, works hard to bring a well-balanced meal from the Bible. They drink deeply together and feast often on the milk and bread of God's, holy word.

On Sunday evenings, Adam Powers teaches lessons in theology. Those Sunday evening studies birthed the pages of this book. Therefore, the pages before you resemble a hiker's journal rather than a diary of ideas. They come not from a mere student of geography or a professor of theology. Rather, these pages flow from a pastor's pen. These pages mark an example of a shepherd tending his sheep. These pages come from a pastor's long hike with his people through the deep valleys, tough terrains, and steep summits of God's word. This work stands as a flag on a mountain's summit point! This flag waves as a sign of faithfulness in the face of the shifting winds of culture. This flag signals God's grace at work once again as a modern-day pastor seeks to obey the Apostle Paul's exhortation, "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Timothy 1:4).

Imagine! Imagine you receive a flyer in the mail inviting you to take such a hike. Imagine you're invited to join the hike with these people through the deep valleys, tough terrains, and steep summits of God's word. Imagine you're granted the privilege to climb alongside such a tour guide along with his crew. That is precisely what the following pages offer you!

Come alongside Adam Powers as he takes you on an exciting journey! Of course, this is no overnight camping trip. You won't be pitching a tent in your backyard. This is a long hike! Your goal is to reach seven summits! So, remember to drink deeply. Remember to feast often. Remember to guard every gift you receive. Remember to avoid straying from the path. Remember to avoid backbiting chatter. You must stay focused if you want to reach the top. Of course, the hardest work begins once you reach the top.

Once you reach the top and see the flag of faith waving defiantly in the wind, remember your responsibility to guard what you have seen, heard, and received. The Apostle Paul explains, “Guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge,’ for by professing it some have swerved from the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20). Once you’ve seen the depths and the heights of God’s word, you must embrace the responsibility to guard this news. Guard this precious news while you share this precious news with other potential hikers.

Tanner Cline
October 2018

Preface

“Of making many books there is no end...” (Ecclesiastes 12:12b)

Many books have been written about theology throughout the ages. I suspect that, as long as there are ministers preaching the Word to local congregations, there will continue to be books on theology written by those pastors for these congregations. This is a noble endeavor and ought to be taken up anew in every generation. This is what has driven the book you now hold in your hands. I have had the privilege of sitting under a very high quality of professors and theologians both at Reformed Theological Seminary and beyond. I have also been the recipient of a few well stocked libraries from aged pastors. I am eternally indebted to these men for passing onto me what they learned. All this to say, in this book I am not bringing anything new or original to the table. I do not aim at theological innovation. If anything, I'm bringing and setting before you what was once at the center of the table of the Church, the historic reformed faith. Where I have been helped by these ancient and modern reformers I have done my best to cite them in the footnotes, but I'm sure I have left some out. For this, I humbly ask that the reader will forgive me. What you have before you is the compilation of a systematic theology series I led our church through on Sunday evenings from February 2016 to June 2017. It was received with such gladness and interest that I set out to undertake a more lasting presentation of this material.

This work is dedicated to my wife and helpmate, Holly. You have stood firmly and unwaveringly by my side on the brightest and darkest of days. I don't deserve you and I am forever grateful for you. If it weren't for your constant encouragement I would not know the gospel as well as I do now, nor would I be the man I am today. I love you. What a life we get to have together!

Adam Powers
July 2017

Chapter 1

What Is Theology?

“Everyone is a Theologian.” (R.C. Sproul)

In my younger days I was an avid rock climber. For me, climbing was an adventure. Scaling cliffs and mountainsides I never thought possible, falling further than I'd like to more times than I'd like to admit, and reaching the top of certain routes to turn around and gaze out on a wondrous landscape before me. I did not climb for climbing, but for the view. Eventually, as I guess it does for most climbers, this adventurous spirit grew in me and led me to desire to train for and attempt the infamous quest of the seven summits. This quest is held near and dear to many in the climbing community because it is so difficult. Only the best climbers in the world have successfully climbed the tallest mountain on each continent and by doing so have earned the right to say they have completed the seven summits. Well, I have never attempted and likely won't attempt any of the seven summits in my life. But even though my best climbing is far behind me I have not stopped climbing at all. In fact, I am climbing far grander and more beautiful mountains than I ever dreamed of. What mountains I am climbing? The mountains of God. I'll let Charles Spurgeon introduce these mountains to you.

On the morning of January 7, 1855 Spurgeon began his sermon like this:

“The highest science...the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of the child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity, so deep that our pride is drowned in its infinity...when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height...we understand that no subject will humble the mind of man than the thoughts of God...But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe...this subject is humbling, expanding, but also comforting...in contemplating Christ, there is a balm for every wound and a bandage for every sore. Would you then loose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, and plunge yourself in God's deepest sea. Lose yourself in His ocean and you shall come forth as from rest, refreshed and invigorated...it is to this subject I invite you now.”¹

On this January morning in 1855 Spurgeon invited his hearers to climb the great mountains of God in the Scripture and if you've picked up this book consider yourself to

have received the same invitation from me. More on these summits in a moment, for now I must say one thing from the outset. Having become a Christian in college the Bible and its doctrines were by and large brand new to me. God had given me a thirst to read, to study, and to delve deeply into His Word. After college I went onto seminary where my passion for theology began to expand and be inflamed by a rich Christ-centered view of the Bible. Since then I've spent more than a decade in pastoral ministry and one of the largest surprises I found was that most people within the Church do not share this passion and zeal for a robust and Christ-centered theology. I began to hear a common refrain from Christians that goes something like this, 'Sure people found theology interesting back in the day, but don't you know it's the 21st century? I mean, can't we just do life without it? Doctrine just isn't practical.' This is a fair question and because of how widespread it has become it deserves our attention and an answer.

I will begin by making a statement. One that you may or may not agree with now, but by God's grace I hope you soon will. Here it is: believing theology is impractical and irrelevant for our lives is both dishonoring to God and harmful to man. Why? Three reasons at least.

First, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God might be complete, equipped for every good work." Since the Bible is God-breathed it is profitable, and because the Bible is profitable there is nothing more practical for your life than what it contains. It will teach you, rebuke you, comfort you, correct you, train you in righteousness, and equip you for the good works God has prepared us to do (Eph. 2:10), works that are to be done publicly so that others will glorify God (Matt. 5:16). Knowing what this passage teaches about the nature of Scripture moves us to ask, not whether if theology is practical, but 'are you interested in being trained for righteousness?' If you are you'll love the Bible and will therefore love theology. If you're not concerned about training in righteousness you won't love the Bible and won't love theology either.

Second, Psalm 111:2 says, "Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them." The works of God are great and if we think they're great our response to these great works will be a deep and rich study of them. But there is more. Not only will the great works of God lead us to study them, but from studying them we'll begin to delight in them. Too many people believe the two realities of deep study and deep delight have nothing to do with one another but this passage believes them to be inseparable. This is no accident. Studying the great works of God leads to a deep delight in God. Or we could say that studying the deep doctrines of God leads to experiencing deep joys in God. So naturally new questions come into view. Do you delight in God? Do you want to deepen your delight in God? Study His works. Where are His works found? His Word.

Third, Jeremiah 6:16 says, "Stand by the roads and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." In context Jeremiah is calling God's people back to what they have left behind, namely, the ancient ways of God which He gave to His people through Moses in the Law. Jeremiah's call in 6:16 to God's people before the Babylonian exile is God's call for us today. The duty and delight

of every Christian is to stand, look, and find out where ancient roads are, where the good way is and walk down them our whole lives.

I've stated the avoidance of theology dishonors God and hurts man, but the opposite is gloriously true. To do theology honors God and benefits man. These three passages above remind us of this and show us how incredibly practical theology is.

We can go further and say something that many Christians have forgotten today. Everyone is a theologian.² Have you ever thought of that? Everyone you've ever met in your life is a theologian, and you also, are a theologian. Let me explain. If you've ever had a thought about God – who God is, what God is like, what God demands of us, what God does, what God doesn't do, etc. – do you know what you're doing? You're doing theology. I've hear too many people say 'I don't do theology because it causes too much division and controversy. I just love Jesus.' Those who embrace this go through life with what they think is a simple faith that avoids all deep controversial issues while majoring on the basics. As admirable and well intended as this may be, it is severely mistaken. What's misunderstood is that the statement 'I don't do theology, I just love Jesus' is a profoundly theological statement. It's incorrect to be sure, but it is deeply theological nonetheless because it presents a view of God they not only have accepted, but a view of God they would recommend others to embrace as well. The point of this is simple, we can never escape theology. Even the person who rejects the claims of Christianity does theology when they examine, reject these claims, and form their own opinions of God.

So the question isn't 'Do you do theology or not?', the question is 'Do you do theology correctly or incorrectly?' That question is answered depending on how you do theology. Do you think about God on your own terms? Do your beliefs about God reflect what you want Him to be like or what you think He is like? Or do you submit to His Word and believe what His Word says about Him, even when it goes against what you would naturally want to be true? Doing theology on your own terms is simply humanism wrapped in Christian garb. Doing theology on God's terms regardless the cost to you is a rich, life-giving delight that captivates the souls of all those who dive into the ocean of Scripture.

Taking all of this together I can now make my second statement: I believe the pursuit of correct theological understanding is a vital necessity for the Christian life. I believe it is the Christians' chief pursuit to know God and we cannot know God in any real sense unless we know certain things about Him. Every good husband studies his wife to know her more and more. Every good parent studies their child to know them deeper. So too Christians must be those who desire to do theology rightly, deeply, and heartily for one reason above all else...to know God. But wait, let's ask one more question.

What is theology?

The answer to this question is given to us in the word itself. Many of you have been to schools or universities where you studied things like biology, anthropology, or psychology. These words, along with theology, all share the same ending 'ology.' This ending comes from the Greek word 'logos' (think of John 1:1) and means 'word' or the 'logic' of something. When this word is attached onto the end of a word we translate it as

‘the study of.’ So biology is the study of bios or life. Anthropology is the study of ‘anthropos’ or man. Psychology is the study of psyche or the mind and it’s behavior. When the word logos is attached to the Greek word theo (which means God) it becomes the word ‘theology’ and is translated into ‘the study of God.’ Simply put, theology is the study of God.

But where do we begin? It can be vastly intimidating to launch out into these waters without direction. So, learn what guides us. The underlying premise of all good theology is this: God Himself is the foundation and source of all truth. If we’re to learn anything truthfully in this world we must endeavor to learn it and understand it in light of God. This is why in every century throughout history, except ours, theology has been called ‘the queen of the sciences.’ The profession of theologian and even the philosopher were once seen as noble callings and extremely important vocations. I once heard R.C. Sproul say it’s a shame that this queen has been removed from her throne in our day, only to have the false ruler of ‘self’ reign in her place. The reason I have written this book is because I desire the ‘queen of the sciences’ to regain her throne in our churches today.

I’ve already told you that most Christians today are uncomfortable with theology because of how it is thought to divide rather than unify. What I haven’t told you is that when it comes to the science of systematic theology the level of discomfort increases fantastically. We see this in the fact that systematic theology used to be called the study of dogmatics. Today the word dogmatic is usually only used to describe someone who is close-minded, arrogant, or opinionated. Why then is this word now used in such a negative manner? Because theology, and systematic theology in particular, has fallen on hard times in our generation in and out of the Church. And ironically, it isn’t by making the truth of Scripture less offensive that reaches this modern world, it is only a true and rich theology is the only thing that can save us from the shallowness we’re seeing and feeling today. I think this bent against systematic theology is prevalent right now for two reasons.

The first reason people reject systematic theology is a reason that largely comes from outside the Church. This reason is the philosophy known as existentialism. Existentialism believes there are certain truths we can know but there is no one absolute truth for all to know. This is where the phrase ‘there are no absolute truths’ comes from. You’ve probably also heard someone say, ‘What’s true for you is true for you, that doesn’t mean it’s true for me.’ Existentialism teaches there are many purposes man can discover but there is no one grand purpose for which all mankind was made. Rather, the world is full of one thing – chaos. Because the world is full of chaos, no one can find a true, genuine system that makes sense for everyone. Because of this ‘systems’ are frowned upon today, or thought to be inauthentic, suspicious, or fake. As you can imagine the Bible strongly disagrees with this reasoning. The Bible does teach that there is an absolute truth, and this truth is not relative to each person but stands as true no matter where you are, who you are, or what you happen to think about it. The Bible does teach that there is one grand purpose for all mankind. And while the Bible does recognize that chaos is part of our world (because it is fallen), it teaches that order is more common than we care to admit and is in fact being brought back into the world through the preaching of the gospel.

Because of the Bible's view of truth, Christians throughout history have been eager to put the truths of Scripture into a system in an effort to understand it's teaching better. But when the philosophy of Existentialism came along and gained its massive influence systems of all kinds fell out of favor. Yet you and I can see some irony here because we live in world surrounded by systems. Social media wouldn't run without operating systems, cars wouldn't take us to anywhere if it weren't for detailed mechanical systems. Movie's wouldn't work if it weren't for their intricate electrical display systems. We are a people who feel the need to be constantly plugged into various systems. Thus, it's ironic that we think systems are inauthentic. Indeed, without systems our lives couldn't function as they do, and without systematic theology we couldn't make sense of the all the information the Bible gives us about God.

While the first reason I gave as to why people reject systematic theology comes from outside the Church, the second reason people reject systematic theology largely comes from inside the Church. There are a growing number of people who hold the belief that systematic theology is something the Bible never does. They say that by doing systematic theology we're taking the contents of the Bible and forcing them into preconceived categories using words and definitions that aren't in the Bible at all. Sometimes is said like this, 'The more we seek to systematize the truth, the farther we wander from the truth presented to us in the Bible.' Now, it is a shame that many have done this, many are doing it, and no doubt many will continue to do it. To impose a foreign system onto the Scripture is an irresponsible thing to do. But remember, just because a thing is abused doesn't mean we must also disuse the same. Rather than rejecting systematic theology because many do it wrongly, we ought to seek to do it correctly. As long as the system we seek to arrange is actually comes from the Scripture itself this is not a danger at all. You see, God sees truth as a whole and it is the duty of every Christian to see truth as God sees it, to think His thoughts after Him. This is why Christians from all spheres of life and vocations have set their minds on systematic theology ever since the 3rd century. In this endeavor we will use words that aren't in the Bible. Words like 'theology', 'trinity', and 'original sin.' Even though these words aren't in the Bible they do help us understand what the Bible says. But we have to remember one thing: these words must measure up to Scripture, not the other way around. Scripture is our final authority, definitions of theological words aren't. This is the responsible way to approach systematic theology.

Where We're Headed

So what will our approach be? Remember my desire to climb the infamous seven summits I spoke of at the beginning of this chapter? Well, historically the study of systematic theology has centered on the seven major doctrines of Scripture. It is these seven doctrines that form what I have called the 7Summits of Systematic Theology.

The Doctrine of God – Theology Proper
The Doctrine of Man – Anthropology
The Doctrine of Christ – Christology
The Doctrine of the Spirit – Pneumatology
The Doctrine of Salvation – Soteriology
The Doctrine of the Church – Ecclesiology

The Doctrine of Last Things – Eschatology

This is where we're headed in the pages that follow. But perhaps you've tracked with all this and still think doing theology feels like dissecting a frog in a cold science lab. If that is you be encouraged. The study of God doesn't have to be cold and lifeless. In fact I believe that those who set themselves to studying deep theology are the happiest people on earth. More so, those who study systematic theology benefit immensely because it is in truth the "application of Scripture to every area of life."³ With all the theological nonsense being taught in churches and being sold in Christian bookstores today there is a dire need a return to a profoundly deep and heartfelt devotion to correct and historic theology. Our minds need to be informed and our hearts need to be enflamed with the deep things of God. When we come to God on His terms, we come to know Him as He is. And when we know Him as He is, we know Him better, we know Him deeper, and our delight in Him grows and grows.

Where does this leave us? J.I. Packer prepares us well for these theological summits by saying, "We find ourselves in the position of a mountain climber who, after looking at a grand mountain from a distance and traveling near it, finds himself in the position to approach it directly with the intention of climbing it."⁴

Chapter 2

How Does God Reveal Himself?

*“We know God by two means: first by the creation...
second, He makes Himself known to us more
openly by His holy and divine Word.”
(Belgic Confession, Article 2)*

Christianity is a revealed faith. Because of the fall in Genesis 3 we cannot see God with our eyes, we cannot feel God with our hearts, and we cannot formulate a correct view of God with our minds. We are fallen creatures, and by stating that Christianity is a revealed faith implies that if any person on this planet is to know God at all, God must reveal Himself to us. St. Augustine taught this principle by using an illustration. He said picture a man with perfect vision standing in a pitch black room full of beautiful artwork. Can the man see the beauty of what’s around him? Of course not, it’s pitch black. Although the man has the proper equipment to see the art in the room, he can’t see any of it in the dark. “In the same way, St. Augustine said, the light of divine revelation is necessary for us to know anything about God whatsoever.”⁵

Recognizing that we cannot know God without Him revealing Himself to us, let’s ask a question: how does God reveal Himself to us? Here we find a distinction between two kinds of revelation, general revelation and special revelation. The term revelation doesn’t refer to the book of Revelation, but simply refers to God revealing Himself to us. We’ll begin with general revelation.

General Revelation

General Revelation is called general because that’s what it is. It’s knowledge of God that is general, or common to everyone. Every person, in every generation, regardless of religious belief, or physical location can see the general revelation of God. Psalm 19:1-2 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” This passage teaches that the entire world is God’s audience and all creation is the theater of His glory, so anyone can see the glory and grandeur of God displayed in creation. This is why some theologians call general revelation ‘natural revelation.’ The musician Andrew Peterson sings about this in one of his songs saying, “I can see Him in the sea’s of wheat, I can feel it in the horses run, howling on the snowy peaks, blazing in the midnight sun.”⁶ This is the reason we are drawn to sunsets, sunrises, tall mountains, and white beaches, because in them God reveals Himself.

Romans 1:18-20 further clarifies this saying, “For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” Notice what Paul says here. God’s attributes and eternal power are plain to all men, because God has shown it to us through what has been made. Creation visibly displays the invisible God. Because of this, all men know God and are without excuse. Paul concludes in Romans 1:21 saying, “For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” This is clear: all humanity has the opportunity to know God through general revelation, through creation. But we see the sin of man in that man refuses to acknowledge, delight in, or humbly submit to what we know to be true. Why does man refuse to acknowledge these things? Because by suppressing this truth our thinking becomes futile, and our hearts are darkened.

There are a few consequences to the reality of general revelation.

First, the folly of Atheism. Because God has revealed Himself to all men through what has been made, all men are without excuse. Yet the atheist says he or she doesn’t believe God exists because they say God has failed to give sufficient proof of His existence. Yet, these passages teach that deep down even the atheist knows God in a very real way. So what’s really happening in atheism is not a belief that God doesn’t exist, but rather a rejection of the God they know to exist. This is why Psalm 14:1 says it is only the ‘fool’ who says there is no God.

Second, the innocent native in Africa. Many people, many Christians even, believe that if someone grows up and lives their life in a remote part of the world where the gospel has not yet reached, and die, that they’ll go to heaven. This person is often referred to as the innocent native in Africa who has grown up, lived, and died without ever having heard the gospel. What happens to him? Is he innocent or guilty? Well, if there existed an innocent man in Africa he would go to heaven. But that’s the problem with this thought – there is no innocent person on the planet. All mankind is sinful in nature and guilty before God. We have the whole of our lives to seek out the God we know to be true. How does he know God to be true? From what has been made, therefore he is without excuse.

Third, the physically blind. Now, you may be tracking with me so far, but think there’s a loophole in this because there are people who are born blind. They can’t see what God has made in creation. Are they without excuse? The blind can’t see it, but the Bible says all can feel it. In Ecclesiastes 3:11 God says He has planted eternity in the souls of all men, so that we know there is more to life than what we experience. Also Romans 2:14-15 says the law of God has been written on our hearts which gives men, as John Calvin said, ‘sensus divinitatis’ or a sense of the divine. So those without the ability to see and those who have working eyesight know the general revelation of God and are without excuse.

Some of you may be thinking, ‘The gospel saves, people must know the gospel, how could someone ever know the gospel from just looking at creation?’ Well, one of the reasons general revelation is called general is that it doesn’t reveal any details of the redemption. You can’t learn of the birth, life, death, resurrection, or ascension from a sunset. You can’t learn of the call for repentance and belief from a palm tree. This shows us the difference between general revelation and special revelation. General revelation does indeed give a true knowledge of God, but it is only in God’s special revelation where we gain a knowledge of God that is sufficient for salvation. Which leads us to the next way God reveals Himself.

Special Revelation

While God (in general revelation) reveals some of Himself to all people, God (in special revelation) reveals all of Himself to some people. This is special revelation, where we learn of the details of redemption through the Scripture. Hebrews 1:1-3 shows this, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things, through whom He also created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power.” Here we see the pattern of special revelation God has done throughout redemptive history. Moses, the prophets, Jesus, the apostles, the Bible, and the Church.

Moses

God had revealed Himself to the Patriarch’s Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in various dreams, visions, and sometimes even audible speech. But we don’t find God telling anyone to write down His special revelation until we get to Moses. This makes Moses the first prophet of God’s people, through whom God would reveal Himself by His Word to His people Israel. Moses wrote down what God told Him to and the finished product is Genesis-Deuteronomy, the Law.

The Prophets

After the death of Moses, God raises up prophet after prophet, sometimes two at a time to reveal Himself to Israel, giving His Word to His people. When you survey the main bulk of teaching and preaching these Old Testament prophets we see they were calling God’s people back to Moses, or back to the Law. They were calling them back to the Word.

Jesus

Finally after years and years of prophet after prophet giving God’s Word to God’s people, God Himself revealed the exact imprint of His nature, and gave His people the Incarnate Word, His Son Jesus Christ. Every prophet, priest, and King foreshadowed Jesus, so in Christ we find the true Prophet who is the very Word of God given to God’s people, the true Priest who makes the perfect sacrifice by offering Himself on the altar of God, and the true King who rules over God’s people sitting at the right hand of God the Father. He will come again to usher in His Kingdom fully, and judge the world in righteousness.

The Apostles

After Jesus' earthly ministry we see Jesus pass on the message of salvation to His apostles, who then, after Pentecost, spread the message of the gospel in the power of the Spirit, where we see God grow His Church through His preached Word. There is a pattern here. Just as God used Moses' preaching to reveal Himself and gather the one nation of Israel, after Pentecost it was the apostles preaching that God used to reveal Himself and gather His Church from all nations.

The Bible

Then, as Moses wrote down the Law, we see the apostles being inspired and carried along by the Holy Spirit to write down Scripture. Their Scripture when completed was compiled and forms the New Testament Canon. Thus, this Bible we have in our hands is God's final special revelation to us.

The Church

Just as the prophets were given God's Word to call God's people back to the Law, so too now the Church is to use God's Word to call God's people back to the Scriptures given to us by the apostles.

All of this means God reveals Himself through His Word. We don't need to look for miracles, signs in the sky, or dreams and visions to know God or to be led by God. We now have the full revelation of God and 2 Peter 1:3 says it is this Word that gives us "everything we need for life and godliness." Since it's everything we need we don't need to look for any other revelation from God. This also means we should never add to or take away from His Word. When the apostles finished their writing the canon of Scripture was closed, and God's revelation now stands compiled and completed. This is why there is such a serious threat at the end of the book of Revelation. In 22:18-19 the apostle John says, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." In context, John is referring to his own book of Revelation, but this also stands as a warning to anyone who would seek to add to or take away from the Bible. The Bible is done, finished, closed, and in it we have all we need. This is the meaning of Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." There are secret things yes, God is inexhaustible, and those secret things are secret for a reason, we're not to devote ourselves to them. But we are to devote ourselves to what He has revealed, nothing more, nothing less.

For the Christian it is our joy and duty to honor God's special revelation given to us by believing it and submitting to it. This is for us personally as Christians, and for us corporately when we gather as His Church. His Word, His special revelation, is the very thing that guides, governs, and leads us in all things. If we do not submit to it we think we know better than God about how the Christian ought to live personally and what the Church is to do when we gather corporately. Recall that we, who are born sinners, hating God and hating one another, God (who was under no compulsion to reveal Himself to us) revealed Himself to us in a special manner. Once we embrace His special revelation it is our joy to share this special revelation with as many people as we can. From Moses, to

the prophets, to Jesus Christ, to His apostles, to the Bible, and to the Church. This is the pattern of God's special revelation, where He has disclosed the details of His name, His nature, His works, His ways, and His redemption for the glory of His name. So again, we believe in a revealed faith. All revelation we have from God is by God's initiative. General revelation comes to us in creation, special revelation comes to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

To end, hear article 2 from the Belgic Confession. "We know God by two means: first by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like an elegant book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God...all these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself known to us more openly by His holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for His glory and for the salvation of His own."

Chapter 3

What is the Bible?

*“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

In the previous chapter we looked into the nature of how God has revealed Himself in general revelation and in special revelation. For this present chapter I like you to linger a bit more with me on the nature of God’s special revelation. Let’s ask and answer one question: what is the Bible? It is the Word of God.

When I say that I mean it, literally. The Bible is the Word of God. I don’t mean the Bible contains the word of God within it, or that by reading the Bible you can find the true Word of God in its teachings. No. The Bible doesn’t contain the Word of God within it. Rather, the entire Bible – the whole thing – is the Word of God. The Bible doesn’t merely bear witness to the truth it is the truth. Every word carries with it a divine weight. This is why the study of the original languages of Hebrew and Greek is so important, and why such care is needed not only in translating the Scripture to other languages but choosing a faithful translation for our daily reading today. Jesus held a similar view and in Matthew 5:18 said that until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle, not one iota or dot of the Scripture shall pass away. The grass will wither, the flower will fade, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.

We can and should go further than this because when you say the Word of God is the Bible, a new question arises: how do we define and describe the Word of God? That is what we’ll now do. Historically this question has been answered using eight terms. We’ll do the same and go through all eight terms one at a time. We can separate the first three terms from the second five terms, because the second five terms are consequences flow out of the first three foundational terms.

Foundational Terms

Inspired

To say the Word of God is inspired is to say it is top down revelation, from God to us. There is only one place where the word inspired is used in the English Bible, 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "All Scripture is inspired (literally – God breathed) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." This verse teaches that all Scripture comes from the very breath of God, such that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments come to us directly from heaven. Now, when we speak of inspiration what's in view is the manner in which God superintended or oversaw the writing of Scripture. Plus, when the writing of Scripture is in view the work of the Holy Spirit comes into view as well. 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, "...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Men spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along. This is how God brought about the writing of the Bible.

At this point there can be some misunderstanding regarding the doctrine of inspiration. Some believe the biblical authors had a divine intuition that led them to write certain things. Some believe the Holy Spirit to varying degrees influenced the biblical authors instinct and reason. Some believe the Bible is a normal book written by normal men but becomes inspired only when one has an encounter with God in it. Others believe the Holy Spirit gave a large amount of direction to the authors but left the words up to them. Still others believe God merely dictated to the biblical authors and then they in response wrote down what they heard, like a secretary takes down a letter from their boss. These are all misunderstandings of how inspiration worked.⁷ To be honest, the Bible doesn't tell us exactly how God carried these men by the Spirit to write. We just know He did. Another reason the dictation theory should be rejected is because when we encounter the Scriptures we find distinct differences in the biblical authors. For example the writing of the apostle John was very basic with simple Greek whereas Luke and the author of Hebrews employed a Greek that's more complex and intricate. We see Mark using a specific vocabulary that none of the other authors use, and we see Paul writing long sentences in Greek while others write shorter sentences. Why do these difference in the biblical authors matter? Because we can clearly see the personality of each author coming through in their own writing. So God did indeed carry these men along by the Spirit to pen the Scripture but He did it in such a manner where each author's unique personality comes through in the writing as well. This doesn't exactly tell how God did this, but it does imply that there was more involved than mere dictation.

Infallible and Inerrant

Any teaching on the nature of the Bible must include an examination of the two words infallible and inerrant. They are easier to understand when you see them together as opposed to separate. For something to be infallible it means that it cannot fail, and for something to be inerrant means that it does not contain error. Taken together these two words mean not only that the Scriptures do not err, but they cannot err. It is right for us to embrace these two words because error comes from two sources, deceit and mistake. God never deceives and God never makes mistakes (Numbers 23:19). God is truthful, therefore He speaks words that are true. In our day the term inerrancy has fallen on hard times. It is seen as a kind of blind belief that we should grow out of as we mature in faith. In the place of inerrancy many people now teach and believe an idea called 'limited inerrancy' which teaches that the Bible is errant when it speaks of history, science, or

culture, but is inerrant only when it speaks on matters of faith and practice. And as you'd guess they leave it up to the individual to define what is inerrant in the Bible and what is not.

The reason the Church should reject limited inerrancy and embrace a full inerrancy is simple, Jesus held this belief about Scripture. He believed the Scriptures to be inerrant. Listen to a just a few passages from Jesus. Matthew 5:18, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." John 10:35, "Scripture cannot be broken." John 17:17, "Sanctify them in the Truth, Your Word is truth." Jesus also proved His case in various occasions by referring to the Old Testament simply saying "It is written."

So we have the three foundational terms of Scripture: inspired, infallible, and inerrant. If we believe the Bible to be these three things, it automatically means the Bible is much more as well. Flowing out of these three foundational terms are five more terms that we call the attributes of Scripture.

Attributes of Scripture

Authority

Since the Bible is God's inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word it holds the highest authority over us so that when the Bible speaks to us God speaks to us. Or to say it another way, God through His Word stands over us, rules over us, and makes commands of us. We do not stand over God or His Word as if we were the judge of Him. To say the Bible is authoritative is to say it imposes requirements on those who hear it. When God commands, we're to obey. When God promises, we're to trust. When God declares, we're to believe Him. This is illustrated all throughout Scripture. Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses, Israel, and the prophets all experienced God exercising His authority over them by His Word. God then sends Jesus, His incarnate Word, who exercised God's authority in His teaching. Jesus sent out the apostles in His name as ambassadors to exercise this very authority. Now, through the writing of the apostles the same authority is exercised over you and over me. Throughout all of redemptive history God has, is, and will continue to exercise His authority over all creation through His Word. Therefore to disregard the Bible as if it had no authority over our lives is to disregard God Himself.

Necessity

To say that Scripture is necessary is simply to say that we need it. We need this in two ways. First, we need Scripture in order to be saved. We need Scripture because God's general revelation to mankind in creation is inadequate to give mankind knowledge of salvation. The only place mankind learns of redemption is in Scripture, and so if anyone is to be saved they must have the Word of God. When Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness He responded to Satan's temptation in regard to His hunger by saying, "Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Romans 10:17 also shows this saying, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Second, we need Scripture in order to live Christian lives, meaning we need Scripture because only there do we find a full explanation of who God is and what He demands of us. Just as the only place mankind

can learn of redemption is in the Bible, so too, the only place mankind can learn of obedient Christian living is in the Bible. This is why Israel received the Law; that they would know how to walk and please God both in the wilderness and in the promise land. This is also why we, the Church, now have the Old and New Testaments; that we would know how to do life in this world so as to glorify God in all we do, walking in a manner fully pleasing to Him. We need Scripture, it is wisdom from above that transcends human wisdom. No Scripture, no salvation. No salvation, no Christian living.

Clarity

Psalm 19:7-9 says Scripture revives and reinvigorates the soul, makes us wise, rejoices the heart, and enlightens our eyes. 2 Tim. 2:15 states that Scripture is able to make us wise in the ways of salvation. God intends His Word to be clear to His people, and from reading it we're to gain a sure clarity about God's truth. The Westminster Confession 1.7 says it well. "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due sense of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them." This paragraph explains what is meant by the clarity of Scripture. Not everything in the Bible is clear, there are questions and in it there things hard to understand. But, those things which are necessary for the salvation of man and the Christian life, are so clearly taught that anyone willing to look into the Bible can understand them. This idea of the clarity of Scripture was a hallmark of the Protestant Reformation because prior to the Reformation the Roman Catholics taught and believed the Bible is so complex the average priest can barely understand and interpret it; and if the average priest can barely grasp the Bible's teachings how can the common man ever have a hope of understanding it? Because of this belief the Roman church never translated the Bible into common languages but kept it in Latin which only the priests could read. With the Reformation came the endeavor to translate the Bible into the common man's language so the common man could understand it. And just as this was a hallmark of the Reformation, it must be a hallmark of the Church today. We must always be translating and applying the Scriptures to our lives if we're to know God and understand His will. Or as the English Puritan John Owen once said, "The conferring and comparing of Scriptures is an excellent means of coming to an acquaintance with the mind and will of God in them."⁸

Sufficiency

To say the Scripture is sufficient is to say it contains all that is needed for any aspect of human life. This means the Bible is comprehensive, that across-the-board it includes all we need to know for all of life. 2 Peter 1:3-4, "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through our knowledge of Him who has called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." Peter means to tell us that all of Scripture is sufficient for all of life. In the Bible we find great and precious promises, and through those promises we learn how to become partakers of God's divine nature, which will allow us to escape to fallenness of the world. Some of you may be thinking, 'Sure, the Bible tells us a lot about God, but what does it have to say about fixing my transmission? Or potty training my dog?' Fair questions, and here's

my answer. Scripture does indeed contain more information relevant to doctrine than automotive repairs and dog training, but the sufficiency of Scripture should remind us that those doctrinal truths, those precious promises as Peter put it, teach us how to live while doing automotive repairs and dog training. John Frame says it well, “The Bible’s sufficiency isn’t sufficiency pertaining to specific information but sufficiency of the divine words themselves.”⁹ Whatever we do, the Bible will teach us how to do it to God’s glory, in this way – all of Scripture is sufficient for all of life.

Beauty

This last attribute of Scripture is perhaps a concluding implication of all the other terms I’ve mentioned in this chapter, but it is nonetheless important. The Bible is inspired, infallible, inerrant. We can clearly see its authority, necessity, clarity, and sufficiency. After embracing all these things we’ll then see one last thing, its beauty.¹⁰ By saying the Scripture has beauty is to say that which it reveals to us carries more beauty than any other thing. What does Scripture reveal to us? God. Who He is, what He’s like, and what He requires of us. He is beautiful in His glory, matchless in His wonder, and stunning in His splendor. He is ultimately what the Scriptures reveal to us, and He is beautiful.

Summit 1

Theology Proper – The Doctrine of God

Chapter 4

The Holy One

*“Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,
though the of sinful man Thy glory may not see,
only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.”
(Reginald Heber)*

For the past three chapters we’ve covered introductory matters. We’ve covered the importance of theology, the way in which God reveals Himself to us, and the nature of the Bible. To use another climbing analogy: these first three chapters have been our hike to the mountain. Here in this chapter we begin climbing our first and largest of the seven summits of systematic theology, the doctrine of God. On this summit we’ll look into the name, the nature, the person, the power, the works, the wisdom, the greatness, and the glory of God. Here in the doctrine of God we’ll discover God’s character, and that is why this is the first of our seven summits, because if we understand the character of God rightly (or, as given to us in Scripture) we’ll then rightly understand every other doctrine in Scripture.

So what is God like? This has been a big question throughout the ages, and even in our culture today this question looms large over us. It seems that there are as many opinions about God as there are people on the planet, which means the answer to this question can feel largely subjective and ambiguous. Though this is the case we must always remember that when it comes down to it, it really doesn’t matter what we think God is like. God is who He is. Whether or not we agree with God concerning what He says about Himself doesn’t change anything. God is who God says He is, and that’s the end of the matter. So rather than asking what is God like, let’s ask another question. What does God say He is like? That is a question with a clear answer.

God is Holy

The first time God meets with Moses in Exodus at the burning bush God tells Moses in 3:5, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” The reason the ground is holy isn’t because there’s something special or unique about the ground but because God was there and He is holy. For God to be holy means He is separate, unlike anything or anyone else, that He is utterly unique, transcendent, majestic, and His holiness compels us to worship Him. Thus Moses was to

show a reverence and respect by removing his shoes. Later when God gathers all Israel around Mt. Sinai to hear His Law He warns them in Exodus 19:23 to not come near the mountain because the whole mountain was holy. The temple was called a holy place and the innermost part of the temple was called the 'most holy place' in Exodus 26:33. This of course was the space inside the veil, and because it was the most holy place there were strict rules and regulations to follow if a priest was to enter into it. What does all this mean? If Moses couldn't come near God in the burning bush because of God's holiness, if Israel couldn't come near the mountain because of God's holiness, and if a priest had to follow very strict regulations to enter into the God's 'most holy place' we learn that there is something treacherous, even dangerous, about God's holiness.

Perhaps you already know why this is so. You see, the problem is simple: while God is holy we are not holy, thus God tells us to back away. If man is to approach the holy God we must come near in repentance, awe, and wonder rather than pridefully, carelessly, and lightly. And when we come correctly we find a beautiful thing happen – God makes us holy. God's people are called God's 'holy people' in Exodus 19:6, who gather on a holy day (Exodus 16:23) in a holy assembly (Exodus 12:16) where holy sacrifices would be offered (Exodus 26:33) by a holy priest anointed with holy oil (Exodus 30:25) wearing holy garments (Exodus 31:10). This is really, the entire point of the book of Leviticus. In Leviticus we read of regulations, rites, rituals, sacrifices, offerings, and many laws about this and that – because of one massive reality – a holy God must only be approached by a holy people. And as we move into the New Testament does it surprise you that this doesn't change? Jesus is called holy many times, and now God calls His people 'saints' or 'holy ones' who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are members of His holy church.

I want to show you God's holiness in two ways. First, in the historical Omni's and second, in Isaiah 6:1-7.

The Omni's

Omnipresence

When the Latin word 'omni' (meaning 'all') is paired with our word presence we get the word omnipresence. To say that God is omnipresent is to say God is all-present. 1 Kings 8:27 says heaven and earth can't contain God. Jeremiah 23:23-24 says God is a God at hand and not far away, that no man can hide in secret places so that God cannot see him. Acts 17:28 says God is not far from any man. Psalm 139:7-10 says, "Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."

That God is all-present in all times and in all places means there is nowhere we can go where God is not. Theologians call this God's immensity and mean by this that God transcends all spatial limitations, and yet is present in every point of space with His whole being. So God is both transcendent in that He is eternal and outside of time and space, but also immanent in that He is 'a God at hand and not far away' to each person who has lived, is living, or will ever live. We should believe that God is present in all things, but take caution and remember God also remains distinct from all things. God is

present in the atoms that make up a tree but God is not a tree. Also God is not equally present in the same sense in all things. He is not present on earth as He now is in heaven, He is not present in animals as He is in man, and He is not present in the wicked as He is in the righteous.

Omniscience

When the Latin word 'omni' is paired with our word science (which means knowledge) we get the word omniscience. To say that God is omniscient is to say that God is all-knowing. He is perfect in knowledge, Job 37:16. God fully knows our hearts, 1 Samuel 16:7. God knows the places of our habitations, Acts 17:26. God knows what we need before we pray, Matthew 6:32. God knows when we sit down, when we rise up, He knows our thoughts, motivations, actions, and habits, He is acquainted with all our ways and before a word is on our tongue He knows it altogether, Psalm 139:1-4. Hebrews 4:12-13 says God's Word searches out the heart of man, into the deepest parts, and knows the thoughts and intentions of all men. Romans 11:33-36 where Paul is soaring in praise says, "Oh the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever, amen."

God knows all things. He knows Himself fully, He knows all that comes from Him, He knows all things that actually come to pass (past, present, future), and knows all things that could have possibly come to pass (past, present, future). He knows the hidden things, the mysteries of Deuteronomy 29:29, He knows the depths of human heart, and His knowledge is the source of all other knowledge on this planet, so much that if something is true, it came from God. Or to say it another way, no knowledge exists apart from God's knowledge because all truth is God's truth.

Omnipotence

When the Latin word 'omni' is paired with our word potent we get the word omnipotence. To say that God is omnipotent is to say God is all-powerful. Jeremiah 32:27 and Genesis 18:14 say nothing too hard for the Lord. Matthew 3:9 proclaims that God is able. Job 9:12 says no one can turn God's hand back. Job 42:2 says no purpose of God's can be thwarted. Matthew 19:26 says with God all things are possible. Romans 1:20 says God's power is clearly seen from what has been made. Ephesians 1:19 speaks of God's immeasurable power toward those who believe. The whole thought of God's omnipotence is carried into the name the Patriarchs used 'El Shaddai' which means God Almighty. So God's power is tied to God's might in the name El Shaddai, and throughout the rest of Scripture we see His power portrayed clearly and strongly in both judgment and in grace. Now we should also state that the Bible states there are things God cannot do. For example, Numbers 23:19 says God cannot lie or change His mind, 1 Samuel 15:29 says God cannot regret, 2 Timothy 2:13 says God cannot be unfaithful to His people, Hebrews 6:18 says it is impossible for God to lie, James 1:13 says God cannot be tempted by evil, and James 1:17 says God cannot change or vary. These passages do impact our definition of omnipotence, making it more something like this: God is all-powerful, He can do all that His Word says He can do, or perhaps more clearly, God in

His power can and does bring to pass all within His holy will that is in accord with His nature.¹¹

Holy, Holy, Holy

In chapter 42, of Herman Melville's great American novel *Moby Dick*, Ishmael reflects on the whiteness of the whale. He makes a lengthy argument that 'whiteness' is normally characteristic of beauty and purity, like in a pearl or the whiteness of untouched snow. Yet, when it came to *Moby Dick*, that great albino whale, it was precisely his whiteness that appalled Ishmael the most. Why? Because it didn't lead him to thoughts of beauty of purity, it led to him to believe the whale was wholly other than any other creature of the deep, a singular and incomparable monster created in Leviathan like manner to bring ruin onto men...and in the face of such ghastly grandeur, Ishmael felt like nothing.

In all the reading the late Dr. R.C. Sproul did in his life, he said it was here in chapter 42 of *Moby Dick* that he felt like he was reading Isaiah 6 where the unholiness of mankind is felt in comparison to the majesty of God's holiness. Such things are good for us to feel. I say all this because this morning we're beginning a summer sermon series on holiness. We've titled it HOLINESS: Distinct From the World – Distinct For the World. There is much more to explain about this but for today, it is our hope to present one thing and one thing only: the holiness of God. To do so there is no better place for us cast out into this ocean than Isaiah 6.

First, the Context.

"In the year that King Uzziah died..." In the 52 years King Uzziah reigned the people of God enjoyed prosperity and ease. It was such a prosperous time that King Uzziah began to grow prideful and the people followed suit.¹² They began growing dull, a spiritual decline set in, and everyone began to feel it (2 Kings 15, 2 Chronicles 26). Interesting to note that in the same year King Uzziah died another great city was founded in Italy on the banks of Tiber River, the city of Rome. So in the same year that King Uzziah was dying and the people of God began to decline and the city of Rome was founded and began flourishing, it's during this year that Isaiah is called into ministry by a stunning revelation of God's holy glory.¹³

Second, the King

It is not a mere detail that the King died. Isaiah wants us to see a contrast here. As the earthly King expires Isaiah saw the Greater King still ruling and reigning on His heavenly throne. This would've encouraged Isaiah that God's purposes continue for His people even when the nation's ruler dies and the nation despairs. It would've reminded Isaiah that God is not undone by what undoes man.¹⁴ It also would've reminded him that while all men come and go God remains forever. Psalm 29 says it, "The Lord sat enthroned as King over the flood, the Lord sits enthroned as King forever." Psalm 90:2 echoes it, "...from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." This means there will never come a time when God is not. Regardless if Time magazine proclaimed God to be dead in 1966, He remains (!) and always will. John Piper once said God, "...will be living ten trillion ages from now when all the puny attempts against his reality will have sunk into oblivion like bb's at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean."¹⁵ Or in other words, God not only deserves

to reign supreme, He does reign supreme. No one makes Him Lord, He is Lord forevermore!¹⁶

6:1 says Isaiah "...saw the Lord sitting on the throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple." Isaiah did not see this glorious vision of a god sitting in a field, or on white shores, or in a flowery mountain side. He saw Him on His throne. This is raw authoritative majesty that will never change. We all know what this means when it speaks of the train of God's robe. In a wedding the train of the bride's dress is long for a reason, it signifies the beauty of the bride. It exists to make much of her. I can still remember standing up front seeing the doors in the back of the church swing open to reveal Holly in her wedding gown, walking down the aisle. It was a sight to see, it was gripping, captivating, beautiful, and magnificent to behold. The train of her dress flowed behind her, and the whole moment seemed to be filled with wonder and awe. Similarly, when we see the train of God's robe filling the temple we're meant to see and feel similar things. It is meant to signify the magnificence of His beauty. It doesn't merely take a few people to hold His train, God's robe spills out over the sides of His throne, moving across the floor, completely engulfing the whole of the heavenly temple! Lesson? His majesty is unparalleled. His beauty is unequaled. His splendor is unending.

Third, the Seraphim

6:2 mentions creatures called seraphim who are standing above the throne. With two wings they covered their faces, with two wings they covered their feet, and with two wings they flew. The word "serapim" means "burning ones." This is telling because the word refers to both the fiery angelic beings themselves and what they were created by God to do – burn in worship before the Lord of hosts! These seraphim are not mere mosquitoes buzzing around the throne or fat baby like angels with a cute bow and arrow. They are heavenly angelic fiery beings worshipping the only One worthy of worship. These are creatures that if we were to see them we would think that we had died and were standing before God Himself. There's a reason every time an angel shows up the first words they say are "Don't be afraid." They, in themselves, are a sight to behold, they're terrifying, but not nearly as terrifying or awe-some as the One who made them.

6:3 says, "One called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!" The significance of the anthem of the angels is massive. The Jewish people had various ways to express emphasis in their literature, and they used these expressions in the Bible. We do the same today to emphasize things: we may use italics, we may put a word in all caps or bold letters to draw attention to it, or maybe even attach very intense or alarming descriptive adjectives to the word we want to emphasize to get attention. Isaiah did the same and in his culture the way to communicate supreme importance was repetition. See here in v3 a rare threefold repetition, so rare even has been given the name the Trisagion (thrice holy song). Notice how 6:3 is phrased? The seraphim cry out in response to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy." What does this mean? This means first what it says, that God is holy. But it means more. In all of the Scripture from Genesis – Revelation this verse is the only place where we see an attribute of God raised to the third degree. God is not just "holy", He's not just "holy, holy", He's "holy, holy, holy." Nowhere do we see the Bible say that God is sovereign, sovereign, sovereign – or love, love, love – or mercy, mercy, mercy – or righteous, righteous, righteous – or just, just, just. Nowhere in Scripture do we see an attribute of God have such importance.

Now I am aware that it is dangerous and bad theology to try to pit one attribute of God against another, or to try and assemble a hierarchy of attributes so as to make one more important than others. This is an error people make all the time. In talking with others about God's character, especially when we're talking about His sovereignty or justice, or wrath, I often hear people say, "I don't believe that, my God is a God of love, He would never do such a thing." Well surely God is a God of love, but just as we can't come to the Bible as if it were a cafeteria line, putting things on our plate only if they are pleasing to our tastes, leaving the others we don't like...so too we can't come to the Bible on our terms but on its terms. We cannot construct a hierarchy of attributes as if one were more important than others, BUT if the Bible shows us that out of all the attributes of God there is one that rises to the top – we must believe it. Such is the holiness of God. The use of the threefold repetition of Holy, Holy, Holy teaches us that the one defining characteristic of God's nature is His holiness; it is who He is. Therefore we must speak of all of God's attributes underneath God's holiness. His love is a holy love, His wrath is a holy wrath, His mercy is a holy mercy, His justice is a holy justice, and so on, and so on.

But notice the lyrics of the song as it continues. When it says in 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" why does it not say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His holiness?" If holiness is the one defining characteristic of God, why does it say the earth full of God's glory and not His holiness? It would seem then, that the text is implying that there is a connection between God's holiness and God's glory. What is that connection? Based on this passage, the Glory of God is the holiness of God put on public display. When the holiness of God fills the earth for people to see, it is called glory. Or think of it like this, the basic meaning of holy is "separate" from what is common. You see God is unique, there is none like Him, He is one of a kind. We value gold and diamonds over tin and copper because they're rare or uncommon. Since God is one of a kind, since there is none like Him, since He is separate, since He is holy – God is infinitely precious and valuable above all other things. When His infinite value is put on display before the eyes of the seraphim and Isaiah, they call it "Glory!" So, God's glory is the radiance (or the shining-forth) of his holiness, the out-streaming of His incomparable worth.¹⁷ Nothing is more beautiful than this, nothing is greater than this. His glory is so immense that though we see 6:3 say it fills the whole earth we can be sure the whole of the universe isn't large enough to contain this majestic glory. But though the earth can't fully contain it, the whole earth does truly display it. Indeed all of creation is the theater of the glory of God. That the holy glory of our holy God fills the earth to the brim means it is God's will to make all the earth an extension of His heavenly throne room. Habakkuk longed for this day when the "...earth would be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).¹⁸ The evidence that God is actually doing this is everywhere, in fact there is so much evidence of God's glory in what He has made in creation Paul says in Romans 1:19-20 that all men are without excuse. The beauty of a sunrise, the calm of a sunset, the vastness of the oceans, the immense expanse of the skies, the cry of a baby, the friendship between two people, the love between a husband and wife. Ever since Genesis 1 when God said "Let there be light" it seems that there has been a kind of symphony to behold in all of creation, which all that has been made joins in on. When was the last time you noticed it? When was the last time you remembered that you were made walk in step with this great song of Glory?!

Fourth, the Prophet

We see Isaiah's response to the scene unfolding before him in 6:4-5, "And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost (ruined, undone); for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Immediately we see the foundations of the heavenly temple shaking in response to the vibrant worship happening before the King. Their worship was intense, their worship was deep, their worship was white-hot! Friends, do you shake? Do you tremble when you worship the King? Is there a reverent fear when we worship? We need to be rebuked. Nowhere throughout the whole of the Bible do we see anyone coming into contact with God and leave that meeting feeling disinterested! The whole temple shook with worship, it filled with smoke, and yet here as we worship in this room and what do we do? Stand here unmoved by the glory of God, think about checking Facebook, take a sip of coffee, give a tip to God in the offering plate, start itching to leave early to see the game? Far too many of us are duped into thinking that God's glory, God's holiness, God's perfections, beauty, majesty, and awe are not practical – so we avoid these things and deprive ourselves the richest resource to feed our souls! Pragmatist's do not linger over the glory of God, only those who've seen it and savored it linger on this the greatest of all things. Jonathan Edwards did this and from it he concluded that, "One new discovery of the glory of Christ's face and the fountain of his sweet grace and love will do more towards scattering clouds of darkness and doubting in one minute than anything else." God is ultimate reality, there is no One more real, there is no reality more practical than Him.

But did you notice that we don't only see the foundations of the temple shaking? We see Isaiah shaking too. When Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up, shining forth in all the beauty of His infinite and incomparable glory, Isaiah gained knowledge of two things: for the first time in Isaiah's life he found out who God was, and for the first time in Isaiah's life he found out who Isaiah was as he was deconstructed in God's presence. As opposed to the angelic beings pure worship of God Isaiah knew he was utterly different, opposite even, being a ruined man of unclean lips dwelling among a people of unclean lips. The Hebrew word for glory means 'weight' and upon seeing the weight of God's holiness Isaiah's knees could no longer support him.

Therefore, the first oracle, or prophetic announcement Isaiah delivers as the prophet of God is not delivered against Babylon, Moab, Egypt, Philistia, or even Israel – the first oracle the prophet Isaiah pronounces in his ministry is against himself. We can be sure that some modern psychologist would say this is an example of someone with low self-esteem and that this is a bad thing for us to emulate. I am 100% positive that Isaiah lost all self-esteem when he gazed upon the Lord of glory, and that it was a best thing that ever could've happened to him – for in that moment he gained God-esteem that could never be taken away from him, and would prove to be the foundation of all his life and thought regardless of what life's circumstances threw his way. This affected Isaiah deeply and from here on out his preferred title for God is 'the Holy One of Israel.'¹⁹

Church, nothing that reveals the unholiness of man like the holiness of God. It's like comparing the brightness of a small match to the blazing light of the sun. Sin rightly seen isn't just damaging to man, it is dishonoring to God.

John Calvin said it like this, "We see men who in God's absence normally remain firm and constant, but who, when taken before the manifest glory of God, are so shaken and struck dumb as to be laid low by the dread of death...man is never sufficiently touched and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty."²⁰

Fifth, the Pardon

After the woe he pronounces upon himself we read in 6:6-7, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for." While worshipping, one of the seraph's moves away from the throne and comes near Isaiah holding a burning coal he took from the altar. It isn't hot because it's burning, it's hot because it's holy. And when the heat of the coal's holiness touches the unholiness of Isaiah's mouth it sears him clean. In this moment the transcendent God showed Himself to also be the immanent God with Isaiah. This doesn't make sense. I mean, what judge in any city would keep his job if he forgave sin and didn't punish lawbreakers? As a judge you can't just sweep sin under the rug. How much more is at stake when it is God, the just Judge of all the universe, taking away sin from Isaiah? This coal was taken from the altar of atonement, and with it God removed the sin of Isaiah, as far as the east is from the west, so much so that Isaiah himself can say in his own book "though your sins be like scarlet, God can make you white as snow" (Isa. 1:18).

This doesn't make sense – until we read John 12:41. John says in 12:41, "Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke of Him." What does this mean? What did John just say? He said very simply, and clearly, that when Isaiah saw the Lord high and exalted, sitting on His throne, watching the train of His robe fill the temple, beholding angelic beings worship Him crying Holy, Holy, Holy – John is saying that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus, was deconstructed by Jesus, and was forgiven and healed by Jesus. Then Isaiah would spend the rest of his life using those forgiven and healed lips to proclaim the glories he's just beheld.

The pattern remains the same for us. Remember, God's glory is the radiance (or the shining-forth) of his holiness, the out-streaming of His incomparable worth. In whom does the glory of God shine out of in the clearest and greatest manner possible? His Son. Therefore, Jesus, the Son of God, is infinitely precious and valuable above all other things because He is as Hebrews 1:3 states, "the exact representation of God's being, and the radiance of the glory of God." When we see His glory we must be deconstructed, we must be shocked almost speechless that the Holy Christ would die for His people on the cross and come to that fountain to be washed white as snow. Then we must spend the rest of our lives spreading and proclaiming His good news for sinners like us.

The three historical Omni's tell of His unique holiness and Isaiah 6:1-7 displays His unique holiness for all who have eyes to see. Do you see it? Nothing is more beautiful than this, nothing is more practical for your life than this, "One new discovery of the

glory of Christ's face and the fountain of his sweet grace and love will do more towards scattering clouds of darkness and doubting in one minute than anything else.”
This is our Holy God.

Chapter 5

Ever Three and Ever One

*“Praise and glory to the Father,
Praise and glory to the Son,
Praise and glory to the Spirit,
ever three and ever one.”
(Matt Boswell)*

For ages the doctrine of the Trinity has been upheld even though it's been twisted around a thousand ways to Tuesday. Some people find the doctrine of the Trinity a hard pill to swallow, others think Christians believe in three gods, still others believe we're contradicting ourselves when we discuss God being three and one. Yet, the doctrine of the Trinity is of such importance that if you deny it, you cannot in any real way call yourself a Christian. Here's what I want to do in this chapter. First, we'll look at some definitions, second I'll show you where we get these definitions in Scripture, and lastly I'll overview common ways people distort this doctrine.

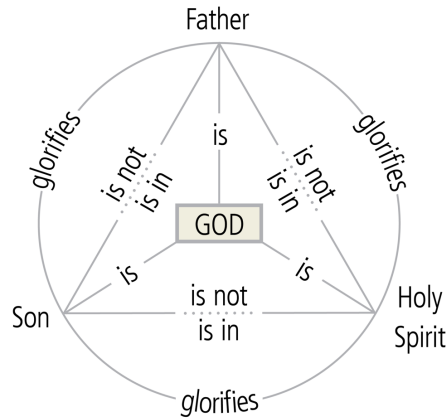
Definitions

Though the word Trinity (coined by Tertullian in 3rd century) never appears in the Bible the substance of it is all over Scripture. Throughout the history of the Church, four fundamental things have always been taught about the Trinity.

- God is One in essence
- God is three in Person
- Each Person is co-equal in power and glory
- Each Person is fully and completely God, but not identical.

Therefore the classic and historic definition of the Trinity is this: God eternally exists as one in essence and three in Person: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. The following triangle diagram displays this historic definition.²¹ See clearly that each Person is fully God even though each Person stands out as distinct from the each other. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit but is in and glorifies both the Son and the Spirit. The Son is not the Father or the Spirit but is in and

glorifies both the Father and the Spirit. And the Spirit is not the Father or the Son but is in and glorifies both the Father and the Son.



Scriptural Proof

All of this is great, but is this the picture we get in the Bible? My answer is of course, a resounding yes! Let's take our definition and split it up into pieces to see this:

'God eternally exists...'

Few people within the Church would debate this. The common refrain found in Revelation 4:8 is enough to prove our point, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." God therefore exists, and His existence is an eternal existence. Psalm 90:2 states, "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God." Hebrews 11:6 lists two things we must believe as Christians, the first of which is that God exists. If you deny God's existence you've got different issues to tackle than the Trinity.

'...as one in essence...'

The hallmark passage for the oneness of God is Deuteronomy 6:4. "Hear O' Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." Historically and even today this verse is called the 'Shema' because shema is the Hebrew word for 'hear.' Throughout the Old Testament God rejects the polytheism (a belief in many gods) of the nations surrounding Israel. In place of this God demands an exclusive devotion to Himself, or in other words, God demands monotheism. Because of this, God should not only have first place in our hearts and affections, we're commanded to put away any form of idolatry we have, recognizing that idolatry, at its root is a worship of false god. So what we receive in Deut. 6:4 is another restating of the 1st and 2nd commandments.

'...and three in Person: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

We just saw the oneness of God, here we see the threeness. Too often people think we lose monotheism as soon as we begin talking of the three Persons in the Trinity, this is

not the case. From the opening verses in the Bible we see Trinity reflected in God. The Spirit of God was hovering over the deep in Genesis 1:2. When God makes man in Genesis 1:26 He states, "Let *us* make man in our image." Proudful Jacob was turned into humbled Israel after wrestling with God in human flesh in Genesis 32. Joshua bowed before the Commander of the Lord's army in Joshua 5. After Isaiah saw the Lord high and exalted God commissioned Isaiah into service saying in Isaiah 6:8, "Who will go for *us*?" As we cross over into the New Testament we see these things continue. As Jesus was baptized the Holy Spirit descended on Him while the voice of the Father spoke audibly for all to hear in Matthew 3:16-17. John 1 says the Son of God who became flesh and dwelt among us was in the beginning with God and was God. The Great Commission states that as we go we're to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe God's commands, and baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Matthew 28. In Ephesians 1 we see how our whole redemption is accomplished by the Trinity. In 1:3-6 the Father is the Architect who plans, predestines, and sends. In 1:7-12 the Son obeys the Father, redeems His sheep, and along with the Father sends the Holy Spirit. In 1:13-14 the Spirit seals us guaranteeing our future inheritance to come, sanctifies us by grace, proceeds from both the Father and the Son, and completes the work the Father and the Son began.

So we have the distinct work of each Person in the Godhead, now we can see clearly that the Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. One in essence yes, but three distinct Persons. From front to back the Bible portrays redemption as a sovereign work of the Holy Trinity. This is why one cannot claim to be a Christian and deny the Trinity, because in denying the Trinity you're denying the God of the Bible, who is the only God who saves. This is who He is. Herman Bavinck echoed this when he said, "In the doctrine of the Trinity beats the heart of the whole revelation of God for the redemption of humanity."²²

'...the same in substance equal in power and glory.'

This echoes back to what we've said before. That God, though three in Person, is one in essence. Each of the three Persons are not separate Gods, they're one God, the same in substance, co-eternal, co-equal, co-essential in power and glory. The clearest place in the Bible we see this is not only what we've just seen in Ephesians 1 where we see the individual actions of each member of the Trinity working together to form the one grand act of redemption, but in 1 John 5:7 where John says there are three who testify and those three agree, or those three are one.

Distortions²³

Modalism

This teaches the one person appears to us in three different modes or forms. There are two ways people make this error. First they speak of water, saying 'Water is like the Trinity because it can be ice, steam, or liquid and remain water.' To which we say, 'No, water is never all three forms at the same time, in the Trinity God is always and at all times each Person.' This leads to the second error, 'Ok, how about a man who is at the same time a father, a son, and a husband, one man, three roles. That is like the Trinity.' Again, 'No. Father, son, and husband describe three functions or roles of one man. In the Trinity, God is three distinct Persons rather than one person in three distinct roles.'

Tritheism/Polytheism

These positions deny there is one God and teaches instead that there are really three gods. The example people use of this is the three-leaf clover saying 'See, this is like the Trinity, it's one plant but has three clovers.' To this we respond and say, 'No, each leaf is only part of the clover and cannot be said to be the whole plant. In the Trinity each Person is fully God.'

Subordinationism

This teaches the Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father in nature and being. They say 'See, the Son and the Spirit obey the Father, thus the Father must be the greatest.' We reply, 'No, within the Trinity each Person is co-equal and co-eternal in power and glory. There is no subordination.'²⁴

Oneness Pentecostalism

This movement teaches many heresies including a form of modalism where God at times manifests Himself as Father, at other times manifests Himself as Son, and at other times manifest Himself as Spirit, saying 'God cannot exist in more than one mode at a time.' To this we respond and say 'God doesn't manifest in different modes, He eternally exists as three Persons.'

Jehovah's Witness

Many people think the Jehovah's Witness group is a genuine part of Christianity. But it is not, because like all other cults they distort the essential doctrines of Christianity. They do believe they are serving the true God because that's what they are taught. But they deny that the Son of God is really God, deny that the Holy Spirit is a Person, and state that those who believe God is Trinity believe in a false teaching. They believe the idea of one God consisting in three persons cannot be explained by human reason. That it is confusing, contrary to normal reason, unlike anything in human experience. We respond, 'Of course it's contrary to human experience, because of sin the entire Bible and all it teaches goes against our nature. Just because we can't explain something so as to leave all mystery behind doesn't mean it's false.'

Conclusion

No illustrations

Because people throughout history have sought to explain the mysteries of the Trinity with images (like water, man with different roles, three-leaf clover) and failed to do justice to the Biblical doctrine it is better for us to simply stick with the classic definition. God eternally exists as one in essence and three in Person: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory. Anything beyond this is heresy.

God as a Relatable Being

Because God has eternally existed in Trinity, He has always been a being in relationship to others which means within the Trinity there has always been a perfect relational

harmony. Thus, God stands out as a perfect society or community of divinity within Himself. Acts 17:25 uses this fact to state that God needs nothing, He is independent, because in Himself He is full. Therefore, when God made the world He didn't do it out of some sense of lack or need. He needed nothing, yet made everything.

Trinity as Ultimate Relational Model

The Bible mentions there is a unity within the Trinity. The word Trinity even means this (Trinity literally means tri-unity). Because of this Scripture teaches us how to relate to one another as the Trinity relates to one another. Where do we see how to have unity in diversity? The opportunity to witness the clarity, complexity, duality, creativity, intensity, joviality, and veracity of unity existing alongside diversity is not found in a university nor found in human depravity; it is only found in the community of divinity we call the Holy Trinity.

Redemption is Therefore Achievable

We see this in two ways. First, Exodus 33:20 and 1 Timothy 6:16 teach us that no man can see God and live but God the Son made the invisible God visible. Second, redemption itself is accomplished by the unified activity of the Holy Trinity. We saw this in Ephesians 1 earlier see it again in Hebrews 9:14, "...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Christ offering Himself through the Spirit to God the Father on the cross. All three accomplish salvation.

Sing!

Because the Church throughout the ages has held the doctrine of the Trinity so close to the heart, many hymns and songs have been written about the Trinity. Three of them held a special place in my own heart and in the life of my family. First, the historic Doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise God all creatures here below, praise Him above ye heavenly hosts, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen." Second, the historic Gloria Patri, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, and ever shall be, world without end, amen, amen." And third a new one called the Messenger Doxology²⁵, "Praise and glory to the Father, praise and glory to the Son, praise and glory to the Spirit. Ever three and ever one."

Chapter 6

The Independence of God

*“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”
(Acts 17:24-25)*

In this chapter we’ll continue to climb out first and most important summit: the doctrine of God. Specifically we’ll look into what is the most unknown and ignored attribute of God, His independence.²⁶ Three things are before us here: what the independence of God is, where we find the independence of God in the Bible, and why the independence of God matters.

What Is It?

The independence of God is an attribute of God that is largely forgotten about within the Church today. This is both ironic and sad because the independence of God is so fundamental to who God is in and of Himself that most theologians believe the independence of God to be the first and foremost of the incommunicable attributes of God. Throughout church history this attribute was not called the independence of God but called the aseity of God. The term aseity comes from the Latin phrase ‘a se’ meaning ‘from self.’ Many people view the two terms of independence and aseity as synonyms because both of them bring God’s self-existence, self-sufficiency, self-containment, self-attesting, and self-justifying into view.

These terms all get at the following meaning: God exists without receiving His existence from something or someone else. Not only does God know all His knowledge from Himself and not from another source, but He Himself is the standard of such knowledge and truth. God is never moved to act by anything outside of Himself. He looks to no one outside of Himself for approval. This makes His control absolute, unchangeable, not subject to the influence of others. This makes His authority absolute, for no one can urge Him to action or prohibit Him from doing what He desires to do. This also makes His presence absolute, for the whole creation is dependent on Him to exist while He is completely independent apart from the world He made. God is Yahweh. Exodus 3:14,

God is 'I AM.' Notice the contrast with us. God is 'I AM who I AM' while we must say 'I am because someone else had me.' God alone is independent, while everything else is dependent on Him.

Where Is It?

Follow me through this process of seeing God's independence in Scripture.

God Owns All Things

Genesis 14:19, 22 say God possesses heaven and earth. Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." Psalm 50:10-12, "Every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a 1000 hills, I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness is Mine." Compared to God the billionaires on the planet are barely ants. God owns all things.

We Give What He's Given

Romans 11:36, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." We never give to God something that is new to Him. When it says all things are from Him it means God is the source of all things. When it says all things are through Him it means God is the means of all things. When it says all things are to Him it means God is the goal of all things. Therefore, everything comes from God. So even those things we give to Him have already come to us from Him.

God Owes Nobody

Job 41:11, "Who has first given to Me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine." Paul quotes this later in Romans 11:35, "Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?" Before ever making the world God was fully independent, fully self-sufficient in Himself. God loved His Trinitarian glory and fullness so much that He created a world to communicate that fullness outside of Himself. Thus, He has never been, is not now, and will never be under obligation to the creatures He made. Knowing this makes us understand that the covenants God made with man were from pure grace. God is not obligated to us all, yet in His holy grace He has brought Himself under promises in His covenants with us. But these are voluntary covenants on God's part, self-imposed, not forced on Him by us.

God Has No Needs

God gives to us not so we will help Him fill a lack in Himself, but because He is gracious. If He were dependent on us, we must conclude that God owes His very existence or well-being to us. This truth has a massive effect on our worship. Notice this in Psalm 50:8-15, "Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before Me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are Mine. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

Biblical worship therefore, isn't intended to meet the needs of God. The purpose of animal sacrifice in the OT was not to satisfy God's hunger but to symbolically atone for sin. The essence of worship (seen above in v14-15) is that God met our needs when He didn't have to. In fact, God mocks worship where a so-called deity (idol) is dependent on man and where man meets the needs of the so-called god (see Isaiah 44:15-17). This means a being who is worshiped must be worthy of worship.

Why does it Matter?

God is not deficient, God is not weak, God is not needy. He is fully sufficient, He is strong, and He needs nothing to exist perfectly. This is all great but why do knowing these things matter? Three reasons at least.

God is the Ultimate Answer

Throughout history every culture (even our own) has searched for something that is 'a se', or some kind of ultimate being, and ultimate standard of truth. People have tried to say it's Mother Nature, this god or that god, human knowledge or experience, reason, logic, or some type of combination of these things. Philosophers for ages have sought after the concept of 'the Absolute' because they know if such a thing exist it would be the grounds for every other thing, but have never quite found it, which is really to say they refuse to see it in the God of the Bible. Thus, the non-Christian search for the ultimate 'a se' being has been frustratingly awkward because they've never seen it though it is directly before their eyes. Or when they've thought to have found it, it changed a few years later. The result of this frustration is that many people have given up the search and rather than seeking to bank their lives on something stable like the 'god' people have embrace the idea of chaos or meaninglessness.

Of course we know the answer don't we? Only the God of the Bible can give meaning to human experience and reason. So don't think the aseity or the independence of God is something that is only abstract, like a distant theory. If we don't embrace God as fully independent, God ceases to be God because He would be dependent on something else for His existence. It produces worship in us, makes us thankful that such a God would willingly redeem us, and a heart that is thankful to God will produce much fruit for God.

Remember Where We Live

Remember where we live. Here in the United States we live in a nation that values independence very highly. We pride ourselves on the fact that we're an independent nation, made up of independent people, free from the reign or rule of any king. 'We serve no sovereign' was a motto of the American Revolution. Whether or not this is a good value for us have as a nation and more so as individuals is a question worth asking, but not one we'll dive into here in this chapter. Rather, I simply want to point something out. You know one thing that isn't valued in our independent nation today, and one thing (sad to say) that's not valued within the American church today? The independence of God. Rather than embracing that God exists for Himself and in Himself fully, we believe God exists for us, for me, for my gain, for my glory. This is a dangerous place to be. God's independence reminds us to refuse to bow the knee before the god of America.

Glory and Joy

Some can talk of the aseity of God in such a manner where God is so great and so big that mankind becomes meaningless. Someone may say, 'If God is so independent and doesn't need us for anything, are we important at all?' Of course the answer is, 'Yes, we are very meaningful. Our existence matters a great deal, and everything we do matters as well.' We see this in His aseity and independence clearly. God didn't have to make anything, He didn't have to make a world and then populate that world, but He did. Why? For His glory. Isaiah 43:6-7 says we were made for the glory of God. This means man's primary purpose in life is to join up with God's primary purpose in His life, namely, to glorify God. When man refuses to glorify God we refuse to do the very thing we were created for and it grieves the heart of God, but when we glorify God, God is joyful and our life becomes ripe with meaning, purpose, and fullness. So the meaningfulness of man comes in that man was made by God and for God. Yes, God does not need us for anything, yet it is an amazing fact of our existence that God freely chooses to create us, allows us to glorify Him, and bring him joy.

So hear this most important statement: to be significant and meaningful to God, is not to believe that we are the center of God's affections, or that God loves us more than He loves anything in existence. No, to be significant and meaningful to God, in the most ultimate sense, is to live for and love God with all our might.

God's Hidden and Revealed Will

*“Life lived according to the will of God
is life lived according to the Word of God.”
(Adam Powers)*

At one point or another every Christian will ask themselves one question, and though every Christian will ask this question, not every Christian will be able to answer this question. The question is very easy to ask, but it isn't always easy to answer. The question is this, 'What is God's will for my life?' How many of you have asked this question? This is a good question, and it should be asked. I always enjoy being asked this question because when someone approaches me asking this I know one thing very clearly – the person sitting in front of me loves God a great deal and because of that cares a great deal about what God wants them to do with their life. So this is a good question, but where do we look for the answer? In the sky? In our soup? In dreams? Maybe visions? In our own experiences with God? No, all of those things shift like the sand and are never sure. Rather, we look for the will of God in the Word of God alone. Before we get into the appropriate answer and how it plays out in our individual lives we must do some work to properly define what God's will is in the first place, because in order to know will of God for our life we must know what the Word of God says about the will of God.

Secret and Revealed / Decretive and Preceptive

When we are concerned about such things we must come back to a verse we've lingered over many times thus far in our study, Deuteronomy 29:29, which says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Right away from this one verse, we see a distinction we can make when speaking of the will of God. God has a secret will and a revealed will. Martin Luther made the same distinction calling them *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus*, or the concealed will of God and revealed will of God.²⁷ These labels are merely an outworking of the reality seen in Deut. 29:29. There are indeed many things about God that we do not know and will not know in this life. But at the same time God hasn't left us in the dark, He has revealed who He is in His Word.

Another way to speak of the will of God is to make another distinction between His decretive will and preceptive will. The decretive will of God, or will of decree, refers to God bringing to pass whatever He so desires in His sovereign pleasure. The ultimate example of God's decretive will is the cross of Christ. Before time began God the Father planned redemption, and chose to kill His Son on a cross for His people. God decreed this to happen, and because He decreed it, it must happen in the manner and at the exact time

God wants it to happen. No one can stop it from happening or resist this will of decree in God. More so, no one can ever be out of the decretive will of God, ever. On the other hand the preceptive will of God, or will of command, refers to God's commandments or His Law. While the decretive will of God cannot be resisted at all, God's preceptive will is resisted all the time, and you can in fact out of the preceptive will of God when you disobey. When we read the Ten Commandments we see ten examples of God's preceptive will at work, and once we read them we can obey His will or disobey His will.

So when we come back to our question, 'What is the will of God for my life?' we should then always ask, 'Well, what will of God are you referring to? His secret will, His revealed will, His decretive will, or His preceptive will?' R.C. Sproul offers good counsel on this saying, "If they are talking about the hidden (or secret) will of God, they must understand that it is hidden. Most of those who ask the question are struggling with what to do in particular situations. When I am asked about God's will in such cases, I reply that I cannot read God's mind. However, I can read God's Word, which gives me His revealed will, and learning and conforming to that will is enough of a task to last me a lifetime. I can help people with that."²⁸ This is good counsel for us. We must remind those who ask us, and remind ourselves when we ask the question that we're not crystal ball readers, and that we should never seek to know the secret will of God or the decretive will of God. Deut. 29:29 says those things only belongs to the Lord. But, we not only can look into the revealed will of God and the preceptive will of God, we should devote our lives to looking into them to learn as much as we can about God's will for our life.

Knowing God's Will

So what can we know from the Word of God about the will of God for our life? Much. Let's look at five passages of Scripture tonight to see such things.

First, Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths." This is a truth to lean into in life. If we acknowledge God in all our doings in life, God will straighten or direct our paths. To acknowledge God in all our ways doesn't mean to simply make God aware of all we do in life, as if God would grant His blessing onto any activity we do (whether wicked or righteous) simply because we asked Him to. Rather, to acknowledge God in all our ways means to do all of life before Him, in submission to Him, to live for His glory, to live life in the way He commands us to live. When this verse is seen in this light, Proverbs 3:7-8 are as instructive as 3:5-6 and show us explicitly how we ought to live and put these things into practice. 3:7-8 says, "Be not wise in your own eyes, fear the Lord, turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment (medicine) to your bones." So how do we acknowledge God in all our ways? We fear God, learn humility, and turn away from evil. If we do that it will be healing and refreshment to our bones. Life lived in this way will be lived according to the will of God because it is life lived according to the Word of God.

Second, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." Can God be any clearer than He is here? All of those who want to know the will of God, for whatever reason, must embrace what is said here in this one verse. In it we learn that

regardless who we are, regardless where we are, regardless what we're into, or regardless where we want to be one day in life God intends us to be a holy and sanctified people. This could settle the issue of God's will for your life by asking a simple question, 'Is this thing I want to do a holy thing?' Or 'Is this job I could take going to help me be more holy?' Or 'Is this person I have feelings for a holy person?' If the answer is no, you can immediately know that you should not to head in that direction. If the answer is yes, you've got a big question answered and lots more to now ask. Bottom line – God's will is for us to be holy, so everything in our lives that would prohibit or hinder our growth in holiness should be cut out and everything in our lives that would promote or encourage holiness should be left in it or added to it.²⁹

For another clear passage on the will of God, see 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." As 1 Thess. 4:3 is, 5:18 is just as clear. The will of God for our lives is simple. Give thanks regardless what circumstances we find ourselves in at the moment. This means the will of God does not always lead us into what is comfortable and directs us to how we do life in the hard times. Rather than asking God, 'Why did you put me here?' we seek after a grateful and thankful heart, a heart that is content. So when we combine 1 Thess. 4:3 and 5:18 we understand a great deal of God's will for our lives. 4:3 leads to press into holiness while 5:18 leads us to press into a thankful contentment. Discontentment in sanctification (which leads to a greater pursuit of holiness), and thankfulness in all circumstances (which leads to greater contentment). Is this not the opposite of the American way? As one of my best friends Benjamin Joffe often reminds me, "We are prone to be content with our sanctification and discontent with our situation." God's will is for us to go against flow of the world.

Third, Romans 12:1-2, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." The principle being taught in this passage is one of discipline in a specific skill. The long training of a classical conductor enables them to detect a false chord struck by one instrument in a symphony of hundred of instruments.³⁰ So too the Christian's mind/heart are fine tuned to truth by continual exposure to the truth of God's Word. This continual exposure to our mind is what renews our mind so greatly. The Christian's heart over time of doing life as a living sacrifice will become attuned to God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. This means when it comes to God's will I often tell people to simply go with what they please because when they're living in line with Romans 12:1-2, what pleases them is living a life that pleases God. So a quick answer to the question 'What is God's will for my life?' is simply 'Just do what you please to do.'³¹

It is often said that Augustine agreed and said, "Love God and do whatever you please: for the soul trained in love to God will do nothing to offend the One who is Beloved." R.C. Sproul similarly states, "As long as what you do (or who you marry, or what job you take, or where you decide to live) falls within the parameters of the preceptive will of God, you have complete liberty to act according to whatever pleases you, and you do not need to lose any sleep wondering whether you are outside the hidden or decretive will of God."³² John Piper says, "The Bible does not tell you which person to marry, or which

car to drive, or whether to own a home, where you take your vacation, what cell phone plan to buy, or which brand of orange juice to drink. Or a thousand other choices you must make. What is necessary is that we have a renewed mind, that is so shaped and so governed by the revealed will of God in the Bible, that we see and assess all relevant factors with the mind of Christ, and discern what God is calling us to do. This is very different from constantly trying to hear God's voice saying do this and do that. People who try to lead their lives by hearing voices are not in sync with Romans 12:2."³³

Fourth, Psalm 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but His delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on His Law he meditates day and night." And Psalm 119:105, 111, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path... Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart." These verses remind us of what we saw at the beginning of this chapter, that we ought not chase after the secret or decreative will of God. No. We're to rather, give ourselves to the lifelong study of the revealed or preceptive will of God, because it is in the Word of God where we find the will of God for our lives. So when others ask us about God's will for their lives remind them or when we ask ourselves about God's will for our own lives remind yourself that the best way to know God's will is to know His Word.

In this manner I say again, life lived in this way will be lived according to the will of God because it is life lived according to the Word of God.

Chapter 8

The Providence of God

*“Who dwells within His most secret place,
is never far from His blessed grace.
'Neath His great shadow all will be well,
no better place now for us to dwell.”
(R.C. Sproul and Jeff Lippencott)*

In a list of favorite Bible passages of all time, near the top of the list would be Romans 8:28. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” Notice Paul’s confidence here? Notice that he doesn’t say, ‘And I hope’ or ‘And I think’ that God works all things together for good. No, Paul knows this to be true and it encourages his heart throughout all kinds of suffering listed in the remaining verses of Romans 8.

Contrast Paul’s bold confidence here in Romans 8:28 with the modern Church. Do we have the same confidence in God to work all things for our good? Do we trust that God so governs the affairs of men so as to bring about our best possible good in the best possible manner? No, most Christians today view God as ‘the man upstairs’ or a ‘divine butler’ who aids us when we call on Him rather than seeing Him as He is, the Sovereign One who governs all things through His providence. Think back to the founding of our nation. Think of the small city within the small state of Rhode Island named Providence. Apparently the early citizens of our nation knew what Paul knew and named a city after it. If our nation was founded today and we had to choose names for cities, you can be sure that Providence wouldn’t be on the list. Many people have wisely remarked that instead of Providence Rhode Island we’d have something like Tolerance, Rhode Island.

How ironic is it that though the doctrine of God’s providence has largely disappeared our nation, and within many of our churches too, within the Bible you can’t escape it. It’s everywhere! The popular notion today is that natural causes bring all things to pass in our world, but in the Bible, there is one source for all events good or bad – God. Let’s look into this neglected doctrine and see what God has for us.

Like the word ‘Trinity’ the word ‘providence’ is not in the Bible, but the idea of providence is all over it.³⁴ The Greek word ‘pronoia’ and the Latin word ‘providentia’ form our English word ‘providence.’ Early on the Church Fathers rejected the Epicurean notion that the world was governed by chance and also rejected the Stoic notion that the world was governed by fate. In place of chance and fate they held that it was God who preserves and governs the world. This is good, but we don’t see the full picture of the doctrine of providence coming into view until St. Augustine carefully defined it in the

fourth century. He saw in Scripture that God does indeed preserve and govern all things, and that God does so through His sovereign, wise, and benevolent will. The Church adopted Augustine's view and despite a few heretics (Pelagius being the worst) and there wasn't much debate on this issue throughout the centuries. 600 years later around the 11th and 12th century Thomas Aquinas agreed with Augustine's view and promoted it also. This led on to the time of the Reformation where Luther and even more so Calvin defined and defended the historic view (Augustine's view) of divine providence. After this came the Puritans who also held the biblical and historic view that Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers taught. After this came much opposition to this doctrine with the teachings of the Deists and the Liberals. Because these two groups had such a low view of sin and thus such a high view of man, man (not God) slowly became to be seen the cause of all things. So here we are today – in the modern Church where the doctrine of the providence of God is largely ignored.

Though we see it earlier implicitly, the first time we explicitly see the concept of providence coming into view is in Genesis 22 where God called Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. You can imagine the torment in the heart of Abraham as he was walking up the mountain with his Isaac knowing what he is about to do. And then we see it. Isaac looks up at his dad and says in Gen. 22:7, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham answered saying in v8, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering my son." That phrase 'God will provide' is where we get the name for God Jehovah Jireh or 'God our Provider.' This is the first place in the Bible where we explicitly see God's providence being spoken of. This is a great passage because it looks forward to God providing the greater Lamb in His Son for the greatest sacrifice of all, His death on the cross for us.

We can define providence in this manner: the continued exercise of the divine energy whereby God preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end.³⁵ Or as the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 11 puts it "God's works of providence are His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions."

This is shown clearly in the Bible, where we see God being providentially over:

The Entire Universe

Ephesians 1:11, "...all things work according to the counsel of His will." Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all."

The Physical World

Psalm 135:6, "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps." Matthew 5:35, "...earth is His footstool."

The Brute Creation

Matthew 10:29, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." Matthew 5:45, "For He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

Over All Nations

Job 12:23, "He makes nations great, and He destroys them, He enlarges nations, and leads them away." Psalm 22:28, "For kingship belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations." Psalm 66:7 says God's "eyes keep watch on the nations."

Man's Birth and Life

Psalm 139:16, "Your eyes saw my unformed substance, in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them." Acts 17:26, "And God made from one man every nation on mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place."

Successes and Failures of All Men

Luke 1:52, "God brings down the mighty from their thrones, and exalts those of humble estate." Psalm 75:7, "It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another."

Seemingly Accidental Occurrences

Proverbs 16:33, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." Matthew 10:30, "Even the hairs of your head are all numbered."

The protection of His People

Psalm 4:8, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone O' Lord make me dwell in safety." And the verse that began us, Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

The Wants of His people

Deuteronomy 8:3, "And He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Philippians 4:19, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Answers to Prayer

Matthew 6:32, "...our heavenly Father knows' what you need." Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Luke 18:7-8, "Will not God give justice to His elect, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily."

Punishment of the Wicked

Proverbs 16:4, "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." Romans 9:22, "What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction..."

Theologians also continue on past these things and make three further distinctions when it comes to God's providence: preservation, concurrence, and government. Preservation

being the continuous work of God by which He maintains all that He has made with all the various properties and powers He gave them. Concurrence being the operation of God's divine power which causes all things to act in the manner He ordained them to. And lastly, government being the continued activity of God where He rules all things purposefully so as to secure and achieve His divine purpose for all things.

So What?

In light of all of this, as we did earlier in the chapter on the Trinity, let's apply these things to us with song. The final lines of the robust hymn 'In Christ Alone' says, "No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me. From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand, till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand."³⁶ Also, based on Psalm 91 R.C. Sproul and Jeff Lippencott got together and wrote a new hymn called 'The Secret Place.'³⁷ Its lyrics are as follows, "Who dwells within His most secret place, is never far from His blessed grace. 'Neath His great shadow all will be well, no better place now for us to dwell. Fear not the terror that comes at night, nor flaming arrows by morning light. His truth is always our sword and shield, against His power, all foes must yield. A thousand fall now at ev'ry side, ten thousand more may have yet to die. Yet plague and sword can ne'er kill the soul, His angels guard us now safe and whole. Refuge and fortress for all who trust, no safer pasture for men of dust. 'Neath wings and feathers of Holy Lord, no greater comfort can He afford. The secret place of God Most High, the shadow of our mighty King. The dwelling place where angels cry, is where our praise will forever ring."

Are these not declarations of God to be completely sovereign in His providential rule over all things? Indeed they are. And it is wonderful to belt this out alongside the family of God. It is one thing to know of God's providential ruling over all things in our heads. It is an entirely different thing to treasure it and enjoy it by singing of it, praising God that He is in control regardless who we are or where we are in life. It is by the powerful, sovereign providence of God that God gives us Himself as well as all else He desires for us to have. Because of this, we will never lack anything in this life, or the next. Psalm 84:10-11 is a fitting ending for this topic, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Incomprehensible Yet Knowable

*“The main business you are here for is to know God.”
(J.I. Packer)*

When we seek to define the incomprehensibility of God we must take great care in what we say. For example, if you looked up the modern definition of incomprehensible you would find the definition to read ‘unable to be understood.’ Do you see what’s wrong with that definition? God, His Person, Work, and Word do not fall under the category of being unable to be understood. Remember, we truly can understand God to a certain extent, for God has revealed Himself in general and special revelation. How are we then to define the incomprehensibility of God? We must use the older definition of the word incomprehensible, which says God is ‘unable to be fully understood.’³⁸ So to say God is incomprehensible is to say He is infinite and because we’re finite we’ll never be able to understand God fully.

God is Incomprehensible

Psalm 145:3 says, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable.” Psalm 147:5 says, “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure.” After David recounts the depth of God’s knowledge of His own creation and creatures he says in Psalm 139:6, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.” Then again in Psalm 139:17-18a, “How precious to me are Your thoughts O’ God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand.” Paul, in 1 Cor. 2:10-11 speaks of similar things when he says, “The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person thoughts (thoughts only implied in Greek) except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts (again, thoughts only implied in Greek) of God except the Spirit of God.”

These passages all teach that God is great. God is so much greater than we are that the prospect of coming to know Him can often seem daunting. How can we with all our sin, all our natural weakness, all our darkness, how can we truly come to know God? This problem between our ability to comprehend and God’s infinite nature is even mentioned in the Bible. For example Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Paul also speaks of this in Romans 11:33-36, “Oh the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has

given a gift to Him that he might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.” In Judges 13 when Manoah (the father of Samson) asks God what His name is and God responds in 13:18 saying, “Why do you ask My name, seeing it’s wonderful?” There is a huge difference between the Creator and the Creature, and isn’t it a wonder that as incomprehensible as God is, He has given us the ability to comprehend Him to a certain degree? Indeed it is.

We not only see God’s incomprehensibility in His being and nature, we see it His special revelation (the Scripture) as well. Never will we be able to read the Bible and come away feeling a ‘smug’ feeling as if we’ve mastered what we just read and never need to read it again. The doxology passage we just mentioned in Romans 11 comes after 11 chapters of deep doctrine, logic, and gospel explanations, and how does Paul come away from that section? Boasting? Swaggering? Arrogant? No. 11 chapters of deep doctrine brings Paul to his knees, it brings him to wonder and awe leaving him with a feeling that he has barely scraped the surface of God’s wondrous works.

God is Knowable

So we can really know Him, truly, deeply, and sincerely. Jesus made this clear in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” This means any dealing with the incomprehensibility of God must also deal with the knowability of God. Therefore we are now in a position to see something wonderful of God’s nature. His incomprehensibility flows from His transcendence over us, while His knowability flows from His immanence. If we make the error of only believing God to be transcendent we make the error of Deism (that God is great, holy even, but far away). On the other hand if we make the error of only believing God to be immanent we make the error of Liberalism (that God isn’t so great or holy, and isn’t worth our worship). But if we believe God to be what the Scripture says He is, transcendent and immanent we’ll see the truth. That God is great, over-all things, Lord of all, infinite and transcendent, such that we can never plumb the depths of our God. But how precious is it that God has chosen come near to us so we could know Him as He really is. John Calvin spoke of God’s revealing Himself to us by using the phrase ‘God’s accommodation.’ Meaning, that God does not speak to us in His own Trinitarian language but rather speaks to us in ways we can understand. God is like a loving parent who speaks in ‘baby-talk,’ He ‘lisps’ to us so we can know Him.

Some people use the incomprehensibility of God as a proof that we cannot know God, but can only know facts about Him or can only know Him as He relates to us. The Bible doesn’t speak this way. The Bible makes it clear that we can know Him, know the Person of God. In Jeremiah 9:23-24 God boasts of this very thing saying, “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.” Hebrews 8:11 says the glory of the New Covenant is this, that we all will know Him “from the least to the greatest.” 1 John 5:20 says Jesus came into the world so that we would “know Him who is true.”

In J.I. Packer's famous *Knowing God* he said many things that are worth a slow digestion. But for our purposes here in this chapter about incomprehensibility and knowability two things that stand out. First Packer says, "The main business you are here for is to know God."³⁹ And second, "Ignorance of God, of His ways and communing with Him, lies at the root of much of the Church's weakness today."⁴⁰ Oh how the Church of our generation needs to remember these very things. Be challenged, reader, do not just move on past these quotes. No, slowly pray them into your bones. God will change you, and He means to do so through knowing Him.

So What?

Again, we gain great sight into glorious things by asking a simple question, 'So What?' Five answers to that question rise to the surface when asking this question about this topic.

Theology Leads to Doxology

God is great, God is inexhaustible, incomprehensible, and yet knowable. Sometimes the most fitting application is to truth as great as this is simply one thing: praise God. Paul shows us this pattern by exploding in praise in Romans 11:33-36 after the rich and robust theology of the first eleven chapters.

Marvel at the Whispers

We can never fully understand any single thing about God. His greatness, His understanding, His knowledge, His riches, wisdom, judgments, and ways are all beyond our ability to understand fully. Job says this in Job 26:14, that what we can know of God is "but the outskirts of His ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of Him." Knowing that we can know who God is and what He is like but never know Him as He knows Himself (fully) leaves us where David was in Psalm 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful to me, it is high, I cannot attain it."

Press On to Know

We can never know 'too much' about God. Too many times people have told me that I'm too heavenly minded and no earthly good. To which I respond, 'Is that a bad thing? No it's not, but I'll tell you this – the only way to be of any true use here on earth is to be heavenly minded, for then we'll direct man to what he needs most, God. The truth of the incomprehensibility of God is that we will never run out of things to learn about Him, and will therefore never grow weary but will continue on delighting in more and more of God's excellence and the greatness of His works as we grow in our knowledge of Him. Hosea 6:3 is our call, "Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord..."

Knowing Him Here to Know Him There

Some people say heaven will be boring, like an eternal church service. Nothing could be further from the truth. What we experience in Sunday worship is a foretaste of what it will be like in heaven. Since this is true, if you don't want Him here in a normal church service that means you won't want Him there either, which tells me you won't be there in heaven. I hope you see now that God's incomprehensibility solves this issue for us. When we're freed from the presence of sin and enter into glory, for all eternity we'll behold Him and learn and grow in our knowledge of Him. So, because God is infinite it will take

all eternity to know Him fully. Thus we'll always be growing in our knowledge of Him for all eternity. Perhaps some of you would disagree with this and quote 1 Corinthians 13:12 which says, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been known." On the surface it does seem to be a problem doesn't it? I'm saying we'll grow in our knowledge of God for all eternity, but Paul seems to be saying that as soon as we enter into glory we'll know God perfectly. The Greek is helpful here. The phrase 'know fully' is the English attempt to translate one Greek word 'epiginosko' which means to gain a deeper and more accurate knowledge of something. This means when we enter into glory we shall gain a deeper and more accurate knowledge of God than the knowledge of God we had here on earth. If Paul wanted to say 'then I shall know all things' he could've done so in Greek very easily using a different phrase ('tote epignosomai ta panta') but he didn't, so I conclude 1 Cor. 13:12 supports what I've been saying all chapter.

Comprehending What Surpasses Knowledge

If that is true for all eternity, it is certainly true for this life. Paul tells us as much when he says the Christian life is one where we're continually "...increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). When he prays for the Ephesian church in Ephesians 3:14-19 Paul prays, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Paul prays that God would strengthen us to comprehend the very thing that surpasses knowledge. And praise God that He answers this prayer right? Amen.

Because of the incomprehensibility of God and the knowability of God the disciplines of a lifelong devotion to Bible reading, a lifelong devotion to prayer, a lifelong devotion to right theology, a lifelong devotion to the ministries of the church should be seen and should be experienced as what they are. Enthralling endeavors. Rather than something we have to do, a life devoted to the knowledge of God is the best life one can have now and in the life to come.

Immutable Yet Mobile

*“God is infinitely worthy of our trust because He is absolutely and eternally unchanging in His being, perfections, purposes, and promises.”
(Wayne Grudem)*

In 1987 Michael Jackson told us, “If you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and make a change.”⁴¹ This rings true for every human that has ever lived. If we’re honest with ourselves we would admit that all of us have many faults, habits, and tendencies that aren’t beneficial for ourselves or for others. Sometimes we even find things in us that are down right destructive. These insufficiencies need to be thrown out or changed into something helpful and beneficial. The Christian can have hope here because by God’s grace He is slowly but surely making us into a holier people. But if we apply Jackson’s lyric to God, everything falls apart. Why? God has no deficiencies or blemishes in His character. When you and I speak of change we usually mean moving toward one of two directions, better or worse. So can God get better? No, He’s already perfect. Can God get worse? No, thankfully He’s promised us that He’ll never modify Himself or His ways. So for God to be immutable means He will never change, not only in His Being, but also in His perfections, purposes, and promises. While you and I are always going to found in the cycle of becoming better or worse, God is exalted above all change. He never grows. He never decays. He never improves. He never deteriorates. He remains the same forever.

When Moses asks God His name at the burning bush God responds in Exodus 3:14 saying, “I AM who I AM.” God simply is. God is Being, God is never becoming. Psalm 102:25-27, “Of old You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but You are the same, and Your years have no end.” Isaiah 48:12, “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel whom I called. I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.” Malachi 3:6, “For I the Lord do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob are not consumed.” Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” James 1:17, “Every good gift and perfect gift if from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” This God isn’t like us. He is distinct from us, and this is part of what means for God to be God.

Wait A Minute...

Aren't there a few passages of Scripture that say God sometimes changes His mind? Yes there are. God says He is sorry (implies regret) for making man in Genesis 6. In Exodus 32:9-14 God is fed up with the continual sin of His people. He tells Moses He is going to destroy them and start over again with Him. Moses responds by prayer appealing to God's glory saying "The nations will think You can't take care of Your people." His prayer and appeal succeeds, and Moses prevents God from destroying His people. Hezekiah prayed and asked for more life after God told him of his impending death, and from his prayers God granted Hezekiah 15 more years of life. In Jonah 3 when the people of Nineveh repented God did not destroy them as He said He would. In 1 Samuel 15:10-11 God says He regrets making Saul king because Saul hasn't followed His commandments. Yet a few verses later in 1 Sam. 15:29 God says, "The Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for He is not a man, that He should have regret."

So what's happening in all these instances? Does God change His mind? Or does He allow prayer to change His mind? Does He change or have regret? Well, we should hold close to God's immutability but we should not understand God to be immobile. God's purposes remain unchanged, but God does have movement within Him as He interacts with the creatures He's made. If Moses hadn't prayed God would've destroyed His people. If Hezekiah hadn't prayed He would've died then and there. If Nineveh hadn't repented God would have made an end of them. And if Saul had obeyed God's Law God wouldn't have grieved over his kingship. When the Bible speaks of God's relenting, regretting, or changing we should remember this is anthropomorphic language, which is God speaking to us in human terms (for example: God doesn't have hands or eyes, but the Bible speaks of God's hands and eyes since those are things we understand). Thus, in each of these situations changes have really occurred but the change wasn't in God's being or His eternal purpose and promises, the changes occurred in man's relation to God.

The Question of Impassibility

At this point some people begin talking about the impassibility of God. This term comes from the Westminster Confession 2.1 where it states that "God has no passions." There are two meanings we can take from this term. Option A defines the impassibility of God as God having no emotions or passions, at all. This is not an option we would agree with, because throughout the Bible we see God having many emotions or passions about various things, here's a few examples. He can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), rejoice (Isa. 62:5), wrathful (Ex. 32:10), pity (Ps. 103:13), love (Ex. 34:6-7, Ps. 103:17), He even makes many appeals to His people to repent (Ezek. 33:11). We deny option A. As for option B, the impassibility of God is defined as God having emotions and passions but not being ruled by them or subject to them, as we are. God feels many things, and always expresses them perfectly. God's eternal purpose, His divine will stands, He doesn't act at by moods, or on the whim of His emotions. Also, "God desires for us to not be ruled by our passions/emotions either but to be subject to Him and His sovereign providential will."⁴² Therefore, when it comes to the impassibility of God it really is a good term and we should keep it around, but do not forget that it really matters what we mean when we use the term.

The Problem of Process Theology

Sometimes known by its more modern term ‘open theism’ process theologians teach change (or process) is an essential aspect of genuine existence and therefore if God is to genuinely exist He must experience process and change as well. They teach that God learns, grows in wisdom, and thus does not know the future. More so, because the universe changes second by second God is affected by these changes and becomes something other than what He was moment by moment.⁴³ If this is difficult for you to grasp think of a river. Because of its constant flow you truly never step into the same river twice. It is always in motion and change, it never ceases to be in this state unless it dries up. Likewise, process theologians believe the universe operates similarly so to them God never interacts with same universe twice, and because it is always changing, He so must also. Charles Hartshorne was the first who brought this into public view in 1897 and since then Greg Boyd, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders have picked up where he left off. The holes are immediately seen in such a view of God. It denies all the traditional or classical doctrines of God we hold dear. And they don’t mind at all to do this. In fact, it seems to be what they’re seeking to do.⁴⁴

I once had the opportunity to meet John Sanders in college. At the time I had only been a Christian for a year, and I was relatively new to the philosophical scene so I had no idea who he was or what he taught. But all the philosophy majors were given the chance to sit down anyone who came to interview for the department head position. So Sanders came in, and I and a few other students sat down with him. He explained his position of open theism against classical theism, and intrigued most of the students present. In fact, from this presentation many of the students became open theists and it started spreading around the campus. But for some reason I didn’t follow suit. I’m not patting myself on the back here, at the time these events unfolded I had no idea why I didn’t agree with Sanders. Honestly his presentation simply didn’t seem honest to me. So while a large group of Christians on campus went off into Sanders open theism, I was led further toward classical theism.

Lessons from Immutability

Maintaining the Proper Distinction

The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck said, “The doctrine of God’s immutability is of the highest significance for religion. The contrast between being and becoming marks the difference between the Creator and the creature. Every creature is continually becoming, changeable, constantly striving, seeks rest and satisfaction, and finds rest in God, in Him alone, for only He is pure being and no becoming. Hence, in Scripture God is often called the ‘Rock.’”⁴⁵ If we do not maintain the proper distinction between ourselves and God we will lose much in our doctrine of God and doctrine of man. Slowly but surely, our view of God will decrease while our view of man increases. Maintaining the proper distinction between God and man is one of the surest ways to remain orthodox in theology.

The Ground of Our Hope

Again, Malachi 3:6 says, “For I the Lord do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob are not consumed.” The reason we’re not consumed is because God does not

change. God says His immutability is the ground of our hope because regardless of what is going on in our lives, when we draw near to God we'll always be able to find Him because He always the same. Just imagine if God did change (keeping in mind our former reasoning that to change means you're either becoming better or worse) this leads to awful implications with God. If God were to change for the better than He was not the best possible being when we first trusted Him. And if He could become better how He is the best possible being now? If God was changing for the worse, than what would that even mean? He could become evil, or wholly evil. How could we trust a God who could change? If His eternal will, purposes, and promises were always up for grabs there's no reason to trust the Bible either, and eventually there would be no reason to think that the blood of Jesus saves us, cleanses us, and washes us white as snow, because God may change His mind. Or even if He wanted to save us, what if His power changed making Him unable to come through on His promises?

Wayne Grudem has a helpful comment here, "A little reflection shows how absolutely important the doctrine of God's immutability is. If God can change, the whole basis of our faith begins to fall apart. God is infinitely worthy of our trust because He is absolutely and eternally unchanging in His being, perfections, purposes, and promises."⁴⁶

The Jealousy and Wrath of God

*“I will vindicate the holiness of My great name,
which has been profaned among the nations,
and which you have profaned among them.
And the nations will know that I am the LORD,
declares the Lord GOD, when through you
I vindicate My holiness before their eyes.”
(Ezekiel 36:23)*

What is the relationship between M&M’s and chocolate ice cream? This may seem like a silly question, but it’s profoundly applicable to the matter now at hand. If you’re a smart person you’ll understand the relationship between M&M’s and chocolate ice cream is one of an inseparable union. No one in their right mind eats either of these on their own. The only manner to enjoy the intricacies of such delights is to eat them together along with chocolate syrup and a crunch bar thrown in too. What is my point here? It’s a simple one. I must admit, as much as I want to see my ice cream preference as an objective fact you may truly disagree with my reasoning which makes this a subjective argument. On the other hand, when it comes to the relationship of God’s jealousy and wrath we exit the realm of subjectivity and enter the realm of objectivity.

So, what is the relationship between the jealousy of God and the wrath of God? It also is one of inseparable union, one of cause and effect. Or we could say the relationship between the two is one of the root and it’s fruit. What I mean by saying this is that in Scripture we often find the jealousy of God prompting or provoking the wrath of God. So let’s define our terms shall we? God’s jealousy is defined as God’s zeal to uphold His glory. God’s wrath is the outpouring of His hatred/anger/fury on all sin.⁴⁷

God’s Jealousy

Exodus 20:5, in the middle of the 3rd commandment God says “...for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.” Exodus 34:14, “For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.” In this verse we see God’s passion to be the supreme object of affection in the hearts of His people, indeed He is jealous for this. This is why we so often see passages of Scripture like Isaiah 40-48 where God goes on a war against all idols and those who worship them. Why does He do this? Isaiah 48:9-11, “My glory I will not give to another.” This is reflected in Paul’s love for the Corinthians in 2 Cor. 11:2 when he says, “I feel a divine jealousy for you.” So as God is deeply committed to His honor and glory, Paul is deeply committed to the welfare of the Corinthians.

Many people today take issue and even take offense that God would be jealous because they think of God's jealousy in the same manner as our own jealousy. And most sensible people recognize that our jealousy is sinful and misguided 99% of the time. What we need to remember is that God is not like us in this respect. He is jealous, and His jealousy is always perfect, never sinful, and is even good because God is jealous over the right things, while we are so often jealous over wrong things. It isn't wrong for God to be jealous for His own honor, glory, and fame. He deserves it completely. It is wrong for you and I to be jealous for our own honor, glory, and fame. It is the one thing we do not deserve.

God's Wrath

As for God's wrath, you probably are aware that it is a doctrine that also finds rejection around every corner in our day. But it always surprises many to see how often the Bible speaks of God's wrath. It is such a common subject because if God loves and is jealous for what is good, true, and beautiful (namely Himself), anytime when those things are opposed or scorned God becomes wrathful. In Exodus 32:9-10 after Aaron made the people the golden calf God tells Moses, "I have seen this people...let me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." This is a repetitive theme throughout the entire Old Testament as God, through His prophets, calls the people back to repentance again and again.

Too many think the doctrine of God's wrath is only an Old Testament doctrine while also believing the God of the New Testament to be a loving God. Such thinking isn't in line with the biblical teaching. Jesus in John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." Romans 1:18, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men." Romans 9:22, "What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction..." After listing a large group of sins in Colossians 3:5 Paul says in 3:6, "On account of these the wrath of God is coming." 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "Jesus delivered us from the wrath to come." Later in the same book he says, "For God has not destined His elect for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Thess. 5:9). Speaking of Israel's refusal to trust God as they camped on the border of the promise land Hebrews 3:11 says, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest." And Revelation 6:16-17 speaks of the great and dreadful 'wrath of the Lamb.'

Now that we've spoken of these two attributes of God separately, let's take a few examples in Scripture of how they relate to one another simultaneously.

God's Jealousy and Wrath

In Genesis 6 when God said He regretted and was sorry for making man on the earth, Gen. 6:6 says God was grieved by the sin of man. We have to ask, why did God grieve? The answer is because He was disobeyed. He wasn't glorified but defamed by man's actions. So the result of this deep grieving in God was the flood, where in wrath God brought death to all mankind except Noah and his family. In Numbers 25 God gets

jealous for His honor among His people when His people dishonor His name, and the result of God's jealousy for His honor is God's wrath brought onto the people. The two instigators were killed and a plague came onto the whole people. It is here in Numbers 25:11 where we see this displayed for us in our various translations of the Bible. The ESV says Phinehas was "jealous with My jealousy" while the NIV says Phinehas was "zealous for My honor among them." Clearly here we have a link and a unity between the two words jealousy and zealous or zeal, such that to be jealous for something is to have great zeal for it. And from this great zeal Phinehas wrathfully speared the two instigators through with one thrust. In Joshua 7-8 Achan disobeyed God and hid it. Once it was found out God had his entire family brought before the people to be stoned. Why? Because God was jealous over His name being defamed, and as a consequence His wrath was stirred and poured out.

We could add many more examples to this couldn't we? Anytime in Scripture where we see sin occurring in God's people, we often see God's jealousy being stirred up and the result is God's wrath being poured out. The definitive example of this reality is the cross. To show you this let's first see Ezekiel 36, then go to Romans 3.

In Ezekiel 36:22-23 we read, "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes." So man sinned, God is jealous to regain the honor of His name, and it's clear in this passage that He promises to one day act. When God acts He will not for the sake of Israel but for the vindication of His holy name, and He'll do this so clearly that when He acts all the nations will know God is the Lord when. So the question for us is, when throughout history did God act for the sake of His holy name? There is one definitive answer – the cross.

Romans 3:23-26 displays this, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." See the reason God wrought redemption through sending His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for His people was the vindication of His own holiness. Or to put it another way, God was jealous for His glory and vindicated His glory and honor by pouring out His wrath onto His Son. This is why the cross is such a stunning event, because in it we see the intermingling of God's love and justice, God's wrath and grace, and God's jealousy and mercy.

Many hymns speak of this. Here are three examples. In Robert Lowry's 1876 hymn 'Here is Love' one stanza says "On the mount of crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide, through the floodgates of God's mercy, flowed a vast and gracious tide, grace and love like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above, heaven's peace and perfect justice, kissed a guilty world in love." In Charitie Lees Smith's 1863 hymn 'Before the Throne of

God Above' it says "Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free, for God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me." One more, in Philip Bliss's 1875 hymn 'Man of Sorrows, What a Name' it says "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood, Hallelujah, what a Savior!" All three of these hymns put the realities of Ezekiel 36 and Romans 3 into song. And when comparing these songs with many (not all) of the modern music used in within the Church today, it is a deplorable difference. We must return, even in our singing, to rich and robust hymns. Why? Because rather than being filled with the same twelve words over and over they are filled to the brim with Biblical truth that nourish the soul.

So what are some takeaways from God's jealousy and wrath? Four things, at least.

Without Them We Are Lost

Without an understanding of God's jealousy and God's wrath, or a neglect of these doctrines, leaves us in a spot where we cannot understand the reason the cross. It is the epitome of foolishness to deny these doctrines, if you do you end up with this, "A God without wrath, brought men without sin, into a kingdom without judgment, through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."⁴⁸ We do not want to end up here. Rather, the jealousy of God should lead us to being jealous for God.⁴⁹

With Them We Gain Encouragement

J.I. Packer leads us well here by saying, "But, we ask, what is the nature of this divine jealousy? How can jealousy be a virtue in God when it is a vice in men? God's perfection's are a matter for praise; but how can we praise God for being jealous?...God seeks what we should seek – His glory in and through men – and it is for the securing of this end, ultimately, that He is jealous."⁵⁰ And Packer again, "To those who are Christ's, the holy God is a loving father. They belong to his family, they may approach him without fear, and always be sure of his fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message."⁵¹ Though the jealousy and wrath of God are something the unbeliever fears, they are things that bring the believer much encouragement.

We Gain An Evangelistic Resolve

These doctrines should move the Christian to eagerness in evangelism because they remind us that God will punish all sin. To this there will be no exceptions. So all those who we know who still are in sin, apart from Christ, will go to hell unless they repent. Does this move you? Does God's jealousy for the glory of His name break upon your heart like water on a rock when you think of all those who are at this very moment mocking the God of glory when they should be loving and adoring Him? Do not move to quickly past this. When this sinks in, it changes you.

We Gain An Unending Serious Joy

God not only upholds His glory, but He is jealous to do so. This is good news for us, because "God's passion for His glory is also the measure of His commitment to our joy."⁵² Or to say another way, God has a zeal to uphold that which makes us infinitely happy, namely, His glory. If God did not do this, He would not love us at all. That He has done this, shows us how great He has loved us.

His wrath is truly terrible. His jealousy for His fame is unending. Our God is a consuming fire. Like Lewis' Aslan, God is good but He is not tame. There is something wild, mysterious, and threatening about God's and His jealous wrath. In our gospel softening generation, we need more of this untamable Christ.

The Mercy and Grace of God

*“Ultimately God’s Grace is a Person, Jesus Christ.”
(David Briones)*

To begin this chapter, I want to remind you of what we did in the last chapter. If you recall we looked into the jealousy and wrath of God, and found that they are two sides of the same coin. It is the zeal or jealousy God has for His own name and glory that stirs up His wrath. In this same manner, when we turn to the mercy and grace of God we’ll find that though very similar they are not the same. They also are two sides of the same coin. God’s mercy can be defined as God not giving us what do deserve, and God’s grace can be defined as God giving us what we don’t deserve. God’s mercy withholds what is due to us, while grace extends what isn’t due to us. Let’s look into these things now.

God’s Mercy

I have defined the mercy of God as God not giving us what we deserve because throughout Scripture we see God granting mercy to those who are in trouble or distress. As we’ll see with grace, because we are fallen sinners any mercy shown to us by God is surprising. To Israel, after God had redeemed them He says of Himself in Exodus 34:6, “The LORD the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Likewise David says of God in Psalm 103:8, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” David again, when he was in distress calls out in 2 Sam. 24:14 saying, “I am in great distress; let us fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercy is great.” Two men in the gospels cry out to Jesus saying, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” in Matthew 9:27. The Publican cries in out “God be merciful to me, a sinner” in Luke 18:13. Paul knows this and picks up on this theme in the introduction of 2 Corinthians 1 when he says God is the “Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.” So from God’s mercy we are not given what we do deserve and from that we find comfort. Hebrews 2:17 says, “Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the service of God.” So then it is only natural that because Jesus became a merciful and faithful High Priest in His incarnation that we find mercy being described as what we receive when we approach the throne of God as believers. Hebrews 4:16, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

We must also speak of God’s mercy as being sovereign, or given out at His pleasure. Exodus 33:19, which is also quoted in Romans 9:15, says, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I show mercy.” Though many people

fight against this doctrine we must see that God is God. He is in the heavens and does all that He pleases (Psalm 115:3). He is under no obligation to dole out mercy to anyone, yet He does, freely, generously, and liberally.

This great mercy of God has inspired Christians throughout the history of the Church in the preaching of God's Word (that He has chosen to reveal Himself to us is itself a mercy), in the praying of God's Word (that He hears us in prayer is itself a mercy), and in the singing of God's Word (that He delights in the praises of His people is itself a mercy). We see this in the historic hymn called Kyrie Eleison (Latin for 'Lord have mercy'). The lyrics to Kyrie Eleison simply repeat the same phrases 'Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord have mercy.' Or 'Kyrie eleison, Christie eleison, kyrie eleison.' Some of you may not be aware that you already know this ancient hymn by your knowledge of it's 1985 Mr. Mister equivalent. Yes you read that right. I have found that most good things lead you to the monster ballads of the 80's. In 1985 Mr. Mister recorded 'Kyrie' where they sang, "Kyrie eleison down the road that I must travel, Kyrie eleison through the darkness of the night, Kyrie eleison where I'm going will you follow, Kyrie eleison on a highway in the night." Ironic that such a historic and robust hymn from church history would show up here!

Bottom line? God ought to withhold mercy from us yet He gives it. Praise Him!

God's Grace

I have defined the grace of God as 'God giving us what we don't deserve' because that's what we see in the Bible. The Hebrew word 'hen' in the KJV is translated into the English 'grace' while the ESV translates it into the English 'favor.' When it comes to God's grace in Scripture we must be reminded who we are. As fallen sinners any favor or grace shown to us by God is surprising. Genesis 6:5 says for no merit of his own, "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord." In Gen. 33:11 Jacob tells his brother Esau that God has dealt 'graciously' with him, and we know also that Jacob did nothing to merit this graciousness because his whole life he was a deceiver. Likewise, when Joseph saw Benjamin for the first time in many years in Gen. 43:29 he said, "God be gracious to you, my son!" The next reference of 'hen' or the grace of God is in Exodus 33:12-17 when God tells Moses that he has 'found favor' with Him. Throughout those verses the word 'hen' or 'favor' is also found in v13, v16, and v17. You could say it's a central theme in the relationship God has with Moses. Also, when God reveals His name to His people in Exodus 34:6 God speaks of His 'hen' or 'grace' saying, "The LORD the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." In all of these examples we see a pattern, God chooses and redeems His people for the express purpose of showing them His favor. All of us are undeserving of such favor. Therefore God's grace to men is in spite of man's unrighteousness and by God's sovereign decision.

Because God's grace to man is in spite of what man is, many people have defined God's grace as God's unmerited favor. This is a good definition and we should continue to use it, but we can go further. You see, we not only don't merit God's grace by anything we've ever done, but we must remember that when God's grace interrupts us we are in

active rebellion against God. Rather than saying God's grace is God's unmerited favor, I prefer to say grace is God's demerited favor.⁵³

When we come over into the New Testament we find the Greek word 'charis' translated into the English 'grace' and even 'joy' at times. John 1 quickly comes to mind when it says in 1:14-17, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness about Him, and cried out, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.' For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." After many had believed in the gospel in Antioch Barnabas arrives and says he sees 'the grace of God' in Acts 11:23. In Acts 18:27 we see grace producing faith when it says that Apollos 'greatly helped those who through grace had believed.' Referring to the gospel itself Paul and Barnabas urged their hearers to 'continue in the grace of God' in Acts 13:43 and in Acts 14:3, 20:24 and 20:32 they refer to the gospel as the 'gospel of the grace of God.' Peter in the Acts 15 council says of the Gentiles, "We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

So we've seen a bit of a change haven't we? From this point on in the New Testament we see that grace is not only God's favor, but that it is also God's power to change hearts, and salvation itself. More so, as I heard David Briones say once, "Ultimately God's grace is a Person, Jesus Christ." This is why Paul throughout his letters can speak of us being 'justified by God's grace.' (Rom. 3:21-24, 4:4, 4:16, 11:6, Gal. 2:21) This is why Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." Similarly in 2 Tim. 1:9 he says, "God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."

Here we see another element to grace, eternal election. When we see this it's no surprise that we find Paul in Ephesians 1:6, 1:12, and 1:14 that our election before the world was made is for 'the praise of His glorious grace.' Clearly then we see that grace cannot be based on our works, rather it itself gives us the power to do good works and live the holy lives we're called to. So Peter speaks in 1 Peter 5:5, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" and goes on to call God the 'Father of all grace' in 5:10). This is why grace appears in many of the greetings and benedictions throughout the New Testament such as 1 Cor. 1:3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." and 2 Cor. 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

So there we have the sovereign mercy and grace of God. It is in these that we see God's love most brightly. Streaming full and vibrant to the elect in the Person, Work, and present reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without it we have nothing, with it we literally have everything. Therefore, our confession must be, "By the grace of God, I am what I am..." (1 Cor. 15:10).

The Wisdom of God

*“Wisdom is that perfection in God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most.”
(Louis Berkhof)*

Here we close out our first of the 7 summits of systematic theology, the doctrine of God. To do so, we turn to the wisdom of God.

What’s better? Wisdom or knowledge? Many pit wisdom against knowledge saying knowledge is mere facts held in the head while wisdom is those facts applied in daily life. There’s something to be said for this, and in a real sense wisdom really is, as many have said, the art of living well. But there’s more we can see in this. The wisdom of God is related to the truth of God as light is related to the sun. All the natural light on earth comes from the sun, just as all the wisdom of God we know comes from the infinite well of God’s truth. Or you could just as easily say it the other way, that all the truth of God we know comes from the infinite well of God’s wisdom. So see how you cannot remove one from the other, they are inextricably bound, so much so that some consider the wisdom/truth of God to be synonyms. Thus, just as we can look at the light and learn of the sun, we can look into the wisdom of God found in the Word of God and learn of the truth of God. Or to say it another way, we can look into the truth of God which is the Word of God and learn of the wisdom of God. John Frame says it like this, “God’s wisdom is the source of His Words and laws. It is the source and standard for all of the world’s knowledge and skills, for godly living, and for the way of salvation in Christ.”⁵⁴ By sending it out God intends His truth and wisdom to lead us back to Him ‘our exceeding joy’ (Psalm 43:4). Therefore the truth and wisdom of God are precious to us, because without them we wouldn’t know God.

In this chapter we’ll focus on what the Scripture has to say about God’s wisdom, and see His truth come into play again and again.

Defined

Wayne Grudem defines God’s wisdom as “God always choosing the best goals and best means to those goals.”⁵⁵ Louis Berkhof defines it more detailed saying, “That perfection in God whereby He applies His knowledge to the attainment of His ends in a way which glorifies Him most.”⁵⁶ In these definitions we see a grand reality. Of all the infinite possibilities that could be, God always chooses what is best. More so, in all His works He

not only know the best way to carry them out, He knows the best way to carry out His works so as to glorify Himself the most.

In his 'Discourse on Metaphysics' the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz made an argued that God created the best of all possible worlds, and I think it is very well done. Here's how Leibniz made the argument. God possesses infinite wisdom, therefore when God does something He always does it in the wisest, most perfect, and most desirable way possible. Therefore, when God created the world that we see before us today we can know that this world exists as the best of all possible worlds, because it was made, and if since God made it, He did so in the wisest way possible. If we were to say that God did not create the world in the wisest way possible, we would be saying that God could have created the world in a wiser or better way. To say that is to find fault with God, and this is the essence of folly. Leibniz is on to something here that many in our modern day do not embrace. In the wisdom of God, God sees to it that He is glorified in all He does. This means that God's greatest desire is to be glorified, and because of this, everything He does serves the end of His glory being made much of. This includes the grand drama we find unfolding throughout Scripture of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Therefore if God were to create a world in which He was not fully glorified or treasured, that world would be lacking in the most fundamental way possible. Therefore the logical conclusion of this thought is that God is fully glorified in this world, because this world exists, knowing that this world would not exist unless it was the best possible of all worlds, because God does all things in the most perfect and desirable manner possible.

The Problem of Evil

But doesn't this bring up the problem of evil? Yes it does. If God created this world as the best of all possible worlds, and everything serves the purpose of glorifying Himself, than what do we make of the evil in our world? Does that evil serve God's glory? If God made the world in the wisest way possible was the evil we see everyday part of His 'wisest possible plan?' Leibniz implies that God must be glorified more because of evil in the world, than if none of the evil had ever happened. Again the logical conclusion is simple. We know God acts for His own glory in the most perfect and desirable manner possible. Therefore everything that was made was made in the most 'wise way possible.' Therefore if evil (or anything) exists we know that God had a wise purpose and design in allowing it to exist. Therefore, I agree with Leibniz, that we do live in the best of all possible worlds. Everything that exists serves the purpose of God's glory. If anything didn't serve the end of God's glory, God wouldn't have allowed it to exist. We'll return to the origin of sin in the next summit but for now see that the problem of evil, isn't a problem at all for God.

A Danger

Now, let's come back from our philosophical excursion and be warned. We've just said some very true and glorious things of God, but see here the danger of philosophy: arriving at truth about God apart from the revealed truth of God. This should prompt us to ask? Does the Bible agree with Leibniz? Yes it does. How so? In Romans 16:27 out of the things Paul could have attributed to God he says in His benediction, "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!" Job says God is 'wise in heart'

(Job 9:4) and that “with God are wisdom and might” (Job 12:13). Psalm 19 and Psalm 104 put the wisdom of God on display through creation saying “In wisdom You have made them all.” We even have an entire section of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon) called the ‘Wisdom literature’ and in that portion of Scripture wisdom is even personified in Proverbs 8. More so, we have Solomon the epitome of Old Testament wisdom. 1 Kings 4:32-33 says Solomon wrote, “3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He also spoke of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish.” Solomon was so wise because God made him this way. He asked Solomon for anything, and out of all the things Solomon could have asked for (wealth, fame, and fortune) he asked for wisdom, and God gave him wisdom and everything else along with it.

Keeping Solomon in mind we find it no surprise when we see Jesus say in Matthew 12:42, “Someone greater than Solomon is here.” When we think specifically of redemption in Christ God’s wisdom comes squarely into view. After spending 11 entire chapters detailing rich and robust doctrine concerning the nature of God’s work through His son in Paul’s letter to the Romans, he explodes into praise in 11:33 saying, “O the depth and the riches of the (what?) wisdom of God...” Later in 1 Corinthians even though the cross is seen as foolishness to the world (1 Cor. 1:18) Christ is the very ‘wisdom of God’ (1 Cor. 1:30) to those who’ve been saved. In fact the whole scope of ‘redemption as wisdom’ is defined for us in 1 Cor. 1:20-31. In many ways God pits His own wisdom against the wisdom of the world and He shows how His wisdom, though seen as folly and weakness, is actually where true strength and truth is found. Even later in Ephesians 3 Paul is speaking of the wondrous reality that in the gospel racial barriers/tensions are broken down (specifically the context is Jew/Gentile, but we can see how easily it applies to the racial tensions in our day) and from seeing such things put on display in the local church, Paul says the entire watching world see’s the wisdom of God. Eph. 3:10 says it, that “...through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”

Therefore We Ought To

Fear

Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” Prov. 9:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.” Psalm 111:10, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, all who practice it have a good understanding.” A recognition of the great and unplumbable wisdom of God will humble man each time he views it. When humbled, we cannot help but gain a reverent fear of God, which ironically, is the way we grow in wisdom.

Trust

Romans 8:28, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Of this Thomas Watson says, “The wisdom of God is seen in making the most desperate evils turn to the good of His children.”⁵⁷ Only a God who is wise beyond all things can work and wield all things for the great good of His children and the great glory of His name.

Love & Seek

We ought to be those who thus, love and seek after the wisdom of God. James 1:5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Psalm 51:6, "Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart." John 8:32, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 17:17, "Your Word is truth." Psalm 119:160, "The sum of Your Word is truth." Isaiah 45:19, "I did not speak in secret, in a land of darkness; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek me in vain.' I the LORD speak the truth; I declare what is right." Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." All of the above passages remind us of how the great wisdom of God turns our own life toward sitting at His feet and learning from Him, so that our whole life is a growth in such wisdom.

Hate & Flee

Because we love and seek the wisdom of God, we also ought to be those who hate and flee falsehood. Proverbs 13:5, "The righteous hates falsehood, but the wicked brings shame and disgrace." John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Romans 1:18 and 22, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...Claiming to be wise, they became fools."

Let us therefore adore the God whose wisdom is of infinite depth, and seek to know and be mastered by this wisdom in order to be wise ourselves.

Summit 2

Anthropology – The Doctrine of Man

Man in His Original State

*“The reason we think the sinfulness of man is so evil is, in part, because of where man has fallen from.”
(Adam Powers)*

We now begin our second summit of the seven summits of systematic theology, the doctrine of man. And as we begin talking about the doctrine of man, or biblical anthropology, there is one thing we must discuss first above all things concerning man – man in his original state, or man made the image of God.

When talking of the nature of man today it is commonplace to hear man described as a cosmic accident on the scene of history. This view, which is still being popularized by the evolutionary viewpoint, is that man evolved over millions of years from a puddle of slime into what we are today. Over the past century we have seen a large pendulum swing. As the theory of evolution gained wide acceptance in the world, the dignity of mankind and the sanctity of human life has decreased and lost favor in the world. Now human life is seen as nothing more than grown up germs in the vast evolutionary timetable.⁵⁸ It’s ironic that against the backdrop of such a pessimistic view of human life presented in the world, that you find the most optimistic view of man presented in the Church. Many people are put off that the Church speaks so often of the sinfulness of man and for this reason they reject Christianity. But don’t let them fool you. The reason we think the sinfulness of man is so evil is, in part, because of where man has fallen from. You see, we were not always sinful creatures. When God made us He made in His image. This means all mankind, believer and unbeliever alike, is made in the image of God and because of this has an inherent dignity and worth.

Near the end of creation God said, “Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

God did something here that was not done before in all His creative activity. He had already made the kingdoms of the world: the sky, the sea, and the land. He had already made the kings for those kingdoms: the birds, the fish, and the beasts. But none of these things were made in the image and likeness of God. More so, directly before making man God said ‘Let us make man in Our image’ indicating a “unique engagement of divine thought and counsel within the Trinity, which would lead us to believe that something correspondingly unique is about to take place.”⁵⁹ Then God made man, male and female,

in His own image, and because of this mankind is the pinnacle of all creation being ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31). This one thing is what separates all mankind from brute beasts small and large. And we must not be ashamed of this today. We live in a time where the life of animals are valued more than the life of a human being. Yet do you see even here from Genesis 1 that to value the life of an animal over the life of a human being is to reverse how God intends things to be? We also live in a time when abortion, the murder of human beings in the womb, is not only widely accepted but seen as a woman’s right rather than the horrid atrocity that it is. The Church must not bow to the culture’s view of man. Rather we must continually teach and embrace the biblical view of the dignity of all man and the sanctity of human life.

Two words in Genesis 1 describe this for us: image and likeness. Early on the Church fathers believed the image/likeness of God in man consisted of man’s rational and moral characteristics. Others like Irenaeus and Tertullian viewed the image and likeness of God in man as two separate things; image being man’s bodily nature and likeness being man’s spiritual nature. The Roman Catholic Church still to this day believes these to be two separate things; image being rationality, reason, and volition, while likeness being an original righteousness added to man at creation. We Protestants differ. We believe the two words image and likeness to be two words which refer to the same thing (the theological word for this is a ‘hendiadys’). So to say we were made in the image of God is to say we were made in the likeness of God, and visa versa. In this manner John Calvin said, “Accordingly by this term (the image of God) is denoted the integrity with which Adam was endued when his intellect was clear, his affections subordinated to reason, all his senses duly regulated, and when he truly ascribed all his excellence to the admirable gifts of his Maker. And though the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and the heart, or the soul and its powers, there was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine.”⁶⁰ Calvin does not separate image and likeness but speaks of both being the natural and spiritual characteristics of man.

So what does it mean, according to the Bible, to be made in the image of God? Images were common in the ancient world the Old Testament was written in, and it was these varied images that represented someone like a god or a king. The 2nd commandment forbids the worship of images, yet see the beauty of man in that by making us, God made an image of Himself. At it’s most basic we must say this: to be made in the image/likeness of God is to be made to resemble God. Therefore though God and man are different, we believe God and man are similar too. We could say that what we see being taught in Genesis 1 is “man’s relationship to the rest of creation is similar to God’s relationship to the creation as a whole.”⁶¹ After Genesis 1:26-27 God gives man the Cultural Mandate in Gen. 1:28 which says, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” This means God has given man finite qualities that are replicas of God’s infinite qualities, and that God has made man like Himself to equip man for his task as a ‘lord’ who exercises dominion, while being a ‘lord’ who submits to God’s Lordship. This is to say that God made man to be lord of the world under Him. It is this role man must carry out. John Frame gives us a helpful pattern to think through when he says God’s three main Lordship qualities are: prophet, priest, and king. Thus, we should see traces of each of these three in man because God made man like Him.⁶²

Man as King

The role of a king is a role of power. Man in the image of God has power, power that is God-given for us to have dominion over and subdue to earth, making it bear fruit for us. Everything God has made in the 1st – 6th days of creation man is to have dominion over. This is Genesis 1:28, the cultural or dominion mandate. See that the kingly task of man having dominion over the world is carried out when man takes creation and turns it into an environment suited to the needs and purposes of man. This not only involves growing crops for food, but also speaks of the arts, sciences, and literature. Man is therefore to be a culture builder according to God's standards, and when we do so, we bring glory to God by living as lords under God, the Lord of Lords.

Man as Prophet

The role of a prophet is a role of authority in language. Man in the image of God is a prophet in that God has given us language in order to exercise authority in the world. Man's first experience with this was when they heard the authoritative prophetic voice of God commanding them in 1:28-31. Man's second experience with this was when Adam used language authoritatively to name the animals in Genesis 2. Then the disastrous third experience was hearing the language of the serpent and believing his word over God's. God then authoritatively used language to condemn the serpent, discipline Adam/Eve, and promise redemption (Gen. 3:15). See the overall pattern here: as God first spoke words to man, man in turn is to speak similar words to his fellow man and by these words impose upon a rule, harmony, and order as he builds culture in the world. Because as man speaks according to God's standards, man speaks with God's authority.

Man as Priest

The role of a priest is a role of mediation. Genesis 2:15 says God commanded Adam to do two things in the garden 'work it and keep it.' Some have said Adam was merely a farmer of the world God had made. Yet, the only other place these two Hebrew words (work and keep) are used together again in Scripture is when Moses describes the priest's duties within the tabernacle in Numbers 3:7-8, and 4:23-24, 26.⁶³ As Adam was called to work and keep the garden, Moses calls the priests to work (or tend to) and keep the tabernacle. Conclusion? Adam was the first priest, in the first temple. And his duties were more priestly than agricultural. Which means Eden was not a farm, but was the first temple. Which makes the garden within Eden, the first holy of holies within the first temple. So in our calling to build culture we must see our calling not as a secular one but as a spiritual one, where all of the culture we build relates to God. Partly this means that one of the most important institutions of culture is the local Church, where we 'work and keep' culture according to God's standards, spreading His Word to nurture His people with the means God has intended for our nourishment.

Obviously when speaking of God being Prophet, priest, and King we must say that all of these offices find their apex in the Person of Christ. Who is (by no surprise) said to be the very image of God throughout the New Testament. What I'm about to say can be a bit hard to follow, so read closely and slowly.

Adam with the aid of his helpmate Eve were to carry out these roles because God not only wanted Adam and Eve to rule over creation, but to spread His image throughout the

earth by procreation. Adam failed to do this when he grasped for the fruit. Next, this same command is passed onto Noah and his family in Genesis 9:1-2, but Ham, Noah's son, failed like Adam. This un-fulfilled command then becomes a promise God made Abraham. Rather than being told to spread God's image across the globe, God promised Abraham that He would bless the nations through his descendants.

Did the cultural mandate just go away? No. It is fulfilled by Jesus.

Jesus is called the 'last Adam' in 1 Corinthians 15:45, and is referred to in Romans 5:14 when Paul says, "Adam was a type of the One who was to come." These verses mean that in Adam we get a preview not only of what Jesus would be like, but also of the work Jesus would come to do. How so? Jesus, unlike Adam fulfilled this command from Genesis 1:28 not by procreation (as Adam was to do) but by making new creations out of sinful human beings. Recall when a person places their faith in Jesus, they become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). They, who were originally made in the image of God (but are now marred by sin) are now through salvation more realistic displays of the image of God than they have ever been before because they are living in communion with God, and that's what they were made for. Also when one is saved by Jesus, Jesus begins to conform to His own image, which the Bible says is the exact representation of the image of God (Heb. 1:3, Col. 1:15-20). So being conformed into the image of Jesus in sanctification is God's work of making us into what we are always meant to be – the image of God.

So you see, the more people come to Jesus, the more people are being made into the image of God by Jesus through what is called sanctification. What does this mean? Jesus is right now fulfilling the Genesis 1:28 command by making these new creations all over the globe. Therefore, to be made in the image of God means we have an inherent dignity and sanctity. It means we were made to be God's prophets, priests, and kings as we build and create culture. And it means the image of God is now being spread throughout the whole earth by Jesus, through the gospel, with the aid of His helpmate, the Church.

Allow me to repeat myself. It's ironic that against the backdrop of such a pessimistic view of human life presented in the world, that you find the most optimistic view of man presented in the Church. Many people are put off that the Church speaks so often of the sinfulness of man and for this reason they reject Christianity. Don't let them fool you. The reason we think the sinfulness of man is so evil is, in part, because of where man has fallen from. You see, we were not always sinful creatures. When God made us He made in His image.

Man in His Fallen State

*“For you are dust and to dust you shall return.”
(Genesis 3:19)*

As we approach man in his fallen state, there are three things I must cover: the origin of sin (which includes the transmission of sin), the character of sin, and the punishment of sin.

Origin of Sin

As long as man has been we have sought to answer the question of the origin of sin, of moral corruption, and of evil. As you can imagine there have been many answers to this question throughout history. But though there are many answers, we can assemble them into a few groups. First, the early Church fathers were split on this. The Eastern Church (Greek theologians) came to settle on a position known as Pelagianism, which denied any connection between Adam’s sin and our own, believing all men are not polluted in Adam. The Western Church (Latin theologians) came to settle on a position known as Augustinianism, which stressed the connection between Adam’s sin and our own, believing all men to be polluted in Adam. As history progressed the majority of the Church would come to a middle position called semi-pelagianism, which believes man to be polluted from Adam’s sin but believes the pollution is not as bad as the Augustinians made it seem. Though the majority of the Church embraced this middle-ground position the Reformers rejected semi-pelagianism. After the Reformation period, the sinfulness of man continued to decrease in the eyes of the Church (though the Puritans held to it) so that eventually it came to disappear all together with the dawn of liberalism. Within the Church now it seems two things are prevalent. First, that Adam was the first sinner, and second, that his sin is not the cause of the sin in mankind and not related to us at all.

What does Scripture say about this? How did mankind receive a sinful nature? What is sin’s origin? You may think it arrogant of me to speak so bluntly but the Bible is crystal clear on this. We can say the following things:

The Consequence of God’s Sovereign Will

The first thing we can say about origin of sin is that the fall of man is the consequence of God’s sovereign will. Don’t mishear me. God is holy, holy, holy (Isa. 6:3), sin cannot be in His presence (Job 34:10), He hates sin (Ps. 5:4, 11:5), He cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no man (Jam. 1:13). God is not the author of sin, yet we can say that in His sovereignty God was pleased to permit and purpose the fall of man to His own glory. We can say this because it is an implication of God’s sovereignty. Since God is

sovereign over all things, since He ordains whatsoever comes to pass, and since all things work according to the counsel of His own will we must conclude that God was not surprised when the fall took place. God didn't say oops. To deny such a thing is foolish because it would place God in subjection to another who brought about the fall against His will. Romans 8:20 says "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." All creation was subjected to futility, this means it was subjected to the fall...by who? By 'him who subjected it in hope.' Who subjected creation to futility in hope? It surely wasn't Adam. He didn't disobey God's one command with an aim toward hope. No, God subjected the creation to futility through the fall of man in hope that one day He would raise it to new life, just as raises His children to new life. Thus we believe with the Reformers and Puritans who said, "It is not sin in God to will that sin be." Romans 5:8 teaches us this principle as well. God shows His love for us (He really desired to display His love toward us) in that while we were still sinners (there had to be sin) Christ died (there had to be death) for us. So by permitting, allowing, and ordaining the fall of man God opened the jaws of death that would eventually slam shut on His Son at the cross. The fall prepared the world for the Son of God to enter it and die.⁶⁴

The Consequence of Man's Wicked Choice

The second thing we can say about origin of sin is that the fall of man is the consequence of man's wicked choice. Scripture does hint in a few places that sin existed before the fall of man in the angelic world (John 8:44, 1 John 3:8), but the place we mainly want to go to mention the origin of sin is Adam's transgression in Eden. The tempter, who was already fallen, came to the woman and through her to the man and lied to them about God's command. They gave in to the temptation and committed the first sin by eating the forbidden fruit. Pollution, corruption, depravity entered Adam and Eve, and into all their descendants after them, such that through Adam, as Romans 5:12 says, 'death spread to all men.' This is the transmission of sin. Louis Berkhof says it like this, "As a result of the fall the father of the race could only pass on a depraved nature to his offspring. From that unholy source sin flows on as an impure stream to all the generations of men, polluting everyone and everything with which it comes in contact."⁶⁵ Romans 5:12-21 teaches this and shows that Adam was the representative head for all mankind in the fall, just as Christ is the representative head for all the elect, who through faith in Him will one day find all the consequences of reversed.

The result of the origin of sin is fivefold. First, all men are brought into the world not only polluted in sin, but guilty from that sin before God, totally depraved, meaning that we're not as bad as we could be but that sin effects man totally. Second, communion with God was lost, and man entered into a condition of spiritual death. Third, shame came to bear on the soul of man, thus Adam and Eve 'covered' themselves. Fourth, physical death entered the world in the human and animal world, we were made from the dust and to the dust we shall all return, or as Paul says, 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom. 6:23). Fifth, man's residence changed from the Eden to exile.

Character of Sin

When speaking of the character of something we're usually referring to the qualities of a thing. When it comes to sin it essentially is two things: total and moral.

Total

Earlier we mentioned one of the results of the fall was that man is now totally depraved. To say we are totally depraved is not to say we are utterly depraved. We are not as bad as we could be, but that the fall of man affected the totality of man. No faculty within man was left untouched or unchanged by the fall of man. Our hearts are bent on rebellion against God, our wills prefer evil to righteousness, and our bodies wear out. This is why people get dementia, cancer, colds, and all other diseases that war against the body. So to say sin is total is to say it totally wrecks us spiritually and physically. Romans 3:10-18 is a good place to see this clearly.

Moral

Many people speak of evil these days, evil things that happen in the world and evil things that happen to people. The one word people shy away from using in most of these instances is the word 'moral.' Because to use the word moral is to refer to a standard that all men must abide by and since we live in a culture where the reality of an objective moral standard is rejected the word 'moral' has lost much of its sway. But when it comes to God and His Word we must see that sin is a moral evil. Scripture speaks of us missing the mark which implies there is a right way or path to seek and go down. Scripture speaks of us preferring darkness to light and rejecting God for our own desires, seeking to get out from under His authority. The Bible calls this unfaithfulness. This implies that embracing light over darkness and obeying God over our desires is faithfulness. To be faithful or unfaithful are words that only exist in moral categories. This means the Bible speaks of sin in such a way as to show it's ethical nature, and shows how life can be lived rightly and wrongly.

In a panel discussion at Together for the Gospel Conference 2016 Albert Mohler said, "We too often think of man's problem as something done to us that requires an inner solution, when the Bible speaks of man's problem in terms of something we've done that requires the solution of another." What he means is that man has deliberately chosen to disobey God and follow what he thinks is better. Man is never passive in sin, we don't fall into sin. We sin because we want to and because of this intentionality we are held responsible for our active opposition to God. This brings guilt, and guilt is a word (again) that only exists and functions in a moral context. To the degree we lessen the sinfulness of sin, to that degree we lessen graciousness of God's grace, until we begin to see all man as more or less good people. This is wrong, sin is not a lesser degree of good, but a moral evil. We're either on the right side or the wrong side.

Punishment of Sin

Lastly, we must speak of the result of sin in man, punishment. All this talk of guilt, pollution, corruption, depravity, and total and moral evil means little if God doesn't take it seriously. Men may make light of it but God doesn't for He will punish all sin both in this life and in the life to come. How? In four ways.

Spiritual Death

Our sinful nature is itself punishment for our sin. Sin is the great separator, separating man from man and more importantly man from God. To be separated from God is a real kind of death, because only in communion with God can man really live. There is no life outside of Him (John 1:4-5 speak of the light inside of Christ being the life of men). So rather than going through life having a nature that always obeys, yearns for, and loves God we now (as a punishment from the fall) have a nature that rejects, runs from, and hates God. This is spiritual death.

Suffering in this Life

All suffering that takes place in this life is a result from and penalty of sin. Weakness, disease, distress, poverty, pain, sickness, sorrow, and everything other woe under the sun entered the world in Genesis 3 as a punishment for our sin. The true and lasting harmony of life has been ruined and wrecked so that we can never get past the fallen nature of this present world. We feel this suffering in our souls, which no longer feels like paradise but a battleground. We feel this suffering with other men, rather than peace we have competition and strife. We feel this suffering in nature, rather than the 'calm or cool of the day' we see in Eden we experience destructive forces of nature like earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, tsunami's, and floods. All of this suffering inside of us and outside of us is a punishment to us from the fall. We can also speak of the suffering in this life that comes to us as a consequence of our own sinful choices. Sometimes God, for His own good and gracious purposes, may inflict trial after trial on someone. But sometimes, the trials we experience are the fruit of our own horrible choices. This is why Jesus said in John 5:14, "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Physical Death

Adam, the first created man, would not have died if he had not sinned, but he did. And part of the wages of his sin was physical death. Romans 5 says in him all men fell as well, and so naturally we will one day face the wages of sin too in our own physical death. The soul was never meant to be separated from the body, but in physical death that is exactly what happens. Genesis 3:19 is now the banner that hangs over all our heads, "For you are dust and to dust you shall return."

Eternal Death

Lastly, and perhaps most sorrowfully. Physical death is not the only death that comes into man's existence as a punishment from the fall, eternal death comes too. For all those who reject the gospel in this life, will experience in full measure the fallen-ness they tasted on earth. Eternal death is the culmination of spiritual death. "The restraints fall away, and the corruption of sin has it's full work. The full weight of the wrath of God descends on the condemned."⁶⁶ This condition of eternal death is the eternal corresponding form of their inward spiritual death.

If you find yourself feeling heavy right now, that's a good thing. You likely understand the weight and gravity of the sin of man, of our own sin. These are things to grieve over, indeed. But do not only grieve over the fallen-ness you feel in yourself, in others, and in the world, rejoice and long for the day when all these sad things will be made untrue. It will come.

Chapter 16

Man in His Redeemed State

*“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law
by becoming a curse for us...”
(Galatians 3:13)*

How is it that God redeems fallen man? The answer to that question is one word – covenant. Particularly the covenant of grace. Let me explain.

Covenant in General

The word covenant in the Old Testament first explicitly appears in God’s dealings with Noah. But the idea of covenant is implicitly present with Adam and Eve in the garden. They were underneath what can be called a covenant of works, meaning that by their obedience to God’s commands they could’ve obeyed and lived forever. Hosea 6:7 confirms this when it says, “...like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with Me.” The word covenant in the original Hebrew is the word berith, which means ‘to cut.’ This word berith is the Hebrew equivalent of the ancient Assyrian word beritu which means ‘to bind.’ When this Hebrew word is brought over into English it is translated into our Bibles as ‘covenant.’ So to make a covenant is cut a covenant, or to make a bond that ties two parties together.

Taking into account that God is God and man is man we understand that God didn’t have to make man, but He did. This was grace. Further grace is seen in that God, while being completely independent from man and over man as Lord of all was not obligated to enter into covenant with the creatures He had made, but He did. This was also grace. That God not only created us, but also entered into covenant with us is evidence of grace upon grace (John 1:16). But let’s get back to our question shall we? How does God redeem fallen man? The redemption He secured for us was previewed by but not ultimately found in the covenant of works but in the covenant of grace. To see this let’s go to the Abrahamic covenant found in Genesis 12-17.

The Abrahamic Covenant

In Genesis 12:2 God says to Abram, “I will make of you a great nation . . . and make your name great.” In this passage God promises Abraham that He will be the father of a multitude in a massive land. This is why Abram's name was changed to Abraham. This promise is repeated many times throughout Genesis 12-17. In Genesis 15:5 God promises, “Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them...So

shall your descendants be.” Genesis 13:14, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants forever.” Genesis 15:18, “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates.’” So what do we make of these things? God promised to Abraham that from him would come a great number of descendants, who would form a great people, that will dwell in a great land. Through this blessing promised to Abraham God said all the earth will be blessed. So Abraham is to be a channel not a cul-de-sac of God's blessing to the whole world. Genesis 12:2-3, “I will bless you...so that you will be a blessing...and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” This is about Abraham certainly, but even here God has a whole people who would dwell over the whole world in view, even us.

After hearing this promise repeated to him many times Abraham responds to it in faith. Genesis 15:6 says, “Abraham believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.” God counted or reckoned his faith to him as righteousness. This means that Abraham has been justified by faith in God's promise of what He will one day do for him. God is not for Abraham, and not only for him alone, but for his family forever. In view of such an astounding promise it's understandable that Abraham would ask what he does in 15:8, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” God, adding grace upon grace, not only made this astounding promise to him, but confirms His promise in 15:9-21 as well. In confirming this promise to Abraham God told him to take a few animals, cut them in half, and lay them out beside each other making a kind of small walkway with the animal pieces. In this culture to make such a walkway was an ordinary way of entering into a binding covenant. The parties would walk through the pieces together and by doing so they would in effect be telling the other that what has happened to this animals will happen to them if they do not uphold their end of the covenant. Later that night God causes a deep sleep to fall on Abraham. During this sleep God alone walks through the animal pieces, signifying that if the stipulations of this covenant are broken the curse of the covenant will fall on Him.

This is sheer grace from God to man. We know God will not fail to uphold any covenant stipulations He places on Himself because He is ever faithful and true. We also know that it won't take very long for Abraham's descendants to fail to uphold the same because man is sinful by nature. This is exactly what we see unfold. God is faithful, Abraham's descendants (His people) are not. What happens because of their disobedience? God bears the curse, they do not. When did God bear the curse for His people? When the eternal Son of God became man, lived among man, died in the place of man, bearing the full penalty of the sin of the elect, and absorbing the full weight of God's wrath. Galatians 3 tells the whole story, how God preached the gospel to Abraham, how God would indeed bless the world through the one Descendant of Abraham, and how that Descendant would bless the nations by willingly bearing a curse for others.

This is work, an act, of the free grace of God to undeserving sinners like us. In case you've missed it let me state the answer to our question clearly. How does God redeem fallen man? God redeems man through the virgin birth, sinless life, penal substitutionary atoning death, humiliating burial, exalting resurrection, and present ascension rule and

reign of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him and through Him God is liberally pouring out His blessing the nations.

The Fourfold State of Man

Lastly I want to give you four categories to aid you in seeing the state of man throughout redemptive history.

Pre-fall man was able to sin/able to not sin.

Post-fall man is unable to not sin.

Post-conversion man is able to sin/able to not sin.

Post-glorification man is unable to sin.

This goes to show you that man in his redeemed state is the same as man in his pre-fall state. Notice that's not the end of the story? Many people speak of heaven as an eden-esque like place, or even as a return to eden itself. This isn't the case. One day we'll find ourselves in a greater than eden where we won't be able to sin at all. All streaming forth from and because of God's glorious grace, a glorious day awaits all those who turn from sin and turn toward Christ in faith.

The Doctrine of Depravity

*“Let ruined sinners cease pretending to be something other than ruined sinners!”
(Martin Luther)*

Picture before you a lion in a cage. And before this lion you see a bowl of meat and a bowl of wheat. Tell me, which one do you think the lion will choose to eat? Right, the lion will always choose the meat, he would never choose the wheat, because lions don't eat wheat, they're meat eaters. Consider a deeper question now: what would have to happen to the lion for him to desire the wheat? Or to ask it in another way, what would have to happen to the lion so that he desired something He has no natural taste for? His nature would have to change, and that is something he cannot do himself.

My aim in this chapter is to persuade you that the salvation described in the Bible is just like this. You see, our depravity, our sinful nature will only choose what it desires, and a sinful nature only desires sin. So just as the lion only eats meat, sinners when put to a choice between Jesus Christ and sin, will choose sin every time. So, naturally a question then comes: what would have to happen to us so that we desire Jesus Christ, whose character and commands we have no natural taste for? Answer: because we're unable to change our own nature, God would have to change our nature. Because of this, our only hope is the sovereign grace of God who can and does change the sinner's heart. You see, the Bible does not present a will in man that is neutral being able to choose one way or another way, but rather a will is presented that's dead in sin or in bondage to sin until God makes it new. Before we get into these things let me just say: it would be irresponsible of me to discuss the doctrine of man without giving a chapter length treatment of our sinful nature, and perhaps a chapter long discussion of our sin may depress you. But let me challenge you. On one hand rejecting the depravity of our sinful state is nothing more than an arrogant assault on the sovereign grace of God. On the other hand embracing the depravity of our sinful state paves the way to the best news in the world, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we turn to the Bible we find it speaking of our radical corruption in five ways.⁶⁷

Guilt

When our first parents were deceived in Genesis 3 and took a bite from the forbidden fruit, they plunged the entire human race into guilt and condemnation. Paul explains this in Romans 5:12 where he says, "...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin...so death spread to all men because all sinned..." As goes the head so goes the body. The relationship between Adam and us is so close that God includes that

phrase at the end of 5:12 "...death spread to all men (not because Adam sinned, but) because all sinned..." From his disobedience to God's first command, Adam brought sin, and therefore guilt, and therefore death to all men because Adam, in Eden, was the representative head of all mankind. Because of this at the moment of our birth, we are born, not as innocent people who choose right or wrong, no, we are born guilty before God before we commit any sin. This is why God says earlier in Romans 3:23, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." because though we were made in God's image we have chosen to exchange the glory of God for our own glory, distorting God's image in us. We had life, and life to the full, walking with God in the cool of the day, all was as it should be, but we rebelled. And our act of rebelling against the King of Kings, the Just Judge of all the universe, is nothing short of cosmic treason, thus all mankind is born under the death sentence, all mankind is born guilty.

To convince us of this guilt God did us a great service and gave us His Law, the Ten Commandments. Romans 3:19, the Law was given "so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable (or guilty) before God." Do you think you're innocent? Look into the perfect standard, the Law of God and ask yourself 'Has God always been first in my life?' 'Have I ever sought after other things before Him?' 'Have I ever used His name in vain?' 'Have I always obeyed my parents?' 'Have I ever stolen?' 'Have I ever committed adultery, or in Jesus's own words, have I ever looked with lust?' 'Have I ever lied?' That's not even all of the Ten Commandments and if you're honest with yourself, there hasn't been a day in your life when you've kept these. What's the result of our disobedience? Real, quantifiable, measurable, guilt. We broke God's Law, and as the Just Judge He is, punishment must come.

Darkness

The Bible goes further and speaks of our darkness. John 3:19-20, "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed." This sad reality John expresses is clear is it not? John 8:12 says Jesus is the Light of the world, and when He came John says light entered our dark world, and not surprisingly, we didn't just prefer the darkness over the light, John says we 'loved the darkness' over the light. This is not a lifeless choice like we would make between sitting here or sitting there at a ballgame...this is a heart level emotionally-loaded assessment. Our natural state when we're born into this world is that we 'love' darkness and hate the light; we love sin, we hate Jesus. Why? Because our deeds are evil, and because we don't want our wickedness to be broadcast to the world by coming to the light, thus we remain in the darkness we so love because we naively think we can hide there.

The Bible speaks even more pointedly when it comes to our relationship to the darkness...it identifies us with it. I wonder if you've ever noticed Paul's choice of words in Ephesians 5:8? I'll begin in 5:7, "Do not become partakers with sons of disobedience (who were described in 5:4-6); for at one time you were darkness..." Did you notice? Paul did not say 'at one time you were in the dark but now you are in the light' he said 'for at one time you were darkness...' If you read John 3:19-20 alongside Ephesians 5:8 you get this, 'Darkness is not just something we're in, and not even something we just love, no, darkness describes who we are as sinners. We are by nature, darkness.'

Hatred

Next see our hatred. Romans 8:5-8 shows this. Describing the difference between living with a mind set on the flesh with and a mind set on the things of the Holy Spirit Paul says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s Law, indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” What is the sinner’s natural posture toward God? Is it one of peace, or maybe indifference or neutrality? No, far from it. v7, “For the mind set on the flesh on hostile to God.” That word ‘hostile’ literally means ‘hates’ or ‘is at enmity with.’ Natural man, or to put it another way, all those who have not been raised to life by the power of the Spirit hate God, are alienated from God, and are at odds with God. Paul even says in v8 that natural man is unable to submit to God. Not that natural man won’t submit to God as if they chose not to, v8 says they are not able to submit to God because of their sin.

We all know the difference between asking ‘can I’ and ‘may I.’ We all once asked a teacher ‘Can I go to the bathroom?’ to which the teacher responded by saying, ‘I don’t know, can you?’ teaching us the lesson that ‘may’ is a term of permission, while ‘can’ is a term of ability. The point of v8 is that natural man, apart from the Spirit of God, is not able to submit to or please God. This is why Romans 3 says what it says in 3:10-12, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Death

Ephesians 2:1-3, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Many people speak of our sinful nature as if we were drowning in an ocean reaching up as hard as we can to grasp, maybe even with just one finger, a life preserver that’s been tossed to us by Jesus. Others speak of it as if we were on a hospital bed, on the brink of death, when Jesus walks in with the cure to save. These are pleasant images for sure, *if* we ignore what the Bible has to say. Because when we come to the Bible we don’t find that we’re drowning we find that we lying cold and lifeless on the sea floor with our lungs filled with water. When we come to the Bible we don’t find that we’re on the brink of death in a hospital bed, we find that we’re six feet under, dead. ‘And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...’ This is not an individual assessment either, it’s universal. We are by nature ‘...children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.’ Yet ironically it says that we, though dead in sin, ‘walk according to the course of the world’ and that we ‘follow Satan, the prince of the power of the air.’ By birth we really are the walking dead.

Blindness

Lastly see our blindness. 2 Cor. 4:4, “...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Here we see Satan’s work, blinding all those who don’t

believe, keeping them from seeing not just ‘the light’ and not just ‘the light of the gospel’ he blinds unbelievers from seeing ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.’ There is glory to be seen in the gospel, the glory of Christ, and if we see it, it will stun our souls and fill our bones with pleasure and exuberance beyond measure. Yet, see here that by birth we’re blind to this, and are unable to see this beauty.

Our radical corruption described in five ways: guilt, darkness, hatred, death, and blindness. Perhaps some of you are thinking, ‘Ok, but what about free will?’ I understand why some of you would say that, but see two quick things. First, do you see that free will isn’t something that works in your favor? Our will is the problem (remember the lion in the cage?) it will only choose sin unless God awakens us through what John 3:3 calls the ‘new birth’ and gives us a taste for something alien to our nature. Second, you call it a ‘free will’ but do you see that it isn’t really free at all? It’s in bondage to sin until God does to it what He did to Lazarus. We come into this world as sinners, justly deserving God’s displeasure, and without hope save in the sovereign mercy of God. Perhaps now you ask what the disciples asked in Matthew 19:25, “Who then can be saved?” ‘With man’ Jesus said, ‘this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

Remember my encouragement at the start: if you embrace the reality of our depravity it paves the way to the best news in the world, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let me show you how this is true. When God does save, when He regenerates our hearts, and gives us the gift of the ‘new birth’ He does the impossible and changes our nature through His sovereign grace.

This act of sovereign grace reverses each of the 5 things we’ve just gone over:

Guilt to Pardon

When God saves, we no longer carry the burden of guilt, but have been pardoned by the blood of Christ, who stood in our place as our substitute on the cross. Romans 3:23-25, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith...”

Darkness to Light

When God saves, we no longer are darkness, but light in the Lord. John 1:4-5, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Ephesians 5:7-8, “Do not become partakers with sons of disobedience for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord, walk as children of light.”

Hating to Loving

When God saves, we no longer hate God, we love Him. 1 John 4:19, “We love because He first loved us.”

Dead to Alive

When God saves, we no longer are dead, but alive. Ephesians 2:3-5, “...we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because

of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...”

Blind to Seeing

When God saves, we are no longer blind, we can see. 2 Cor. 4:6, “For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

So we who were by nature born: guilty, loving darkness and living as darkness, hating God, dead in sin, and blind to the beauty of the glory of God in the gospel – if you at this moment love God, if you see His beauty, if you savor His glory, to quote John Piper, ‘You are a walking miracle.’

Stop Pretending...Admit It

To end, I want to give you Martin Luther. “Man is by nature as completely unable to know God as to please God; let him face the fact and admit it! Let God be God! Let man be man! Let ruined sinners cease pretending to be something other than ruined sinners! Let them realize that they lie helpless in the hand of an angry Creator; let them seek Christ, and cry for mercy.’ Church, we are not a people who have an alien problem that needs an inner solution; we are a people who have an inner problem that needs an alien solution.⁶⁸

Summit 3

Christology – The Doctrine of Christ

The Nature of Christ

*“In the beginning was the Word, and
the Word was God, and the Word was with God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things were made through Him, and without
Him was not anything made that was made.”
(John 1:1-3)*

Having the right tool for the job is fundamental for getting the job not only done, but done correctly. I learned this firsthand in my days as a quick lube mechanic. I remember walking into the shop on my first day, sitting down with the shop manager to learn the ins and outs of how the shop ran. After a lengthy introduction he extended his hand and gave me a small flathead screwdriver. I was puzzled at first, and couldn't see how such a small tool could ever be of use in this line of work. But he looked me in the eye and said, “I give every new guy this small flathead, because it's fundamental to the work we do here.” As I thanked him, walked out, and began working I couldn't for the life of me understand how this little tool would be something I use so often. But, as I progressed in my knowledge and skill I grew more comfortable with the small wrench and found that I was using it to do all sorts of things I never dreamed of. In fact, the more comfortable I became with it, the more confident I grew in my ability to work on any car that happened to come in the shop.

As we dive into this next summit in systematic theology I begin by telling you about this small tool because Christology is similarly fundamental. So fundamental, in fact, that without it we lose much of the Christianity revealed to us in Scripture. As with the little screwdriver, the more correct and comfortable you are with Christology the more confident you'll become about your Christian belief. And confidence, or a firm certainty about our convictions is not only what we need in this secular age but it is why John wrote his gospel account. In John 20:30-31 he says, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.” John didn't write his gospel to give an indifferent observation. No, he wrote this account to persuade us that the things he wrote are true and life-giving.

John 1:1-18 form what has come to be known as ‘The Prologue.’ Only John gives us an introduction like this. Matthew and Luke begin with birth narratives while Mark begins with Jesus' baptism. John begins with an 18 verse introduction intended to answer basic questions about Jesus. Questions like: Who is He? Why did He come? Where is He from?

As John answers these questions we cannot help but find ourselves simply astounded. Concerning this prologue the study notes in the Gospel Transformation study Bible say this, “The prologue of John’s gospel is like the opening movement of a grand symphony. It is meant to grab our attention and draw us into the story – the story of all stories.”⁶⁹ R.C. Sproul in his commentary on John likewise states, “No portion of the New Testament captured the imagination and the attention of the Christian intellectual community for the first three centuries more than this brief section.”⁷⁰ As it captured them, may God now capture us.

“In the beginning...” These first three words are words we should all be familiar with. John isn’t the only one to begin his writing with them, Moses begins Genesis with them as well. That John uses the same words here is intended to teach us that just as God did His work of creation then, God is now doing His work of new creation here. How does God intend to carry out His work of new creation? v1-3 continues, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” Think back to Genesis again. In Genesis we see God creating all things by speaking them into existence saying each time “Let there be...” and there was. Now in this work of new creation it’s clear that God’s bringing it about by something John calls “the Word.” This Word is not only present in beginning of all things, John says the Word is God and the Word is with God. When John says the Word is God shows that the Word is Deity. When John says the Word is with God he shows that the Word is distinct or distinguished from God. Both full-blown Deity and divine distinction are present in this ‘Word.’

To further add to this did you notice there’s an addition in v3 that’s not in v1-2? v3 refers to the Word as “Him.” This prohibits us from speaking of the Word as an impersonal force or some kind of vague power. That John refers to the Word as ‘Him’ means the Word is a Person, indeed one of the three Persons in the Trinity. To further add again, when taking into account the Greek translation of Word, which is ‘logos’, leads us to even more. The ‘logos’ was a Greek philosophical concept used to convey an abstract force that brought harmony, order, and reason into the universe. So in order for the Greeks to be wise or on the right path to wisdom they had to be in touch with the logos. Well John uses this loaded Greek term here in the beginning of his gospel to teach us the true meaning of ‘logos.’ It’s not an impersonal force that brings harmony, order, and reason into the universe, no, the ‘logos’ is none other than God’s divine self-expression. Hebrews 1:1-3 confirms this saying, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom He also created the world. He (the Son) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature...” This Word of John 1:1-3 is none other than the Word God spoke to create the world in Genesis 1. But it’s more than just language, the Word is God wrapped in skin, or to say it another way God’s very Son.

If you’re feeling a bit overwhelmed, that’s normal. John is a very simple writer, but the way he combines simplicity and profundity often leaves us wondering if we’ve understood all his intends us to. Try to think of it like this. If I want to know who a person is, I listen to what they say because a person’s words reveal what they are

thinking. Well, do you want to know who God is? Do you want to know what God's thoughts are? Praise the Lord God is and He is not silent! God has revealed Himself by speaking, and His Word to us is His very Son!

Historically this prologue is significant. Throughout the history of the Church many have rejected these very things, taught other things, been tried by Church councils, and condemned as heretics for teaching false doctrine about Christ. Men such as Arius, Apollinarius, Eutychus, and Nestorius are some examples of men who denied the truths taught in John 1 and instead believed Jesus is something less. Arius, using his term *homoiousios*, denied the full deity of Christ and put forth the idea that Christ was the first or greatest 'created' being who was of a different nature than God. This was denied by the Council of Nicea (325 AD) but it was Athanasius who led the charge arguing for *homoousios*, namely, that Christ was of the exact same nature as the Father. These things made up the following Nicene Creed produced from this council.

Later, Apollinarius believed the divine *logos* took the place of a rational human soul in Christ and therefore made Christ not fully human. This was denied by the Council of Constantinople (381 AD) where a full deity and full humanity were both upheld. Later Nestorius taught that the two natures of Christ were so distinct from each other that Christ was a combination of two separate persons. Around the same time Eutychus taught that the two persons of Christ were so unified that almost all distinctions between them disappeared. Both of these were denied by the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) and the following Chalcedonian Creed produced from it. The creed makes an argument using the Greek word *hypostasis* (which is where the phrase 'hypostatic union' comes from) meaning that Christ's divine and human natures are united in one being. Or to say it another way, Christ's work as Savior involved both His natures and if He were without one of these natures, or if these natures were mixed or confused, there would be no salvation for us.

From all of these false teachers and false teaching the early Church came to embrace four specific things about Christ. First, Jesus Christ is fully divine. Second, Jesus Christ is fully human. Third, the divine and human natures of Christ are distinct. And fourth, the divine and human nature of Christ are united in one Person. Anything less than this is a departure from true Christology.

In more modern times the Jehovah's Witnesses have altered the translation of John 1:1 because they reject Jesus' deity. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, also altered the translation of John 1:1 for the same reason. Sincere as these people may be, to deny the truth of Jesus' deity is to reject Christianity. Remember what I said earlier, as this small flathead was fundamental to my work in the shop, the truths taught in John 1 (and many other places) is fundamental to Christian belief. To move away from it will still leave you with many beliefs, but those beliefs will not be Christian to any degree.

When we move ahead to John 1:4-5 we see John bring up themes that are all found in abundance within Genesis: life, light, and darkness. Not surprisingly these are some of the major themes of John's gospel. Specifically in v4-5 we see that while God spoke the world into being and shattered the dark void during creation, so too God sent His Word into the world and the Word's life and light shatter the dark void of this sinful world

during new creation. The Word of v1-3 in v4-5 is the source of life and this life is the source of all light in the world and in men. No wonder why John includes the time when Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). It is true, light and darkness are opposites. It's also true that some speak of the Christian life as a battle between these opposites. Though this is true to a degree, do not believe the lie that they are opposites of equal power. The light of the Word, the light of Christ overcomes all darkness.

This is why John would later write this in 1 John 2:8, "...the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." So through the Word life and light come into the darkness, and even though some may mock at the song or phrase, when one comes to faith in Christ one truly has 'seen the light.'

The Names of Christ

*“...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.”
(Philippians 2:10-11)*

It doesn't take a long time reading the Bible to discover that names mean a great deal. Names of people, names of places, and names of events often describe much more than names do today. Today we don't usually mean to teach something much when we name a person, place, or thing. There may be some sentiment or traditional notion behind the names we give things, but that's usually where it stops. In the Bible we find something different. We find the character of a person, place, or event wrapped up in its name. This is certainly true when it comes to names of human beings we meet in the Bible, but one thing most of us overlook is that it's also true of God and the names He is called throughout Scripture.

If I were to go over every name God has or is called by in the Bible this would be a long chapter. We could speak of: Elohim, Yahweh, Adonai, the Holy One of Israel, the Fear of Isaac, I AM, or the Lord of Glory. But for our purposes here covering the doctrine of Christ the most important names of Christ we have in Scripture are Christ, Lord, and Son of Man.

Christ

This is the most common name for Jesus that we use today. It's so common to call the Son of God Jesus Christ that many people think Christ is Jesus' last name. But it's not. His name is simply Jesus, Christ is a title given to Him. It's actually the title given to Jesus more often than any other in Scripture. It's used so often throughout the Bible sometimes we find it reversed and we read of 'Christ Jesus.' The word Christ is the Greek word *christos* which comes straight from the Hebrew word *Messiah*, or, the anointed One.

Jesus' first sermon is recorded for us in Luke 4:18-21 where we see Him walk up to the front, take the scroll of Isaiah, open it to chapter 61 and read the following, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." After reading that passage from Isaiah Jesus said to those at the temple, "Today this Scripture

has been fulfilled in your hearing.” By doing this Jesus was proclaiming to the world that He was the One Isaiah was speaking of. He was the Messiah, the anointed One. He was saying He was the Christ.

But if Jesus was to be the Christ according to Isaiah’s standards, He had to be more than what was reflected in Isaiah 61. Isaiah spoke of the Christ many times throughout his prophetic ministry. He said the Christ would be a shepherd, a king, a lamb, and a suffering servant. The odds were astronomical for all these things to culminate in one person, but nothing is impossible with God. In fact, once Jesus comes on the scene in redemptive history at His first coming it is breathtaking to see all the different strands of prophecy come together into harmony in the Person and work of Jesus. He was the long awaited Christ, the Messiah, but spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep in John 10. He spoke of His Kingdom being at hand in Mark 1, and if He has a Kingdom He must be a King. This is why the Babylonian astrologers, the magi, traveled an astounding distance to see the boy Jesus and give Him gifts, because He was a King. John the Baptist spoke of Christ being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world in John 1. That He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world shows us that Jesus is also the Suffering Servant who suffers and dies for His people. All of these things and more culminate in the one Person of Jesus. This means Jesus is the Christ. This is most famously stated by Peter in Matthew 16 when Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?” To which Peter responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Lord

After the title Christ the second most used name or title given to Jesus is the title Lord. Actually the statement ‘Jesus is Lord’ was the first creed or confession of the early Church. This was not only the first creed of the early Church, the statement ‘Jesus is Lord’ was the confession that put the early Church in serious conflict with the Roman Empire because Caesar was known as Lord. For the Church to claim another Lord than Caesar was no small offense, it was considered high treason. This is why so many Christians were killed in the early Church, because they would no longer say ‘Caesar is Lord’ but would boldly proclaim the truth before their executioners ‘Jesus is Lord.’ Jesus Himself even does this at one point in His ministry when answering a question about taxes. In Mark 12:13-17 Jesus is asked, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” This person was obviously laying a trap for Jesus but Jesus answered wisely saying, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” In this brief statement Jesus made a clear distinction between the true God and Caesar, a man who was wrongly held to be a god.

You should be aware though, that the Greek word for Lord, kurios, is not always used in royal language. It had three common uses. First, the word was used as a polite address. So when someone today uses the word ‘sir’ they are being polite and respectful. In the first century this was one way the word kurios was used. Second, the word was used as a greeting for wealthy landowners who owned and employed slaves. When used in this manner the word kurios was intended to provide a distinction between slave owner and slave. So the landowner would be referred to as Lord while the slave was called ‘doulos’ which is often translated as servant or slave. Third and lastly, the word was used as an

imperial title. This is where the usage of Caesar as Lord comes into play. The Caesar chose the loftiest title to accompany his name, so Augustus was not merely called Augustus or even Emperor Augustus. Being Caesar, Augustus demanded to be called kurios. This last usage is the usage being employed when we say Jesus is Lord. We do not intend to communicate politeness or even that Jesus is a person of means, no, we intend that Jesus is majestic, that He is truly Lord over all.

This is what Peter meant to convey in John 6. After Jesus saw many people leave Him He posed a question to the disciples, "Are you going to leave too?" Peter responds, "Lord, to whom else would we go? You have the words of eternal life." This imperial usage is what Thomas meant to convey in John 20. Remember he had doubted the resurrection because he couldn't see it but when Jesus revealed Himself to him and he saw His wounds Thomas cried out, "My Lord, and my God!" Perhaps the most famous use of this title is found in Philippians 2:5-11 where Paul writes some of the most memorable words in Scripture. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In this passage you really can make the argument that the name that is above all names, the name at which every name will bow isn't the name Jesus, but the name Lord.⁷¹

Son of Man

To end our discussion of the names of Jesus we come to third most frequently used name of Jesus in the Bible, the Son of Man. Many critics of Jesus claim that His divine reputation came from the opinions of those around Jesus rather than Jesus Himself. Yet, this is misleading because while this is the third most frequent name or title attributed to Jesus in the Bible after Christ and Lord, Son of Man is the name Jesus uses the most when speaking of Himself. So of all the things Jesus prefers to be called, nothing is more preferred by Him than Son of Man. Still others think the name Son of Man refers to a humble or creaturely image Jesus wanted to portray, as if Jesus preferred Himself to be thought of as just a son of another man. This also is not the case. We see this in the pinnacle text of Daniel 7:13-14 where we find the majestic and exalted definition of the name Son of Man. Daniel 7:13-14 says, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and He came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

See the glory of this text. The Son of Man is one who comes to the Father, called here the Ancient of Days, and receives dominion, glory, and a kingdom, for the express purpose that all peoples and nations would serve (i.e. worship) Him. The Son of Man is not only

given all these things, but it says after this that His kingdom shall be everlasting, it shall not pass away, and shall not be destroyed. This is no humble or creaturely designation is it? No, it's a supreme and sovereign title. R.C. Sproul comments on this passage saying, "In the New Testament usage of this title, the Son of Man is a heavenly person who descends to earth, and He represents nothing less than the authority of God. He comes to bring judgment to the world because He embodies the divine visitation, the day of the Lord. Therefore, this is an exalted title given uniquely to Jesus in the New Testament. As you read through the Scriptures and come upon this title, look at its context, and you will begin to see that it is a majestic and exalted designation for Jesus."⁷²

So see in the names of Jesus, more than just names. See His character. Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is the Son of Man.

The States of Christ

*“Where the Head goes, so goes the body.”
(John Fesko)*

The Son of God has always been from all eternity past and before the world was made. The Son, the Spirit, and the Father were all present together and will be present together for all time. But, there are two stages that the Son of God went through that the other two Persons of the Trinity did not. Philippians 2:6-11 shows both of these stages. The first stage is Christ’s humiliation in 2:6-8, the second is Christ’s exaltation in 2:9-11.

3 stages of the Humiliation of Jesus

Incarnation - Phil. 2:6

Do you see what the Son of God willingly gave up and laid aside? When it says that He existed in the form of God, it means that the Son of God was the exact nature of God. It means that the Son of God possessed all of God’s characteristics, qualities, and attributes. It means that the Son of God was equal with God in every way possible. Now even though the Son of God was in all ways equal with God, this verse goes on to say that He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. What does that mean? Recall when Adam and Eve were in Eden. After succumbing to temptation they reached up and grasped at the fruit because they wanted to become like God and by grasping for the fruit they were showing that they wanted to be equal with God. They had no right to do this and God told them not to do it, but they did it anyway. The Son of God is very different. He did not grasp equality with God even though He had every right to do it because He was God. Instead He willingly laid it aside and as Phil 2:7 says, “took the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of men.” He did not hold on to His authority as God, He laid it aside, and as John 1:14 says “became flesh and dwelt among us.” The Son of God was wrapped in skin. So many people think Jesus’ suffering began in the garden of Gethsemane or at the cross, but see that it began here. The only thing He had ever known was being next to and with His Father on the throne, and now for the first time ever, the eternal Son of God was not in the direct presence of the Father. He entered into a human world, with sin and suffering and temptation when He had never known sin, suffering, or temptation. Jesus’ suffering began as soon as he was in Mary’s womb. Thus, the incarnation was the start of Christ’s humiliation.

Earthly Life - Phil 2:7

Not only did Jesus leave the throne of God laying aside His equality with God, Jesus came here, being made like us, why? To take the form of a servant. Do you realize how shocking this is? God came to earth, not to rule over the creation, but to serve the

creation. Mark 10:45 says, “Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...” The goal of His life was serving. When He came, His life was filled with loneliness, rejection, poverty, hunger, temptation, and persecution. And in the midst of all of this He did not sin and perfectly obeyed the Law of God. At the end of His life, He was betrayed by a close friend, denied by a close friend, and deserted by the rest. Why did He come? 2 Cor. 8:9 says, “Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.”

Crucifixion (and Burial) - Phil. 2:8

Not only did Jesus lay aside His equality with God, not only did Jesus leave the throne of God to become like we are, not only did Jesus become a servant of all men even though He created all men; Jesus came to earth to die on the cross for sin. “...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). He came not to serve, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Jesus came to earth to die. This was the main goal all along, everyday of His life, He saw the day approaching. And then it came, and He became obedient to His Father’s will, and died on a cross. He who was the Lord of all the earth, the supreme Lawgiver, placed Himself under the Law, taking the form of a servant, for the purpose of absorbing the wrath of God, on behalf of God’s people, on the cross. In doing this He died and entered the grave. This is love, in that God wasn’t making much of our worth but enabling us to make much of His worth forever.

5 Stages of the Exaltation of Jesus

While Jesus’ humiliation represents life here on this side of eternity, the exaltation represents what life will someday be like for those who believe in Jesus. When we get to 2:9 there is a shift in the text, and the shift comes in the form of transitioning us from the humiliation of Christ to His exaltation. How did God exalt Jesus? Five ways.

Resurrection

The exaltation of Christ began as soon as He left His burial clothes in the tomb and left the tomb empty. We all know what the resurrection was, but why does it matter?

- Eternal life is now secured for all who believe in Jesus (John 11:25-26).
- Our faith is not futile (1 Cor. 15:17).
- We are no longer in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17).
- We will not perish when we die (1 Cor. 15:18).
- We are not to be pitied at all in our suffering, for one day it will end (1 Cor. 15:19).
- As 1 Cor. 15 continues we rejoice, that the last enemy (death) has died.

This is not just a doctrine to be known, this is the resounding ‘Yes!’ that Jesus reigns over all things. The resurrection of Jesus and the Spirit that raised Him from the dead is the same power we now have for living the Christian life as well as the assurance that one day we will also rise from death just as Jesus did. Few things are this precious.

Ascension

The ascension is when Jesus returned to heaven from earth. It is still to this day and will be for all days the most important political moment in all history. Because in this one act

Jesus not only ascended, He ascended to a throne, a throne on which He sat down to rule and reign over all things. Why does this matter?

- It means that Jesus will forever be in heaven interceding for us (Heb. 7:25).
- It means that Jesus will forever be our human representative in heaven (1 John 2:1-2).
- Because He ascended we too shall rise one day to be with Him (Rom. 6:5).
- Because He ascended He can prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3).
- Because He ascended He can send the Holy Spirit to us (John 16:7).
- When we get to heaven, we will not meet a great being who we cannot relate with, we will meet a human face with nail scarred hands (Heb. 4:15).

Reign at God's Right Hand

After His ascension Jesus went to a specific place in heaven, to the right hand of God. The right hand of God is the symbolic place of power, honor, distinction, and prestige. That means He is now ruling and reigning over His kingdom, waiting to come back again to take us there. He is not done with His ministry because He has ascended, He continues it to this very moment. Why does this matter?

Sometimes circumstances in life make us think that God is not in control, but we should learn from this that Jesus is always in control of all things at all moments. He orders all things that come into our lives. If bad things happen to us, think of this. Think of this along with verses like Romans 8:28. That will show us that Jesus is letting these things happen to us for a good reason. God does not call us to rejoice in the bad things themselves, but He does call us to rejoice in the fact that He orders our trouble and pain for good reasons. He wants us to trust that He is in fact on the throne, reigning, and ruling during these times. As Psalm 29 says, "He sat as King at the flood, He sits as King forever."

Second coming

After Jesus' reign on the throne, at the time He so desires, He will return. Unlike His first advent when He came as Savior, in His second and final advent He will come as Judge. 2 Thess. 1:10 says that Jesus will come again to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at by all who have believed in Him. Why does this matter?

- He will come in great glory, and everyone on earth will know that Jesus is in fact who He said He was. God over all, King, and Lord of the universe (Phil. 2:10-11).
- Everyone who opposed Him or did not believe in Him will be judged, be found wanting, and sent to eternal torments forever (Matt. 25:31).
- Everyone who loves Him and who believed in Him will be judged, be found righteous, not because of what we have but because of what Jesus has done. The Christians who are dead will rise first and then those who are still left here on earth will fly away to Jesus, our home, life, rest, and peace (1 Thess. 4:16).

Future Reign

After all these things, the resurrection, the ascension, the reign at God's right hand, and the second coming, Jesus' exaltation continues on into eternity. The earth will be changed and remade into the New Heavens and the New Earth, the New Jerusalem, and our song will forever be about the Lamb receiving the reward, the glory, the honor, the praise, for

His suffering. There will be no sun, or lights of any kind, Jesus will be our light and lamp and life forever and ever. This is the goal of all history, His glory that has been displayed in various ways through the history of redemption will be then and forever displayed for all to see, and we will feast upon His matchless and infinite delight forever and ever.

Since this pattern of humiliation then exaltation was true for Jesus' life, and since He's the head of the Church, why do we (who are the body of Christ) think life will be any different for us? Or in other words, "Where the Head goes, so goes the body."⁷³ For the Christian, our best life is always yet to come.

Christ's Offices: Prophet

*“Christ executes the office of prophet,
in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit,
the will of God for our salvation.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

In the last chapter we looked into the work of Christ in His two stages of humiliation and exaltation. Seeing His work in that manner is very helpful indeed, but within these two stages there is another thing for us to see, namely the threefold office of Christ. It is summarized clearly in the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q23, which asks and answers as follows: “What offices does Christ execute as our Redeemer? Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in His humiliation and exaltation.”

Joined along with the explanation of His humiliation and exaltation is the description of Jesus, as our Redeemer, executing three offices in His work: prophet, priest, and king. Not all theologians throughout Church history have believed in these three offices, while others of them see these offices in a kind of chronological order, as if Jesus was functioning as Prophet during His earthly ministry, functioning as Priest in His sacrifice, and now functions as King on the throne. I disagree with such reasoning, and believe that Jesus functions in all three offices throughout his entire humiliation and exaltation. I also believe these three offices are united in the one Person of Christ, and because of this it can sometimes be difficult to draw sharp lines between these three offices because in the redemptive work of Christ His whole Person is on display. I also must conclude that if the fall didn't happen man would function in these three roles now, but due to the fall God now executes these offices through His Son.

Let's take them one at a time.

The Prophetic Office

We should state a few things in general about the office of prophet if we're to understand Christ as our Prophet. Prophets were special. They are referred to in Scripture as the mouthpiece, the herald, the messengers, and the watchman of God. Created by God, called by God, and commissioned by God to declare God's Word to God's people no matter the cost. A prophet was one who had the very word of God on their lips, and because of having the word of God on their lips the words of the prophet were just as authoritative as if the divine voice of God uttered audibly from heaven. They were not responsible for the results of such preaching, but they were charged to faithfully proclaim

what God had made known to them. That may seem straight forward enough, but often their preaching caused quite a stir among God's people which made being a faithful prophet a difficult calling because the message they were given by God was not always favorable. When we think of the prophets we think of Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, Amos, etc., all the way up to the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. It was their duty and delight to proclaim the Word of God to God's people. You can imagine that due to the nature of this calling, some prophets were quite famous, and because of this there were many who claimed to be a prophet that weren't. So part of the test of a true prophet was the truthfulness of their words. If they proclaimed their own words or their own ideas that in time proved false, all the people would know they were false prophets, and by consequence all the people would know who the true prophets are as well. So we find in Hebrews 1:1, "Long ago at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets."

Part of the preaching of prophets was to proclaim to the people that one day the greatest Prophet would come. In this manner Moses says in Deut. 18:15 and following, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to Him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die...' I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And whoever will not listen to My words that He shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him." In context, this refers to Moses' successor Joshua, but ultimately this points forward to Jesus Christ, who is a Prophet with a capital P. John Calvin comments on this saying, "God, by providing His people with an unbroken line of prophets, never left them without useful doctrine sufficient for salvation, yet the minds of the pious had always been imbued with the conviction that they were to hope for the full light of understanding only at the coming of the Messiah."⁷⁴ So we read earlier in Hebrews 1:1 that God spoke to our fathers through the prophets, and if we continue on we read in Hebrews 1:2 we see more. "...but in these last days God has spoken to us by His Son..." So the office of prophet is a speaking office, through which God gives His Word to His people, which culminated in God sending His very Word (His Son) to His people.

Jesus as Prophet

As we began this chapter we looked at question 23 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, now to expand on these things we will look at question 24, which asks and answers, "How does Christ execute the office of prophet? Christ executes the office of prophet, in revealing to us, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation." Held within this answer are three things to see concerning the prophetic office of Christ.

Christ's Prophetic Office is Revelatory

By using the word revelatory I mean revelation. Not the book, but the action of revealing God's truth to us. We often speak of the Bible as God's revelation to us. This is what I mean by saying Christ's prophetic office is revelatory, that it reveals the truth of God to us. This is mentioned in view every time Jesus teaches by words or actions. It is succinctly spoken to us in Hebrews 1:1-2, "Long ago in many times and in many ways,

God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. But now in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son..." God used to reveal His truth to His people through the prophets, but now God reveals His truth to us through the Prophet, Jesus Christ.

Christ's Prophetic Office Reveals the Will of God for our Salvation

When the catechism states that Jesus reveals to us the will of God for our salvation, the will of God in view is not God's decretive will or God's preceptive will. No, the will of God revealed to us is the whole counsel of God, or everything God desires us to know, embrace, believe, and trust in to be saved.

Christ's Prophetic Office Reveals the Will of God for our Salvation by His Word and Spirit

By His Word meaning His teaching through His words and His actions as John 20:31 states, "These are written so that you may believe Jesus is the Christ, and by believing you may have life in His name." By His Word also meaning that Jesus is Himself the very Word of God come to us as John 1:1-14 states. So if we recall that a prophet spoke the very Word of God to God's people, and since Jesus was the very Word of God become flesh, no wonder people were amazed at the authority He spoke with. By His Spirit means the sense in John 14:26, which states, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." So when it states that Christ prophetically reveals the will of God for our salvation to us by His Word and Spirit we should think first and foremost of the Scriptures, because it is the Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which reveals the will of God for our salvation to us. So when we open the Bible we have in our hands the result of Christ's prophetic office. As God gave His Word to His people through the prophets, so now in our day (or as Hebrews states it, 'In these last days...') God has given us His Word through His Son by the power of His Spirit. This is why Col. 3:16 implores us to "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

Four Final Notes

First, the Word without the Spirit is insufficient to teach us the will of God for our salvation, because it is only by the Spirit that we are able to truly comprehend and receive the truth within it. 1 Cor. 2:14 makes this clear, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Second, the Spirit without the Word is also insufficient to teach us the will of God for our salvation, because though God could reveal it to us in this way He has never told us He will do it this way. So if we're to know the will of God for our salvation we must have both the gift of His Word accompanied by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Third, beware additional revelation. That God used to speak to His people through the prophets and now does so in these last days by His Son teaches us that God's work of prophetic revelation is complete in Christ and in His inspired Word. This is why the warning at the end of Revelation to 'not add to this Scripture' is meaningful for the book of Revelation and the whole of Scripture as well. Therefore, if we want to know God we

don't need to look any further than the Scripture because only there do we find the Spirit inspired truth about Jesus Christ.

Fourth, we seem to struggle with this in our day. Even within evangelical reformed churches like who teach these things, how often do we feel the pressure or the weight of the popular notion that the Bible is not enough for us? Our experience and church activities reveal that we yearn for 'more' whatever that may be. This is why people go to things like the devotional book 'Jesus Calling' and the prayer book 'The Circle.' Both of these things communicate that the Scripture is not enough, and promise that when you add this new method of prayer or new knowledge from God to the Bible, you'll reach a spiritual level you never thought possible. God's prophetic work through His Son and His Spirit is sufficient, this is why 2 Peter 1:3 says, "We have all we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him."

Since these things are sufficient, we dare not seek more.

Christ's Offices: Priest

*“Christ executes the office of priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

Remember earlier I stated that at times it is difficult to make black and white lines between these offices because all three of these offices are united in the One Person of Christ. For example, in the last chapter we learned that as Prophet Jesus reveals, by His Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation. His Prophetic role is a revelatory role, a role that teaches us what we need to know in order to be saved. As we look into His Priestly role, it is different in its scope yet does it not still teach us and reveal the will of God to us? Indeed it does. This is just a brief example how these offices are distinct but not separate.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism question 25 asks this question, “How does Christ execute the office of a priest? Christ executes the office of priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.” This reveals that there are two primary functions of the Priesthood of Christ: mediation and intercession. We’ll take them one at a time.

Mediation

Think of the Old Testament priest. God has ordained and commanded that His people Israel be active in the sacrificial system. This meant that on varying holy days, Sabbaths, festivals, and celebrations the people would be engaged in ritual sacrifice where God’s wrath would be satisfied through the offering up of an animal functioning as a substitute for the people and their sin. These sacrifices were meant to be moments of worship for Israel. Who was it that God called to lead the sacrificial system and tend and keep the tabernacle and temple? It was the Levites, the priests. As Adam was to tend and keep the garden within Eden, so too Aaron (the first priest) and his descendants were charge with tending and keeping the worship of God for God’s people.⁷⁵ By leading the priests were literally ‘standing in the gap’ between God and His people. The people brought animals or wheat or grain for an offering, and it was the priest who actually made the offering. Year after year these offerings would have to be repeated, and in particular once a year the high priest would make an offering inside the holy of holies. The priest would get dressed up in holy garb for this occasion and included in his garb was various gems and jewels that signified the people themselves, meaning that the priest entered the holy of holies as the representative or in behalf of the people of God. Contrast this role of priest

with that of a prophet. The prophet was to be God's representative to the people, while the priest was to be man's representative to God.

This is of course where we see the glory of Jesus Christ being our Priest. Listen again to the first part of the Shorter Catechism's answer, "Christ executes the office of priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God..." Held within this answer are three important truths about Jesus functioning as our priest: substitution, satisfaction, and reconciliation.

In His Priestly work of substitution Jesus as Priest not only made an offering as our representative before God, He was the offering itself. He was the 'sacrificial animal' or the 'unblemished Lamb' that bore our sins. No other Priest ever did such a thing. There was always an animal or something other than the priest himself that he would offer to God. Not so with Jesus. He was the offering. In our place, as our substitute He bore the wrath of God that we deserved.

In His Priestly work of satisfaction we see the first result of Jesus' substitution. Just as the unblemished animals offered up to God would satisfy God's wrath and justice on the people's behalf, so too, when Jesus offered Himself up as our substitute He satisfied God's wrath and justice on our behalf. That His bloody sacrifice satisfied God's wrath means His sacrifice is sufficient for all, and efficient for the elect. Nothing else need be added to the work of redemption, Christ's work alone is able to save all those He intends to. I said sufficient for all, but only efficient for the elect because we must remember the extent of the atonement. The atonement in the Old Covenant sacrifices extended only to the Israelites. No Canaanites, or Jebusites, or Moabites were covered by these sacrifices at all. In the same manner, but largely greater, the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ on the cross extends only to the elect from every nation. Many people say Jesus died for the whole world but this is simply not true biblically. Anytime Scripture says Jesus died for all, or for the cosmos, it refers to all of the elect throughout all of time not every single person who ever lived. If all men were in view we'd have to embrace universalism or a deficient view of the atonement which believes the work of Christ on the cross doesn't actually save us, but only makes salvation possible. We reject both universalism and this low view of the atonement. That Christ's substitutionary atoning sacrifice satisfied God's wrath means it actually saves us.

In John 12:24 Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Think about those who heard this. Perhaps they heard Him say the hour of His glorification had come and thought it meant something else, that Jesus was about to set up His dominion on the earth and crush Israel's enemies once and for all. To them, this would've been confusing and disappointing.⁷⁶ 'What? The hour of your glorification has come and you're speaking of dying?' What Jesus implicitly stated with the donkey in His triumphal entry He now explicitly states here in an agrarian paradox. For Jesus, the way to fruitfulness lies through death, the way to gain lies through loss, the way to glorification lies through humiliation. Or to say it another way, like the seed whose death is the germination of life for a great crop, so too Jesus' death produces an abundant harvest.⁷⁷ When you hold a kernel of wheat (or an acorn) in your hand you cannot see all that is in it. It looks rather small and unimpressive but it contains a world of life on the inside. How does all that

world of life get out? By the kernel being shoved beneath the ground. Then, and only then, life breaks forth out of it for all to see as new plants burst upward out of the ground. By speaking like this in v24 Jesus is saying that by dying He will bear much fruit. He will be plunged beneath the ground in death and put in the tomb. From the appearance of things this will look very unimpressive and disappointing. But this death will cause the life within Him to burst forth from the grave in resurrection power which in turn causes more resurrection fruit to come forth all over the globe.

You cannot believe this verse if you entertain or believe Jesus' death on the cross just made salvation a possibility. Put away from you any doctrine of the atonement you have that involves any kind of possibility. Possibility is not present here. Christ, the seed in view in v24, does not get plunged into the ground in death in hopes that it might bear fruit. Jesus didn't come, live, die, rise, and ascend to sit on the throne and fret anxiously hoping that someone will take advantage of what He did and be saved. This is what Jesus wanted Philip and Andrew, and these Greeks, to know. That His Kingdom doesn't begin with a coronation, but with a crucifixion.⁷⁸ That He, the great Seed of eternal life will be plunged into death, not to make a harvest possible, but to secure a harvest plentiful.

In His Priestly work of reconciliation we see yet another result of Jesus' substitution, that because Jesus bore God's wrath in our place as our substitute God was not only satisfied but was also reconciled with His elect. Due to sin all men are not merely separated from God, we're alienated from God. Because of the blood of Jesus, the elect who were once alienated and far off have been brought near and have been reconciled. That we're reconciled to God means that all believers now have been given the ministry of reconciliation, spreading this message to the ends of the earth through any and every means we can.

When most people think of Jesus' Priestly work on our behalf these are the things they think of, but we shouldn't stop here because His Priestly work continues and will continue until glory. Don't misunderstand me at this point. Roman Catholics believe that Jesus' Priestly work still continues today but they believe we see it in what they call the mass. In the mass they believe the same sacrifice of Calvary is offered again in an 'unbloody manner.' Because of this many people call the mass a 're-sacrifice' of Christ, and for them this is part of why they believe Jesus' priestly work still continues today. We very much disagree and stand with Hebrews 9:28 and other places in Scripture that says Jesus offered Himself to God once to bear the sins of many. Jesus does not repeatedly die, He only died once. Which means, His Priestly work of substitution, satisfaction, and reconciliation is no longer continuing today. This is why I do not recommend anyone to participate in a mass because they seek to do things the Bible strictly prohibits. What then do I mean when I say that His Priestly work is still continuing today? During His humiliation His Priestly work took place in terms of His sacrificial work, but in His exaltation it continues in terms of His intercession.

Intercession

In the beautiful section of Hebrews 7-8, 7:23-25 says this, "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but He (Jesus) holds His priesthood permanently, because He continues forever. Consequently,

He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

To intercede for someone is to plead or pray for them. This verse teaches that Jesus, after His ascension, is still carrying out His Priestly work by continually praying and pleading to His Father about us and for us. Joel Beeke comments on this saying “the application of justification is the direct result not of Christ’s death nor His resurrection, but of His intercession.”⁷⁹ Thomas Goodwin said it like this, “We owe our standing in grace every moment to His sitting in heaven and interceding every moment.”⁸⁰ By saying these things Beeke and Goodwin before him do not mean to belittle the cross and it’s work, they mean to show us how Jesus applies His fully sufficient cross work to the hearts of the elect throughout all of time. How does He do it? He does so it in His intercession where He applies the benefits of His life and death to the Church. Thomas Vincent commenting on this question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism states, “Christ, in His intercession does pray to and plead with God, as our advocate, that through the merit of His death we might be actually reconciled, our persons accepted, our sins pardoned, our consciences quieted, our prayers answered, and at last our souls saved.”⁸¹ Because of these things Jesus is truly our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and this is why Jesus can now tell us, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14). Hebrews 8 declares that Jesus is our High Priest who continues His work of applying His redemption to His people so that we’ll persevere in faith until He comes back, when He will put aside His offices and be glorified together with the Father and the Spirit.

I often say this, but this is an incredibly encouraging truth. Knowing Jesus right now, at this very moment, is praying and pleading for us before His Father, continually applying His redemptive work to our hearts so that we grow from degree of glory to another, this gives a solidity to the soul, a boldness to the bones, and encourages us to risk all for the sake of the Gospel. Robert Murray M’Cheyne felt this and said, “If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies, yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me.”⁸²

Christ's Offices: King

*“Christ executes the office of a king,
in subduing us to Himself,
in ruling and defending us, and
in restraining and conquering all His
and our enemies.”*
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)

As we did with prophet and priest, let us begin looking at the kingly office of Christ by looking into the Old Testament kings. Think back to the moment when Israel first asked for a king back in 1 Samuel 8. Though this was not good for Israel the desire for a king wasn't wrong in itself. In Deuteronomy 17 God had told the people a day might come when they would want a king like all the nations around them, and that this desire is acceptable so long as the king met certain standards. There we find the king must be a male Israelite and not a foreigner, the king must not acquire or hoard many horses, wives, or gold. The king must be a man underneath the law of God, a diligent student of the law of God, so that he may fear God all the days of his life. This kind of king would be a good king for God's people because he would live under and rule them with God's law. But as the history of Israel makes plain, they're not merely for asking for a king in 1 Samuel 8, they're seeking to be like all the other nations, to keep in step with the world around them. Sure God may have done many things for them but no one has a God for their king anymore, that's old fashion now, they want a king. Well, as we've been told many times by those wiser than us 'Be careful what you wish for. You may just get it.'

After the debacle that was Saul's kingship we had a few other rogue men who sought to steal the throne away from David, but eventually David became king and then his son Solomon. And after Solomon there is a string of kings who seemed bent on sinning against the Lord and leading His people astray (though there are a few shining lights among them). Then after exile and coming underneath Roman subjugation, the people had no king again, but the promise of the prophets was that one day the king, the true Ruler would come "whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" as Micah 5:2 states. Then He came, and in His first sermon said this, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism question 26 asks and answers this, "How does Christ execute the office of a king? Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to Himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all His and our enemies."

In this brief question and answer we see a summary of the work Christ does as King for us, in particular we see three things.

Subduing us to Himself

That Jesus as King subdues us to Himself presupposes the truth that we are at first cold to Him, rebellious against Him, hating Him and others, stubborn, and disobedient. Though all the souls of the elect are His from before the foundation of the world, we do not come out of the womb loving Jesus above all things. He must, in His time and in His power, awaken us from the dead, breath new life into our lifeless hearts by effectually calling us to Himself. This means God's electing love in eternity past is not the end of the story, it's merely the beginning. God will lead all of those He has elected in Christ to salvation through Christ and the first step in this process is the effectual call. This is why Paul says in Romans 8:30, "And those whom He predestined He also called..." First comes the election of God then comes the call of God. And not just any call, but a call that is 'effectual' because the call itself creates what is not there. Life from death, light from darkness, faith from unbelief, salvation from condemnation, and adoption from alienation. Thomas Vincent comments saying, "This implies that in effectually calling them and bringing them under His government, wherein, by His Word and Spirit, He does conquer their stubbornness and enmity, and make them a willing people to Himself."⁸³

So before Jesus exercises any Kingly authority against the enemies of His people, He exercises His Kingly authority against the evil within the souls of His elect in order to make them His own.

Ruling and Defending His Church

King Jesus rules over His people. This rule is a gracious rule, a Fatherly rule, never a punitive or harsh or tyrannical rule. Even in His discipline all of His Fatherly actions toward us are done lovingly. But it is rule nonetheless, you cannot get away from this. We are a ruled people as Christians. We are not free. Free from the power of sin and death sure, but now we're underneath a new rule, the rule of Christ. Paul speaks of this in Romans 6:22 when he says just as we once were slaves of sin, we are now slaves of righteousness. How does Jesus rule over His people?

Through Giving the Law

First, Jesus rules over His people by giving us His law with its commandments, which He expects us to keep. This is true in both the Old Covenant and New Covenant. Israel was to obey all the law of God Moses gave them and now the Church must obey all the commands of Christ given to us in Scripture. In both the Old and New Covenants these commandments include blessings for those who obey and curses for those who disobey. One of the most neglected doctrines of the modern Church is the pleasure God has in the obedience of His people. If we truly learn grace it will lead us to obey. At least that's what Paul says in Titus 2:11-12 when he says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age..." What

is it that moves us toward a holy life? What is it that teaches us godliness? The grace of God that has appeared.

Through the Officers of the Church

Second, Jesus rules over His people through the officers of the Church. Though there are two officers of the Church to be appointed and installed, I have the office of elder in view here. Deacons are truly officers of the Church but the office of deacon is an office of service, while the office of elder is an office of rule. Through the elders of the Church Jesus equips His people through the ministry of the Word, He nourishes His people through discipleship, and He guards His people through discipline.

Through the Spirit

Third, Jesus rules over His people inwardly through the sanctifying and supporting presence of the Holy Spirit. Chiefly by writing His law on our hearts so that our nature is further and further conformed to the image of Christ. So 2 Corinthians 3:3 states, “You are the letter of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.”

It is in these same three ways that Jesus doesn't merely rule over us but defends us as well. By giving us His commands, by giving us elders, and by giving us the inward ministry of His Spirit, Jesus so defends us as to cause us to hide underneath His wings. And under His wings we should seek to stay, whether in right standing of the Church or under its discipline.

Restraining and Conquering His Enemies

King Jesus also restrains and conquers all of His and our enemies. Let's ask the question: who are our enemies? Though we may be able to give many names to this at times in history, chiefly we must say our enemy is the unholy trinity: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

In regards to the world, the flesh, and the devil Jesus has already conquered them and has canceled their power over us on the cross, and at conversion Jesus saves us from the power of this unholy trinity. But, though He's saved us from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we still struggle with the presence of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Think of the line in the hymn 'O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing' when it says, “He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free, His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me!” Did you notice what the hymn writer said Jesus breaks? The power of *canceled* sin. Yes, sin no longer has any grip on us. It is truly canceled. But because it has not been dealt its final blow and is still present in the world, it still holds power over us and has a sway in our nature. Thus, part of the Kingly ministry of Jesus is in restraining its influence in this world and in our hearts.

But we cannot believe that God in His providence will always lead the Church in triumph over His enemies in every generation. There have been large periods of time within Scripture and within modern Church history when God has allowed wickedness to reign and spread, which brought great difficulty to those within the Church. In Exodus 1 God allowed a new Pharaoh to be crowned over Egypt who didn't know Joseph and as a result

large sweeping persecution swept over the Israelites. Or think of the dark ages between the 6th century and the 15th century. Not all was dark during those times, but by and large it was a long 900 year period when the Church was led by cruel and corrupt popes. This means that though Jesus is indeed King, ruling and reigning on the throne, He does at times allow His people to enter into times of great distress and even despair for our benefit. Ultimately the Church will be triumphant in Christ when He returns to bring His Kingdom in full measure and exercise His full Kingly authority in judgment over His and our enemies.

So to sum up: Christ as King subdues us to Himself, rules and defends us, and restrains and conquers all His and our enemies. During His humiliation we see His Kingly authority in His ministry. Right now in His exaltation, He still carries out His Kingly authority by being Lord over all things.

Summit 4

Pneumatology – The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

Delighted Among the Trinity

*“These things I have spoken to you that
My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”
(John 15:11)*

In the modern Church it is easy to see that confusion abounds regarding the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. This confusion is most easily seen in the three groups most of us fit into. First, we have those who seem consumed with the Holy Spirit. These see all of life through communing with the Holy Spirit, they make bold and confident assertions about what Spirit is leading them to do with their lives, and in their worship services it is commonplace to see various displays of the Spirit, such as being slain in the Spirit or speaking in tongues. Second, we have the Christians who seem devoid of all Spirit-filled activity. They are exceedingly academic and logical in their Christian experience, their worship services seem rigid or heavily structured, and in any discussion of the Spirit's work is looked on with suspicion rather than a deep affection or gratefulness. Third, we have a group that has largely been a reaction to both of previous two positions. This is a sort of middle ground position which affirms the continuing presence of charismatic gifts today while at the same time denying their relevance or usefulness in public use. This position is sometimes referred to as 'cautious continuationism.'

All three of these groups usually claim to believe in the Trinity, but in practice the first group appears to view the Spirit as supreme, the second group appears to ignore the Spirit entirely, while the third group appears to be afraid of the Spirit causing some type of public embarrassment or spectacle. Of course a question rises to the surface after seeing such a separation within the Church: 'Who is right?' Or maybe I should ask it like this: 'Which group has a more Biblical Christianity?' or 'Who has a sounder theological understanding of the Spirit?' These are great questions indeed. Questions that must be not only asked, but answered as well. The frustrating thing about answering such questions is that each group claims to be correct. So what then is the answer? To be fair, let me lay my cards on the table.

The historic Reformed faith, of which I am a part, has largely been perceived as academic, cold, heady, or overly intellectual in regard to the things of God. Some have described our church services as too liturgical or structured. Someone once told me there is so much order in our worship at SonRise Community Church that the Spirit of God is prohibited from doing what He wants to do. Is that true? I certainly don't think so, but clearly the person who expressed this does. I've often heard comments like these and I often wonder at them because it is the exact opposite of what I see in Scripture and what I've encountered in my own Christian experience. You see, I believe the modern Church

has an unhealthy desire for the extraordinary. We desire power, we desire signs, we desire wonders and miracles and mountain top experiences with God. Now, don't misunderstand me. The extraordinary is not bad at all. But it's not where we spend 98% of our Christian experience. Most of our experience will overwhelmingly be ordinary, and you know what? I think that's how God intends it to be.

This desire for the extraordinary is not new with our generation, it was fully present with the disciples too. Philip said to Jesus in John 14:8, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." After all that Jesus had done and taught, Philip thought it just wasn't enough and sought after something extraordinary so he asked Jesus to show them the Father and said that if Jesus did this that it would be enough for them. Then they would truly know that Jesus was God. How did Jesus respond to him? In John 14:9-11 He said, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." Jesus points out that Philip doesn't properly understand the incarnation, and that Philip can find the extraordinary God he's looking for in the ordinary looking Person of Jesus Christ.

This is what I see today. The modern Church has embraced a Philip type mindset in the Christian life and we need to be called back to the ordinary. Even as I write those words it sounds wrong doesn't it? When did being elected before the foundation of the world by the Father, saved by the penal substitutionary atonement of the Son, and indwelt by the Spirit become something that we see as ordinary? Are these things not the epitome of extraordinary?! Shame on us for looking for something greater.

So what do we do about this? With all these things and more seemingly up for grabs in the modern Church when it comes to the Holy Spirit, the only thing we can do is return to Scripture. With God's help we must examine the teachings of the Word of God. While I'll seek to do this in this in this present chapter let me go ahead and disappoint some of you. If you are reading this looking for a solution to the charismatic gifts in the church today, you'll be unfulfilled and I'm afraid you'll find what I've got to say rather ordinary (remember what I said 2 paragraphs ago?). There are much more pressing matters I want to cover. I want delve deeply into the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, trace how it develops throughout Scripture with an aim to see what the work, the goal, and the priorities of the Holy Spirit are. Once we see the big picture redemptive work of the Spirit, it is my view that these side matters (which we have wrongly made central matters) will fade in their significance.

Delighted Among the Trinity

As theologians wrote on the Trinity throughout Church history the centrality of the Trinity has become clearer and clearer. One such model, called the psychological model of the Trinity came to the surface.⁸⁴ Joe Rigney does a wonderful job of explaining this view of the Trinity stating that "...in the Godhead, there is God in His direct existence (Father), God's self reflection or contemplation of Himself (Son), and God's love and

delight for Himself (Holy Spirit)...there is God, God's idea of God, and God's love for His idea of Himself."⁸⁵ Before you write this view of the Trinity off as bizarre, perplexing, or even a Freudian twist on the Trinity (which it's not!) take note of the following passages. Colossians 1:15 says Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" and Hebrews 1:3 says Jesus is the exact imprint (or representation) of God's nature. This is why Jesus says when you've seen Him you really have seen the Father (John 14:7-11). Taking these passages together we understand that for all eternity God has had an image of Himself. This image is the exact imprint or representation of His nature. Because this image of God is the exact imprint of God it has pleased God to make known the glories and beauty of His own character to the world through this image, which is His Son.

What then do we make of the Holy Spirit in this description of the Trinity? The Spirit, in the above paragraph is described as 'God's love for His idea of Himself.' Or to say it another way the Spirit is the very love and delight which the Father and the Son have in each other. This love that flows between the Father and the Son is deep and infinite and wonderful and exuberant. Jesus Himself speaks of this love when He mentions the 'glory' the Father gave Him because He loved Him before the foundation of the world in John 17:24. This love, flowing back and forth between Father and Son, is so substantial that it stands out on its own as the third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. That love then bursts out of the fellowship of the Father and Son and pours over onto us at the moment of conversion. We see this in Romans 5:5 when it says "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." It is the Spirit who is the very love of God, which from being poured into us brings all of God's delight in God into the soul of man.

Many theologians through history have described the Spirit like this. St. Augustine stated it saying that love cannot exist on its own because in order for it to exist there must be multiple parties involved doing the work of loving one another. For example, God couldn't be love unless there was something for Him to love. If that something were us or something that isn't part of Himself God would not be perfect because God would then need us or that something in order to be a loving God. So, God must be love inside Himself.⁸⁶ Speaking of this Gerald Bray says Augustine believed, "...the Father is one who loves, the Son is the one who is loved – the "beloved Son" revealed in the baptism of Jesus – and the Holy Spirit is the love that flows between them and binds them together. It is in the Spirit, moreover, that we who are believers are bound to God and made partakers by adoption of that love which is intrinsic to his being."⁸⁷

In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis expressed it like this, "The union between the Father and the Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know this is almost inconceivable, but look at it thus. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the 'spirit' of that family, club, or trade union. They talk about its 'spirit' because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and the Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God. This Third Person is called, in technical language, the Holy Ghost or the 'spirit' of God.

Do not be worried or surprised if you find it (or Him) rather vaguer or more shadowy in your mind than the other two. I think there is a reason why that must be so. In the Christian life you are not usually looking at Him. He is always acting through you. If you think of the Father as something 'out there', in front of you, and of the Son as someone standing at your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you...God is love, and that love works through men-especially through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son."⁸⁸

Jonathan Edwards said it like this years before Lewis did in his own Puritan manner. "The Godhead being thus begotten by God's loving an idea of Himself and shewing forth in a distinct subsistence or person in that idea, there proceeds a most pure act, and an infinitely holy and sacred energy arises between the Father and Son in mutually loving and delighting in each other, for their love and joy is mutual, Proverbs 8:30 – "I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." This is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible. The Deity becomes all act, the Divine essence itself flows out and is, as it were, breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the deity in act, for there is no other act but the act of the will."⁸⁹ Edwards went on to conclude the following about the Trinity as a whole, "The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of Himself and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the deity subsisting in act, or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth in God's infinite love to and delight in Himself. And I believe the whole Divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the Divine idea and Divine love, and that each of them are distinct persons."⁹⁰

Since the Holy Spirit is the love which flows out from and breathes forth between the Father and the Son, see the beauty in Jesus' words in John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." In context 'these things' refers to all Jesus taught in 15:1-10, but the substance of Edwards and Lewis and all we've mentioned before fits within this statement as well. The reason our joy is full is because the joy Jesus gives to and places within us, is none other than the Holy Spirit Himself.

The Pentecost Outpouring

*“...in the New Covenant we experience,
not a kind of second blessing experience of
the Spirit after conversion, but a one time full
and forever filling of the Spirit at conversion.”
(Adam Powers)*

There are specific Sundays marked out on the yearly Church calendar where you know certain truths will be focused on. For example on Palm Sunday you'll most likely hear a sermon on the Triumphal entry. On Good Friday you'll most likely hear a sermon on the cross of Christ. On Easter you'll hear of the resurrection, near the end of October you'll hear of the Reformation, and during the Christmas season you'll hear of the birth of Christ. But most of us (especially those of us in the reformed protestant world) do not know that there are two other celebrations in our calendar around the beginning of summer.

The first is Ascension Sunday where we remember and rejoice Christ's ascent to sit on the throne of God to rule and reign at the Father's side until He comes again in glory and power. I do wonder if we know the second celebration at all. After Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, the Spirit of God descended to indwell the Church Jesus purchased with His blood. So today we're taking a break from our series in John's gospel to remember and rejoice in the events of Pentecost Sunday.

Our text in view this chapter is Acts 2:1-13. But in order to see the full scope of what took place at Pentecost we must return all the way back to Genesis 1 and slowly progress towards Acts 2. So let's take a journey shall we?

We first meet the identity and see the activity of the Holy Spirit in the first few verses of Scripture in Genesis 1:1-2. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." From reading how the Spirit hovered over the dark void we get a sense of expectation, that God through His Spirit is about to do something. And of course He was about to do something in making everything from nothing. How did God do this? Through His Word. So in the first two verses of the Bible we have the coupling of God's creative power in His Word and Spirit.

Moving ahead in redemptive history we come to Exodus 19 where God descends on Mt. Sinai in fire. This is another scene where God's Spirit descends to His creation, and by God descending like this in thunder and lightning and thick cloud surrounding the

mountain the people were terrified. What happened after God fell in fire on this mountain? He gave the Law to His people. Again we have the imagery of God rescuing His people, descending to them to meet them in both Word and Spirit.

Move ahead a little bit to Exodus 28 where instructions are given for making Aaron's priestly garments. It says in 28:2 they were designed for glory and for beauty. Then in 28:3 it says God filled Bezalel with His Spirit to make these clothes. Then in Exodus 31 God gives instruction on how the tabernacle is to be built. And in 31:1-3 God says He fills Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit to make all that is required for the tabernacle's construction. In these instances we again see Word and Spirit united in operation. God filled certain people to make certain things, things that would be used in the ministry of God's Word to God's people.

Move much further ahead to the histories and prophetic books of the Old Testament and we find that the normal operation of the Holy Spirit was one of a temporary filling. Prophets, priests, and kings would be filled with God's Spirit for a certain time, for a certain moment, for a certain purpose and then the Spirit would move on. But the further we progress into the prophets we find a new reality and new operation slowly coming into view. One day the Spirit would no longer function in a temporary filling but would Himself be the very Person who raises people from spiritual death to spiritual life, who recreates the heart into a soft and moldable heart, and who then permanently fills the soul causing us to submit to the Word of God and walk in the ways of God (Ezekiel 36-37). Again notice Word and Spirit coupled.

Move ahead now a little bit to Joel 2 where we find the grand promise given concerning the Spirit of God. As Joel is prophesying about the events that would usher in the kingdom of God, the age to come, the last days he says in 2:28-32, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke (notice the similarities with Sinai?). The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls." This grand prophesy concerning the activity of the Spirit of God has to do with the events of the last days. Specifically, it's about the moment the last days begins. During this time the Spirit of God will fall on and fully fill all those who call on the name of the Lord to be saved as they hear and respond to the preaching of the gospel. Once again, see here the same elements of Word and Spirit being coupled together.

Now, as we move out of the Old Testament where God has made promises and move into the New Testament we see firsthand how God has kept those promises.⁹¹ How has He kept His promises concerning His Spirit? We see it first in Jesus, specifically at His baptism, where He the very Word of God was empowered by the Spirit of God to do the will of God in His redeeming work. And during that redeeming work, specifically in John 14-16, Jesus promises that He and the Father will send the Spirit to them and by the

power of the Spirit they will be able to do greater things than they've ever seen. Notice Word and Spirit are coupled once again in the gospels.

And now, in Acts 2 we find the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost, to say the least, was a very important day for the Jews. The word Pentecost itself means fiftieth in Greek being that it was exactly fifty days after Passover when the people would, each year, celebrate God giving them the Law on Mt. Sinai. It was also called the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Harvest because it was held at the beginning of harvest season. As Luke explains this event he describes it in two parts. In v1-4 we see the events of Pentecost, and in v5-13 we see the effects of Pentecost.

The Events of Pentecost

v1 mentions all the disciples were present and gathered together. This group included the disciples, Matthias (who was chosen to replace Judas in v26) and all the other believers, which 1:15 told us was around 120 people. When the day began they had planned to celebrate Pentecost, God's giving of the Law and the formation of His covenant people at Sinai, but unbeknownst to them they would end up celebrating the formation of a new covenant people. Notice the four elements resounding from these first four verses include similar elements of all the Old Testament texts we began with today: a mighty rushing wind, tongues, fire, and a filling.

First, a mighty wind in v2, or in the Greek a mighty *pneuma* (Spirit). This mighty and sudden wind that blew was no mere weather event. It was the strong breeze of God's Spirit that no man could resist. It resembles the Spirit hovering over the dark void in Genesis 1:2, it resembles the storm surrounding Sinai in Exodus 19-20, and it resembles the wind/Spirit that rattled through the dry bones in Ezekiel's Vision to recreate them anew as a vast army fit for the Lord of hosts. Just as the wind of God's Spirit hovered over, filled, and consecrated the Old Testament temple, so too here the wind of God's Spirit is consecrating the new temple made up of the new covenant people of God.⁹²

Second, tongues in v3. Recall it was in Babel that the people desired to make a name for themselves by building a large tower reaching into the heavens. The reason they were able to build such a wonder of the world is given in Genesis 11, they had a common tongue. The text says God came down from the heavens to see it (which means it wasn't really that tall at all) and confused their common tongue because they were laboring for the glory of man. The curse of Babel was immediately felt as all those present dispersed over the entire world. The curse of Babel and the curse of sin in general began to diminish at Pentecost as those of many nations heard the gospel, not in a common tongue, but each in their own native tongue. This meant the new covenant people now being created would be a people no longer made of one nation but made of many peoples and many nations.⁹³ Therefore, the tongues present at Pentecost were given by God primarily to show us the formation of a new covenant global people, not to prove that speaking in tongues is a proof of being filled with the Spirit.⁹⁴

Third, fire in v3. Fire often indicated the presence of God with His people. It was a smoking fire that walked through the animal pieces in Genesis 15 confirming the Abrahamic covenant, it was a burning bush that God spoke to Moses out of, it was fire that thunderously fell at Mt. Sinai, it was a fiery pillar that led them by night, it was

wonders of fire that Joel spoke of long ago, and now it is fire appearing above each believer. God is, after all, a consuming fire is He not? That the fire of God's presence symbolized here is present over each individual believer rather than over the whole of them means each believer is himself or herself indwelt by the very presence of God and yet is not consumed, as the bush of old.

Fourth, a filling. v4 says all the believers that day were "filled with the Holy Spirit." Before the Ascension Jesus told them in 1:5, "...John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." This of course happened a few days later as Jesus filled, or baptized, these believers with the Holy Spirit. 1:8 speaks of the same thing when it says the Spirit 'comes upon' us. 2:38 also does this speaking of how we 'receive' the Spirit upon believing the gospel. This Pentecost moment marks a unique change in how the Spirit operates with God's people. David experienced the Spirit coming on him and leaving him for various times and purposes, which is why he said in Psalm 51:11, "Cast me not away from Your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me." Now, in the New Covenant we experience, not a kind of second blessing experience of the Spirit after conversion, but a one time full and forever filling of the Spirit at conversion. Ephesians 1:13-14 speaks of it like this, "In Him you also, when you heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." Notice once again the pattern of Word and Spirit continues.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in one of his daily devotionals, tells the story of attending a political meeting where two politicians were scheduled to speak. He said the first spoke brilliantly about politics and was clearly a very articulate man. But the second, though not as polished or formal, spoke with a power that surprised Lloyd-Jones. When thinking over why this second man affected him so Lloyd-Jones said, "The first man spoke as a educated advocate, but the second man spoke as a man who experienced and was deeply persuaded in his cause, because of this he came forth not merely as an advocate but as a witness!"⁹⁵ Think about this. The disciples knew Jesus, walked with Him, heard His teachings, listened to His sermons, watched His miracles, they saw Him die, and they saw Him rise. If anyone were able to testify to these things it was them. "And yet, Acts 1:8 tells us they would be quite unable to do this until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit."⁹⁶ Or we can say it like this, without the Spirit in Acts 1 they were held back, but with the Spirit in Acts 2 they were sent forth.⁹⁷ They were filled then and we are filled today that we would be, not mere spectators - onlookers - observers, but witnesses! This Pentecost moment begins the same steady theme throughout the entire book of Acts. When one hears the gospel and comes to the Lord by the power of the Spirit, what happens is that person begins preaching the gospel in the power of the Spirit. Just as God once filled and gifted Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit to make the priestly garments and build tabernacle, so too God now fills us and gifts us with His Spirit to build the Church of Jesus Christ. Just as those former things were made by the Spirit for beauty and glory, now we work by the Spirit to spread the beauty and glory and of Christ!

An intentional parallel and contrast are presented to us here. At Sinai the Spirit thundered mightily and the people were filled with fear as they backed away from God though God was making them a people and entering into covenant with them by writing outwardly on

the tablets of stone. Here at Pentecost, the Spirit blew mightily as God wrote inwardly on tablets of human hearts and the filled the people with a holy boldness as they drew near to God and preached the gospel courageously before a hostile crowd.⁹⁸ What was the result of this? In one day more people were converted and added to the Church than in the entire earthly ministry of Jesus. Remember Pentecost was called the Feast of Harvest because the first fruits of the crop would be brought in? This suggests that the 3,000 converts that became part of the new covenant people that day were only the first fruits of more gospel harvest to come!⁹⁹ Derek Thomas describes this saying, “Pentecost signaled that something had been done (the atoning work of the Messiah) and that something had not yet been fully accomplished (the gathering of the people of God into the visible Church of Jesus Christ).”¹⁰⁰ Question: how are God’s people going to be gathered in? Answer: by the Spirit empowered gospel preaching of Spirit filled disciples of Christ. Once again, it’s Word and Spirit in view. They were together there at creation, they were together at Sinai, and they’re still together in God’s work of new creation at Pentecost. What God joins together let not man separate!

All of this means the Pentecost event is unrepeatable. Or as the Gospel Transformation Study Bible says, “Luke’s focus in Acts 2 is on the fulfillment of prophecy, not on paradigms for personal experience.”¹⁰¹ Peter will soon bear witness in just a moment (2:17-18) and tell us that this Pentecost event is what Joel’s prophecy was all about! That Joel 2 was being fulfilled here means Pentecost marked the beginning of what is known as the last days. Jesus had come announcing the arrival of the Kingdom throughout His earthly ministry, and now by sending His Spirit He emphatically declared that the last days had now fully come, that the old was gone, that a new era had dawned, at a New Sinai, where a New People were created, called into a New Covenant, and given a new commission to be carried out “not by might, nor by human power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.” (Zech. 4:6)

The Effects of Pentecost

We then see the crowd react in v5-13, “Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

The large crowd that was already assembled, it seems to tell us, hadn’t seen the tongues of fire land on the disciples in that room but they indeed heard the great and mighty wind and saw the effects of that fire as v11 says, the mighty works of God were proclaimed. The response was varied, words all throughout v5-13 show us what they were ‘bewildered,’ ‘amazed,’ ‘astonished,’ and ‘perplexed.’ In v12 many of that group believed asking ‘What does this mean?’ But others sadly mocked, and concluding all these folks were drunk at nine in the morning! Many may similarly mock today and say

all this is hogwash and nonsense! But praise God that not everyone will mock, some will be amazed and will look into the meaning of these things...and find the very fullness of God in the gospel of Christ through power of the Spirit.

May you, when you hear the Word of truth, the gospel of Christ crucified for sinners, may you repent and return, may you believe in Him, and from believing may you know and experience the one time full and forever filling of God's Spirit, and find all the strength, to live all of life, to the glory of God.

Revealed and Illumined

*“In inspiration the Holy Spirit gave us the gift of Scripture, so too in illumination the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of understanding Scripture.”
(Adam Powers)*

We now turn our attention to the two great works of the Spirit in regard to the Word of God: revelation and illumination.

Revelation

As for revelation, we’ve already covered this in chapter 2 but let me remind you of it briefly. In that chapter I asked the question ‘What is the Bible?’ and I answered that question with three main terms. I said the Bible is inspired, inerrant, and infallible. Thus, the inspiration of the Scripture was the work of the Holy Spirit. The very words of Scripture were ‘breathed out by God’ like 2 Timothy 3:16 states, and because God the Spirit inspired this Word, it is also inerrant and infallible. It cannot err, and cannot fail. But we didn’t stop there. We continued on and mentioned that the result of the Spirit’s work in inspiring the Scripture is the five attributes of Scripture. Authority: the Word of God is the final rule of faith and life for Christians, it holds the highest authority, we sit underneath it. Necessity: the Word of God is necessary if we’re going to be saved. Clarity: though there are many things mysterious and deep within the Word of God, it is stunning in its clarity revealing God’s truth to us in a way we can understand. Sufficiency: the Word of God is fully capable of accomplishing the word God sends it to do. And lastly, beauty: in the Scripture we behold God in His glory, who is objective beauty Himself.

The Bible doesn’t contain the word of God within it, or give us the ability to find the true Word of God in its teachings. No. The entire Bible – the whole thing – is the Word of God. The Bible doesn’t merely bear witness to the truth, it is the truth. The doctrine of revelation, or revealing God’s truth to us through inspiring God’s Word is the first great work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Word of God. But it isn’t the only great work of the Holy Spirit in regard to the Word of God. The second great work of the Spirit with the Word is the doctrine of illumination.

Illumination

Before we get into what illumination is see the connecting point between these two doctrines. The Spirit’s inspired revelation is the grounds for the Spirit’s illumination.

Without revelation illumination wouldn't happen. We can't have illumination apart from revelation. John Owen says it like this, "Scripture is the only external means of divine supernatural illumination because it is the only repository of all divine supernatural revelation."¹⁰² So what makes the Spirit's illumination possible? The Spirit's revelation. Thus we have the external Word of God and in the internal testimony of the Spirit that impresses the truth of His inspired Word on us. So what is the illumination of the Spirit? It is "when the Holy Spirit externally assures believers that the Scriptures are the Word of God, at the same time the Spirit enables them to understand the mind of God through the illumination provided the His internal testimony."¹⁰³ It is an internal testimony, or awakening, a giving of light to the soul that was once in the dark, that results in, not super spirituality as Eastern religions speak of, but in an understanding of the revelation of God.

To show you this truth I want to describe to you the three Biblical aspects of faith.

Notitia

'Notitia' refers to the 'facts' of Christianity or the content of our faith. When someone believes in something, it is because they know the basics or the facts of that particular something and they agree with them. For example when I say I believe Peyton Manning is an exciting football player to watch I say that because I know certain facts about him. His stats show that he's undoubtedly one of the best quarterbacks of all time. Of course you may disagree with this statement because the excitement of watching a football player is largely a subjective experience rather than an objective fact. But when it comes to Christianity we move away from subjective experience and move toward objective fact. When someone comes to believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ it is because they first of all know Jesus' teachings. But be careful. To know is not the same as believing in. Notitia is not saving faith, many people know the teachings of Jesus and reject Him as Lord. Notitia is simply a knowledge of the facts.

Assensus

Whereas 'notitia' refers to the basic facts or content of Jesus' teachings 'assensus' refers to the conviction that the notitia of our faith is true. It's when someone looks at the Person and Work of Jesus and believes Him to speak the truth after examining His teaching. Think of it this way: if I were to make the claim that chocolate is the best flavor of ice cream, you would immediately begin to examine my statement and think through the qualities and characteristics of other ice cream flavors in relation to chocolate. If, after seeing the facts, you decided that I was correct and chocolate really was the best ice cream flavor of all time it means that you not only knew the facts, but that you believed those facts to be true. Or to say it another way, you mentally assented to the truthfulness of my statement. This is assensus, and yet again I must say, even this is not saving faith. Many people not only know but agree with the teaching of Jesus while remaining spiritually lost and in the dark. Recall James 2:19? Even the demons know many things to be true about Jesus yet refuse to bow the knee to Him. Remember Jonah? He knew correct theology as a prophet should, but did that theology lead him toward a life of obedience? It did not. He ran from God. Lesson? We need more than mere facts.

Fiducia

If notitia are the basic facts, and assensus is seeing those facts as true, fiducia goes further. Fiducia refers to a trust in or reliance on those facts. Fiducia is not only knowing the teachings of Jesus, not only agreeing that those teachings are true, but banking our lives on those teachings, relying on them, and trusting in them for our salvation. Many men can gain a knowledge of the notitia of faith, many men can also see that knowledge as true, but no man can of His own power and will come to trust in these facts. Only the Spirit of God can do this inside the heart and soul of man. Which brings us back to our central focus here.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Notice it says that the natural man does not accept the things of God, not because he simply rejects them, but because he is not able to understand them. Recall what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3? “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Unless we are born again natural man is unable to ‘see’ the glories of the God’s kingdom. He is blind to them. Only the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to see the kingdom and understand the things of God.

The work of the Holy Spirit in opening our eyes to see God’s kingdom and understand God’s ways is called illumination. Illumination is not the Spirit giving man a new revelation of God, but an inward work deep within our hearts that enables us to see glory and beauty in the revelation of God in His Word that has always been before us. In inspiration the Holy Spirit gave us the gift of Scripture, so too in illumination the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of understanding Scripture. Paul speaks of this illuminating moment in 2 Corinthians 4:6 when he states that God, just as He did back in Genesis 1, says within our hearts ‘Let there be light!’ and from this we gain “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Just as God spoke His Word into the dark void and created the heavens and the earth, so too God spoke His Word into the dark void of our hearts and resurrected us from death to life.

Illumination begins before conversion with a growing grasp of the truth of God’s Word and His demands of us. The Spirit convinces us of our sin and convicts us of the same, warning us that judgment is to come if we do not repent and believe in the gospel. After conversion the illuminating process continues in our sanctification as the Spirit continues to do the work of opening our eyes and hearts to comprehend what is beyond all comprehension, the love of Christ. By doing this throughout our lives the Spirit fills us with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18-19). Therefore, this work of illumination begun before conversion and continuing in our sanctification until our glorification, is a lifelong ministry of the Spirit toward Christians. Knowing that this is how the Holy Spirit operates within us to grow us in grace should prompt and move and lead and cause us to labor in the Scripture privately and publicly. While praying that the Spirit would incline our hearts to His testimonies (Psalm 119:36), open our eyes to behold wondrous things in His Law (119:18), unite our hearts with His to fear Him properly (Psalm 86:11), and satisfy us with Himself so that we would be glad and sing for joy all our days (Psalm 90:14).

To bring back our earlier terms, allow me to end our discussion with two Puritan thoughts. John Flavel believed that *notitia* and *assensus* is God's preparatory or convicting illumination where man's conscience and intellect are touched by grace while *fiducia* is God's saving illumination where man's will is transformed by grace to enjoy and taste God's beauty and sweetness.¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Edwards describes all three of these terms in relation to how God desires to be glorified. "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory; and that it might be received both by the mind and heart. He that testifies his idea of God's glory doesn't glorify God so much as he that testifies also his approbation of it and his delight in it."¹⁰⁵

Applied

*“But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed”
(2 Corinthians 3:16)*

I want to begin by pointing out a difference in our study thus far. We’ve just finished studying the doctrine of Christ, or Christology, which really could be called – redemption accomplished. In Christ’s humiliation and exaltation He accomplished all that is needed for the redemption of the elect. There is a profound reason why we study the doctrine of the Spirit, or Pneumatology, directly after Christology because while Christology is redemption accomplished, Pneumatology is redemption applied. Thus we see again the glory in the Trinitarian work of salvation: the Father plans, the Son redeems, and the Spirit applies. To make the application of redemption plain to you here in this chapter we turn our attention to one thing, the doctrine of conversion.

Conversion

Conversion isn’t usually thought of today as a good word. Instead it’s seems to convey a negative image or a moment of forced decision, as if someone were coercing you or holding a gun to your head and requiring you to make a decision or else. But I submit that this notion is largely an unfair view of this word. For example if we were to look in a thesaurus we would find the following synonyms for the word conversion: change, adaptation, alteration, renovation, transfiguration, exchange, and even transformation. Interesting isn’t it? That our culture views the word conversion is so negative while the synonyms bring nothing but positive pictures into view. I suppose the negative idea of conversion has crept in from Church history, specifically those moments on both the Roman Catholic and Protestant side of the aisle when conversion was done by coercion. When it was forced either by trial, by inquisition, or by war. These are stains on the history of Christianity and are evidence that the Church is full of fallen men and women. Events like these have lingered in the mind of man ever since giving us a sort of distaste for the idea of conversion.

But when we come to the Bible we see an entirely refreshing and positive view on conversion. Rather than being seen as coercion we see it as the great work of the Holy Spirit in beginning the Christian life by raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is the moment of transformation, when we become, by the work of the Spirit, something we never thought we would ever be. Conversion is the whole salvation experience.

The Transformation of Conversion

When we open the Scripture we find that one word rises to the top when we discuss conversion. This word in Greek is *metamorphuo*, which as you can probably guess is where we get the English word *metamorphosis*. When this word shows up in the New Testament it is translated as ‘transformation.’ In regards to the transformation of conversion two passages set this before us.

2 Corinthians 3:18

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

The context into which this verse comes to us is 2 Cor. 3:12-18 where Paul is comparing the glory of the Old and New Covenants. To illustrate this comparison he speaks of Moses, who had to put a veil over his face so that the Israelites (who had hardened hearts, 3:14) wouldn’t be terrorized by the glory of God (3:13). Paul says even in his day when the Law is read there is still a veil over the hearts of the Israelites (3:15). “But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed” (3:16). More so, Paul interrupts his argument with a statement about the freedom that comes into the heart when the Holy Spirit reigns. Paul makes this intrusion into this argument in order to tell us that the One who does the work of removing this veil over our hearts is the Holy Spirit Himself, and because the Spirit does this, we now have freedom (3:17). Then, in what has to be one of the most famous passages of Scripture, Paul summarizes by detailing this Spirit produced transformation saying that in the New Covenant when we behold the glory of the Lord, we are literally transformed into another kind of person, and that glory continually changes us from one degree of glory to another. If there is any doubt in the reader as to who is responsible for this unveiling, transforming, metamorphosing work, Paul makes it clear in 3:18, “This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

So from this first passage we learn that conversion is a transformative moment, where the Holy Spirit does the work of removing the veil over our hearts so that we can truly behold the glory of God. And from beholding the glory of God, what happens? We are transformed. Notice that this transformation occurs more than once. We are transformed at the moment of conversion when we behold the glory of God, and throughout our lives God the Spirit continues to transform us to greater degrees by allowing us to see more and more of God’s glory. Notice the end of 3:18 again, “For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” This is why Paul is able to call us letters written by the Spirit in 3:3 and 3:6. What more evidence do we need that our conversion and sanctification is the result of the Spirit’s transformative work?

2 Corinthians 5:17

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

The context into which this verse comes to us is 2 Cor. 5:14-19 where Paul is laying out the ministry of reconciliation all believers have received from God. It is the love of Christ that compels us. He died so that those who live would no longer selfishly live for themselves but for the glory of Christ who died and was raised for them (5:14-15).

Because Christ died that we would live for His glory Paul says he no longer regards those who believe in Christ according to flesh (5:16). How then does Paul regard believers? 5:17 tells us he regards us as we truly are, new creations of God. The old has passed, the new has come. How did this happen? 5:18-19 tell us. All of this is from God, who sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself and then give us the ministry of reconciliation after His resurrection. This is all good and well but where does the Holy Spirit come into this? Through the theme of creation. Back in Genesis 1 what was hovering over the waters? The Spirit. What then did God do to create all we see today? He spoke His Word by the power of His Spirit into the darkness and created all things. Paul uses this exact argument one chapter earlier to describe how God made new creations out of us at conversion. In 2 Cor. 4:6 he says, "For God, who said 'Let light shine out darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Therefore, the meaning of 5:17 is that just as God accomplished creation through His Word and Spirit, so too, God accomplished our conversion by His Word and Spirit too, making us new creations.

So we see gloriously that the transformative work of the Spirit is the means by which God converts His people and the means by which God grows His people. This is nothing less than a complete transformation. When God the Spirit transforms us, awakens us, illumines us, or regenerates us, two things then bring about our conversion: repentance and faith. What is repentance? It is a turning away from sin. What is faith? It is a turning to Christ in a whole souled trust.

Before you get the wrong idea that the 2 Cor. 3:18 and 5:17 works are God's works while the works of repentance and faith are our works, hear me loud and clear, repentance and faith are both God's works as well. 2 Timothy 2:25-26 states that God is the One who grants repentance and Ephesians 2:8-9 states that God gives the gift of faith. Just as the work of unveiling our hearts to behold the glory of God is both a one time work of the Spirit in conversion and a continual work of the Spirit in sanctification, so too is repentance and faith. The Christian life begins by God doing in us what we can't do for ourselves (remember 2 Cor. 3:18 and 5:17). This inner work then shows itself outwardly in the works of repentance and faith. Therefore repentance and faith is the way one becomes a Christian and the way one lives the entire Christian life. When we grow in Christ we will grow deeper in the knowledge of our sin and more aware of how dire our need for the gospel truly is. This leads us to a cycle of thankful repentance and trusting faith throughout the whole of our Christian experience.

So what is conversion?

Generally speaking it is the whole salvation experience But specifically speaking it is the Spirit's transformative work within us, which enables us to behold the glory of God, repent and believe, and become new creations in Christ, continually growing from one degree of glory to the next. Conversion is the beginning of the application of redemption. All of this is from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Sanctified

*“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace,
whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,
and are enabled more and more to die to sin,
and live to righteousness.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

What is sanctification? Does God do it or do we do it? What does it look like in real life? These are questions the Christian Church has been asking ever since it’s birth, and throughout the ages many have answered these questions well and many have answered these questions poorly. In our day, it is my opinion that we need a massive shift, a reformation in our understanding on this subject. We need this for two large reasons. On one hand there are Christians who view sanctification as a man centered response to justification. Meaning that while justification is something God did to us for the glory of His name and sanctification is something we do for God to the glory of His name. On the other hand there are Christians who view sanctification as something standing against justification by faith alone. Such that any type of call toward holy living is seen as wrongfully leaning into works based salvation. Both of these beliefs fall short of Scripture.

This shows itself today in many ways. One only has to go a Christian bookstore or the Christian section of a larger bookstore to see that multiple volumes of books have been written the disciplines of the Christian life and discipleship. And as good as these books can be for us most of them largely have one giant glaring omission. They never mention the gospel or our union with Christ at all. The result is that we now have a doctrine of sanctification that largely says ‘Yes God’s grace has saved you, but your effort will now make you holy.’ Or ‘Yes God’s grace has saved you, but the rest is up to you.’ Or even, ‘Yes God’s grace has saved you, but if you really want God to be happy with you, you must live a good life.’ It’s as if we believe that while we have been justified by a righteousness produced totally by Christ, we think we must be sanctified by a righteousness produced totally by ourselves.¹⁰⁶ This is nothing but a return to living under the law rather than under grace. There are many ways we could approach this subject, but I think it’s best to start back at the very beginning. So first I want to clarify the difference between justification and sanctification, then move onto the gospel nature of sanctification, and finally end with the Holy Spirit’s work in sanctification.

Justification vs. Sanctification

In question #33 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism justification is defined as “an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” Contrast this with question #35 where the Catechism defines sanctification as “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness.” Note that in both of these definitions we see God’s free grace being given to undeserving sinners. The difference comes when we see that justification is a one time act of God’s free grace in man, while sanctification is the ongoing work of God’s free grace in man.¹⁰⁷ In justification, because of the righteousness of Christ being imputed or accounted as our own by faith, God truly has declared us to be what we’re not – righteous. In sanctification, we see God’s work within us to make us into what He’s already declared us to be – righteous.

Even here we see the glory of the gospel in that our justification doesn’t depend on our sanctification. Or to say it another way, our acceptance with God doesn’t depend on our performance in the Christian life. We’ve already been justified, made right, and accepted by God and from that secure position God begins to grow us more and more into the image of His Son. We even see a shadow of this in the Ten Commandments. Before commanding Israel to do anything, God reminds them of who they are. In Exodus 20:2 God says, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” After this clear statement of their redemption out of Egypt and their adopted and secure position with God, God then commands them to live in a new way. The same is true with us. God has finished the work of redemption through His Son and by faith in Him God saves us from the slavery of sin and adopts into His family. Then, once we know of the security of our new state as sons and daughters of God, God then commands us to live in a new way. So rather than true obedience to God and true growth in that obedience to God coming from our obedience to God, the truth is the other way around. True obedience to God and true growth in that obedience comes out of our identity and union with Christ. It does not come from trying to earn His favor, it comes from resting in His favor already given to us. This is where we begin to see the gospel nature of sanctification.

The Gospel Nature of Sanctification

I said earlier that the error is that while we have been justified by a righteousness produced totally by Christ, we think we must be sanctified by a righteousness produced totally by ourselves. This is wrong. Sanctification does involve effort, and sweat, and hard disciplined work toward putting off sin and putting on Christ. But that effort, sweat, and hard disciplined work are fueled by the grace of God shown to us in the gospel. Paul’s letter to Titus shows us this in two ways.

First, in 2:11-12 Paul says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”

What does Paul say has appeared among us? His grace, which brings salvation to all people. What is that this grace teaches us? Paul says it is the grace of God that has appeared, the very grace that brings salvation, gospel grace, that teaches us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age. Here we see that great foundation and fuel of sanctification is not trying harder, but believing in the gospel deeper. Therefore we can conclude that a deeper understanding of the gospel will lead to a deeper and more sanctified Christian walk.

Second, in 3:3-8 Paul says, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

In v3 of this passage Paul sets forth our miserable condition apart from the grace of God. But when the goodness and love of God appeared what did He do? He saved us. Not because of what we’ve done, but because He is merciful. How did He save us? By the washing, the renewal, or the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, whom has been richly poured out on us through Christ. Because of this great salvation Paul says we who were once sinful are now ‘heirs according to the hope of eternal life.’ Just in case we doubt such wonders Paul says this is a statement to bank ones life upon, it is trustworthy, so trustworthy that he calls Titus to be always proclaiming such news. Here’s where sanctification comes in. Did you notice why Titus is to keep proclaiming this good news? v8 gives us the reason, “so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works” which are excellent and profitable for all people. Again, it is from beholding the grace of God in the gospel that one is reminded of who we once were, who we are now, and how we should be living in light of such grace. Sanctification is stirred and promoted within the soul of man by meditating on the gospel, not by trying to follow rules and regulations. As Titus was encouraged, we must be encouraged to insist on these things as well so that those who believe the gospel would live as becomes followers of Christ. This is why Mark Dever says, “Being a disciple of Christ does not begin with something we do. It begins with something Christ did.” These things are truly excellent and profitable for all people.

Where does the Holy Spirit come into this? To answer this we turn to Galatians 3 and Philippians 2.

The Holy Spirit’s Work Sanctification

In Galatians 3 Paul is making an argument against the Galatians who have begun well but have since turned to a different gospel. In Gal. 3:1-5 Paul says, “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or

by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

In this rebuke Paul asks two questions. In v2 he asks, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” Then in v3 and v5 he asks the same question, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” The Galatians were converted by the Spirit’s work, just as all Christians are. This is not Paul’s contention with them. His issue is what they were seeking to after beginning so well. Having begun by the Spirit they began to try and do the work of sanctification by the flesh. Paul says this is opposed to how sanctification really happens. It doesn’t happen by works of the flesh, but by hearing with faith. In other words, the same way they were saved (hearing the gospel with faith) is the same way they will grow in sanctification. That the Spirit is mentioned in v5 tells us that the Spirit is One who opens the eyes and enables conversion to take place, as well as the One who opens the heart and enables sanctification to take place as well. Yes, we really do work, effort, sweat, and labor in sanctification. But behind all of our doing is the Holy Spirit who is doing it all. As Augustine said, “We do the work, but God works in us the doing of the works.”

In C.S. Lewis’ book *Mere Christianity* he asks us to imagine two books on a table, one sitting on top of the other. He goes on to say that book A (the bottom book) is doing the work of supporting book B (the top book). If book A weren’t doing its work of supporting, book B wouldn’t be in its position. Lewis uses this illustration to flesh out his understanding of how the Son of God could be the begotten Son of God and the eternal Son of God at the same time. I want to use this image to make a different point; a point about sanctification. Imagine the Holy Spirit is book A and you and I were book B. The Spirit is seen here as the One who always supports us, upholds us, sustains us, and enables us to be in the position we are in as children of God. Do you see now what enables sanctification? Because of the Spirit’s supporting work within us, we can do what God has called us to do, namely, to progress in holiness. The Galatian heresy was just the opposite. They sought to progress in holy living by their own power without the support of the Spirit of God. To say it another way, they were trying to be book B without the aid of book A.

Philippians 2 makes this point as well. In 2:12-13 Paul says, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

We should ask the age old question here about the chicken and the egg here. Which came first, our work for God or God’s work in us? Don’t say the really foolish thing here, that our work enables God to do His work in us. Be reminded. God is God, we are not. We never ‘allow’ or ‘let’ God to do His work in or through us. God is not in a box until we choose to let Him out. This is preposterous to the highest degree, not to mention arrogant. It is also foolish to state that man and God work together as two paddlers labor together within the same kayak. If that were true, God’s work in us would be dependent on our

work for Him, which brings us back into the incorrect notion we just mentioned and place God in our dependency because without our work His work couldn't be done. No, these are foolish things to say. God's work alone is sufficient to save and sanctify.

Rather than these two options, which really are the same bad option, just as in our book A and B example above, we must see that the reason we're able to work (there really is work to do!) out our salvation with fear and trembling is precisely because God is already working within us to move us toward sanctification. Jason Meyer describes this well when he says "...we work out what God works in us."¹⁰⁸ So what comes first, our work for God or God's work in us? Clearly, not only does v13 come before v12, but v13 enables v12 to occur.

Now, let me end by asking the question: who is at work when God is working within us? Who is at work in v13? None other than the Holy Spirit who is presented here as the One who both moves us toward sanctification and enables us to work at holiness and work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Nourished

*The more I considered Christianity,
the more I found that while it had established
a rule and order, the chief aim of that order
was to give room for good things to run wild.”
(G.K. Chesterton)*

We've seen how the Spirit begins and sanctifies the Christian life. Now we'll examine how the Spirit nourishes the Christian life. When I use the word 'nourish' I do so intentionally. Usually when we think of the word nourish we think of a person's diet and recognize the consequence of a proper diet is nourishment to one's body. This nourishment results in health. The same is true of us spiritually. When a proper spiritual diet is adhered to the result is spiritual nourishment. This spiritual nourishment results in spiritual health. This then leads us to the question at hand this evening: what is the proper diet for a Christian's nourishment and spiritual health? Answer: the ordinary means of grace.

When I say the 'ordinary means of grace' what I mean is that God uses specific means or methods to give His grace to His people, thus growing them. What methods are they? In the Bible there are three of them: the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. This language about 'ordinary means' comes from the Reformed confessions of the Church from the 16th and 17th centuries. One such example is the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which asks us in question 88, "What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are His ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation." It's the Spirit's work in view here because it's the communication or application of redemption that's in view here. Christ has accomplished redemption and the Spirit then applies redemption to our hearts by the ordinary means of grace. While the Holy Spirit can and does work immediately on the heart at times, generally speaking, His work is done through certain means.

So we have our task before us. Let's delve into these three ordinary means of grace by which God grows His people.

The Word

When I say the Word of God is an ordinary means of grace I'm wanting to say three things at the same time. First, Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God. Second, Scripture

is the inerrant Word of God. Third, the preaching of the Word is where these two meet. Preaching is more than conversation about God, it's a heralding of a message that God really does work through: transforming, justifying, renewing, growing, and even judging. Michael Horton says, "In proclaiming God's Word a minister is not merely describing a new creation and exhorting us to enter into it; through this proclamation, Christ Himself is speaking a new creation into being."¹⁰⁹ Where is this in the Bible? Isaiah 55:10-13, which says, "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." Held within this passage is not only the promise that God's Word will always accomplish His purposes when it goes out (v10-11) but that when it goes out God delights to use it in such a way as to reverse the effects of the fall in the heart of man (v12-13). Rather than thorns and brier's, because of the Word working in us, there shall be cypresses and myrtles.

This work the Spirit does through the preaching of the Word inside the heart is the reason why the New Testament says the Word of God is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). This is why Paul says "faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). This is why Paul told Timothy to devote himself to the "public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). And this is why we're commanded to "let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly" (Col. 3:16) as we gather together for worship. The Word of God is a means of grace in that God, through His Word, works His will into the lives of His people.

Sacraments

John Calvin once said, "Christ communicates His riches and blessings to us by His Word, and He distributes them to us by His sacraments."¹¹⁰ Don't be put off by the word sacrament. It is an old word meant to describe something that conveys grace. Some prefer the term ordinance meaning the things Christ ordained for us. Roman Catholics believe there to be seven sacraments given by God, but the Bible only gives us two of them: baptism and the Lord's supper. To speak of both of them together we could say baptism is the sacrament which signifies our entrance into covenant with God, and the Lord's Supper is the sacrament where we continually affirm our existing covenant with God. I speak like this because the New Testament (Col. 2:11-12) specifically says baptism is the fulfillment of the old covenant sign of circumcision, and as a covenant sign, baptism functions largely in the same way circumcision did, expanded now to men and women of all nations, not just men of one nation. Thus, there is to be only one occasion of baptism for each believer and multiple occasions of the Lord's Supper.

How do these two sacraments serve as means of grace? They are visible gospels to us. In this light the function of the Word of God as a means of grace is very similar to how these sacraments function as means of grace. They are to the eyes what the preached

Word is to the ears.¹¹¹ Meaning that as our ears hear the preaching of the Word from the pulpit, so too our eyes see the preaching of the gospel in the sacraments.

There are two implications of this in regard to how the sacraments are to be employed within the Church. First, there are no individual sacraments. Too often we baptize someone and receive the Lord's Supper in an individual manner. Knowing the sacraments preach to our eyes, we know they are for more people than the ones individually partaking in them. Upon seeing someone go into the waters of baptism and seeing another receive the Supper, we see a dramatized version of what the gospel is and we are assured anew that we are in Christ ourselves. In that moment we have just been preached to, not in an audible Word, but in a visible Word from God. All who see it are ministered to, thus there are no individual sacraments. Or to say it another way, the sacraments should only be practiced in the midst of the gathered Church. Second, sacraments can function not only as covenant blessing but as covenant curse as well. When someone hears the preached word from the pulpit and disregards it as foolishness, what will happen to that person if they continue in their unbelief? They'll go to hell. Now, if we say that sacraments are a visible preaching of the gospel, why would the ignoring of it be any different than the audible Word? If you disregard your baptism, go back to the world to seek after sin, and continue in that sin, you make it plain that you never were a believe to begin with and will go to hell. If you disregard the Lord's supper and don't weigh the warning of coming to the table, because they're the signs of the covenant and because you've just partook of them, you will incur a stricter judgment and it becomes, not a covenant blessing to you, but a covenant curse for you. Sacraments are not a trivial thing. Nothing in the Bible is.

Prayer

Recall that the means of grace are the means which God has ordained to communicate the life-giving and sanctifying influences of the Spirit on the souls of men. This is precisely where prayer comes into view, for it brings us near to God. Fellowship with God is man's highest good (Psalm 73:25-28), and when we through prayer draw near to God, God draws near to us (James 4:8). Since the Word is the proclamation of God to man, and since the sacraments are the visible preached Word of God to man, we can state that prayer as a means of grace functions as the manner in which man responds back to God in intimate fellowship. What else can man do after receiving such glory in the Word and the sacraments but pray? While we wholeheartedly want to encourage private prayer, we wholeheartedly want to encourage corporate prayer as well when the 'I' turns into 'we' before God. When the 'we' is present we are reminded of the communal nature of all the other means of grace as well. Thus, most all we've said of preaching and the sacraments could also be applied to prayer here.

See something startling as we close. Our God has decided to reveal to us, in His Word, certain means by which He places His message into the hearts of His people: the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. These are common things that do an uncommon work. Yet even though this is the case we see churches of all shapes and sizes today refusing to employ these methods because they seem to be old-fashioned, or outdated, or no longer relevant to modern man. This doesn't speak well of modern man. Perhaps these ordinary things seem so boring to so many today because we have an insatiable hunger for the

extraordinary. We have to be wow'd when we come to church just like we're wow'd when we go to the movies or the football game. There has to be a sense of hype or excitement just as the hype or excitement we feel unboxing a new iPhone. This is why certain churches view their leader as more of an emcee rather than a pastor, just as they view those who attend as an audience rather than a congregation.

I believe this trajectory is the result of the Second Great Awakening, or as some prefer to call it – the lesser awakening. In the first Great Awakening Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield and others believed true revival was God's extraordinary blessing on God's ordinary means of grace. This is why the first Great Awakening was largely a theological awakening where robust biblical preaching held the prominent role. Contrast this with the Second Great Awakening where men like Charles Finney and D.L. Moody decided that revival can be achieved without God's blessing, simply by doing the right things in the right ways. Revival according to Finney wasn't something that only God could produce, it was something man could produce and control. So rather than robust theological and biblical preaching standing front and center, it was man-made methods and types of persuasion standing at the center which were used to get people to make decisions for Christ.

I fear this tendency is by and large dominating our church culture today. Which is strange to me because I see and meet people all the time who want God to move in mighty and powerful ways just like He did in the book of Acts, but at the same time they want to keep the Bible a certain distance away from them. They say the Bible isn't relevant and just want more of Jesus. Is this what we see in Acts? No, it isn't. All throughout the book of Acts, whether it was miracles, speaking in tongues, or the appearance of angels we see the extraordinary apostles being committed to the ordinary means of grace. They never felt the signs and wonders were enough because after each sign or wonder they preached the gospel. Therefore our current desire to experience a renewal, to experience hype and excitement in church reveals a “dissatisfaction with God's ordinary blessing on His ordinary means.”¹¹² When it comes down to it, the Word, the sacraments, and prayer, just don't dazzle us as much as the new iPhone or latest gadget does. One argument these people say about those of us who employ these ordinary means is that we are far too ordered in our worship, too rigid, too structured, too restrictive. To which I answer by pointing to G.K. Chesterton who said, “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.”¹¹³

To neglect the ordinary means of grace shows that deep down you really think you know better than God does about how to lead His Church and grow His people. Far be it from us to have such a mindset among us. As I began this chapter I asked one question: what is the proper diet for a Christian's nourishment and spiritual health? We can finish our study here with another question. How does God deliver His grace to His people, and what should our churches look like to reflect this? Rather than changing our message or changing our methods, let's make a deep commitment to the message and methods God gives us in His Word. We should trust in God rather than seeking flashy methods. After all, doesn't God know how to lead His Church better than we do?

Ligon Duncan gives us a warning here, “These are the main ways God’s people grow. We are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. But the instruments, the tools of God’s grace to bring us to faith and grow us in grace are the Word, prayer and sacraments. Nothing else we do in the church’s program should detract from these central instruments of grace, and indeed every thing else we do should promote and coalesce with them.”¹¹⁴

Gifted

*“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists,
the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for
the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”
(Ephesians 4:11-12)*

As we come near the end of our time in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and as we come to a close on the foundational things of the Holy Spirit we can now tend to those matters that are more debated. So without further ado, let's speak of the gifts of the Spirit. All of the gifts of the Spirit are important for sure, but some of them bring a certain amount of controversy. The controversy not only involves the extent of these gifts, but what the gifts are, and whether or not the Spirit still gives certain gifts to God's people today. But before we get into the controversy I want to begin describing the filling of the Spirit by going back in the Old Testament to provide us with the proper foundation for why God through His Spirit gives gifts at all within the Church.

In the back half of Exodus we see redeemed Israel standing before God at Mt. Sinai. After receiving the Law they then receive many other laws concerning rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices. After these things God commands Israel to build the tabernacle according to specific instructions. Then we come to Exodus 31:1-11, “The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

Notice that the tabernacle is to be constructed by God's divine instructions by men who have been filled with the Spirit of God and equipped for such a task. Specifically we see two men in view who will lead the task: Bezalel and his assistance Oholiab. It says in v3-5 that God filled these men with His Spirit in order to give them ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship, and artistic design in gold, silver, bronze, stones, and wood.

Do not miss that the reason the Holy Spirit filled these men was so that they would build the covenant dwelling place of God.

Take that same pattern and bring it forward into Ephesians 4:7-14, “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

Notice the same Exodus 31 pattern comes back into view in Ephesians 4? Just as Bezalel and Oholiab were filled with the Spirit to build the tabernacle in the Old Covenant, so too, in the New Covenant God gives gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) to His Church so that the body of Christ would be built up until the body gains unity and maturity so that we’d no longer be children tossed by every wind of doctrine. So just as the Spirit filled men to build the first temple in the Old Testament, the Spirit also gave gifts of men to build the temple in the New Testament. It was the Holy Spirit who constructed the tabernacle and it is the Holy Spirit today who constructs Christ’s Church.

See the bottom line when it comes to the gifts of the Spirit. At the moment of conversion every believer is filled with the Spirit and according to 1 Corinthians 12:13 this filling or ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is what causes unity among the body. It is therefore unbiblical to claim that within the body there are two groups of people, those that have been baptized in the Spirit and those that haven’t. As John Frame says, “If that were true, it would be a cause for disunity rather than, as Paul says, a basis for unity.”¹¹⁵ So what does this mean for the gifts of the Spirit? Much. Gifts of the Spirit do not exist to create a special class of believers among the Church, and gifts of the Spirit do not exist to cause confusion amid the Church. No, gifts of the Spirit exist to build the Church.

Now that we’ve set up our foundation, what is a gift of the Spirit and what gifts does the Spirit give to the Church today? A gift of the Spirit is an ability given by the Spirit used for the good of the Church and the glory of God. This is where the disagreements begin. While some give a list of up to twenty-five gifts the Spirit gives to the Church, others say there’s as few as seven. Biblically it is difficult to come up with a certain number. We want to avoid a specific number and simply stick with 1 Corinthians 12:4-5 which says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord...” Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 are two places that give lists of gifts, and even there the lists are different. They mention gifts such as showing mercy, administration, teaching or prophecy, faith, knowledge, and serving. We should also think of gifts of singing or leading in worship, kindness or a welcoming demeanor, financial wisdom, general wisdom, landscaping or building upkeep, cooking for large

church dinners, etc. These are all gifts of the Spirit given by the Spirit to strengthen and support the Church.

While those gifts are easy to recognize, there are other gifts that prove more difficult. The difficulty isn't so much seeing them in Scripture (they're all there in the Bible). The difficulty comes in knowing whether or not the Spirit continues to give them out today. To these we now turn:

Apostle (Eph. 4:11)

Called by Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry, God sent His Spirit to the apostles to give the Church His finished revelation in the NT Scriptures. Thus, the gift or office of apostle no longer exists today because when the canon of Scripture was closed there is no longer a need for new revelation.

Prophet (Eph. 4:11)

Called by God to give a message from God to God's people is what a prophet is. There is disagreement as to whether or not this office still remains today. Surely, there is an authority present when a pastor faithfully preaches the Word of God, but does that make him a prophet? I'm not so sure it does. If you want to say pastors are New Testament prophets I'm willing to believe that as long as we see these men simply as those who have been gifted with the ability of preaching.

Evangelist (Eph. 4:11)

Someone gifted with the ability to lead men to Christ in a convincing and persuasive manner. That these do exist in the Church today is no excuse for not sharing the gospel, because we're all called to do so. The calling of the evangelist according to Eph. 4:11-12 is to not only evangelize the lost, but teach the Church how to evangelize as well.

Healing and Miracles

Within the Bible miracles do happen, but they are rare. They only occur regularly in a few ministries in Scripture, and there are large periods of time when no miracles ever took place among God's people. So first I conclude that miracles, biblically, aren't to be seen as a regular part of God's people. They are extraordinary as opposed to ordinary. When miracles do appear throughout Scripture we can see a pattern. There are four moments when they occur. The ministries of Moses, Elijah/Elisha, Jesus, and the apostles. In these special times we read of many miracles taking place. But we also read in those passages that these miracles were given to validate or testify to the message they were preaching. 2 Corinthians 12:12 calls miracles "signs of a true apostle" and Hebrews 2:4 says through signs and wonders "God bore witness to the ministry of the apostles." This means the signs and wonders God worked during these ministries serve as witnesses that these men were truly sent by God and that their message was of God. This makes sense because if everyone were able to perform miracles they wouldn't be special during these particular ministries. So I conclude this: God is free to do whatever He wants to do, and can do miracles among us if He so desires with no problem at all. But we should not expect miracles among us because they're no longer apostles today, and the witness that our preaching is true today is Scripture itself, not a sign or wonder.

One last question to all of you. When did hearing God's Word preached, in the power of the Holy Spirit, believing in the gospel, and being saved from death and hell to the enjoyment of God forever cease to be a miracle among us? Indeed we need to adjust our definition of what is truly miraculous.

Tongues

I do believe the Scripture is clear on miracles, but I also believe it is difficult to find a similar clarity in regards to tongues. We see it in the Bible for sure. We see God create many languages as He did the work of separation at Babel and then we see God reverse that separation at Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on the apostles during the preaching of the gospel as Joel 2 predicted. We then see Paul comment on the use of tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 because within the Church at Corinth tongues were being abused and misused. He instructed them with 2 comments. First he said in 1 Cor. 14:5-6 that if someone speaks in a tongue during worship an interpreter was necessary. And second he says that when someone speaks in a tongue the individual is built up but when one prophesies (or preaches) the whole congregation is built up. Paul then in 14:13-18 discourages the use of tongues in worship because of this saying he would rather speak five intelligible words than 10,000 words in a tongue so that the Church would be built up. Then we find Paul encouraging them in 14:20 to press onto maturity and leave childish things behind. What are childish things? In context, it is speaking in tongues during the worship of God's people. If that's not clear enough Paul then goes on to say in v21-25 that speaking in tongues will cause unbelievers present among us to think we're crazy, while prophesying will cause any unbelievers present among us to be gripped with the message of the gospel.

From all of this I conclude the following: if tongues exist today in the Church, because their use seems to be discouraged in the public worship of Corinth, I discourage their use among any public worship setting today.

Let me end with Paul's encouragement to the believers in Corinth. In 1 Cor. 14:20 he says, "Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature." Maturity with the gifts of the Spirit will move us to think less of ourselves less, and more of others. May the Spirit of God turn our eyes to those around us.

Ripened

*“If we live by the Spirit, let us also
keep in step with the Spirit.”
(Galatians 5:25)*

In the last chapter we began looking at how the Holy Spirit fills the believers life at the moment of conversion and gives us certain gifts to be used to for the good of the Church and the glory of God. In this chapter we'll continue exploring another dimension of this same conversion moment filling by looking into the fruit the Spirit brings into the heart of every Christian. See here quickly that there is no place in the Bible that mentions a 'second filling' or 'blessing' of the Spirit that raises us to greater spiritual life or deeper and newer spiritual experiences. No, we receive all of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, and as we grow in faith through the sanctifying presence of the Spirit we experience all the initial things we've been given by the Spirit in deeper ways.

Galatians 5:16-26, says, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”

Here in 5:16-17 Paul introduces us to two categories or realities that are at odds with one another. On one hand we have the Spirit of God and His desires for us while on the other hand we have the flesh and its desires for us. Flesh doesn't mean our physical bodies, no. When Paul contrasts the flesh with the Spirit he is speaking of the remaining presence of sin within our nature. Remember God has saved us from the penalty and power of sin, but we still struggle against the remaining presence of sin. These desires are like oil and water, they don't mix. This means the Christian life will be a struggle because of the warring nature of the Spirit and the flesh. And at times this struggle really will keep us from doing what we want to. We think of Paul describing his own Christian experience in Romans 7:18-19, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”

He then concludes in v24-25, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Paul is making the argument throughout Galatians that because of the grace of God we’ve received by faith in Christ we’re to reorient our habits, change the way we do life, and work at walking in step with the Spirit rather than living at the whim of what we feel or desire and walking in step with the flesh. We recognize that the desires of the Spirit either push out the desires of the flesh or the desires of the flesh push out the desires of the Spirit. Those who walk in step with the Spirit (though they at times will sin) will not be characterized by gratifying or making room for the sinful desires of the flesh. Rather, those who walk in step with the Spirit will be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, or as John Frame calls them ‘the new character traits’ of the Christian ‘that replace the works of the flesh.’¹¹⁶ So, yes, the work of the Spirit is invisible and mysterious as John 3:8 states but because Paul gives us the fruit of the Spirit we now know the direction the Spirit moves in. More so, though our Christian experience will be a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh, we don’t lose heart. That the Spirit of God is in us producing His fruit is evidence that we are children of God and no longer under the Law, but under grace.

Later on in the same chapter (Gal. 5:19-23) Paul aids us by giving us two lists. These lists describe the difference between the works of the flesh is and the fruit of the Spirit. In v19-21 we see the works of the flesh, “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Note a few things here. First these things contain all that is present within the natural heart of man. Left to ourselves we don’t only go in the direction of these things, we live in the midst of these things. Paul says this is evident or clear. Like a fish doesn’t know it’s wet until it is removed from the water, sinners like you and I don’t know what our sins are until we’re saved and have eyes to see it. Second see what’s in this list. There are things we could call major sins that have very public consequences: sexual sins of all kinds (immorality), the worship of false gods (idolatry), and a refusal to come to God on His terms (sorcery). But there are also sins that many would (wrongly) call minor sins, things that the eye cannot see: hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, envy and the like. Only the Christian sees these things as sin. Third do you see this list seems to be inexhaustible? Paul ends this list by saying “and things like these” to indicate that sin in man no matter what every age we live in will always show itself in an ugly variety of horridness. Lastly see that Paul by listing outward sins and inward sins side by side should reminds us that all sin is ugly and carries with it tragic results. The tragic result of living a life characterized by such things is not being included in our Father’s inheritance. All men are sinners by nature, and those who repent of these things are granted an inheritance to come while those who love and live in these things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The next list we receive comes to us in v22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Again, note a few things here.

First note Paul’s use of fruit. He used the word ‘works’ to describe the characteristics of the flesh and could have called the characteristics of the Spirit many other things, but chose to use the Greek word ‘karpos’ which is ‘fruit’ in English. This should make us think of John 15:1-8 where Jesus uses the imagery of us being branches that bear fruit and are pruned to bear more fruit while being united to Him the true Vine. We could also bring up imagery from Psalm 1 where believers are likened as trees that planted by living water bearing fruit in and out of season. In light of these things it is no coincidence that Jesus says He has water to give that makes us ‘never thirst again’ (John 4:14) and that from drinking this water it will grow within us into a spring of water welling up to eternal life’ (John 4:15). Next note the use of the singular here. Paul refers to these new character traits as the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit not ‘fruits.’ This is significant because it means that every Christian at the moment of conversion receives a new nature that contains all of these things not just some of them. Sure, based on our natural dispositions some of them may show more than others, but they’re all there in us by the Spirit. So we can never excuse our poor manners or temper by saying the Holy Spirit hasn’t given us patience or kindness. Third, note Paul’s ending comment, “against such things there is no law.” On the surface of things this may seem to mean that in no people group throughout history do we find man made laws against the fruit of the Spirit. For example, in our own day there is no law against kindness. But Paul is going deeper than this. Herman Ridderbos comments explains this well saying, “The law is not against those who walk by the Spirit because in principle they are fulfilling the Law...in Christ by the power of the Spirit.”¹¹⁷

So all that Paul has said throughout Galatians seems to find expression here in chapter 5 as well. Walking in step with the Spirit means to walk in His fruit, and when we walk in His fruit we have evidence that the Law of God (which Christ bore the curse of – 3:13) is not against us.

Lastly in v24-26 Paul gives two consequences of these things. In v24 he concludes saying “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Thus this is the natural response of those who have placed their faith in Christ. They not only go on the offensive by laboring to war against the desires of the flesh, but they go on the defensive and seek to build their lives around and cultivate the growth of these spiritual fruit in their souls. So rather than gratifying the works of the flesh and denying the fruit of the Spirit what we see in true believers is crucifying the works of flesh and growing in the fruit of the Spirit. Paul ends in v25-26 saying “if we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” v25 can follow exactly where v16 ends. This gives v25 a concluding force that implies that to walk by the Spirit (v16) means to live by the Spirit (v25a). So the call for us is to keep in step with the Spirit (v25b).

Or to say it another way, rather than being conceited, rather than provoking one another, and rather than envying one another (probably listed because Paul knew these works of the flesh were going on in Galatia) the transformation we’ve gone through in becoming new creations in Christ is truly new but what is now new for us must because the norm

for us as we endeavor to live a life filled with the Spirit's fruit. So the life of the believer is a continual repentance when we find that we fall short of this fruit (or more resemble the works of flesh) and a continual exertion towards keeping in step with the Spirit of God. Praise God that the Holy Spirit operates within us so that what is now true of us may continue to be growing in us by the grace of God.

Kept

*“When the moment comes when my grip weakens on God,
His grip remains fixed.”
(C.J. Mahaney)*

We have arrived at the end of our study on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Let me trace where we've been:

- Delighted: the Spirit Among the Trinity
 - The Pentecost Outpouring
- Revealed and Illumined: the Spirit's work with Scripture
 - Applied: the Spirit's work in Conversion
 - Sanctified: the Spirit's work in Sanctification
- Nourished: the Spirit's work in the Ordinary Means of Grace
 - Gifted: the Spirit's work in His Gifts
 - Ripened: the Spirit's work in His Fruit

To close our study on the Spirit we turn our attention to the Spirit's keeping work in finishing the Christian life. To do this we'll zero in on the small letter of Jude. Because Jude is an often overlooked New Testament book due to its small size, let me give you a quick over of the book itself. The author identifies himself as “Jude, a servant of Christ and brother of James” in v1. Jude, Judah, and Judas were common names in first century Jewish homes, and many different people that held this name are mentioned in throughout the New Testament. The best clue as to who this Jude is, is when he says he's the “brother of James.” This James, most likely refers to the leader of the church in Jerusalem and the half-brother of Jesus. If that's correct than the Jude in view is none other than other half-brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3) who did not believe in Jesus until after the resurrection.

Now as for Jude's letter. The main themes of the letter are twofold. First, Jude writes to combat and call out the false teachers of his day, who were abusing God's grace and our Christian liberty as an excuse for their own sin (v4). Second, Jude writes to correct this false teaching by pointing out that those who are truly followers of Christ will strive to keep themselves in God's love knowing that God is able to keep them (v1, v21, v24).

As Jude expands on these two themes in these 25 verses we see much for our current study on how the Spirit keeps us to the end. Specifically in three verses: v1, v21, and v24. Let's see these three verses in their context and then see two truths streaming out from them.

The Verses

v1, “Jude, a servant of Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” v1 begins the letter and in it Jude tells us who he’s addressing his words to. His letter is directed towards people who meet three qualifications: those who are called, those who are beloved by God the Father, and those who are kept for Jesus Christ. Called, beloved, kept, three of the most encouraging realities for every true believer.

v21, “...keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” This verse meets us in the context of v17-23 where each believer is given four commands that make Christians distinct and different from worldly people who cause division. Jude mentions these false believers are devoid of the Spirit, but the things that are true of believers is that we are people who are building, praying, keeping, and waiting. These four things seem to give characteristics of those who are full of the Spirit.

v24, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy...” v24 is one of the most famous doxological statements in the whole Bible. Here our hope is that God will keep us and we will acknowledge His glory, majesty, dominion, and authority.

Taking these three verses together in their contexts shows us what would seem like a contradiction. v21 teaches us to “keep ourselves” in the love of God while v1 and v24 teaches us that Christians are people who are “kept” by the God who is able to “keep” us until the last day. So what is it? In order to finish our race to the end and persevere in faith, do we keep ourselves in the love of God, or does God doing the keeping work until the end? To this we answer a simple, yes. Yes, we must keep ourselves in the love of God and yes, we are kept by God, and yes God is able to keep us until the end. Let me explain what I mean and what I don’t mean.

When I give a yes answer to this question I am not at all saying that there is some kind of partnership between God and man where He does His part of keeping us and we do our part of keeping us which all falls apart if either God or us doesn’t do our part. That is not what I’m saying. What I am saying is that there is a specific order in play here. Yes we keep ourselves in the love of God and yes God keeps us, but which one comes first? Or which one enables the other? Biblically, God’s keeping of us enables us to keep ourselves in the love of God. This is how the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to finish the race we’re running, all the way to the end. Therefore, when we get to the end of our race we’ll never be able to say that it was because of our effort that got us there. We’ll fall down on our faces and praise God who kept us by His Spirit throughout our whole lives. The Holy Spirit began our Christian experience, the Holy Spirit sustained, supported, and nourished our Christian experience, and the Holy Spirit will keep us all the way to the end.

This is the same pattern present in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. In 1:6 Paul makes the confident statement that the “work God began in us, He will complete until the day of Christ Jesus.” Then in the very next chapter he says in 2:12 that you and I are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Well Paul, which one is it? Does God finish

the work He's begun in us or do we work it out in order to stay strong to the end? Our answer comes in 2:13 when Paul says, "For it is God at work within you, both to will and to work according to His good pleasure." So because God is at work within us, Paul says (as Jude does) that we are enabled to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. In fact we could say that one of the means God uses to finish His work in us, is our work to encourage one another to keep going. So God in His sovereign wisdom plans both the end and the means to get to that desired end.

This is the truth these three verses give us. And from seeing this truth we are brought face to face with an age-old debate in and outside of the Church, the debate between man's responsibility and God's sovereignty. Too often, in an effort to get rid of the tension present in Scripture people think if God is sovereign man cannot be responsible, or if man is responsible God cannot in any meaningful way be sovereign. Both of these are errors. When we come to the Bible we come to a Scripture that is perfectly content to hold up before us both the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God at the same time in such a way where both of these realities aren't reduced or extinguished. There is a tension here that we must not seek to explain away but must rather embrace. Man is truly responsible for his actions, and God is truly sovereign over all things. Our three verses in Jude depict this to us.

Truth #1: Man's Responsibility (v21)

In v21 we see that one of things man must do in order to persevere in faith to the end is persevere. We must keep ourselves in the love of God, and as the surrounding context shows we must do the hard work of building, praying, keeping, and waiting for Jesus Christ. How often do we come across this truth, that the Christian life is a community project? We must encourage one another, and all the more (the author of Hebrews 3:12 says) as we see the Day approaching. v22-23 show us how to do this. We must encourage those who doubt, and seek to snatch the disobedient from the fire.

Truth #2: God's Sovereignty (v1, v24)

In v1 and in v24 we see the other side of the coin, that behind our work of keeping ourselves in the love of God, God is at work doing His own keeping work within us. This work God does within us to keep us with Himself until the end, is the work of the Holy Spirit inside of us. And the Spirit's work inside of us is so thick, so real, and so substantial that as v1 says we truly can conclude that our identity as Christians is those who are 'kept' by God. And as v24-25 says we can truly conclude that this keeping power of the Spirit is something to praise Him for everyday. The ever-present and powerful work of grace in the heart of man should cause a doxological bent to the Christian's life. Praise should be ever flowing out of us in response to such great work. All whom God justifies, He glorifies. There are no drop outs!

The Puritan Richard Sibbes once said it like this, "As we say of the mother and the child both hold, but the safety of the child is that the mother holds him."¹¹⁸ Or as C.J. Mahaney said, "It's not that our grip on God is unimportant, or that our grip doesn't matter at all. No, it is only God's promise to keep us that we can keep ourselves in the love of God...being kept by God precedes our keeping ourselves in God...so when the moment comes when my grip weakens on God, His grip remains fixed."¹¹⁹ What a hope we have in this! Praise God!

Summit 5

Soteriology – The Doctrine of Salvation

Covenant Theology

*“Because Jesus, as Son of God and
Mediator of the covenant, cannot be divided,
the covenants cannot be divided.”
(O Palmer Robertson)*

To begin studying the doctrine of salvation we must first cover something that lies just underneath the surface of everything I’ll mention in this fifth summit of systematic theology – covenant. I say this because every time God engages with mankind either to save or to condemn God does it through covenant. Thus, in order to have a true and healthy understanding of soteriology we must look first to covenant theology. Covenant theology is merely an explanation of the special grace given by God to man. Common grace, or general grace, is something we’ll look into in the next chapter.

What is A Covenant?

Throughout the Bible we come face to face with the reality of the covenant on many occasions, and when you look at all of them there appears to be only three kinds of covenants in Scripture. Man making a covenant with man, man making a covenant with God, and God making a covenant with man. In each occasion of these covenants there are similarities that can be compiled together as a whole to form a working definition of covenant. O. Palmer Robinson defines a covenant as “a bond in blood sovereignly administered.”¹²⁰ Can you see the different aspects at work in his definition? First, a covenant is a bond. Second, a covenant is a bond in blood. Third, a covenant is sovereignly administered. Let’s look into these further:

A Bond

To say a covenant is a bond is to say a covenant results in binding people or parties together into a new kind of relationship. This is most clearly seen in Scripture when God establishes a covenant with His people, declaring that He is forever committed to them and that He will always relate to His people in a certain manner. Then in response the people or parties on the receiving end bind the covenant by performing a kind of external practice. It could be a verbal oath (Gen. 21:23-24), the giving of a gift (Gen. 21:28-32), eating a meal (Ex. 24:11), making a memorial (Josh. 24:27), sprinkling blood (Ex. 24:8), offering a sacrifice (Gen. 15), and passing under the rod (Ezek. 20:37). Along with these external practices there are always signs that follow covenants. For example we think of the rainbow in Genesis 9, and circumcision in Genesis 17. These signs were more than external practices, these signs function as a token or pledge (like a wedding ring) symbolizing the permanent nature of the covenant bond.

A Bond in Blood

To say a covenant is a bond in blood is to say a covenant is a bond of life and death. “It involves commitments and life-an-death consequences.”¹²¹ And once the covenant has begun only the shedding of blood is able to release any covenant obligations. This is why there are covenant blessings for those who obey the stipulations of the covenant, and covenant curses for those who disobey, with the largest curse for covenant disobedience being death. This shedding of blood exists within covenants to show the depth and gravity of the promises being made within a covenant.

Sovereignly Administered

Robinson adds the last phrase ‘sovereignly administered’ in his definition for needed clarification just in case we wrongly think covenants involve a lengthy agreement over details, or a kind of bargaining back and forth between the parties. This doesn’t happen in biblical covenants. Every biblical covenant is initiated by a greater party to a lesser party. An example of this would be when a conquered people are brought into a covenant relationship with their new masters. The best example of this is when God (the greater party) enters into covenant with His creation (the lesser party). Because God is greater He gets to be the One who decrees the stipulations or terms of the covenant.

So, a covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. Our next question then comes in afterwards.

What Covenants are in the Bible?

We see a plethora of covenants being made throughout Scripture between man and man, and even man and God. But when it comes to those covenants God makes with man, six covenants stand forth in blazing clarity.

Adamic Covenant - Commencement
Noahic Covenant - Preservation
Abrahamic Covenant - Promise
Mosaic Covenant - Law
Davidic Covenant - Kingdom
New Covenant - Consummation

That these are God’s covenants made with man tells us that there never has been and will never be a time in history when God has dealt with mankind outside the realm of covenant. Or to say it another way, from commencement to consummation God’s people have always related to God on the basis of covenant. Some people think that covenant didn’t exist until Noah because it isn’t until Noah that we find the word ‘covenant’ used in Scripture. But even though the word covenant isn’t in the early chapters of Genesis the presence of a bond in blood sovereignly administered is. This is why Hosea 6:7, long after Adam and Eve, in talking about the adulterous ways of Israel says this “Like Adam they transgressed the covenant...they dealt faithlessly with Me.” So all the way from the garden to glory, God is a covenant God with a covenant people.

Now, we would be wrong to embrace this covenantal framework and conclude that God works differently in each covenant. Though the covenants are different, and made with different parties, they all serve the same purpose. More so, rather than replacing covenants beforehand, each time God makes a new covenant with His people that new covenant expands on the reality of all previous covenants. So to this end let's look briefly at a covenantal diversity and unity.

Covenantal Diversity

Covenant of Works / Covenant of Grace

First, there is a distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The term 'covenant of works' describes God dealing covenantally with man in his pre-fall condition. So Adam and Eve, pre-fall, were in covenant with God and could have received the covenant blessings of God solely by their own works. They were not yet fallen and so they had a nature that could produce a righteousness acceptable to God. Contrast that with the term 'covenant of grace.' This term describes God dealing covenantally with man in his post-fall condition. So after the fall all men can no longer come into any covenant blessings of God based on works, but solely by the grace of God. This distinction is why some people refer to the covenant God made with Adam and Eve simply as the 'covenant of works' but that is misleading because even in the covenant of works we see grace at work in that God didn't have to make men at all, but did and willingly entered into covenant with them. Some people also call the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works because by keeping the Law Deuteronomy 6:25 says "it will be righteousness for you if you are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God." To call the Mosaic covenant a covenant of works is misleading as well because the Law was given to show that we cannot do enough on our own to earn a right standing with God. The only covenant that can truly be called a 'covenant of works' is the covenant God made with Adam and Eve in the garden.

Old Covenant / New Covenant

That we make a distinction between an old and a new covenant does not mean to imply that one is old and one is new. It's far greater than mere age in view here. All of the covenants before Christ are in the category of 'old covenant' while the one covenant that dawned in Christ is in the category of 'new covenant.' The old covenants are seen as 'promise' and 'shadow' and 'prophecy' while the new covenant is seen as 'fulfillment' and 'reality' and 'realization.'

So even in the diversity among the covenants we see a harmony present which reminds us that God is same yesterday, today, and forever. Let's now look at the unity among the covenants.

Covenantal Unity

We see the unity of the covenants structurally and thematically. Structurally all these covenants were initiated by God, given to an underserving people, with blessings if they obey and curses if they disobey. Thematically there is one theme resounds throughout them all, "I shall be your God and you shall be My people." Not only is this theme continually present in all covenantal dealings between God and His people, but the result

of this wondrous theme is that God actually dwells in the midst of His people. It doesn't stop here either. All of this moves covenantal structure moves forward throughout redemptive history and culminates in the moment when God dwelt among His people in a single Person, Jesus Christ. O Palmer Robinson comments on this saying, "In the Person of Jesus Christ, the covenants of God achieve incarnational unity. Because Jesus, as Son of God and Mediator of the covenant, cannot be divided, the covenants cannot be divided. He Himself guarantees the unity of the covenants because He Himself is the heart of each of the various covenant administrations."¹²²

So we can conclude with one grand statement: from seeing the unified covenantal structure of all Scripture we see that in Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's covenantal purposes. Before we move headlong into the doctrine of salvation there is one more introductory matter to cover. The other side of God's special covenant grace given to His people, His common grace given to all.

Common Grace

*“For He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”
(Matthew 5:45)*

We began this study on the doctrine of salvation by looking at covenant theology by way of introduction. Covenant theology could be described as an explanation of God’s special grace given to His people and His people alone. Now we turn to another introductory matter when it comes to the doctrine of salvation: common grace.

I fear that those of you who are familiar with and enjoy long detailed definitions of theological terms are going to find my definition of common grace too simple. Common grace is just that – God’s grace that is common or given to all men bringing countless blessings to all.

Common Grace

The doctrine of common grace arises from a question. We know that this world is fallen and under the curse of sin, yet how is it that in the world we still see traces of things that are good, true, and beautiful? How is it that order exists amid the chaos and confusion here? How is it that earth brings forth food, trees, flowers, and fertile fields rather than just thorns and briars? How is it that we fallen creatures still give evidence of being made in the image of God by using our time, talents, and treasures to do good toward our fellow man? How is it that the sun rises or rain falls on a world that hates God? How is it that man is capable of doing praiseworthy good in the lower earthly sphere while being incapable of doing any good in the higher spiritual sphere? Article 18 of the Augsburg Confession answers these questions like this, “Man’s will has some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can reach unto; but it has no power to work the righteousness of God.” So we see natural man does have some ability to do good in this earthly lower sphere of life. How is man able to do this?

One possible answer we could give at this point is to say that man has the ability to do some good to fellow man because man isn’t as fallen as we think he is, or that there is more good in man than we thought there was. But such an answer would be wrong and we would do well to reject any answer to these questions that attributes any good to man. The correct answer lies in the first subject of our chapter, the common grace of God.

When talking of the common grace of God some reformed theologians speak of three kinds of common grace.¹²³ First, a universal common grace, or a grace that extends to all

creatures. Second, a general common grace, or a grace that applies to mankind in general and to every member of the human race. And third, a covenant common grace, or a grace that is common to all those who live in the sphere of the covenant whether they belong to the elect or not. Others within the reformed community simply refer to common grace as the general grace God gives to all mankind that results in countless blessings.

Before we move onto describe these blessings see the difference between covenant theology (or special grace) and common grace. Special grace is limited to the elect of God only while common grace is given by God universally to all mankind. Special grace removes the guilt and penalty of sin, quickens the sinner's heart, and sanctifies the saint until glory. Common grace does no such thing. It does not remove any guilt or penalty of sin, but merely restrains its influence or lessens its consequences. Special grace is irresistible. Common grace is resistible and tends to always be resisted to varying degrees. To sum up what common grace is we could say this: by His common grace God restrains the influence and growth of sin in the world, and maintains the order of life for all mankind.

The Blessings of Common Grace¹²⁴

The Physical World

That God didn't wipe out all of mankind immediately after the fall in Genesis 3 and allows sinners to continue to live in His world, is sheer common grace. God blessed the household of Potiphar through the faithfulness of Joseph in Genesis 39:5. Psalm 145 speaks of God who is "good to all" (v9), and God giving food each season so that man could satisfied (v15-16). Mathew 5:44-45 says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encourages us to love our enemies by pointing out that God loves His enemies by giving them sunlight and rain. In other words, you and I are encouraged to love our enemies because God loves the wicked through His common grace. And though Paul speaks of the world as groaning for redemption in Romans 8:19 and being subjected to futility in Romans 8:20, can we not say that much of this world is stunningly beautiful? White beaches, towering mountains, vast canyons, wide rushing rivers, gold fields, majestic sunsets, and to a certain degree heart shaking thunderstorms. That God still makes His creation beautiful, even though so many reject Him, is part of His common grace.

The Intellectual Realm

That God would restrain the sin of humanity intellectually is evidence of common grace. We are fallen people, and yet even Hitler didn't kill his mother. We are totally depraved yes, but we're not utterly depraved. We're bad, but we're not as bad as we could be. Romans 1 and Acts 17 are two examples in Scripture where we see that pagan man still knows God to a certain degree. In Romans 1:21 Paul says "Although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to him..." Acts 17 Paul is preaching to the Aeropagus, the men of Athens and in 17:22-23 Paul points out that they are very religious and grasped a bit of the truth even though it was still clouded. "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you" (17:23). That man is still knows the truth, in part, is not a result of the genius of man but the common grace of God. Therefore everything that

pagan man discovers, writes, invents, or creates that is in line with the truth whether found in science, technology, or even in other religions is evidence of the common grace of God given to all mankind.

The Moral Realm

That all men have an inward sense of right and wrong is evidence of God's common grace. He puts a conscience within us and now our behavior shows the work of Law written our hearts either to accuse or excuse us of wrongdoing (Romans 2:14-15). In Luke 6:33 Jesus mentions something that even sinners do saying "If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same." That sinners would not always act in line with their sin is a result of common grace.

The Artistic Realm

That God would give unique talents and gifts to fallen men to be able to create the arts is a result of common grace. When I say the arts I refer to any activity man could express himself in whether it be in athletics, acting, directing, cooking, singing, painting, designing, drawing, playing an instrument, singing while playing an instrument, even skill in writing is in view here. That a Christian like me could get so much soul enjoyment out of the movies of a man like Peter Jackson (who directed all of the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit movies) and so much enjoyment out of the soundtrack for those films made by Howard Shore shows that great gifts have been given and spread around to all mankind by God's common grace. I'm sure many of you could say the same thing about various enjoyments in your life from our unbelieving neighbors whether it be iPhones, a golf course, the NFL, or the latest Pixar movie. Think about it: many sports fans enjoy the quality of an Under Armor or Nike product and by and large we don't give a thought to whether or not these people made their products for the glory of God. We buy and enjoy them because they are made well. The same could be said of many bookbinders who print the Bibles we read everyday. Yet how many of them also use the same ink and machines to print works made by other religions? Probably many of them. Yet we buy them. All of this shows the variety of gifts God has given to man, solely by His common grace.

The Societal Realm

That our world has institutions like government and family which many unbelieving people labor within and receive the benefits of is evidence of common grace. In this respect we could also speak of organizations like the Red Cross and other charitable groups and public service groups that serve to relieve poverty, hunger, and homelessness around the globe. All of this is evidence of God's common grace.

There are countless other things we could speak of here in regard to the blessings of common grace. But let's end this discussion with a sobering reminder. Common grace is just that, common. We should not reject the good things unbelievers make as evil, but use and enjoy them according to the principles given to us in Scripture. That God has given mankind so many blessings through common grace should lead us to do two things. First, we should thank God for His many common grace provisions He has given and continues to give us. Second, we should remember that common grace isn't saving grace or special grace. Being a recipient of common grace does not put you into a covenantal relationship

with God. The unbelieving world uses and abuses common grace all day long, it ought to be the Church who lets them know who the Giver is.

Election

*“My heart knows none above You,
for Your rich grace I thirst,
I know that if I love You,
You must have loved me first.”
(Josiah Conder)*

There are many ways to approach a proper understanding of the doctrine of salvation but I believe one the best ways is by studying what is called the *ordo salutis*, or the order of salvation. The first item in the *ordo salutis* is election. Therefore in God’s covenantal dealings with mankind, the first thing He did in eternity past is choose a people for His own possession, this is election.

When speaking of the election of God many people speak like this, ‘In eternity past God looked down through the corridors of time and saw or knew in advance who would say yes to the offer of the gospel and who would say no. On the basis of this prior knowledge God then predestined those who embraced His Son.’ Many people believe the election of God works this way, perhaps this is a reflection of what some of you believe. If it is, I’m glad you’re reading this because I’m going to try and persuade you that this is not the teaching presented to us in the Bible. Rather, the doctrine of election present in the Bible is God lovingly choosing all who will one day believe, before time began, apart from any foreseen faith or works in us, for our holiness, for our adoption, through Christ, for the praise of the glory of His grace.

I have 10 points to make to show you this. The first two points are introductory remarks and the eight subsequent points are from Ephesians 1:3-6.

Election is Necessary

From conception we hate God, we are guilty, we are darkness, we are dead in sin, and we are blind to the beauty of the gospel. Just as a lion cannot change his nature to become an herbivore, so too we are unable to change our evil nature to become lovers of Christ. To say that God’s election is necessary is to say that without the election of God no one on the planet throughout history would be a Christian. If anyone is to know God in a saving sense, God must bring it about through His sovereign grace. So, if you fight against the doctrine of election it just may be that you have a deficient understanding of our own sin, because a right knowledge of our sinful state reveals to us the necessity of election. Without election, no one would be saved.

Election is Part of Scripture

It is often said that we shouldn't be concerned about having a deep conviction about election because it's something we can't fully understand. Yes and no. Yes, we will never understand any doctrine fully because God is infinite and we are finite, and it truly is impossible for finite creatures to plumb the depths of infinite realities. BUT, 'no' because of Deuteronomy 29:29 which says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." There are many secret things that we'll never know until glory, and we should never seek after those things. God's election though, is not a secret thing. It's not only revealed in the Bible, it's clear in the Bible. Therefore because Deut. 29:29 calls us to devote ourselves to what is revealed (all that is in the Bible), we should devote ourselves to learn as much as we can about everything in the Bible.

Let's go to Ephesians 1:3-6 where we'll see eight essential points on election.

Election is a Spiritual Blessing

Ephesians 1:3 may be the most wonderful sentence in the whole book of Ephesians. In Christ God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. There is nothing the believer now lacks because of the work of Christ. If we were to make a list of these benefits it would have no end. If you were to think about this list and what benefit would come first what comes to mind? Salvation? Forgiveness? The Scripture? Assurance? Prayer? The fellowship of His Spirit? The Community of His Church? Notice in v4 what Paul thinks of first. The Father "...has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world..." The first benefit we've received from the work of Christ Paul thinks of is the election of God. I wonder if you've ever thanked God for this? That God out of sheer grace chose you before the foundation of the world. If you find yourself to be a Christian today, be reminded that your salvation was accomplished, not by accident or random events, but by the eternal and unchangeable plan of God. This is an immense spiritual blessing.

Election is God's Choice

Before any decision is made, before any choosing happens on our part, it is God's choice that determines. v4 says, "...even as He chose us..." This follows all that we've seen in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 7:7 says, "The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Deut. 10:15 says, "The Lord set His heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day." Just as God had a chosen people in the Old Testament, God now has a chosen people in the New Testament. John 1:12-13 says, "To all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." After Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel Acts 13:48 says, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." We could also speak of Jacob and Esau described to us in Romans 9 as an example of how God elects. In v11-13 Paul says, "Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad – in order that God's purpose of election might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls – Rebekah was told 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'" Then a few verses

later anticipating the question of injustice Paul says in v18, “So then God has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills.” Thus, it should not surprise us to read in our Bibles in Eph. 1:4 ‘...He chose us...’ Election is God’s choice.

Election is in Christ

Ephesians 1:4, “...even as He chose us in Him...” and even later in v5 where he says that because God chose us we become sons of God “through Jesus Christ.” Election does not happen apart from Christ. God intends to save His elect through His Son Jesus Christ. So rather than having His elect people pop out of the birth canal with the word ‘elect’ tattooed on their foreheads, God sent His Son and gave Him a message, ‘Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.’ You know what this means? If you believe in Jesus today, you’re the elect of God. A few more verses clarify the Christ-centered nature of election. In Matthew 11:27 Jesus says, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.” So Jesus chooses to reveal His Father to some and not others. In John 5:21 Jesus confirms this when He said, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will.” Election happens in Christ and through Christ.

Election Took Place Before Time

Ephesians 1:4, “...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...” So God the Father chose us in His Son before God made the world and everything in it. That election took place in eternity past means God gave His elect grace in Jesus Christ before there was ever a need for grace. God elected people before the fall in Genesis 3, which means when the fall happened God was at work setting the stage of the redemption of His people through the work of His Son. 2 Timothy 1:9 agrees, “God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our own works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.” Also Revelation 13:8 where John says, “All who dwell on earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of the life of the Lamb who was slain.” So before God made the world, He wrote a book called, ‘The Book of the Life of the Lamb who was Slain.’ In this book God wrote names, and everyone whose name is not in this book will one day worship the beast. A similar encouragement to the saints of their heavenly citizenship is found in Rev. 7, 17, 20, and 21. Church, there is such hope to be had in this, if you know and love Jesus right now be sure of this, God has known and loved you much longer.

Election is to Holiness

Ephesians 1:4, “...even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (why?) that we should be holy and blameless before Him.” Sometimes I hear it said that if you believe in election it would make you lazy in living the Christian life. The Bible disagrees. The very reason God chose us in His Son before time began was that we would be holy and blameless people. God elected His people in eternity past, redeemed them through His Son in the present, and will keep them holy through the ministry of His Spirit so that we gain the future inheritance we’ve been promised. See here that God intends to bring His elect all the way from spiritual death in sin, to redemption from sin, and finally to the elimination of that sin in glory. According to Eph. 5:27 this is why Jesus came, “that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any

such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” So if you claim to be a Christian and you’re not living a holy life that is evidence that you not only don’t understand the doctrine of election but that you don’t understand the doctrine of the incarnation. Holiness is a fruit of election.

Election is God’s Purposeful Love

One summer when I was in college, a group of guys and I were on our way up to North Georgia for a summer job. On the way we began discussing theology and one of the guys asked me, ‘Adam, I know you believe in predestination, can you explain it to me?’ Before I got a chance to answer another one of the guys jumped in and said, ‘I can answer that for Adam, it’s very simple. You see, we believe God is fair, Adam doesn’t.’ I’m not so sure what I responded with in the moment but looking back I should have said this, “If God were fair with us, no one would be saved, and we’d all receive the penalty our sin deserves.” You see, many people feel that God’s election isn’t fair but see here in Ephesians 1:5, “In love He predestined us...” In love God chose, in love God elected, in love He predestined. Later in v5 it says this loving predestination was according to the purpose of His will. It is no small encouragement to know the reason of how you came to be what you are today. Why am I a Christian today? Answer: God’s electing love has brought it all to pass. Many people love speaking of God’s love, but notice here in v5 that if you define God’s love apart from His election you don’t define God’s love as the Bible does. In 1836 the hymn writer Josiah Conder knew this and penned these words in his hymn *My Lord I Did Not Choose You*, “My heart knows none above You, for Your rich grace I thirst, I know that if I love You, You must have loved me first.”

Election is for Adoption

Ephesians 1:5, “In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...” As if His love is not already great enough, it is revealed as greater when we finish v5 because we who born as slaves to sin, now because of God’s election, are His sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. 1 John 3:1 enlarges this thought for us, “See (the Bible calls us to ‘see’ His love!) what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” God speaks of this in Isaiah 43:6-7 saying, “I will say to the north ‘Give up!’ and to the south ‘Do not withhold!’ bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made.” His electing love has adopted us into His family, through Jesus Christ, and if we’re in the family we are heirs of an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. Just as we cannot define holiness and God’s love apart from election we cannot define the doctrine of adoption apart from it as well.

Election is to the Praise of God’s Glorious Grace

To see the ultimate purpose of election see v6, “...to the praise of His glorious grace...” Here we learn the primary purpose of election is not redemption, but that we through the redemption of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit would praise His grace, His glorious grace (repeated in v12, and v14 as well).

Taken together all of these previous points should humble us, not make us proud, haughty, or arrogant. Why am I a Christian today? Not because of anything in me, but only because of God’s sovereign grace.

Calling

*“God’s Spirit calls men to Jesus in diverse ways.
Some are drawn so gently that they scare
know when the drawing began, and others are
so suddenly affected that their conversion
stands out with noonday clearness.”
(Charles Spurgeon)*

Throughout my life I remember certain calls. I remember the first time I answered our home phone as a young boy with a timid ‘Hello?’ I remember getting into trouble and having to call my mother from the principal’s office in first grade. I remember God calling me into pastoral ministry in December 2003. I remember the many calls Holly and I exchanged our senior year of college before we began dating. I remember the Easter Sunday my mother called me to tell me my Grandfather had died. I remember the day the elders of SonRise Community Church called me to inform me that I’d been chosen to be the next pastor. All of these calls, some hard and some exuberant, mean much to me. I’m sure you could give a list of similar calls that have happened in your life that are meaningful to you as well. But of all the calls we could mention one call matters more than any other, the effectual call of God.

It’s at this point where we encounter a paradox. Because of God’s predestining love, many people in the world are truly the ‘elect of God’ but still remain dead in sin and without hope. God has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world, yet they live as unbelievers, apart from Christ, still rejecting the gospel. How is it then that God brings these chosen ones, how is it that God brings His elect to a saving knowledge of the truth? The answer according to Scripture is the effectual call.

Or we could say it another way: God’s sovereign election is not the end of the story, it’s merely the beginning. God will lead all of those He has elected in Christ to salvation through Christ and the first step in this process is the effectual call. This is why Paul says in Romans 8:30, “And those whom He predestined He also called...” So first comes the election of God then comes the call of God. And not just any call, but a call that we say is ‘effectual’ because the call itself creates what is not there: life from death, light from darkness, faith from unbelief, salvation from condemnation, and adoption from alienation.

To show you this I want to walk you through a few passages that help explain what the effectual call is and what happens in us and to us because of it.

Open Eyes to See the Wisdom and Power of God

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 says, “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” In this passage we’re presented with three groups of people: Jews, Gentiles, and another group Paul refers to as ‘the called.’ Three groups with two very different responses to Christ. Jews demand signs/wonders and upon seeing/hearing of Jesus Christ they conclude Him to be a stumbling block. Greeks (or Gentiles) were seen as more cultured people than the Jews so rather than seeking powerful signs they sought after wisdom and upon seeing/hearing of Jesus Christ they conclude Him to be folly. This response of unbelief does not surprise us because in the verses leading up to v22-24 we continually read that to the world the cross is foolishness (v18), that it pleased God the world through wisdom cannot find Him or know Him (v21a), but rather God saves those who believe a message which the world sees as foolishness (v21b).

Standing against the unbelief of Jews and Gentiles is the other group, ‘the called.’ We’re introduced to this group in v24. When these people heard of Jesus Christ they did not think Him to be a stumbling block or folly, no, they held Him to be the very power and wisdom of God. A slow reflection of these three groups and their responses to the gospel prompts us to ask one question: what made the difference? How did the third group recognize Christ as God’s very wisdom and God’s very power while the Jews and Gentiles missed it? The Jews wanted their signs, the Gentiles wanted their wisdom, and ironically the very things that both of these groups were seeking are found together in Christ in the highest degree possible. He is the power of God...He is the wisdom of God. What made this last group embrace the truth of the gospel while the others rejected it? Answer: they were called of God.

We see this in the first few words of v24, “But to those who are *called*...” That’s it. That’s the difference maker. “But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” This means the call of God is the very thing which removes our John 3:3 blinders. Anybody recall John 3:3? Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.” Because of our sinful nature we cannot see the kingdom of God, we’re blind to the beauty of the gospel by birth, but those who are called, those whom God gives the new birth (that’s what ‘born again’ means) can see power and wisdom in the gospel. They don’t think of the gospel as a small thing that doesn’t have meaning for their life, they think it is life. Do you? It was the call of God that made this third group in 1 Cor. 1:24 see the truth of who Jesus really is while the rest of the world was blind to it. Thus, the call of God is an effectual call or is efficacious because it brings about the desired effect.

Through the Gospel of Christ – For the Glory of Christ

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul always gave thanks to God for the Church in Thessalonica, because they are beloved of the Lord. How

does Paul know they are so loved by God? He says it's because God chose them and is currently working in them by His Spirit so they would be sanctified in the truth. After electing them and choosing them before the foundation of the world how does God convert them and begin this work of Spirit sanctification in their hearts? Paul says it in v14, "To this (to what? To Salvation, to sanctification, to the Christian life) He called you (how did He call?) through our gospel (why did He call?) so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." So again it's election first and then God brings that election to pass in their lives through calling them to Himself through the gospel.

This is where I want to point out the difference between the external call of God and the internal call of God. The external of God is when both the elect and the nonelect hear a preacher calling them to the gospel. This external call goes out from faithful pulpits all around the world, it's heard on podcasts, radio, and even TV when you watch an old Billy Graham crusade or something faithfully presenting the gospel. The internal call of God on the other hand, is when God through His Spirit awakens you, grants you the new birth, removes your natural blinders, and because of this work of (which we call regeneration) you can hear God calling to you within, in your heart. You feel God affirming within that what you're hearing is good, true, and beautiful.

So we have two calls. The external call that goes out to all people indiscriminately and does not result in salvation, and the internal call that goes out only to the elect that does result in salvation. This internal call is the call we see in v14. It is the effectual call of God, the call that brings about the desired result. It's a call that carries the power of creation and new creation. In Genesis 1 God called out into the dark void and all creation was made, in John 11 Jesus called out into the dark cave and Lazarus rose from the dead, and when God calls out into our dead hearts we awake, we're born again, we become new creations, and in this awakened or quickened state we find ourselves feeling strangely warmed to the gospel and you know what we do then? We willingly choose to repent and believe. So hear this loud and clear: sinners really do choose to repent, sinners really do choose to believe. But no choosing and no believing will happen until God calls, because His call literally changes our hearts, His call gives us the ability repent and believe.

Now that we've seen that these two calls are different calls, see also that the internal call of God in the soul of man has an inseparable connection with the external call of God from the pulpit. In v14 Paul says, "To this He called you *through our gospel...*" It is through the preaching of the gospel that God calls His elect to faith. Particularly it is the power of the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the gospel, which takes that gospel and makes it effective within the heart of man. Of course this means the external call of God in the preaching of the Word of God can be taking place while the internal call of God in the soul of man takes place. Or it can mean that the external call of God in preaching can linger in the soul of a man or woman for many days, weeks, or even years before God grants His saving internal call. I recall reading of a certain farmer who went on a long journey to hear George Whitefield preach, and after hearing him he returned home to his work and nothing much changed for him spiritually. But one day weeks later while working on the farm he remembered something Whitefield said and in an instant the farmer fell to his knees in repentance, crying out for God to save him from his sins. In this farmer's case the external call went out when he heard Whitefield preach and weeks

later God did what only He can do, saving that farmer in the middle of his farm. This is the internal call, it works with and alongside the external call.

Since it is through the external call or the preaching of the gospel that God saves His own with His internal or effectual call, do you see how necessary the preaching of the gospel is? Without it no one gets saved, yet with it God powerfully works to save. In this light, St. Francis of Assisi's comment "Preach the gospel always, if necessary use words" is one of the most ridiculous and miserable comments in history.¹²⁵ Since God saves His people through preaching, words are always necessary to preach the gospel. Romans 10:15, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."

In v14 Paul ends the sentence giving us the result of effectual calling saying, "To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means, not that you and I receive any glory of our own upon God's calling, but that from this calling we're brought face to face with the most ultimate reality in the entire universe: the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So the effectual call of God is through the gospel of Christ, and for the Glory of Christ.

There are many other places that speak of this call. Ephesians 1:18 shows Paul praying for the Church asking God to enlighten the eyes of their hearts, so that they would know the hope to which God has called them. Paul, in 1 Timothy 6:12 encourages young Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called..." Hebrews 9:15 says it only "those who are called" who receive the promised eternal inheritance. 1 Peter 2:9 says it as well, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The effectual call of God is a holy calling, 2 Timothy 1:8-9, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us with to a holy calling..." The effectual call of God is a heavenly calling, Heb. 3:1, "Therefore holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession..."

It saddens me that much of the last two centuries most of Protestantism has operated with a shallow man-centered method which puts the emphasis on 'making decisions' for Christ. I'm sure most of you have been to or heard of meetings/revivals like this, whether in a tent or in a church building, where someone with a large personality comes in to preach and seeks to persuade the crowd to accept Christ by walking the aisle or signing a card or praying a certain prayer. The Bible speaks of no such thing. We can no more schedule a true revival of God's Spirit among the God's Church than we can schedule a tornado or a hurricane. We should pray for it, and want God to do a mighty work again, but we should recognize that revivals come and go on God's timing and in God's way. We cannot produce the miraculous power of God by our own innovative methods. In these meetings the gospel is adulterated because it is added onto the end of a message in the form of an invitation rather than being the whole substance of the message, which would be far better because than the whole sermon would be an invitation to the gospel.

The best evidence of true salvation is not having raised a hand or praying a prayer or signing a card or being baptized or even attending church. The best evidence of true

conversion is the presence of light, warmth, love, and joy in God found in the gospel of Christ saving sinners. This transforms a life, because once God effectually calls you to Himself, you will not remain the same. Charles Spurgeon said, “God’s Spirit calls men to Jesus in diverse ways. Some are drawn so gently that they scarce know when the drawing began, and others are so suddenly affected that their conversion stands out with noonday clearness.”¹²⁶

The hymn *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee* sings of this. In 1907 Henry Van Dyke wrote these words, “Joyful, joyful we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love, hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above. Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!” As the heart opens to heat of the sun, so too the heart opens to the voice of God Almighty calling it to life. And when God calls, sin melts away, doubt is driven back, and in flows gladness and light.

Repentance

*“Repentance unto life is a saving grace,
whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin,
and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ,
doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it to God,
with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

We are now at a transition point within the soteriology, where we move to covering works that come about as a result of God’s electing, calling, and regenerating. Namely – repentance, faith, justification, adoption, union with Christ, sanctification (which we’ve already covered), and glorification. We begin with repentance.

‘Repent’ in the Old Testament is ‘shuv’ in Hebrew meaning to turn or to return. ‘Repent’ or ‘repentance’ in the New Testament is ‘metanoia’ in Greek meaning a change, a reversal, or a reformation of the heart. In this movement within the heart there is a double turn. Turning from sin and turning toward Jesus in faith. So right here from the beginning see that repentance and faith inseparably joined together, they are to be thought of as opposite sides of the same coin, or as Louis Berkhof says, “complementary parts of the same process.”¹²⁷ Similarly John Frame teaches, repentance and faith are two things, which constitute one action that stem from the heart’s attitude, repentance being the negative aspect of that one action and faith being the positive.¹²⁸ So, one cannot have true faith without true repentance, just as one cannot have true repentance without true faith. To aid us in our discussion this evening I want to read you a paragraph of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Question 87 is as follows. “Question: what is repentance unto life? Answer: repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it to God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”

Taking our cues from this question 87, repentance is four things.

A Saving Grace

Here again we see the difference between saving grace and common grace. Both the saving grace and common grace of God are gracious gifts of God which He bestows according to His purpose and will. Repentance isn’t among the blessings included in God’s common grace that He gives to all men. How do we know this, well, common

sense, because all men do not repent, therefore repentance isn't a common grace. Rather, repentance is a saving grace God grants only to the elect. Paul affirms this in 2 Timothy 2:25 when he states "God grants repentance which leads to a knowledge of the truth." Luke also affirms this in Acts 11 where he writes of Peter explaining to a group of Jews how God had worked among the Gentiles. After describing this moment Luke tells us how Peter's hearers respond in Acts 11:18, "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." In this light, we see what repentance is something granted by God, a gift, that, when coupled with faith, saves and leads a sinner to a knowledge of the truth.

Repentance is a saving grace, for sure, but what exactly does repentance entail? The catechism continues.

A True Sense of Sin

Questions 87 says, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin..." and later it mentions that the sinner has "a grief and hatred for his sin." This means repentance has a substantial element of sorrow to it. Paul makes a contrast on this point speaking of the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." Worldly grief or sorrow, like the sorrow of Esau (Hebrews 12:17), like the sorrow of Judas (Matthew 27:3-10), and like the sorrow of the Hebrews 6:4-8 person produces death and no hope. In this false repentance there truly may be a grieving that's taking place inside the soul but that grieving is more focused on the consequences of our sinful actions or the fear of punishment rather than the offense and grief we caused in God. On the other hand, godly grief or sorrow (like the grief of David in Psalm 51) recognizes, embraces, and owns a true sense of our sin, of how wretched we are before the holy and just God, and how we're under the penalty of sin and death for such sin. This kind of sorrow leads to a grief and hatred of our sin, an honest confession of our sin, and ironically brings soothing peace into the heart of a sinner.

Do not be confused about this. Many can show outward signs of repentance while nothing inwardly is taking place. Though I do think repentance can cause or bring outward consequences (like aches, angst, or nervousness, etc.), we should remember to think of repentance as by and large an inward act of the heart and soul.

A True Sense of God's Mercy in Christ

The catechism not only encourages us to have a true sense and hatred for our sin, it encourages us to have a true sense or "apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ." This is one of the truly remarkable and truly beautiful truths to behold. That God, who is holy and just, who hates both the sin and the sinner, would be so gracious and merciful toward sinners in Jesus Christ is simply stunning. This is one of the great ironies of the gospel. Only those who know they don't deserve it, receive it, and repent. In addition, seeing the beauty of God's mercy in Christ makes sin against God much more odious. Wrong as it

may be most of us would think it a small thing to sin against a tyrant or an evil man, but to sin against someone who is gracious, who is friendly, who is kind – would be a tremendous evil. How much more does this apply when we think of how we’ve offended and sinned against God Almighty, whom we literally owe everything to? So within the heart of someone who is truly repentant, there will be both a robust hatred for sin as well as a soothing sense of God’s mercy. Well, what do these two things within the heart lead to?

A Turning from Sin Toward Christ and Obedience to Him

After describing the true sense of our sin and the true sense of God’s mercy in Christ to us, the catechism ends its definition of repentance by saying the sinner “turns from sin to God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.” Knowing our sin and knowing God’s mercy leads us to this double turn. Away from sin, towards Jesus in faith. This is a change in purpose, a change in direction, and a change in living. We do not turn towards better behavior or better actions. No, we turn away from sin and toward Jesus Christ. Evidence that we’ve done this will be seen in that we now endeavor to obey Jesus. This is why repentance must come after regeneration. No one can turn from sin toward Jesus while remaining in our natural hostile state. God must change our nature and enables us to do so. And once He does so, everything changes about how we live.

Many have said throughout the past few decades that one can come to Jesus as Savior without coming to Him as Lord, meaning that one can truly be saved and still be living in a life in sin. This is not true, and is really a false idea of the nature of repentance. To repent is to turn towards Christ after you’ve turned away from sin. You cannot have Christ and your sin too. This is not to say that Christians are perfect people, heavens no. But this is to say that the bent of the heart changes after turning to Christ. We will struggle with sin and our remaining corruption for the rest of our lives yes, but we no longer practice sin as a lifestyle. We must turn from it in order to turn to Christ. Sin cannot remain our friend if Jesus is to be our Lord.

Taking all four of these things together, can you now see why the shorter catechism calls repentance, ‘repentance unto life?’ From repentance comes life, and life delighted full of pleasure in God.

Now, everything I’ve said thus far deals with repentance at the moment of salvation, isn’t there a continuing element of repentance in the Christian life? Yes, there is. Because we are not made perfect at salvation we’ll struggle with sin all our days, and because we’ll struggle with sin, sad as it is, we’ll find ourselves giving (perhaps even diving) into sin. When we do this we must repent. We must turn back again, and return to the gospel. This does not mean that we lose our salvation. It means that we’re normal Christians, people living in the tension of the already but not yet. Growth will come, but it will look more like the slow growth of an oak tree rather than the fast growth of a weed. And as we grow, we may have seasons of rebellion or coldness to God. As we grow it may even seem from the outside it that we have our stuff together, but we know the truth. On the inside, where we encounter the motives and intentions of our heart, this is where the battle rages on. So what do we do when we sin after conversion? We remember the

promise of 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Repentance and faith are the way we begin the Christian life, and repentance and faith are the way we live the Christian life. We must always be turning away from sin and turning toward our Lord Jesus.

Faith

*“Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace,
whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone
for salvation as He is offered to us in the gospel.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

Within the ordo salutis we have already spoken of repentance. Now we turn our attention to the other side of the coin, to faith. Recall I made the comment last week that repentance and faith form a double turn, but I also said that they’re in no way inseparable things as if we could have one without the other. Turning from sin and turning toward Jesus is one action or the opposite sides of the same coin. Louis Berkhof says repentance and faith are, “...complementary parts of the same process.”¹²⁹ Similarly John Frame teaches they’re two things, which constitute one action that stem from the heart’s attitude, repentance being the negative aspect of that one action and faith being the positive.¹³⁰ We used the Westminster shorter catechism to examine what repentance is, we’ll do the same with faith though we’ll venture to other places as well.

One particular genre I always enjoy and in which we can see a great deal about who we are as a people is music. The list of songs that mention faith is as long as the Mississippi river. But faith in this respect is usually spoken of in relation to a lover, or has having faith in yourself. Both of these fall enormously short of the biblical idea of faith. In the Bible when the word faith is used it more resembles an idea of trust, a believe, hope, conviction, confidence, expectation, reliance, and dependence upon God Himself. In question 86 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism it asks “What is faith in Jesus Christ? Answer: Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered to us in the gospel.”

Think of it like this this. When we turn from or repent of sin we don’t turn towards nothing...we turn, not just by faith in general like so many people speak of, but faith in a Person. Namely, the Person of Jesus Christ. And what happens in the heart once we turn? As the catechism says there are two things that happen: a receiving of Jesus and a resting in Jesus.

A Receiving of Jesus

As the Apostle John begins his gospel and begins unfolding the incarnation of the Son of God, the Word made flesh he says this in 1:9-13. “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own people,

did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” So Jesus came into the world that He had made. He came into to His own, yet His own did not know Him or receive Him. Then in v12 we find the wondrous moment of contrast where John points out that not all rejected Him, some did receive Him. What does it mean to receive Jesus? v12 continues and explains it for us, “...to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name...”

To receive Jesus, therefore, is to believe in His name. This word ‘believed’ in John 1:12 is the Greek verb ‘pisteuousin’ which is used by Paul in its noun form ‘pistis’ which we translate as ‘faith.’ So, to receive Jesus is to believe in His name. And, to believe in His name is the same as having faith in Him. v12 shows us what it means to have faith in Jesus, v13 shows us the origin of our faith in Jesus. When you receive Him, or believe in His name, or have faith in Him John says you become a child of God who is born, not by the will of man, but by the will of God. So the sovereignty of God is on display in the faith of man, in that, just as God grants repentance, so too God gives faith to His people. That’s why v13 is placed after v12, to show us v13 enables v12 to occur.

That God gives faith as a gift to His people is confirmed in Ephesians 2:8-9 when Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” There are many important things to glean from this verse, it’s one of the pinnacle passages describing justification by faith alone. But one often overlooked thing in this passage is the small phrase “And this” in the middle of v8. What is the word ‘this’ referring to? Paul has just spoken of us being saved by grace through faith, so grace and faith are in view. When he continues on and starts the next sentence with “And this” he means “And grace and faith” are not your own doing, they are the gift of God. So receiving Jesus is a gift of God.

A Resting in Jesus

To explain this idea of resting in Jesus I want to describe the conversion experience of Martin Luther.¹³¹ Here’s how it played out. Looking back throughout Luther’s life there’s an intriguing pattern to notice. Every five years he was involved in, or had himself, a major controversy. In 1505 he was almost struck by lightning and ran into the monastery. In 1510 he visited Rome on an errand and became disenchanted with Roman Catholicism by all the wickedness he saw. In 1515 he had what proved to be his most pivotal controversy, and to this day it is called ‘The Tower Experience.’ After doing much in depth study of the Scriptures Luther came to believe that the proper way to interpret the Bible is to find the ‘sensus literalis’ which means we should interpret the Bible according to it’s literary genre. Well, later that year Luther was assigned to teach through Paul’s letter to the Romans. So in his private study in preparation for his lectures he came to Romans 1:16-17 and came to a screeching halt. That passage says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written (quoting Habakkuk 2:4) ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

Luther came to a halt because he found v17 repulsive. It was the word ‘righteousness’ that haunted him. He said, “I hated that word ‘the righteousness of God’ by which I had

been taught according to the custom and use of all teachers that God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.” This, for Luther, was a barrier to God, a chasm between the holy God and his unholy heart that cannot be crossed. Luther saw no way around it and despaired of all hope. He was not righteous, thus, he could not live by faith. But, then Romans 1:17 broke upon his soul. He saw that what Paul was teaching was that there is a righteousness that is received as a result of faith and not as a result of works, and that once a person received this by faith they were reconciled to God. What made the difference for Luther was that he was now studying the Greek text of Romans, not the Latin. You see, in the Latin text of Romans the word for righteousness is ‘eustificare’ which comes from the Roman legal system and means to make righteous. So the Latin meaning of this word in Romans 1:17 is that God’s very righteousness is in view. But in the original Greek the word was different. The Greek word for righteousness was the word ‘dikaioune’ which means to count or to declare one as righteous. This was Luther’s awakening. Luther saw that Paul was teaching, not of God’s own righteousness, but of a righteousness God gives freely by His grace to people who don’t have a righteousness of their own. Then he read St. Augustine on Romans and saw that he also believed this. Then Luther said this, “At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely faith. Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.”

This ‘Tower Experience’ explains a lot of why Luther was the way He was. Luther was unwavering and steadfast against the onslaught that would soon come his way for teaching the doctrine of justification by faith alone because he knew that when looked upward he beheld a reconciled Father because of Jesus’ work, not an angry Judge. Luther received Jesus by believing in His name and having faith in Him and as a result Luther rested in Jesus.

Philippians 3:8-9 confirms this rest of soul that comes by faith and shows us what all of this leads to. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...”

Luther’s boldness as we’ve seen came from this, and our boldness can also come from this. We can live like v8, we can count knowing Christ as better than all things, we can count all things as rubbish compared to knowing Jesus our Lord because God has done v9 to us. He has given us a righteousness that is not our own, a righteousness that stands full and final in our account never to be removed.

See a pattern in all of this.

Receiving Jesus leads to resting in Jesus. Resting in Jesus leads to recognizing Jesus’ worth above all things. Recognizing Jesus’ worth above all things leads to risking all for Jesus. Receiving, resting, recognizing, risking – begun by faith, sustained by faith, and Lord willing...finished by faith.

Chapter 39

Justification

*“Jesus...was delivered up for our trespasses
and raised for our justification.”
(Romans 4:25)*

The doctrine of justification, and specifically the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls. Perhaps some of you have heard that before. I want to take it a step further and say that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is not only the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls, it is the doctrine on which every person stands or falls.¹³² The issue in view when considering justification is without a doubt an issue of supreme importance. How does a sinner come into a right and reconciled standing with a holy God?

As you can imagine, throughout the history of the Church many theologians and scholars have tried to answer this question and because of this the doctrine of justification quickly became one of the most debated points of theology. Examples abound: St. Augustine and the humanist Pelagius, Martin Luther and the scholar Erasmus, the Reformers and the Roman Catholics, or more currently the controversy brought about by N.T. Wright and his New Perspective on Paul. Though this has been debated throughout the ages, the Bible is quite clear on the answer. We're justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Where do we find these things? The Scripture alone.

Begin with me in Deuteronomy 6 to see the problem. After God gave His law to the people Israel a second time as they were on the banks of the Jordan River, Moses told them in Deut. 6:25, “And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.” Moses knew the law represented a perfect Lawgiver and that just as God is righteous, so would Israel be if they kept it. But we know what happened don't we? Israel not only didn't keep the law, they rejected the law. They refused to obey God and went their own way. They therefore have a problem, they need a perfect righteousness to be accepted in God's sight, but they don't have it. And as our own hearts have shown us, Israel's problem is not only Israel's problem, it's man's problem. Ever since the fall we refuse to honor God as God in our lives and go our own way. Because of this we will forever the righteousness that would put us in right standing with God. So what are we to do? What can we do?

To answer this problem as we ought to I want to do two things. First, I want to examine biblical evidence, and second, I want to point out the difference between justification, sanctification, and glorification.

Biblical Evidence

Genesis 15:5-6

“And God brought Abram outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then He said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And Abram believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”

In context when we come to Genesis 15 we find ourselves in the middle of God unfolding His promise to Abraham. Abraham doubts God, thinks his servant will be his heir, God corrects him and continues to make His promise plain. Even though Abraham is old, God says he will be the father of a multitude and that the nations will be blessed through him. The significance of this moment in 15:6 is it clearly displays Abraham looking to the promise of God by faith and then displays God counting that faith to Abraham as righteousness. This word ‘counted’ in English is the Hebrew word ‘chashav’ which is important because this word is a legal term used other times in the Old Testament when legal declarations were made. That God uses it to ‘count’ Abraham as righteous signifies that God made a legal, binding, and unchanging declaration about who Abraham was not because of what he did, but because of his faith in the promise. So we have the beginning of the unfolding of justification by faith alone.

Romans 4:1-5

It just so happens that Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 a few times in his letters. One of those moments is Romans 4:1-5, where he says “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...”

In this portion of Romans 4 Paul in v1-3 points out that Abraham was indeed justified by faith and not by works of any kind. But in v4-5 and throughout the rest of chapter Paul states that this was not just a pattern present in Abraham’s life, it’s a pattern present for all men as well. Just as Abraham was not able to boast before God for any of his works, so too no man is able to boast before God for any works. And just as God counted Abraham as righteous by faith then, so too God will count (or legally declare) any man righteous by faith now if that faith in is His Son Jesus who justifies the ungodly, or saves sinners by His perfect work. This solves our Deut. 6:25 problem and shows that we can be given a perfect righteousness before God through faith. But it doesn’t answer the question of how that righteousness is given to us and it doesn’t tell us what the source of that righteousness is. To see that we must move onto our next passage.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

“...in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

So what is the source of the righteousness in our justification? Jesus Christ is the source. In 2 Cor. 5:19-21 we see the glories of Jesus' reconciling righteousness. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. How did God do this? By not imputing our sins to us and imputing them to Jesus as well as imputing the righteousness of Jesus to us, which reconciles us to God. This is a double imputation and a great exchange. Jesus, who never sinned receives our sin, and we who never had any righteousness receives His righteousness. So how are given a righteousness through faith? John Calvin comments on this passage saying, “How can we become righteous before God? In the same way as Christ became a sinner. For He took, as it were, our person, that He might be the offender in our name and thus might be reckoned a sinner, not because of His own offenses but because of those of others, since He Himself was pure and free from every fault and bore the penalty that was our due and not His own. Now in the same way we are righteous in Him, not because we have satisfied God's judgment by our own works, but because we are judged in relation to Christ's righteousness which we have put on by faith, that it may become our own.”¹³³ So, see that in this double imputation God does not just remove our sin and leave an empty void in us. He removes our sin and fills us with Christ's righteousness at the moment of salvation (by grace through faith) and “right then and there the believer, like Abraham, is counted righteous.”¹³⁴

Romans 4:23-25

“But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

This last reference is an important one, because too many people only speak of justification in terms of the cross and not the resurrection. Paul makes this point in this passage quoting Genesis 15:6 again saying the words “it was counted to him” were not only for Abraham, they're for us as well. Then Paul goes on to speak of our faith in “Jesus...who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” Paul is saying when Jesus rose from the grave, the resurrection was proof that the Father had accepted Jesus' payment for sin and placed Jesus back into the His full favor. Since faith unites us to Christ, in both His death and resurrection, God's approval of Christ results in God's approval of all who are united to Christ. Therefore as Jesus was validated by His resurrection, so are all those united to Christ by faith, which means the final Day of Judgment to come has already been settled for the believer.

So our justification not only involves our past and our present, it involved our future as well. In this sense Jesus was “raised for our justification.”

The Difference

Errors abound regarding justification because many people have mistook it for its cousins, sanctification and glorification. We have already covered sanctification when we worked through pneumatology, and we will cover glorification when we cover eschatology. So for now let me just be brief on this point.

The confusion enters on one hand when we mistake justification for sanctification, and on the other hand when we mistake justification for glorification. To confuse justification with sanctification means that we are made right with God through our own merit and progression in holy living after conversion. To confuse justification with glorification means that we cannot truly know if we are saved until death when we stand before God face to face, and even then God may require us to go through a time of agony to make us fit for His presence. Both of these errors completely disregard the beauty of God's grace to us through His Son and the nature and extent of Jesus' work on our behalf. Though these can be seen as separate errors we could also view them as the same error. Both believe Jesus' work doesn't save us on it's own. Something must be added to it in order to make it effective. And ironically a large portion of Protestants and all Catholics believe the missing ingredient is our own effort and works. Clarification is obviously needed.

Here's the difference between these three theological cousins:

Justification is the initial act of God's free grace, *sanctification* is the process of God's free grace, and *glorification* is the final act of God's free grace.

Or, *justification* is when we have been saved, *sanctification* is when we are being saved, and *glorification* is when we will be saved.

Or, *justification* frees us from the guilt of sin, *sanctification* frees us from the power of sin, and *glorification* frees us from the presence of sin.

As you can see, when we confuse justification with consequences of justification we misinterpret the entire doctrine of salvation and are left with salvation by works to some degree.

Adoption

*“Adoption is an act of God’s free grace,
whereby we are received into the number,
and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.”
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)*

Now that we have covered the doctrine of the ins and outs of election and justification, we come to the point in the ordo salutis where we begin to cover the benefits of justification. These benefits are the doctrines of: adoption, union with Christ (mystical union), sanctification, and glorification. It speaks against us that we do not give as much energy to understanding and teaching these benefits of justification as much as we give toward understanding and teaching justification. John Frame says we don’t give adequate attention to these benefits because of our emphasis on the Reformation.¹³⁵ I disagree. I do agree that we do not give these benefits as much attention as we ought to. But I don’t think it’s because we’re too focused on the Reformation, it’s because too often we don’t apply the glorious doctrines that were recovered during the Reformation. When we apply the five great solas and the doctrine of justification by faith alone the destination we end up at is these benefits. So to truly and whole heartedly embrace the doctrines recovered in the Reformation will lead us to a deep and rich study and appreciation of these great benefits. Our attention now turns to them.

Adoption is described for us in the Westminster Shorter Catechism clearly and plainly. In answering the 34th question, “What is adoption?” the catechism responds with this for an answer: “Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges, of the sons of God.”

A number of places in Scripture speak to this reality. John 1:11-12 says, “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God...” So all those who received Jesus or all those who believed in His name God made them His children. Galatians 3:23-26 says, “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” One chapter later Paul expands on this in Galatians 4:4-7 saying, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir

through God.” This is a Christmas time reality, that the Son of God was sent at the fullness of the times. Born like us, so that we would become like Him, and once we believe in Him we receive adoption as sons, are given His Spirit, given to heart and new desire to cry out to God as Father, and gain an inheritance. In Ephesians Paul brings the sovereignty of God into adoption when he says in 1:5, “In love He (God) predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.” Lastly one of the highest moments in 1 John is when John exclaims in 3:1 saying, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

Think of like this. In the past few chapters we have covered many glorious things. In regeneration God awakens us, in justification God legally declares us to be righteous, and in adoption God brings us into His family. Adoption comes after these things because it is the result and the benefit of all that has come before in the *ordo salutis*. Because of this we can say it is in truth an apex in the *ordo salutis*. But do not confuse these doctrines. Regeneration is all about birth, that though we were born sinners God gave us a new birth and made us alive. Justification is all about declaring us to be righteous when we’re not. Regeneration grants us new life and justification clothes us in an alien righteousness. The glory of the doctrine of adoption is that once we’ve been made alive by God and declared righteous by Him He then brings us into a family we’re not naturally born into. So when, through faith, we receive and rest on Jesus Christ as He is offered to us in the gospel, God then receives us, brings us into the number of His children, and gives us all the rights, blessings, and privileges belonging to the sons of God.

A proper question would then be: what are the privileges of the sons of God? Or to ask it another way we say: what are the privileges of adoption? It can all be summed up in one phrase. Because of God’s work within us, we now relate to God as Father. What does relating to God as Father mean for us?

We are Now Sons and Daughters of One Family

Perhaps some of you recall how Jesus begins the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9, “Our Father in heaven...” not “my Father in heaven...” There is now not only a new relating to God as Father, but a communal relating to Him as *our* Father. This means at the moment of conversion we were brought into a new and vast family. This new family is so integral to who we now are as Christians that it’s ties are closer than blood relations. Yes value your earthly mother and father, your brothers and sisters, love them deeply and enjoy them richly. But recognize there is a greater bond between two believers than two unbelieving blood relatives. We may not have anything else in common in the whole world, but if we both believe in Jesus Christ we have an entire eternity to get to know one another and praise God together over the reality that as His children we cannot be more loved by God in Christ than we are right now. We are His children. Even in His Fatherly discipline toward us is filled with His love and compassion toward us. It is an immense privilege to have been brought into such a vast and diverse family.

We are Now Led by His Spirit

Romans 8 is one of those places in the Bible that you need to know well. When I say ‘know it well’ I mean it should be one of those places that you continuously return to at moments of suffering, sin, weakness, despair, and even joy. Beginning with no condemnation and ending with no separation, the whole chapter is a catalogue of the

benefits of being a child of God. Specifically 8:14-16 says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...” Here Paul says we have received the Spirit of adoption, and as he does in Galatians 4 he says here again that this Spirit of adoption cries out within us “Abba! Father!” Than this Spirit gives us an internal testimony that we are children of God. Think about that. Before God saved me the only thing being confirmed within my soul was that I not only hadn’t done enough to earn grace from God but that I couldn’t do enough to earn God’s grace. Everything in my natural state pleads for my condemnation, yet now, by faith and by the internal testimony and leading of the Holy Spirit I know that I am a child of God. This gives every Christian great assurance.

We are Now Given an Inheritance

One verse later in Romans 8 Paul says this in v17, “...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.” Also 1 Peter 1:3-4 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...” Among wealthy communities you usually find two kinds of people: those who’ve worked hard for great wealth, and those who’ve been given great wealth. Those who’ve been given great wealth usually are not those who win the lottery but those who’ve received a large inheritance. As a child of God we too have an inheritance, but our inheritance is unlike a worldly wealth passed down from one generation to the next. Our inheritance is kept in heaven for us, it is imperishable (it will last forever), undefiled (pure), and it is unfading (it never runs out). I often tell my own son that everything I have is already his. How much greater is the reality that everything that is God’s is already ours? This promise of future inheritance leads to a present thankfulness. Paul speaks of this further when he mentions the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, calling Him a “down payment” and “deposit” of our future inheritance. Therefore, the spiritual vibrancy we taste now in this life is but a glimpse of what we shall one day enjoy!

We are Now Driven towards Sanctification

Recall earlier when I spoke of the exclamation in 1 John 3:1? Where John rejoices in the fact that we are children of God? Now see what the next two verses say. 1 John 3:2-3 says, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” If we understand the doctrine of adoption it should move us toward sanctification. As God is pure, so too, all those adopted by God strive to be like Him, pure. Kevin DeYoung helpfully states it like this, “Those most passionate about the gospel of God’s free grace should also be the most passionate about the pursuit of holiness.”¹³⁶ This holiness is simple. It’s a family resemblance. God is holy, thus, His children must be as well.

We are Now Adopted – We Will be Adopted

All of our doctrine relates to all of our doctrine. We cannot isolate each individual doctrine thinking it will be a stand alone kind of object. They aren’t, theology doesn’t

work like that. So, when speaking of the doctrine of adoption we began by clarifying the difference between it and regeneration and justification. We'll finish by speaking of how adoption relates to the doctrine of eschatology. It's simple, brief, but very promising. At the moment of conversion, God brings us into His family and gave us the blessings and benefits of being His children. Now we are waiting for that moment when God will call us home, to our true family, to Him. So we are truly adopted now, and we will be truly adopted one day. The adoption we've experienced in conversion is but a foretaste of the greater adoption to come.

Union With Christ

“We do not live for our union with Christ or our acceptance with God, we live from our union with Christ and our acceptance in Him.”
(Dr. John Fesko)

Before Holly and I got married I was a poor college graduate who had just begun seminary. This meant I had zero income. Holly, on the other hand, had graduated, she had already started working, which meant her bank account was much larger than mine. After an 8 month engagement the day finally came, and Holly and I arrived at a beautiful church in downtown McDonough, GA to be married in the presence of God, family, and friends. My eyes filled with tears as she walked down the aisle, my heart pounded with excitement, and a marvelous thing took place that day. Not only did I gain a godly and gorgeous wife that I didn't deserve, I also gained a full bank account. I said 'I do' and my bank account went from empty to full. From no work of my own, simply because our lives were now united as one everything that belonged to her became mine and the little I had became hers. You see the greater lesson in this don't you? When we become Christians, when we God saves us, we're adopted into a family we we're not naturally born into and united to Him, and from no work of our own everything that belongs to Him becomes ours.

Recall a few chapters ago where I covered justification I said there were benefits from our justification: adoption, union with Christ, sanctification, and glorification. This is our focus: our mystical and wonderful union with Christ. To do this, I want to ask and answer two questions.

First, What is Our Union with Christ?

In his *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof defines union with Christ as an "...intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation."¹³⁷ So this union with Christ is greater than a merger or a blending. It is a vibrant, life giving, and familial bond. It is such a close bond Paul mentions that we have died and our lives are now "hid with Christ in God" in Colossians 3. This intimate, vital, and spiritual union is seen in the one phrase repeatedly found throughout the New Testament. In fact, it's repeated so often that many believe this one phrase reveals the sum and substance of Paul's theology. Do you know what this phrase is?

"In Him" or "In Christ"

In Him God has given us every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3), in Him we were chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), in Him we have redemption (Eph. 1:7), in Him all things are united (Eph. 1:10), in Him we have an inheritance (Eph. 1:11), and in Him we were sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). We are the body in Him who is the Head (1 Cor. 6), we are the branches in Him who is the Vine (John 15), we are the sinners made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21), and we are living stones in Him who is the Cornerstone (1 Pet. 2). In Christ there is no condemnation or separation (Rom. 8), all those in Christ are sons of Abraham (Gal. 3), we're alive to God in Christ (Rom. 6:11), we have eternal life in Christ (Rom. 6:23), the Spirit of life has set us free in Christ (Rom. 8:1), we are wise in Christ (1 Cor. 4:10), God establishes us in Christ (2 Cor. 1:21), God leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14), we become new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and on and on and on! The one dominating theme of Paul's theology is that because of God's work, we are 'in Him' or 'in Christ.' We truly do encounter our union with Christ from eternity to eternity.

Anthony Hoekema, in his book *Saved By Grace* helpfully points out that we experience our union with Christ in eight different ways.¹³⁸

First, we are initially united with Christ in *regeneration* (Eph. 2:4-5, 10)

Second, we appropriate and continue to live out of this union through *faith* (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:16-17).

Third, we are *justified* in union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9).

Fourth, we are *sanctified* through union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; John 15:4-5; Eph. 4:16; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Fifth, we *persevere* in the life of faith in union with Christ (John 10:27-28; Rom. 8:38-39).

Sixth, we are even said to *die* in Christ (Rom. 14:8; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 14:13).

Seventh, we shall be *raised* with Christ (Col. 3:1; 1 Cor. 15:22).

Eighth, we shall be eternally *glorified* with Christ (Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

This is distinctively Christian. No other world religion has anything teaches anything like this. I once heard Burk Parsons say it well, "Union with Christ is a uniquely Christian doctrine. Muslims don't claim to be 'in Mohammed' or 'in Allah' or Buddhists 'in Buddha.'" Yet in the pages of sacred Scripture we find a thing of wonder. Not only has God elected us from the before the foundation of the world, not only has He called us, regenerated us, granted us repentance and faith, justified us, and adopted us. Even more, wonder of wonders, He unites us with Christ so close that when He sees us (yes, sinners like us) He sees the manifold perfections of His Son. This is our union with Christ.

Second, What does Union with Christ Lead to?

It is wise to remember that all ideas have consequences, some good and some bad. The truth of our union with Christ has only glorious consequences.

First, it gives us a sure identity

At home we are currently teaching our sons Jack and Luke about where our identity comes from. One of the questions we've come up with to teach them this is to ask them two questions. First we ask 'where do you find out who you are?' The answer is 'in Jesus.' Then we ask 'where do you not find out who you are?' and the answer is 'in yourself.' This all comes from our union with Christ. We do not find out who we truly are by looking at who we are, what we've done, or where we come from. No, this is what the world does to find identity, meaning, and purpose. We look to Christ because only in Christ do we have our sure identity.

Second, it transforms our obedience

Too many of us think that trying harder or doing better accomplishes our sanctification. Yet, Jesus plainly tells us the way we produce fruit and grow in our sanctification is by our abiding in Him and enjoying our union with Him. This is His entire point in John 15 when He speaks of us being the branches that must abide in Him, the Vine. The life sustaining power for growth is in the Vine, and if we're to grow we must be united with that Vine. This is also true when we move over to Paul's writing. In almost every place where the New Testament commands us to obey God in this or that way, close by and usually before the command we find a statement that we are 'in Christ.' One of my seminary professors, Dr. John Fesko, used to tell us, "We do not live for our union with Christ or our acceptance with God, we live from our union with Christ and our acceptance in Him." This changes how we obey God. We do not obey to earn a right standing with God. Rather, we obey from our right standing with God already given to us in Christ. So we obey from a sure identity in Christ, not from our activity for Christ.

Third, it brings us into a united family, the Church

What do I mean when I say that union with Christ brings us into a united family, the church? I mean this: union with Christ creates unity in Christ.

In Ephesians 2:1-10 we find out what God has done to bring us into union with Him. Then in a surprising twist in 2:11-22 we see what God has done to bring into unity with the Church universal. After 2:13 Paul doesn't return to focus on who we once were apart from Christ, he turns to describe who we are after God has brought us to Himself through Christ. This has implications that are both personal and communal, and when you read 2:14-18 you can see Paul going back and forth between the personal implications of 2:13 and the communal implications of 2:13 almost in every verse which shows us that our life God started when He saved us individually, has more to do with just us individually, it has everything to do with the community of people God then brings us into. True unity of the Church, therefore, only comes through those who have been united to God through Christ by the Spirit.

Eph. 2:21 unfolds this profound reality by stating that Christ is not only the foundation as the Cornerstone of the Church, but that in Christ the whole structure is being joined

together forming a holy temple in the Lord. This again shows us what the Church is – it is a unified community, which finds its unity in Christ. And oh how important this unity is! All believers, you and I, being united to Christ by faith find ourselves united to one another in Christ. There is no society more sacred than the Christ's Church. We together form what Paul calls a 'holy temple in the Lord' revealing again that when we move over from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant we find ourselves being moved by God out of the physical into the spiritual. The temple was to be the center of God's activity among His people, to which all nations would come and see the King of Kings. Now in the New Covenant there is a spiritual temple as the center of God's presence among His people – what is this spiritual temple being built up by the Lord? It is you and I, it is the Church. It is also dazzling in its beauty having every intricate detailed and mapped out by God to be beautiful beyond words. No longer do the nations have to come and see this beauty, but we as the unified holy temple of God go to the nations and bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Because of our great union with Christ, and because it produces a unity within the Church, we must come to see that our unity within the Church isn't merely a good idea or a church growth principle that pastors and leaders try to convince you of. No, it's life and death. Churches that are full of discord are unhealthy, inward focused churches that misrepresent and mar the true picture of the gospel to the communities their in. But, churches that are unified are healthy, gospel-spreading churches that display the truth of the gospel within their communities.

Our union with Christ is great. It is a great benefit of our justification, and it brings itself great benefits to the Church.

Glorification

“The doctrine of glorification is the grand finale of our salvation; where all that God has done in our hearts for His glory and our good comes to completion.”
(Adam Powers)

We began our study on soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, many pages ago. Here we bring it to its conclusion by looking at the final doctrine in the ordo salutis, glorification. And when covering glorification there is one text we must go to, Romans 8:28-30. Here Paul says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”

This passage, known to many as the golden chain of salvation, runs the whole gamut of the ordo salutis. The ESV Study Bible mentions this in its notes for v30 saying, “The chain that begins with the word ‘foreknew’ in v29 cannot be broken.”¹³⁹ John Murray, in his commentary on John, says, “Three actions are mentioned, calling, justification, and glorification. There is an unbreakable bond between these three actions...serving the apostle’s purpose in delineating the divine plan of salvation from its fount in the love of God to its consummation in the glorification of the sons of God.”¹⁴⁰ Although Paul describes our glorification in the past tense (glorified) it is intended to teach us a double meaning: we have already been glorified in Christ and we will be glorified in Christ when our salvation has been completed.

As a young boy and up through my teenage years my family always vacationed in Sarasota, FL during the 4th of July weekend. We would eat at the same beachside diner every year, enjoy live music, we’d dance, shoot off our own fireworks, chase tiny crabs by the water with flashlights, and finish the evening by watching the firework show put on by a nearby beach resort. Most of you have seen similar firework displays, where there is all sorts of various booms, sounds, colors, and sizes of fireworks all leading up to the grand finale when they would set off hundreds of fireworks at the same time. This grand finale was always the highlight of the evening for me. The loud blasts, color displays, and sheer volume of lights in the sky were captivating to behold. In the same (but greater!) manner, the doctrine of glorification is the grand finale of our salvation, where all that God has done in our hearts for His glory and our good comes to

completion. It is when He will give us resurrection bodies, and free us from the presence of sin to enjoy Him forever and ever.

Romans 8 shows us this in a few other places. After speaking of our adoption and union with Christ 8:17 says, "...and if children than heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Romans 8 presents the Christian life as a life of suffering, but in the midst of that suffering we must be reminded of a few things. Namely, that our suffering in this life is a sharing in the sufferings of Christ. This is not just a statement intended for those who die a martyr's death. No, this is for the whole Church. By sharing in the suffering of Christ, I think Paul means that our Christian lives, which are lived out in this fallen world, will cause us to bump up against and inwardly feel much fallenness and suffering. Paul spoke of always carrying around in his body the death of Christ, and we who believe know what this is like living in a fallen world as fallen and simultaneously redeemed person. Paul's promise here in v17 is that if we share in His suffering (which all Christians do to varying degrees) we need to remember that we'll one day share in His glory. Or to put it like Paul does, one day we'll be glorified with Him. This causes a certain change about a believer's life. We see it in v18 when Paul continues saying, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

First, see a confirmation of v17 here. That phrase 'this present time' is why I interpret v17 to mean suffering as a born again creature in a fallen world. Again, the suffering Paul has in mind is suffering brought to Christians during 'this present time.' Second, do you see how Paul's hope of a future glory changes how he encounters the suffering in the present? He thinks of this current suffering as something not even worth comparing with what's to come. He says similar things in 2 Corinthians 4 when he speaks of how the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ being held in jars of clay like you and I causes us to not lose heart. "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18). In both Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 4 Paul uses comparative language. Comparing the sufferings of this present world with the glory that's to come. And his conclusion in both of these passages is the same: because of the eternal weight of glory that's awaiting us, these present sufferings are two things. First, they're not even worth comparing with that glory, and second, they're only light and momentary afflictions. In the verses that follow (Romans 8:20-27) Paul continues to expand on this saying the whole creation, and we ourselves (who are helped by the Holy Spirit) groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoptions as sons. Then into that context, we hear the stunning promise – "Those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified." There are no dropouts!

Let's go further.

After the stunning promise of a secure and sure glorification is no surprise that Paul rejoices in v31-39 with some of the most well known and celebrated passages in the book of Romans. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against

us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Can it get any better? Because of these things every believer ought to long for the day when this glorification, when this completion of God's salvation in us, will bring us to the city we have sought. The city whose maker and builder is God. We long for the day when we'll be ageless in our youth again, when we'll run and not grow faint, when we'll sing and not grow weary!

I want to rejoice with you for a moment. The subject of glorification shows up in many songs and hymns: here's a short list of some that have stood out to me over the years.

"We long for the day when we'll see the far kingdom beyond the sea, with a river that we will know, that's ever clear and ever full from the Fount that overflows from the King. We will drink deeply and we will find, that this joy that's ever full will ever rise!" (*Far Kingdom, The Gray Havens*)

"We long for the day when all things will be made new, and we'll see the hope He's called us to. And in His kingdom paved with gold, we'll praise His faithfulness of old!" (*The Getty's, When Trials Come*)

As Abraham was called to go to a land he never knew of, so too the Church universal is wandering through the wilderness of this present world coming ever nearer to Jordan's stormy banks, which will give way to the greater promise land. "No chilling wind or poisonous breath can reach that healthful shore, where sickness, sorrow, pain, and death are felt and feared no more. When shall we reach that happy place and be forever blessed, when shall we see our Father's face and in His bosom rest?" (*On Jordan's Stormy Banks*)

"So we're waiting for the King, to come galloping out of the clouds while the angel armies sing. He's gonna gather His people in the shadow of His wings, and we're going to raise our voice with the song of the redeemed, cause all this darkness is a small and passing thing...this is the storm before the calm, this is the pain before the balm, this is the cold before the warm, these are the tears before the song, this is the dark before the dawn...we will wake at the burning edge of dawn and we'll be able to finally believe the King had loved us all along." (*Andrew Peterson, The Dark Before the Dawn*)

We could also speak of 'The Sweet By and By', 'I'll Fly Away', 'When the Roll is Called Up Yonder', 'Amazing Grace' and countless other songs. The truth is this: God has saved us. By grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God

alone – and yet though He’s saved us, we are not now what we shall soon be. Amen and amen!

Summit 6

Ecclesiology – the Doctrine of the Church

The Church As True Israel

*“The Lord knows those who are His...”
(2 Timothy 2:19)*

Having finished the first five of the seven summits of systematic theology, we now begin the sixth summit: Ecclesiology, or, the doctrine of the Church. It is fitting to cover the doctrine of the church directly after the doctrine of salvation because who is it that benefits from the great redemption wrought by Christ? Or who does God apply the merits of His Son’s salvation to? The answer to both questions is: the Church. So after covering soteriology we naturally turn to the arena in which that soteriology is proclaimed and possessed, ecclesiology.

To begin we can learn a bit of what the nature of the Church is by looking at the Greek word ‘ekklesia.’ This is the word usually translated as ‘church.’ This word begins with prefix ‘ek’ which means ‘from out of’ and ends with a form of the word ‘kaleo’ which means ‘to call.’ Thus, ‘ekklesia’ means the called ones, or the assembly of those who are called out by God. We get our English word ‘church’ from another Greek word ‘kyriakon.’¹⁴¹ We say ‘church’, the Dutch say ‘kirk’, the Scots say ‘kerk’, and the Germans say ‘kirche.’ Within this word is the word ‘kurios’ or ‘Lord.’ That the Church is often spoken of using this word indicates that all those within it belong to the Lord.

Though this is the case, because we live in fallen world and because we ourselves are fallen creatures, the Church doesn’t always reflect what it’s supposed to be. This is why Jesus gives us images to think of the Church like the sheep and the goats and the wheat and the tares. So every time the Church gathers together they gather as a mixed body. Some, hopefully most, are believers while others are not, though they may sincerely think they are. Theologians throughout the history of the Church have spoken of this mixed reality using two terms: the visible and invisible church. By visible they mean those we can see coming and gathering together who make a profession of faith. By invisible they mean those we cannot see who not only profess, but truly possess faith. All men can see the visible church when it gathers together, but only God knows the invisible Church. After warning Timothy of certain false teachers who have come into the church Paul speaks of the invisible Church when he tells Timothy, “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His...” (2 Tim. 2:19)

This distinction between the visible and invisible is not just a New Testament reality within the Church, it has Old Testament roots as well. Think back to Old Testament Israel. Visible Israel included all those who had the covenant sign of circumcision put on them. This meant that a physical sign was present in the Old Testament to identity the

people of God. But, as Paul says in Romans 9:6, not all Israel is truly Israel. Some Israelites who had been circumcised rejected the God of the Israelites. This means within Israel there were those who visibly identified with Israel by their circumcision, as well as those who invisibly identified with Israel by their faith in the God of Israel. This is further clarified for us when Moses speaks of a comparison in Deuteronomy 30:6 referring to a group of Israelites who were circumcised in flesh and circumcised in heart. We know what it means to be circumcised in the flesh, but to be circumcised in heart means that one truly loves God. Who knew the difference between visible Israel and invisible Israel? God did.

This same mixed pattern is not done away with when we cross over into the New Covenant people of God, the Church. Just many unbelieving Israelites had the sign of the covenant placed on them and were mixed in with believing Israelites, so too many unbelievers within the Church today and have partaken of the New Covenant signs (baptism and the Lord's Supper). All this to say, just as Old Covenant Israel was a mixed body, so too the New Covenant Church is also. But we do not lose heart. Nothing about the Church is invisible to God.¹⁴² While we can only take someone's word for it, while we cannot look at the true condition of someone's heart, God "knows those who are His."

Now we can move on to more about the nature of the Church. It's a common belief to think the Church began in the book of Acts when the disciples went out to preach and masses of people converted and began gathering together to worship the risen Christ. While there was something wonderfully new about what was happening in the book of Acts, the Church (or the assembly of God's people) began long before. Rather than beginning in the book of Acts, the Church extends back all the way to the very beginning. In fact, we could say that wherever we find people worshipping God we also find the Church. Before the fall Adam and Eve were in the very presence of God as He walked in and throughout the garden. After the fall we see Cain and Abel offer sacrifices. Genesis 4:26 mentions that in the days of Seth and Enosh people began to call on the name of the Lord. As Genesis continues we see moments of worship as people build altars, offer sacrifices, and pray calling on God. Fast forward to the Exodus. God redeemed His people out of slavery for what purpose? "...when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12) The reason God brought His redeemed people out of slavery in Egypt was for the purpose of worship. Then once God brought them out and brought them to the mountain to worship Him God made them a covenant people, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation distinguished from all other nations in the world.

Peter picks up this same language to describe the New Covenant people of God in 1 Peter 2:9 saying, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." This type of language is not isolated to Peter alone, much of the same Old Covenant Israelite language is used to describe the New Covenant people throughout the New Testament. That this happens teaches us that Israel and the Church are not two separate peoples with two separate promises from God. No, Israel is continued by and fulfilled in the New Covenant people of God, the Church. So we really can say that the New Covenant Church is true Israel. Paul says as much when he says the

true descendants of Abraham are those who believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:29). Paul even calls the Galatian believers the 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16).

Jesus even teaches these very same things Matthew 12:46-50. "While He was still speaking to the people, behold, His mother and His brothers stood outside, asking to speak to Him. But He replied to the man who told Him, 'Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'" G.K. Beale helpfully shows us what is happening in this moment saying, "Here Jesus redefines a true Israelite as 'whoever does the will of My Father.' Jesus's true family consists of those who trust Him, not those who are related to Him by blood. Because Jesus is restoring not only Israel but also all of creation, including Gentiles, the true people of God no longer can be marked out by certain nationalistic badges that distinguish one nation from another. Therefore, in order to become a true Israelite and part of Jesus's real family, one no longer needs to keep all the specific requirements of Israel's law that marked Israel out as Israel in contrast to the rest of the nations: laws of circumcision, diet, the temple, the Sabbath, and so on. Jesus is redefining the true Israel, the true people of God, by saying that loyalty to Him is the mark of a faithful Israelite. People no longer must possess the badges of old national Israel in order to be a part of the true, new Israel... You do not have to be of the bloodline of Abraham to be his true child, nor do you have to move to Israel geographically to become an Israelite, you merely have to move to Jesus, true Israel, and embrace Him."¹⁴³

As I bring this section to a close, let me give you two implications:

First, because the New Covenant Church is now the true Israel and because faith in Christ brings us into that spiritual kingdom we are no longer looking for the current or a future national Israel to be remade. To be looking for that, and to believe in a kind of future geopolitical Israel to bring God's kingdom into this world through a reinstatement of the Mosaic Law would be a backward move in redemptive history.

Second, the Old Testament belongs to Christians today just as much as it belonged to Israel then. Who is it that Paul uses as an example in Romans 4 to illustrate justification by faith alone in Christ alone that he described in Romans 3? None other than the patriarch Abraham. Where does the plethora of examples of heroic and robust faith found in Hebrews 11 come from? The Old Testament. All the saints of old were justified by faith alone in Christ alone by believing in the promises of God that would one day come to pass in the Messiah. So while we look back at God's work in Christ, they looked forward to what God would do in Christ. And isn't it true that all of the promises of God made in the Old Testament come to their ultimate fulfillment in Christ? Indeed it is. The Old Testament is a Christian document, or as it is commonly said, "The New is in the Old concealed, and the Old is in the New revealed."

So what is the Church? "The Church is the people of God in all ages."¹⁴⁴ The Church is not a building, though buildings are a good thing to build for us to meet in, but people. And not separate people, but the covenantally blood bought unified people throughout all of history (Eph. 2:11-21).

The Images of the Church

*“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”
(1 Timothy 3:14-15)*

When I refer to the images of the Church, do not think of the ‘images’ forbidden in the 2nd commandment. Rather, think of the ways in which the Bible describes the Church; the metaphors and the descriptions of it. There are many of such images given to us, let’s take a look at the ones most often used.

The Church as a Building

Many people often refer to the ‘church’ as a building, and while they may not know it, they’re closer to the truth than they realize. The Church is a building. Of course I’m not referring to the physical wood and dry wall, but the individual men and women who have believed in Jesus who are then made into a spiritual building by God.

Peter makes this point in 1 Peter 2:4-8 saying, “As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”

Jesus is portrayed here as the chief cornerstone, rejected by men but chosen and precious to God. All mankind responds to this cornerstone by believing or not believing. Those who believe on Him, Peter says, are being built up as living stones into a spiritual house. The function of this spiritual house, which is the Church or the New Covenant priesthood, is to offer up acceptable worship to God through Christ. When they do this, they will never be put to shame. For those who do not believe, this cornerstone isn’t chosen and precious but offensive and uncertain. The picture we get here is that while the believers are being built up into a spiritual house with a firm foundation, being built

together for the purpose of worship, all those who do not believe are shamed and stagger about in life aimless and hopeless with no foundation.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promises that the Church will always be because He will build it though all hell is afraid of it and eager to wreck its success. Though the Church appears weak in this world we are indeed ever steady and ever firm because of our foundation stone, Jesus. There is no more physical temple any longer, Jesus has tabernacled among us and in His flesh fulfilled the physical temple. Now, all believers are the temple of God, made not with human hands but by the hand of God Himself, and in which God dwells. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). The Church is the building of God.

The Church as a Body

Another image used for the Church through Scripture is that of a body. To say this is to say that the Church is the Body of Christ. Jesus is our head, we are the body; the hands, feet, toes, fingers, knees, ankles, and elbows of Christ. You see the correlation right? Just as the correct operation of all the parts of our physical bodies is necessary for normal life to occur, so too to say the Church is the body of Christ is to say that each member of the Church is vital to the correct operation of the whole. So each member is a living extension of the greater body, and is dependent on all the others. And just as the body as a whole only works rightly when it works together as a unified whole, so too the each member and each local congregation of the global Church should always strive to be so united. Also, just as our physical head leads the body it sits atop, so too Jesus is the head of the Church. Naturally then, as goes the head so goes the body. Or to say it another way, the Church ought to submit to the Head and only go where Jesus leads.

Body is used as a designation to refer to the universal Church as well as the local church. In Col. 1:24 Paul shows us the universal nature of the body of Christ saying, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church...” Paul’s suffering in his own flesh is a witness and presentation of Christ’s sufferings to the universal Church, or body of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-12 is an example of this designation being used to refer to the local church. “And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” In context, Paul is referring to the gifts Jesus gave to the Church after His ascension. Though there are ways in which we can clearly see the universal Church being spoken of here, especially as we continue into v13-15, we also clearly see ordinary activity of the local church too. How? Where is it that the saints, the body of Christ, are equipped to do the work of ministry? In the local church. Where do those saints exercise these work of ministry once they’re equipped to do so? In local churches all around the world. So held within the image of the Church as the body of Christ we see the necessity of unity in that all the members ought to be striving toward the same goals with the same purpose. We see the activity of the local church to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and we see the grand scope of the universal Church as the context into which those saints are sent to do the work of ministry. The body of Christ is indeed simultaneously the most diverse and unified group of people on the planet.

The Church as a Bride

One of the most famous images of the Church is one of the most intimate images given in Scripture. This of course, the Church as the Bride of Christ. Throughout the Old Testament God refers to Israel as His unfaithful and adulterous wife. As we cross over into the New Testament we see it's the Church who, though unfaithful like Israel, has a husband in Christ that is ever faithful. Ephesians 5:25-27 says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." It may seem strange to some of you that as believers we all have a common husband already in Christ, but this is how the Bible encourages us to think of ourselves in relation to Jesus. We are His bride and He is our husband. We submit to Him and He lovingly leads us. He labors in us and through us to see to it that we are made more and more holy like He is until the day we see Him face to face.

That day will be a day unlike any other, and we'll realize that every wedding ceremony we've ever seen or been in was just a foretaste of the greater marriage to come. Rev. 21:2-4 says, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'" This is the marriage supper of the Lamb, when we will be presented holy, spotless, and flawless to our Lord Jesus. We will forever be His people and He will forever be our God.

The Church as the Pillar and Buttress of the Truth

Lastly, in 1 Tim. 3:14-15 Paul makes use of an image of the Church we don't often speak of. In that passage he tells Timothy, "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth." To say the Church is a pillar and buttress of the truth is to say the Church is the guardian, the defender, the protector, and the citadel of the truth in all ages against all those who oppose the gospel. This has a twofold application. As the Church defends the truth by proclaiming the truth unapologetically, the Church also protects the truth by teaching it to the Church every time it gathers together.

But what truth is the Church to guard, defend, and protect? Paul mentions this truth in the very next verse in 1 Tim. 3:16 when he says, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." This is none other than one of the earliest and most concise summaries of the work of Christ we have. Some people even think this was one the early creeds of the Church. All that to say, the truth the Church is to guard, defend, protect, teach, spread, rejoice in, and treasure

above all things is the gospel itself. In a day when deep convictions about religious beliefs are seen as arrogant, narrow-minded, and even antiquated or neo-colonial do you see the calling of the Church in Scripture? She is called and equipped by God to be an institution of proclamation, an bastion of propagation, that preaches the truth of gospel of God from the whole counsel of the Word of God to everyone soul that will hear.

The building, the body, and the bride of Christ. Called out of this world to boldly and lovingly proclaim the truth of God to this world. This is the Church.

The Marks of the Church

*“And we believe in One, Holy,
catholic, and Apostolic Church...”
(Nicene Creed)*

Early on in our study through the 7 Summits of systematic theology we examined the attributes of God, that is, those characteristics that describe who God is. In our study here in this chapter we'll look to the attributes, or marks, the Scripture uses when speaking of the Church. These marks have been points of identification for not only what the Church is in general but also what makes a healthy local church. Though there are many modern and historical confessions and creeds that point to various and important marks of the Church, I want to focus on the oldest creed that does this, the Nicene Creed. In the Nicene Creed, written around 325 AD at the council of Nicea, we read the following statement: “And we believe in One, Holy, catholic, and Apostolic Church...” These four marks are the marks of the Church.

One

To say the Church is one is to say the Church is unified. This is a bit shocking to reflect on. When we come to the Son of God in faith we are united to the Son. Because we're united to the Son, we're accepted by the Father, and because we're accepted by the Father John 17:23 tells us that the Father now loves us even as He loves His own Son and because the Father loves us He sends the Holy Spirit to reside in us. So every believer is in the Father and the Son and the Spirit, yet in our union with the Godhead we don't lose our own distinctive identity or personality.

Now because of this work of God's grace, being a Christian is more fundamental to our identity than the family we come from, the ethnicity we represent, the job we labor in, it is even more important than our nationality. The unity we share with other Christians is greater than any other bond we have in this world. This means where Christians exist, diversity always exists, but the stunning thing about the witness of a healthy church is that in the midst of diversity, there is unity. Therefore, our unity is a visible display of the invisible gospel.

So, true unity begins with the gospel, is upheld by the gospel, lasts by the gospel, and spreads because of the gospel. Paul writes of Jews and Gentiles at the end of Ephesians 2:14-18, saying that God has “...abolished the dividing wall of hostility that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came

and preached peace to you were far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” Did you notice here that it is the gospel alone that upholds unity? How did God get rid of the hostility between Jew and Gentile? The cross of Christ, where He remade one new man from two separate peoples. If we continue down in Ephesians, going all the way 3:10 we find the purpose of this unity. God’s purpose is “...that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” What is on display in the unity of the Church? None other than the very character of God. Remember, you can’t physically see the gospel; but when we foster and encourage community that is supernatural, it makes the invisible gospel visible. Union with Christ, brings unity in Christ.

Let me try to illustrate this for you in an effort to concretely apply this. Suppose you wanted to heat a large room with burning coals, how would you do it? Do you spread the coals evenly throughout the room? No. That would dissipate the heat and eventually each coal would burn out. So how do we heat the room? You push all the individual coals together into one pile in the center of the room, and as they burn together they become one large heat source that’s brighter and hotter, and warmth will fill the room. Such is the unity of the local church. The more unified we become the brighter and hotter we’ll burn with the heat of the gospel, and the brighter and hotter we burn with the heat of the gospel, the more compelling our community becomes in its witness to the lost.

Holy

When I was young and thought of the word ‘holy’ I would think of certain people from history like Ghandi, Mother Teresa, and even Jesus. But when someone spoke to me of holiness I would think of rules, regulations, laws, structure, discipline, and work. My thoughts as a young boy reflect how the world thinks about the concept of being holy or holiness, and after having been a Christian I think that, though there are exceptions, by and large the Church feels the same way about holiness as the world does. This reveals something about us that we should just be honest about. Perhaps we don’t care about holiness. Perhaps we fear being legalistic, or getting into a religion of rules and are frightened by words like effort, discipline, and work thinking they’ve got no place in a faith centered on grace. Well, whatever your opinion of holiness is the Church of Jesus Christ is to be a holy people.

In 1 Peter 1:14-15 he says, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct...” Here we are presented with the reality that for Christians, holiness is to be pursued. v14 and v15 say the same thing in different ways. v14 says it negatively saying ‘do not be conformed to ignorant passions’ and v15 says it positively saying ‘be holy in all your conduct.’ When you combine the commands in v14 and v15 you have a clear picture of what the pursuit of holiness looks like. Since we’re called to not conform to ignorant and wicked passions, being holy means we conform to what is good, what is true, and what is beautiful. What is good, true, and beautiful? God Himself.

We’ve seen this in Old Testament Israel, they were set apart by God from the surrounding nations to be holy. Now Christ’s Church is to be set apart from sin and the

surrounding world to be holy herself. Israel was to look different from her neighbors, and now the Church, though in the world, is to look different from the world. v14 calls this type of life 'obedient.' Therefore obedience for every Christian means conforming to Christ rather than the world around us. This means holiness is not optional for the Church. Holiness is not just something for mature Christians, holiness is not just something for pastors and elders, holiness is for all Christians, in all times, in all places. I know that each of you has at one time or another asked God this question, 'God, what is Your will for my life?' Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." You can't get clearer than that right?

It is said that the moon, though appearing to be very bright, has no light of its own – it only reflects the sun. The same is true of us, in and of ourselves we have no holiness, we are mere reflectors of God's pure light. Peter says the same thing as he continues his passage "...as He who called you is holy, you also be holy..." while v16 quotes Leviticus 11:44 where God says, "Be holy, for I am holy." This teaches us that the foundation of our own holiness is God's holiness, that our holiness is a reflection of God's holiness.

catholic

Some of you right here from the start may be alarmed at such a because you may believe by teaching the 'catholic' nature of the Church that I am affirming the Roman Catholic Church. I am not doing that. I would never do that. So why use the word 'catholic?' Well the word 'catholic' that the Nicene Creed uses here has a lower case 'c' not an upper case 'C.' You may not think this matters very much, but the size of the letter 'c' determines alot. While an upper case 'C' indicates a proper noun and refers to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, the creed's usage of the lower case 'c' indicates the original sense of the word, which simply means 'universal.' Therefore to say the Church is catholic, to define the Church as having 'catholicity' is to say the Church is universal. This means Christ's true Church is formed by all the people who, in all times and in all places, have believed in Jesus Christ as He is offered to us in the gospel.

In Revelation 5:8-14 Jesus took the scroll the four living creatures and the 24 elders fell down before Him, with their golden bowls of incense, and then what happened? They sang a new song with these words, "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every TRIBE and LANGUAGE and PEOPLE and NATION, and You have made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Later on after this all the hosts of heaven and earth sang two more songs singing these words in v12 and v13, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing...To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

These new songs the living creatures, the elders, the myriads of angels, and all those on and under the earth are singing is a song of praise to the Lion-Lamb Christ who acted in redemption, purchasing for God...what? A universal Church made up of all peoples. Notice the new song being sung isn't about the glory of America, or English speaking peoples, rather it's about the glory of Christ who has redeemed men and women from all peoples and all tribes and all languages and tongues.

Apostolic

The meaning of Apostolic is given to us within the word itself. To say the Church is 'Apostolic' is to say the Church is founded on the apostle's teaching. The book of Acts makes this crystal clear in Acts 2:42 when Luke, the author, says, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Here we see a summary of what the early Church devoted themselves to or continued steadfastly in when they gathered together. They devoted themselves to prayer, to the breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and fellowship. But notice what's on the top of the list here? "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching..." Above all they did, the central object in focus was the teaching of the apostles. This is why we say that the apostles' teaching is the foundation of the Church.

This is clear to most of us I think and, clear as it may be, it does bring up a number of questions, questions that need answering. Questions like: 'Who were the apostles?' 'What did the apostles teach?' and finally 'Why is the apostles' teaching so important?' To answer this briefly I'll just say this. The apostles were common, ordinary men who became Apostolic representatives by the power of the Holy Spirit, who then through the inspiration of the Spirit turned into Apostolic writers, who have left in their writings an Apostolic witness for the Church for all time. Therefore the Bible you hold in your hand is the only Apostolic authority for us today as well as the sum and substance of Apostolic teaching. As the early Church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, let's do the same today.

What is the Church? It is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The Worship of the Church

“...the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”
(Westminster Confession of Faith)

There are few things that have caused as much controversy within the Church as worship. One of the reasons there are so many denominations is largely due to how churches worship. We could all give examples all over the spectrum in regard to this. Within one small city it is likely to see a church with very hefty structure or liturgy, a church with no structure at all, as well as a church that tries to blend the two. For each of these particular local churches, beliefs about worship govern how they function. Everything from how the building is built, what kind of things the building is used for, and what happens throughout the week. When the Sunday service(s) are in view a whole new batch of questions come up in regard to a church's worship philosophy. How does worship begin? What do we do in worship? What do we not do? Is there music? If so, what kind and what instruments do we employ? Is there a sermon? If so, who preaches it and what makes up its contents? Is there prayer? If so, how should it be done? Is there an offering, a greeting, announcements, sacraments, calls to worship, or a benediction? If so, how do we do these things? The answers to all these questions (and more) comes down to one thing. What we believe about the nature of worship.

Amid all the varying opinions about worship and all the worship wars that have been fought over the centuries there is one thing too often forgotten – what does God say about worship? Perhaps on the surface that statement seems a bit naïve, but hear me out. Too many people have confused the difference between biblical mandates for worship and personal preference in worship. And by so doing we have often given our own personal worship preferences a divine weight they were never intended to carry. When this happens we can easily fall into the error of being more committed to our own man made traditions than God's requirements for worship. Which would make us modern Pharisees.

So as we approach the subject of worship we must take caution. I want to discuss worship with a twofold aim. First, I want to examine what has historically been called the regulative principle to see what God has to say about how He's approached in worship. Second, I want to discuss how the Scripture encourages us to apply this regulative principle in worship.

The Regulative Principle

As early as Adam and Eve believed the word of the serpent over the Word of God in Genesis 3 we see the battle of worship begin. More so, as we move into Genesis 4 we see more of the great concern God has in how He is worshiped. Cain and Abel both worship God through making their own offerings. Cain's is rejected and Abel's is accepted. When God replies to Cain about why his offering was rejected in 4:6-7 He implies that Cain knew how to make an appropriate offering and if he had correctly made the offering he would've been accepted. In his anger over being rejected by God, Cain kills his brother. Later and all throughout Exodus we see God rescue and redeem Israel out of slavery in Egypt for the purpose of worship. Moses told Pharaoh, "...let us go a three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God" (Exodus 3:18). This theme of letting them go to worship is repeated on and on and on as the narrative progresses. Of this Ligon Duncan says, "It is the primary reason why God sets His people free: to worship Him. The primacy of worship in a believer's life is, thus, set forth. We are saved to worship!"¹⁴⁵ After being redeemed from slavery God then brings them to Sinai and gives them the law to order their life and worship. The law is clear in the first two commandments. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve (lit. 'worship') them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exodus 20:3-6).

They were to worship God only. No images, no idols, nothing else. Only God. All of Israel's worship is to be governed by a true knowledge of God, His character, and His Word. No idols are to be worshiped and the true God is to be worshiped in the right way. Why? God is a jealous God. This means there are regulations on what the true worship of God looks like. These regulations are where we get the term, the regulative principle. The clearest definition of this principle is seen here in the first two commandments. One of the most helpful explanations of it is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21, paragraph 1. "The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and does good to all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called on, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." To sum this up, since the Bible is where we learn who God is, the Bible is also to be the place where we learn how God is to be worshiped.

Israel did not do this well. In Exodus 32 we further see God's concern over how He is worshiped when He rebukes the people for the golden calf incident. Afterwards in Leviticus 10 we find the sad account of Nadab and Abihu. Two brothers who offered strange or "unauthorized fire" to the Lord and were killed on the spot. We learn from these instances that the holy God must only be approached by a holy people. After the second giving of the law in Deuteronomy we see prophet after prophet reminding God's

people of what He revealed to them through the law of Moses. And when we cross over into the pages of the New Testament we do not see God's concern about how He is worshiped lessen. We see it continue in Jesus' teaching and in the teaching of the apostles.

The Application of the Regulative Principle

There are many ways we could speak of how to apply the regulative principle, and in order to do so here I'd like to take a brief look at the 16th century Protestant reformers. If you were to ask any one of the reformers what the reformation was about what do you think they would say? Justification by faith alone? Salvation in Christ alone to the glory of God alone? No. I think, they would say the reformation was about worship. Think about it. Before the reformation the worship of the church was done as a mass, and the centerpiece of the mass was the table. In the Roman Catholic understanding it was at the table, and by the priestly words, that the bread and the wine would literally become the body and blood of Christ. And when this happened Christ would be re-sacrificed anew and all those present would benefit from it. The reformers rightly saw this as what it was, heresy. So after the reformation broke out and Protestants began gathering together for worship, they put a new centerpiece in place by replacing the table with the pulpit. Because, it's in the Word of God where we encounter, meet, and reckon with God Himself. And so by placing the pulpit front and center it was a visible reminder to all present that the Word of God governs the worship of God's people. Or to say it another way, the reformation of doctrine demands the reformation of worship.

Let's now move back to the present and apply this regulative principle in light of the reformers recovery of the centrality of the Scripture. Because the Word is the only rule for faith and practice, and because His Word governs all of worship, the Bible should take center place in the worship of God's people. This is applied in many ways. While all of life is to be worship to God as we give ourselves to be living sacrifices, the heart of our personal worship is the gathered worship with the body of Christ.¹⁴⁶ So let's aim at applying this to corporate worship.

First, we should apply the regulative principle in the theology or philosophy of our worship. This first point answers the question as to what the basis of our worship is. As Westminster Confession chapter 21 states, we must not worship according to our own imaginations or preferences, but instead we must worship God in the manner God has instituted to be worshipped. We worship Him the way He wants us to, not the way we think is best. So, our theology of worship should not be based on pragmatic principles or popular trends or fads but based on what we see from God in Scripture. This means that rather than thinking about what we enjoy in worship, let's instead think about what God expects of us when we gather together to worship Him.¹⁴⁷

Second, we should apply the regulative principle in the structure of our worship. This second point answers the question of what elements to include in a worship service. Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see a variety of things taking place among the worship of God's people. We see Scripture being read, Scripture being preached, prayer, singing, offerings, sacraments, and vows/oaths. Other than this, there's not much guidance as to how to put all these things together.¹⁴⁸ God has given us a great measure

of freedom here (this is why churches can look and feel so different). For example, many passages such as Colossians 3:16, John 4:24, and 1 Corinthians 14:40 give us principles for worship, but doesn't direct how to plan our services step by step. There is one guiding principle to keep in mind. Which brings us to the last point.

Third, we should apply the regulative principle in the content of our worship. This third point answers the question of the substance of our worship from beginning to end. Everything done in the worship of God's people should be pointing towards and proclaiming the same message as the text of the sermon. In this way, everything done serves the preaching of the Word. Why do this? Because while we may be speaking to God in song or prayer throughout the service the sermon is the apex of the service where God speaks to us. In this manner we sing the Word, pray the Word, hear the Word, see the Word, and respond to the Word. If we're to continue to reformers tradition of the centrality of the pulpit, we will keep the Word the most prominent factor in our worship.

The Sacrament of Baptism

*“What the preaching of the gospel
is to our ears, the sacraments are to our eyes.”
(Dr. John Fesko)*

It is no secret that many within the Church disagree on the nature and extent of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The disagreement surrounds the method of how these are carried out, who the recipients ought to be, and even on whether we should call them sacraments or ordinances. Let me state from the beginning that I highly doubt anything I have to say on these things will solve this historical, and often volatile, debate. But I continue nonetheless.

Speaking Generally

The word sacrament comes from the Latin word ‘sacramentum’ meaning a solemn or sacred oath. Roman Catholics believe there to be seven sacraments, most Protestants only believe there to be two of them; baptism, given to us in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), and the Lord’ Supper, given to us in Jesus’ teaching in the upper room (Matthew 26:26-29). In addition to the word sacrament is the word ordinance, which simply means a statute or command Jesus ordained for the Church. The difference between these two words comes down to what we believe is happening while engaging in these activities. To prefer the title *ordinance* over the title *sacrament* generally means one believes there is no grace communicated from God to those participating in the activities themselves. To prefer the title *sacrament* over the title *ordinance* generally means one believes there is grace communicated from God to those participating in the activities themselves. I prefer to call baptism and the Lord’s Supper sacraments because I believe God strengthens us in His grace through them, but I also do not mind the term ordinance either because these two practices truly have been ordained by God for the Church.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 92. It asks, “What is a Sacrament? A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” Did you notice that both the word sacrament and ordinance are present in this definition? Though we find people rejecting one title in preference of the other, it’s good to use both in defining what they are.

We can also state generally that both sacraments function as signs and seals. Signs, in that what the preaching of the gospel is to our ears, the sacraments are to our eyes.¹⁴⁹ This means they visibly signify or show the invisible truth of God to us. In a very real sense

the sacraments are a dramatized display of the gospel. But they are also seals. Just as a ruler in ancient times would seal a document with his royal seal to communicate that the message was from him and carried his authority, so too, the sacraments are visible seals from God promising that all who receive them truly participate in the grace given through them. Paul makes this point well in Romans 4:11-12 saying, “Abraham received the *sign* of circumcision as a *seal* of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”

Speaking Specifically

There are two fundamental issues we must cover when approaching baptism. The first one is simple and is usually welcomed by all believers, while the second needs some explaining. First: we are commanded by God to embrace, believe, and teach not only what the Bible explicitly teaches, but also what the Bible implicitly teaches. Second: while the New Testament authors assumed discontinuity with Moses, they always assumed continuity with Abraham.

Like I said, few Christians will disagree with the first fundamental principle. Let me explain the second principle. All over the New Testament, various authors place Moses and the law of God, in contrast to Christ and the gospel. For example, one could say the whole point of the book of Hebrews is to teach that Jesus is better than all that’s come before. Better than the angels, better than Moses, better than the law. The author even says that Jesus deserves greater glory than Moses because His blood can do what the blood of bulls and goats could never do. For this reason Heb. 10:1 says the law was just a shadow of the greater realities to come. We could also point to Paul where he mentions we’re no longer under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14) and that the law was only given by God to chase us to the cross, that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24). Each time the Mosaic covenant is mentioned in the New Testament discontinuity is in view.

Now contrast that with how the New Testament authors speak of the Abrahamic covenant. Rather than discontinuity being in view, we only find continuity being spoken of. After Paul’s great explanation of justification by faith in Romans 3, who is his example of such faith in the very next chapter? Abraham. The largest place we see this reality is in Galatians 3 where Paul makes some marvelous statements linking Christians with Abraham. In Galatians 3:7-9 Paul says, “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Rather than being placed in opposition to the gospel, when Abraham is in view we see a continuity.

This principle leads to an implication in how we ought to interpret the New Testament in light of the Old Testament. Because the New Testament authors showed a consistent discontinuity with Moses and continuity with Abraham, we not only should read the New Testament in the same manner, we should understand that the New Testament is an

inspired commentary on the Old Testament. Or to say it another way, we should never read the Old Testament apart from the New Testament.

Now we are primed to see baptism, and no surprise we'll begin with Abraham. Follow along as I read Genesis 17:1-14 (read). You may think this is a strange place to begin discussing baptism, but as you'll see, it is very appropriate. In this passage we see God relating the details of His covenant with Abraham. This is where we learn of Abram's name change to Abraham, where we learn that God will bring many nations and kings from him, and where we learn that the Abrahamic covenant also had to do with Abraham's children. In 17:7 God said He would be God to Abraham and to his offspring after him. Then in 17:10 to confirm this covenant God commanded both Abraham and his children to be circumcised. Circumcision was thus, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and from this point on in Scripture all Israelites had the sign of the covenant put on them as children to indicate that they were part of visible Israel.

Now, when Jesus came and inaugurated the New Covenant in the great commission He gave these instructions, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Rather than giving the command to go into all the world, make disciples, and *circumcise* them, Jesus makes it crystal clear that the sign of the New Covenant is no longer circumcision, but baptism. Paul affirms this in Colossians 2:11-12 when he says, "In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

So taking a look at the whole of Scripture we see a clear connection between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism. Just as circumcision was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament, baptism is the fulfillment of it and is now the sign of the covenant in the New Testament. Most believers agree with this.

Here's the part where a large disagreement occurs. Some end right here concluding that as Abraham was made righteous by his faith in God's promise and then had the sign of the covenant put on him, that New Covenant believers are to do the same thing. Exercise faith and then and only then have the sign of the covenant put on us. That's called credobaptism or believer's baptism. It's probably not an overstatement to say the majority of evangelicals believe this. But I think the Bible takes us further than that. Just as God's promise to Abraham was for him and his descendants and just as the sign of that promise was for him and his descendants, so too the New Covenant promise and its sign is given to believers and to their children as well. Thus, here we see more continuity from the Abrahamic Covenant in the New Covenant. This position is called paedobaptism or infant baptism.

Let's take a moment to compare and contrast these two views.

First, the credo view says that infant baptism is that it's not commanded anywhere in the New Testament, and that this is why we shouldn't be doing it any longer today. The paedo view responds by saying the silence of any command against paedobaptism is actually a proof of it. If there were going to be such a drastic change in how the sign of the covenant is applied in the transition from Old to New Testaments, we would have a command to not place the sign of the covenant on our children any longer, and we don't have that anywhere, thus we're still to do it.

Second, the paedo view says that evidence of infants being baptized is that we have multiple examples of household baptisms throughout the books of Acts. The credo view responds and says of course there were household baptisms, but no one can be sure of the presence of infants in those situations., it just doesn't say.

Third, the credo view objects to paedobaptism because they believe the New Covenant to be different than the Old Covenant with Abraham. Sure it may have its roots in the Abrahamic covenant but the paedo view is too similar to or not different enough from the Abrahamic covenant. The paedo view responds by saying it is similar for sure, because it's a matter of promise and fulfillment. Rather than just having the sign of the covenant be on one nation, now the sign of the New Covenant is put on any believer from any nation.

Fourth, the credo view says along with Galatians 4:21-31 that the true children of the covenant are spiritual children (children who believe by faith) and not children of the flesh (offspring). Thus we're only to put the covenant sign on the spiritual children, not the children of our flesh. The paedo view responds by saying sure – the true children of God are indeed those who share the faith of Abraham, and who by faith are saved and enter into the promises of God. But even Ishmael received the sign of the Abrahamic covenant even though he didn't believe, so we should also place the sign of the covenant on our children when we believe like Acts 2:39 seems to indicate. Now, I ought to make something clear here. Unlike the Roman Catholics, Episcopal, some Methodist, and some Lutheran denominations who believe the infant to be saved or promised salvation one day, the reformed view denies that and says there is nothing salvific about paedobaptism at all. It's merely a sign and seal of the covenant, it doesn't bring one into that covenant.

A Recommendation

I, a fully committed paedobaptist, pastor a church that holds to credobaptism. Does this surprise you? It may at first, but hear me out before writing me off would you? Rather than being something that fights against our congregations' unity we've found this to be something that helps us work towards a greater unity. How so? In our context there are not many reformed churches so on any given Sunday we'll have a denominationally reformed mix of backgrounds present including both reformed Baptists and conservative Presbyterians. I've been told this is also the case in many reformed churches throughout Europe, where due to the lack of healthy churches, certain congregations make room for those with differing views on baptism. Because of this we open our front door of membership a bit wider and extend full membership to those coming to us from a reformed paedobaptist community without making them be rebaptized. This not only was my personal recommendation, but the recommendation of our elders as well. Why?

Where the belief in the paedobaptism does not involve baptismal regeneration or a guarantee of salvation, we do not view this belief as a weighty enough departure from Biblical teaching to exclude a person or family from membership, if those coming forward for membership meet all other relevant qualifications and are persuaded from Bible study and a clear conscience that their baptism is valid. In such a case, we believe we should not require baptism by immersion as a believer for membership, but should welcome them into our membership gladly and fully.

Let me end with words of John Bunyan, “May the time soon arrive when water shall not quench love, but when all the churches militant shall form one army, with one object – that is extending the Redeemer’s kingdom.”¹⁵⁰

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

*“What the preaching of the gospel
is to our ears, the sacraments are to our eyes.”
(Dr. John Fesko)*

Let me begin this chapter in the same way I began the last one. Many within the Church disagree on the nature and extent of the sacraments. The disagreement surrounds the method, the mode, and even on whether we should call them sacraments or ordinances. Again, I highly doubt anything I have to say on these things will solve this historical, and often volatile, debate. But I continue nonetheless.

Speaking Generally

In the previous chapter I've already spoken generally about what sacraments are, so here before speaking specifically on the Lord's Supper be reminded that what the preaching of the gospel is to our ears, the sacraments are to our eyes.¹⁵¹ This means they visibly show the invisible truth of God. The sacraments are, thus, a dramatized display of the gospel. But not only so, they are also seals from God promising that all who receive them truly participate in the grace given through them. Now, let's move onto the table.

Speaking Specifically

As with all sound doctrine we must look into the whole of Scripture to find the whole overview of any particular doctrine. And this is especially true when we come to the Lord's Supper, because its roots take us all the way back to the Exodus. Recall it was during God's redemption of Israel out of slavery in Egypt that He instituted the Passover. As the final plague was drawing near God warned His people in Exodus 12 to prepare for this moment by putting the blood of an unblemished lamb on each doorpost of their homes. The people were then to eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs in haste with their belts on and sandals on their feet. As God passed through to strike down the first born of the land of Egypt He said He would see the blood and pass over all those homes which obeyed and did this. This hasty meal was to be a memorial day feast celebrating the beginning of Israel's new year from this day forward and it was these things that each prophet of God called the people of God back to throughout the Old Covenant. Then there's a change.

As Jesus' hour was drawing near He gathered together with His disciples to celebrate this Passover one last time in Luke 22. At this meal in the Upper Room Jesus did something new. Rather than repeating what the Israelites had done for ages and ages, He changed

things. Here is how Luke recounts the moment. “And when the hour came, He reclined at table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:14-21).

As God instituted the Passover long ago for the remembrance of what He did to save Israel from the death of the first born and redeem them from slavery in Egypt, so too here Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper for the remembrance of what He was about to do to redeem God’s people from a greater slavery, greater sin, and a greater Pharaoh, Satan. Just as the Passover was to be a repeated event for Israel each year as they did life together in the land God brought them to, so too the Lord’s Supper is to be a repeated event for the Church as we do life together where God has placed us. Recall it was Satan who first said ‘take and eat’ to our first parents before they fell in Eden. It is Jesus who redeems that phrase by instituting the Supper.¹⁵² As often as the Church does this, her members see Christ’s death showed forth and are as the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 96 says, “...not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.”

While this is positively astounding to see and is itself a massive paradigm shift from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, this does bring up other questions that need answering. Questions, which no doubt have caused much debate throughout the centuries. Is Jesus present at His Supper? If so, how is He present and what exactly happens at the Lord’s table? How is the Lord’s Supper to be done rightly in the Church? Who is to take the Lord’s Supper? Are there times to refrain from partaking? To these questions we now turn.

The Question of Presence

In the early Church the Lord’s Supper was often accompanied by large feasts which at times led to some abuses with drunkenness and immorality (1 Cor. 11 shows us this). As the Church matured it was Augustine’s view was that held firm. While speaking of the correlation between the two Augustine did differentiate between the elements of bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ, which is the same as saying he differentiated between the sign and the thing signified.¹⁵³ He never taught that a change from mere bread and wine into the physical body and blood of Christ occurred at the table but this view (called transubstantiation by 1134) slowly began circulating until it was the officially adopted by the Fourth Lateran council in 1215.¹⁵⁴ In transubstantiation, Jesus is thought to be substantially and physically present in His table. This means the bread and wine undergo a change from mere bread and wine to the real body and blood of Christ even though they still look like mere bread and wine. How does this work? The moment the priest utters the words of consecration ‘hoc est corpus merum’ (meaning ‘this is my

body') the change occurs.¹⁵⁵ Afterwards the people are invited to partake. Because they viewed the Supper in this manner, no leftovers were allowed to be thrown away so the priests were required to finish all that was left. But since the common churchgoer in pre-Reformation times didn't know Latin they couldn't understand the words the priest was saying. All they heard was foreign words being repeated quickly before the sacrament, which humorously led to the phrase 'hocus pocus' being born. After the Reformation things were thankfully different, but not altogether united.

When the embers of the Reformation began to fan into flame it is wonderful to notice how much unity there was among all the reformers when it came to the abuses of Rome, the authority of Scripture, man's depravity, justification by faith alone, and the glory of Christ. But such unity did not exist when it came to the doctrines surrounding the Lord's Supper. In fact, after Luther's debates/trials with his Roman accusers, the most heated debates within the Reformation era were between fellow Protestants on the nature of the Lord's Supper as they reacted with differing degrees from the Roman position. And still to this day large differences continue to exist between Protestants. Most of us fall into one of three views.

Luther objected to the Roman view of transubstantiation by putting forth his own view called consubstantiation. Luther believed the elements of bread and wine remained mere bread and wine while simultaneously continuing to uphold that Christ's whole Person is physically present in, under, and along with His Supper. Luther would not believe anything less than the physical presence of Christ in the sacrament because of Jesus words 'this is My body.' Additionally, Luther taught that one doesn't just receive the grace put forth in the sacrament by faith, but with ones actual mouth as well. Luther is rightly critiqued on his view of the Supper because it's difficult to distinguish any real tangible difference between consubstantiation and the transubstantiation he was reacting against. For most Protestants it simply looks and feels too much the same. Lutherans today continue to embrace and teach this view and often explain it by saying Christ is present in His Supper as magnetism is present in a magnet, or as the soul is present in the body.¹⁵⁶

If Luther is critiqued for not having moved far enough away from the Roman position, the memorial view could rightly be critiqued for having moved too far away from the Roman position. The Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli is often cited as being the main proponent of this view but rightly examined it seems to be more a Socinian, Arminian, and Mennonite doctrine than a Zwinglian doctrine. In this memorial view the Supper is believed to be nothing more than a symbol or a mere commemoration truly representing spiritual truth but not conveying any grace to those who partake. Jesus is not believed to be present in the Supper physically or spiritually in any way and any benefit derived from the sacrament is determined solely by the faith or apprehension of those coming to receive it.¹⁵⁷ The majority during this day rejected this view as heretical, leaving the view almost entirely in the hands of the radical reformers and Anabaptists.

Is there a middle ground between these two views? I think there is. While Luther's view reacted too little against the Roman view and while the memorial view reacted too strongly against the Roman view, John Calvin and the majority of the other reformers took another view teaching what is called the doctrine of real presence. They believed

Jesus wasn't physically present in His Supper since His human nature is exalted at the right hand of God and can only be in one place at one time. Nonetheless, Jesus' divine nature can be everywhere at once which means Jesus is spiritually present in His Supper to meet His people and grow them in grace. This connects the Supper not only to the past work of Christ on the cross, but also to the present and future work of Christ by His Spirit in His Church. This view believed it was in the act of receiving the bread and wine rightly that God mystically communicated a life-giving influence and nourishment to the soul. This is by and large became the position of reformed congregations. To be fair, in writing on this view Calvin wasn't always as clear as he was in other places which led many during Reformation, and many today, to take up similar yet slightly different views on this.

May We Return

All this to say, most Protestants of Church history believed Christ was present in His Supper and communicated His life-giving grace to His people by that presence. Yet, ironically the majority view in the evangelical world today is the memorial view. Which suggests we don't take the Lord's Supper serious enough. Because God is present at His table, the Supper should be approached with reverence, love, and care. This is why the table must be explained in churches today. This is also why we must read the warnings in 1 Corinthians 11 placing a 'fence' around the table for two purposes. First, the fence functions to encourage repentant believers to come forward and receive and second, the fence functions to warn both unbelievers and unrepentant believers to hold back and refrain. Both of these purposes function to guard and protect the purity of the Church. Most historical catechisms and confessions include such warnings and give instructions for those who will be receiving and refraining about how to those things well. But sadly few people practice this today to avoid offending churchgoers.

Jesus didn't ordain His Supper to be a mid or post Sunday service snack for any who so desire. May we return to a high view of His table.

The Members of the Church

*“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.”
(Acts 20:28)*

Security is a booming business today.¹⁵⁸ We have sophisticated alarms in our homes. We have and continually change detailed passwords for our computers, phones, and online accounts. We have various sets of keys for our cars and offices. Airports and other public venues abound with metal detectors and security guards. And these aren't bad things are they? Of course not. We should be very eager to employ these various measures of security to keep our families, homes, cars, phones, computers, and places of work and fun safe. After all, in a fallen world we interact with fallen people who make these things are necessary.

Yet, notice one thing: almost 100% of our securities is for two purposes, to allow certain people in and to keep certain people out. These purposes points out a glaring omission among Christians. We're very concerned with having the best security in every aspect of our lives but when it comes to the security of our churches we grow extremely careless. I'm not saying that we too often leave the doors unlocked or the alarm turned off, no. I'm saying that when it comes to the spiritual security of the Church, when it comes to who we let into membership and who we keep out of membership, we are far too careless. Paul Alexander sums it up well when he says, “The password of the gospel is often not required, the key of sound doctrine seldom made necessary, the verifying signs of holiness and love left unexamined, and so the purity of the church left open to compromise.”¹⁵⁹ So how do we see to the spiritual health and security of God's Church? Two ways, church membership and church discipline.

Acts 20:28-32 is a place where from seeing the doctrine of church membership naturally flow from Paul's teaching to the elders in the Ephesian church, my prayer is that you'll be greatly served today by learning what the Bible calls us to in our life together.

As you turn there let me set the context. Luke tells us in the verses leading up to v28 that Paul called for the elders of the Ephesian church to urge them to carry out a proper and God honoring ministry. Though persecuted and hunted Paul spoke of his humility, his tears, and his teaching. He tells them God is calling him to go Jerusalem where he must finish the ministry the Lord Jesus gave to him and preach the gospel though it will likely bring greater persecution to him. Amid what had to be a tearful moment, Paul told these

elders he wouldn't see them again, he was innocent of their blood, and that he hadn't shrunk back from teaching them the whole counsel of God. It is here where we pick up on Paul's words to these elders. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

Let's consider three things. What church membership is, why church membership is urgent, and where church membership leaves our hope.

What is Church Membership?

As Paul continues on towards his final remarks to the Ephesian elders, he tells them in v28 to keep a careful watch on their own hearts and on the flock of God. By paying careful attention to the flock, they would be caring for the Church of God that He bought with His own blood. This is the call and commission for these elders in v28, and any elder in any congregation throughout the ages.

A question rises up here. Who are these elders to care for? All it says is the "flock of God." Who is this flock? It surely cannot mean all Christians, that would be way to large a task for one group of elders. So who are they to care for and exercise spiritual leadership over? Not just any flock of God found around the world, but specifically the flock of God that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers of. Did you see that detail? The Holy Spirit chose men to carefully watch a certain flock of God that God bought with His own blood. Which flock are these Ephesians to care for? The Ephesian church. The Holy Spirit placed them over the church in Ephesus and because of this they're to be pay careful attention to the flock in Ephesus, as they pay careful attention to themselves.

Here in v28 we see the principles of elder leadership explicitly. But underneath the explicit command to lead and care for the church, we implicitly also see the Christians who willingly join themselves with and submit to these leaders in the Ephesian church. Who are these people that have come to and joined the Ephesian church? The members of the Ephesian church. That's who is in view here when it says to pay careful attention to the flock of God. In other words, the leaders of the church in Ephesus are to have a special relationship to the Christians in the church in Ephesus. This relationship is one of pastoral care, where spiritual needs are attended to and met.

There are many takeaways from this passage in regards to church membership.

We see the Definition of Church Membership

Church membership is a formal relationship between a church and a Christian characterized by the church's oversight of that Christian's discipleship as well as that Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship under the care of the church.¹⁶⁰ v28 shows us this. Explicitly we see church membership from the view of the

elders here, but implicitly we can also see the same from the view of the members as well. For the elders, it is no small thing to care for the blood bought church of God. These are the very people they are responsible for before God. And the same is true from the member's view. It is no small thing to join with and submit to a local church. The elders of that church are the ones they are to be responsible to before God. For both of these groups, coming together in church membership is an agreement and the counter cultural declaration that they will not live their Christian lives in isolation from other believers, but will live their Christian lives under the care and watchful eyes of qualified elders along with other Christians.

We see the Boundaries of Church Membership.

Today some people are immediately put off by church membership because the very talk of it brings up the notion that some are 'in' and some are 'out.' This is completely understandable, no one likes to feel left out. But though understandable, we should never avoid a biblical practice so that people are less offended. Does this make you uncomfortable? Perhaps this will aid you. God has always been eager to make the distinction of who His people are and who His people are not. In Leviticus 19, Old Testament Israel is called to live holy lives, just as God is holy. In living like this God says He is pleased that His people are not characterized by the wicked living of the nations around them and thus distinct from them. You know where Leviticus 19 shows up again in the Bible? Peter quotes it in 1 Peter 1:14-16 to tell us that we as members of the church are to live holy lives, because God is holy, and that our holy living makes us distinct from the world around us. Bottom line? God calls His people to be separate and distinct. Paul even brings this up in 1 Cor. 5 when he speaks of those who are inside the church and those who are outside of the church, to indicate that there truly is a difference.

In our passage here in v28, we see the clear difference too. There are those who the elders are to care for and those who they're not to care for. Who are they to care for? Everyone who comes and joins themselves to the Church in Ephesus. Who are they not to care for? Everyone who doesn't join themselves to the Church in Ephesus. Practically speaking, this is how elders know who to spiritually care for and who to take serious responsibility for before God. Who are elders responsible for? The members. Who are they not responsible for? Everyone else. Why? Because the Holy Spirit has only made us overseers over the membership of the church and no one else.

We see this in every single book written in the New Testament after the book of Acts. Each one of these letters is written to a specific group of Christians called churches. Why do you think there are so many commands about how we're to live with and treat 'one another?' Because all the 'one another's' are to be carried out in the context of church membership. So even though you'll never find a verse in the Bible that tells you outright to become a member of a church, the Scripture assumes that's already the case.

So we've seen what church membership is, let's now see secondly why church membership is urgent.

Why Church Membership is Urgent?

After Paul counsels these elders to shepherd the members of the Ephesian flock, he continues by warning them in v29-31 saying, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.” So the urgency in church membership come from security, specifically the security of the church in allowing certain people in, and keeping certain people out. What kind of people should be let in? Those who know the gospel, love the gospel, and have been changed by the gospel. What kind of people should be kept out? Wolves. There’s something about this that even a small child can understand. In nearly every fairytale story the one of the villains is either a wolf or has wolves as they’re evil underlings or minions.

I’ll never forget the moment I first watched the movie *The Never Ending Story*.¹⁶¹ As the land of Fantasia is being destroyed by the great despairing blackness the main character Sebastian meets the great power behind the blackness. As Sebastian approaches this great power all you see is big black eyes and all you can hear is a deep throaty growl. Then the moment comes, it frightened me as kid, a great black wolf lurks out of the cave to meet Sebastian and they fight for the fate of Fantasia. One thing has always stood out to me about the wolf. His chief weapon wasn’t his enormous stature or his large claws. It was his words. It was the words of the wolf that caused the great blackness and pushed it over the whole land. And Sebastian faced the battle of ceasing to listen to the wolf and believe the truth that he already knew.

Come back now to v29-30. Notice that Paul uses the image of a wolf to describe the false teachers who creep into the church. Notice that Paul says it’s their cunning words that lead the flock astray. It’s their false teaching that infects the church and ultimately ruins the church. This is what Satan always does, twisting the truth to lead people away from God to him. Rarely do these wolves seem to be so at first, but eventually they will be seen as what they are. Christ will out them. So what do we do about these people? We go to v31 to find guidance, “Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.” How did Paul bring security to the church? How did Paul protect the flock? By allowing certain people in, and keeping certain people out. He employed alertness and pure teaching that stood as bright as the sun in contrast to the blackness the false wolves were teaching. This passage is one of the reasons why we have a slow church membership process. When wolves come, and they do come, we’ve found that they don’t normally like things that take a long time. So when we see someone attending the church or when we even see someone in the membership process who seems to be a bit wolfy we examine that person deeper, and if we find things that concern us we extend the membership process even further with them and include more and more gospel teaching and a heightened watchfulness, in the hope that these errors will be corrected and this person would repent and join the church as a sheep and not a wolf. Why do we do this? Not because we think we’re better than anyone or that our club is the best in the world, heavens no. We do this because we want to protect you, the sheep!

We’ve answered from this passage what church membership is and why it’s urgent. Now let’s see where church membership leave our hope.

Where Does Church Membership Leave our Hope?

I am asking the question ‘Where does church membership leave our hope?’ because the commands and duties described in v28-31 are daunting and require an unusual level of discernment and wisdom. Discernment and wisdom that is rare even among elders. What then is our hope in protecting the flock of God if the elders given by God naturally lack all that is necessary for the security and purity of the church? Naturally speaking, there is no hope. But supernaturally, there is every reason to hope. Why? Because the elder is what he is, and can do what he can do, because of God’s enablement alone. Knowing this leaves us in the lap of v32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

Paul’s hope for the Ephesian church isn’t the elders of the Ephesian church. What’s his hope? Two things: “I commend you to God *and* to the word of His grace.” First, Paul’s hope is in God because though God gives elders to be shepherds over His flock, He Himself is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. An elders wisdom may run out, an elders discernment may fail, an elder may not always be able to distinguish between the sheep and the wolves, but God never fails. Second, Paul’s hope is in ‘the word of His grace.’ This is either a reference to the gospel itself, which is the greatest thread of God’s grace in the Scripture, or it refers to the entire Scripture itself, which contains all the threads of grace throughout history. Paul’s hope is in these two places, for two reasons. First, God and the word of His grace is able to build us up. And Second, God and the word of His grace gives us our long awaited inheritance among the church eternal. So again, where do demands of church membership leave us? With God and the Word of His grace, which is able to do what none of us can do.

In a day where a deep commitment to anything is rare, “...one of the most countercultural things you can do is join a church and worship every week.”¹⁶² Visit around sure, find a healthy church, go regularly of course, and then quit merely attending it, and join it! Just as the goal of dating is marriage, the goal of visiting a church is joining! “If the church is a building, we are the bricks. If the church is a flock, we are the sheep. If the church is a vine, we are the branches. If the church is a body, we are the arms, legs, knees, and toes. If we’re Christians, we must be members of a church.”¹⁶³

Perhaps you think church membership is too old fashion or unbiblical. Some people think of it like that. But think of it like this. The flock of God, is the very people God obtained with His own blood. If God went to such lengths to purchase His bride, shouldn’t we go to great lengths in setting up and committing to a hefty church membership to for the security and the purity of God’s Church?

The Officers of the Church

*“The officer must do nothing that contradicts the gospel, and must do everything that commends the gospel.”
(Jeramie Rinne)*

Having just looked at who the members of the Church are, we now turn to examine who the officers of the Church are. And when we turn to this we turn to none other than Jesus Christ Himself. Ephesians 5:23 states, “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior.” Similarly Colossians 1:18 states, “And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.” To put it simply, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. There was no election. There was no vote. There were no competing candidates. There has been, is now, and always will be One at the helm of the Church. The Lord Jesus. Only He is sufficient to lead and build the Church throughout the ages. Only He is strong enough to bring the Church home to glory. Only He is the great Shepherd of the sheep. We could stop here and be done with this chapter but one of the fascinating things about Christ’s present rule and reign over the Church is that He rules in the Church through two divinely appointed offices. These two offices are the office of elder and deacon. Let’s take them in that order.

The Elder

1 Timothy 3:1-7¹⁶⁴ says, “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer¹⁶⁵, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

From this we can gather six qualifications and characteristics of elders.

A Noble Task

The word noble in 3:1 could also be translated ‘good’ or even ‘beautiful.’ Why would one someone see the office of elder as a noble, good, or beautiful task when it involves so much labor, stress, exhausting work? It’s a beautiful and noble task because it’s gospel

work, and nothing is more noble or beautiful than the gospel. Therefore the desire to be an elder is a good desire, you've got to want it, and those who want it, want a beautiful thing.

Above Reproach

Rather than instructing us to look for those who are gifted leaders, the Bible again and again puts the emphasis on the character of a man, not his ability. 10 out of 10 times it would be better to have a godly man who must learn how to lead as an elder than a charismatic leader with a history of moral failures. 'Above reproach' in 3:2-3 means the elder must do nothing that contradicts the gospel, and must do everything that commends the gospel.¹⁶⁶ The call of being above reproach is a call to be an example of Christlikeness to the Church. Seeking to not only avoid evil, but avoid the appearance of evil. This is what the word blameless is getting at. The elder is to be a peacemaker rather than a fire starter, a gentle giant rather than a proud talker, a tender warrior rather than a troublemaker, a lion-hearted and lamblike leader rather than a totalitarian general. The elder is to be like Christ.

Able to Teach

3:2 contains a qualification we often forget. Right there in the middle of the verse it says '...able to teach...' It's at this point we come across of the most untaught truths on elders. Many people think the pastor is the CEO while the elder's are his board of directors or trustees, wrong. In the New Testament there's not an office of pastor, we only find two offices: elder and deacon. The biggest difference between the two is that elders are to be 'able to teach.' This means elders are pastors and because they're pastors they must be teachers. That elders must be able to teach means elders must participate in the teaching ministry of the church (the pastor shouldn't be the only one you hear from) and elders must protect the teaching ministry of the church. Titus 1:9 confirms this. Elders must "...hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." The elder must recognize truth from error and when he sees error he must warn the church through sound instruction. In this way, the elders defend and protect the church. One last thing in regard to this. Though all elders are to be able to teach, not all elders are called to mainly teach. 1 Timothy 5:17 seems to speak of two kinds of elders. Those who rule well and those who rule well and labor in preaching and teaching. This distinction is what leads some denominations to have the distinction between pastors and elders, or teaching elders and ruling elders.

Family Life

3:4-5 show that a man's family life tells us much about who the man really is. He must be a 'one-woman man,' a devoted, faithful, loving, caring towards, and respected by his wife. Also, the elder must also be a devoted father, a loving father, who wields a strong yet caring hand, who recognizes that the children are not his friends but his children and not the center of the family. As parents submit to God, his children must submit to him. It's his calling to teach his family the Scripture as they go about life. And he must not only teach his children in word, he must show them the truth in his life. Bottom line: if the elder is to be a pastor within the church, he must first be a pastor within his home.¹⁶⁷

Public and Private Maturity

The elder must be a mature man, not a new believer, or an immature believer. The warning is clear in 3:6-7: if a new believer, or an immature believer is made an elder, he'll quickly become puffed up with pride and will fall into the condemnation of the devil. Notice that this maturity must not only be evident to the man himself in private but it must be evident to those who do life with him, believers and unbelievers. The elder is to be a man who is thought well of, who is respected, who lives out the gospel in the church and out of the church.

Male

Perhaps it should be obvious by now but let me say it clearly. God has called men to be elders within the church. Paul has linked leading in the Church to leading in the family, and just as God has called men to lead their own families, God also calls men to lead in the church family. Does this mean men are better than women? Of course not. This does mean that since Genesis 1 God has created men and women equal but with different roles to play. Men are to humbly lead while women are to humbly follow. After the fall, who did God first call to account? Adam. He was the leader, thus he was called to account. Created equal, with complementary roles to play, each having our own characteristics of masculinity and femininity that both show the glories of God.

Taking all six of these things into account we can sum up the call of an elder by saying God shepherds His Church through them.

The Deacon

Acts 6:1-7 says, "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

The Church was growing at an exceptionally fast rate and the apostles found themselves hindered in their calling to the ministry of the Word and prayer. Why? Because certain people were being overlooked by other people in the daily distribution of food and because there was no one else to attend to these things, the apostles did. What did they do? They decided to choose seven men who had three qualifications: men who were of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and full of wisdom. These were the first deacons, and from this point on in the early Church anytime Paul or another biblical author uses the word 'diakonos' we have the office of deacons in view.

Some may critique me in this chapter for spending such a large amount of space on the elder and such little on the deacon but I only have a few things to say about deacons because the character requirements and qualifications are almost exactly the same as that of the elder. Paul makes this clear by continuing on in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 by saying, “Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

See the difference in that deacons, while being held to almost the exact same character standards as elders, are not required to be able to teach. Taking this passage and Acts 6 into account we conclude that while the elder is an office of rule, the deacon is an office of service. And while the office of elder is reserved for men, the office of deacon is extended to men and women. This is not clear in Acts 6 or 1 Timothy 3, but it is clear in Romans 16:1. Here Paul uses the Greek ‘diakonos’ meaning deacon rather than ‘doulos’ meaning servant to describe Phoebe. I think he chose this word because Phoebe was indeed a deaconess in the early Church.

How these differences play out in the life of the Church is that while the elders are busy ruling over and shepherding the members, the deacons are busy serving the members physical needs as well as the needs of the overlooked. It would be an error to have the deacons rule over the church, just as it would be wrong to view deacons as junior elders. These two offices are just that. Two offices ordained, instituted, and used by God to provide for, govern, lead, teach, discipline, and protect His Church.

So to end let me just say this: the life of the elders and deacons are so important because overtime what the leaders are will be what the church becomes.

The Mission of the Church

*“Matthew 28:18 is the highest statement
of Christology in the entire Bible.”
(Matthew Osborne)*

We have covered many things concerning the doctrine of the Church over the past several chapters. The nature of the Church, the images of the Church, marks of the Church, worship of the Church, the sacraments, the members, and even the officers of the Church. Here we finish our journey through ecclesiology with an examination of the mission of the Church.

Sooner or later the question ‘What is the mission of the Church?’ is something every Christian asks. We ask this question because a Christian, by definition, is a new creation. And the most fundamental thing about a new creation is that by God’s work we are now, new. This means at the moment of the new birth, a new life begins, and God intends our new life to be lived out among the new community called the Church. Once involving ourselves in the membership of the Church we begin to grow in our knowledge of the Church’s mission. Or to say it another way, once we’ve been inside the Church long enough we begin to understand that God has called the Church to one certain task above all other tasks. This task is the mission of the Church.

But with the rise of the term missional, I’m afraid it is now a bit more difficult to discern the chief task God calls the Church to do. Such that almost everything the Church does is seen as its mission. To worship God is our mission. To study the Bible is our mission. To pray is our mission. To disciple is our mission. To care for those in need is our mission. Being missional is helpful in that it reminds us that everything we do carries a deep sense of purpose along with it. John Stott states that mission isn’t all the Church does, but “...everything the church is sent into the world to do.”¹⁶⁸ But being missional can be less the helpful because when everything the Church does is part of our mission, it can be puzzling to know if God even gives or calls the Church one supreme task above all others.

So we come back to the question, ‘What is the mission of the Church?’ And when looking for the chief or supreme task and activity God has given to the Church, when looking for the mission we’re to give ourselves to we need look no further than Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always.”

Taking a closer look at this commission shows us that there are three things¹⁶⁹ to see here: submitting to the Authority of Christ, following the Command of Christ, and enjoying the Presence of Christ.

Submitting to the Authority of Christ

The authority of Christ is large theme throughout the gospel of Matthew. For example in it we see Jesus healing, casting out demons, teaching with authority, as well as forgiving sin. So when we read here of the authority of Christ in 28:18 it's not a new authority we see. We've seen His authority all along. But because of His resurrection He does now have a new level of authority, indeed the highest possible authority.¹⁷⁰ Because of this, first and foremost, the one reason Jesus Christ can say that He has been given all authority is because He and He alone is the resurrected Lord. He is One who has an unending Kingdom, and He is the One with everlasting dominion. At the beginning of Matthew 28 Jesus was in the tomb and when He rose v3-4 says, "His appearance was like lightning, and His clothing was white as snow. And for fear of Him the guards trembled and became like dead men." When the stone rolled away from the tomb everything changed. We are no longer free to ignore Jesus as a mere teacher or prophet, we must recognize and submit to Him as the very Lord of all.

Matthew Osborne rightly states that Matthew 28:18 is the highest statement of Christology in the entire Bible.¹⁷¹ All of the great Christological passages of the New Testament (Col. 1:15-20, Phil. 2:5-11, and Heb. 1:1-3) exists because Matthew 28:18 came first. Jesus has all authority. Therefore all men must humble themselves before Him. Perhaps you've heard someone say, or perhaps you yourself have once said that 'you made Jesus Lord of your life.' Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus isn't made Lord by our approval and authorization, He is Lord. He doesn't become God over us when we give Him permission, He is God over us. This means when we repent of sin and turn to Him in faith we are not accepting Him into our lives. No. When we repent of sin and turn to Him in faith, we become acceptable to Him. Do not miss this: the Lord Jesus holds all authority over heaven and earth.

Following the Command of Christ

Because Jesus holds all authority He has the right to do whatever pleases Him, and it pleases Him to command us to go and disciple the nations. v19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..." David Platt says of this commission, "This is not a comfortable call inviting most Christians to come, be baptized, and sit in one location. This is a costly command directing every Christian to go, be baptized, and make disciples of all nations."¹⁷² As the first Adam was commanded by God to exercise dominion and spread God's image with his helpmate Eve, so too, now the Second and Last Adam Jesus Christ is exercising His dominion by spreading His own image around the world through His helpmate the Church.

This does indeed mean that the mission of the Church is to go spread the gospel of Christ and disciple with the gospel of Christ to the uttermost ends of the earth among every

people group. But it also means ‘as we go’ about our life we should be about the business of the Kingdom of God wherever we find ourselves to be. Just because some may feel urged to go to the hard places of the world to spread the gospel, it does not mean the rest of the Church has no commission responsibility. We’re all to be about the work of the commission in our own contexts. Or Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Some have interpreted this Great Commission in such a way as to lessen the importance of working hard to alleviate suffering around the world. We should not do this, but we should keep things in the proper perspective. Yes we care about suffering, yes we care about homelessness, yes we care about the quality of food and water, yes we care about slavery of all kinds, and yes we care about serving those in need. But, if we attend to these important physical needs while neglecting the most important spiritual need of all people we sin. All of the Church, throughout all generations, is to chiefly and supremely be about the business of baptizing and teaching disciple making disciples. The Church should be concerned with getting the whole counsel of God to the whole world. Whatever else we do as the Church in this world pales in comparison to this mission.

Remember, the One commanding us to this mission has all authority in heaven and earth. Who He is and what He has done is the very message we’re to be spreading. And because He is worthy of all worship for who He is and the work He has done John Piper is exactly right to say, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the unredeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity.”¹⁷³

Depending on the Presence of Christ

Lastly, upon whom do we depend in this chief mission of the Church? How do we know this mission will succeed? Are we banking on our own ingenuity or on our own methods? Are we relying on our own stick-to-itiveness and endurance to make it to the end? Are we trusting in our own resources to spread this message to all peoples? No, v20 shows us what we must depend on, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Jesus promises to always be with us. Matthew begins and ends in the same way. The announcement of Immanuel (God with us) began the book, and now the promise of the presence of the resurrected Lord forever ends the book.

To sum all of this up, in submitting to the authority of Christ, following the command of Christ, while depending on the presence of Christ the Church finds and fulfills its chief mission of discipling the nations. All of His authority, to all of the nations, teaching all that He commanded, with all of His presence.¹⁷⁴

Church, take hope. This mission cannot fail.

Summit 7

Eschatology – Doctrine of Last Things

An Introduction to Eschatology

*“The apostle Paul arrived at the conclusions he did throughout his letters not because he was a theological innovator but because he knew his Old Testament very well.”
(Derek Thomas)*

It has taken us a long time to get to this final summit of systematic theology, but we’re here at last. The word eschatology comes from the Greek word ‘eschaton.’ Used throughout Scripture in various forms and tenses this word means last things. So when coupled with the ending ‘ology’ eschatology means the study of, or the doctrine of the ‘last things.’

Though eschatology deals with many things, the sum and substance of eschatology is that “Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven and promised to physically return on the last day in order to raise the dead, judge the world, and then create a new heaven and new earth.”¹⁷⁵ It indeed has much to say about the future, but what is often overlooked is that eschatology also has to do with both the past and the present as well. Because of this, we’ll spend time in both Testaments to gain clarity as to the nature and prominence the Scripture gives to eschatology. But before we dive into these things, I should make it clear that in these chapters I’ll be taking the viewpoint of covenantal amillennialism. This view, which I believe to be biblical view, is often contrasted with the dispensational premillennial view, and for good reason. The two views present vastly different interpretations of not only the end times but the rest of Scripture as well. I will compare and contrast these views some when it is necessary to make a distinction for the sake of clarity, but I’ll mainly be covering the covenantal view here.

How shall we begin this endeavor? With five introductory statements.¹⁷⁶

First, Israel’s prophetic hope is found in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ as well as in the Church. This is to say that all of the Old Testament’s prophecies and promises are fulfilled in Jesus and His Church, and once fulfilled we’re not waiting for any future fulfillment to come.

Take for example, Jesus as the fulfillment of the Temple. In John 1:14 the Word did not only become flesh, it says “He became flesh and dwelt among us...” This phrase doesn’t just mean He resided or settled among us, it means far more. In the closing chapters of Exodus we see God confirm and renew the covenant He made with Abraham to the people of Israel, we see God give Israel detailed instructions for the tabernacle, for all the

items that would go inside the tabernacle, and for the priestly garments. God says these things were to be made for beauty and for glory. God commanded all these various things and the tabernacle to be made because He intended to dwell among, or to be present with, His people through the tabernacle in their wilderness wanderings. After Israel obeyed and made these things, God's glory, the shekinah glory of God, came down and filled the tabernacle, bringing a terrible and awesome joyful fear among the people.

Now go back to John 1:14. That phrase 'dwelt' is the Greek word 'eskonosen' which literally means 'tabernacled' or 'tented' among us. So just as God formerly dwelt and made His presence known among His people in the tabernacle, now God dwells and makes His presence known in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. And more so, just as the result of God dwelling among His people in the tabernacle was a display of God's glory, did you notice what the rest of v14 says? There is another and greater display of glory in our current wilderness of this fallen world. "And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John is making clear that because God has tabernacled among us in Jesus, God's glory is now revealed to us and has truly taken up residence among us in the Person of Jesus. Which means, Jesus is the true shekinah glory of God. Or we could say it all another way: God used to come, filling the tabernacle with His glory, to speak with Moses face to face. Now God has come to speak with His people and reveal His glory in a vastly more intimate way, as Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:6, in the face of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all the Old Testament symbolism of God dwelling with man in the tabernacle and the temple, all that God hinted at in a dim and imperfect fashion is now fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

Thus, we're not looking for a physical temple to be rebuilt in national Israel today that marks the beginning of the end times. God no longer lives in a temple or tent or tabernacle, and He won't ever return to one. Divine space is no longer confined or located or seen in a place, but a Person. Now, it is entirely possible that modern day Israelites may build a new temple and take up the Old Testament sacrificial system again within it. If that happens, though it may cause all sorts of political and religious turmoil, it will have zero theological significance. To think God would do that to mark the beginning of the end of all things is to make a backward move in redemptive history.¹⁷⁷ The only temple God now dwells in and will dwell in forevermore is His Son. And adding glory to glory, Jesus is now by the Holy Spirit making His Church into a new spiritual temple as we embrace the gospel, treasure it above all things, and spread it to all peoples.

You could also see this first principle in Jesus being the fulfillment of all the priests, all the prophets, all the kings, all the feasts, all the ceremonies, even the Sabbath itself. He is the Person all of the Old Testament points to and finds its fulfillment in.

Second, the biblical authors view the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes as one act in two phases. That is to say, God's redemptive purposes and His Kingdom truly came with the first advent of Christ, but will finally and fully come with the second advent of Christ. Which means, we now find ourselves in the 'overlapping of the ages.'

The time commonly referred to as the 'last days' begins with the first advent of Christ and ends with the second advent of Christ. We're not waiting for the end times to come upon us one day in the future, we're here in them now.

Take one example from Genesis 49 when Jacob was blessing his sons. To his son Judah he says in 49:8-10, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." In this blessing is the promise that all Israel will submit to and bow before Judah's descendant. Judah is called a lion that holds a scepter, which is an instrument of rule. And this ruling or kingly scepter will remain in the house of Judah until one of Judah's descendants comes to take it, and once this coming one takes it, the obedience of the peoples will be to him. This promise is fulfilled and confirmed in the Davidic covenant, but it's ultimately fulfilled in the royal reign of Jesus Christ.

Now go back to 49:1 and notice Jacob says all these things will take place 'in days to come' or in Hebrew 'in the last days.' So what happens to mark the beginning of the last days? Jesus Christ, the long awaited descendant of Judah will come, and take the up the scepter to rule. Some say this refers to the second advent of Christ when He will come to judge the world and usher in His Kingdom. I disagree and believe this to be speaking of the first advent and not the second. Why do I think this is referring to the first advent? Because Hebrews 1:1-3 confirms that the last days began when God began speaking (revealing Himself) through His Son. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." So, when Jesus was born He brought His Kingdom with Him, He began exercising His rule in part, and the last days began. These last days will end the moment Jesus returns for the second time to judge the world and usher His Kingdom in full. Therefore in this sense we see that there is an 'already but not yet' tension in our current time. We have been saved (Eph. 2:8), justified (Rom. 5:1), adopted (1 John 3:1), resurrected (Rom. 6), glorified (Rom. 8:30), and redeemed (Eph. 1:4), and yet we await the day when we will be saved (Rom. 5:10), justified (Rom. 2:13), adopted (Rom. 8:23), resurrected (1 Cor. 15), glorified (Phil. 3), and redeemed (Rom. 13:11).¹⁷⁸

Third, an implication of these first two points is that the New Testament is God's inspired commentary on the Old Testament.

Hence, Jesus can say the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms all speak of Him on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:27 and 24:44. Which leads Sam Storms to say, "Old Testament authors prophesied of events that would occur in a distant time and in a new world inaugurated by Jesus. From their original context they might not fully grasp how their words would find fulfillment in a history radically transformed by the coming of Christ."¹⁷⁹ So, the New Testament shows how Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled at Christ's first coming, and how they are then ultimately fulfilled at Christ's second

coming. The authoritative guide to understanding and interpreting the Old Testament is the New Testament. Dr. Derek Thomas once told us students at Reformed Theological Seminary that the reason the apostle Paul arrived the conclusions he did throughout his letters not because he was a theological innovator, but because he knew his Old Testament very well.

Fourth, when it comes to prophecy we should remember that “our ideas about things we have never experienced are largely controlled by things we have experienced.”¹⁸⁰

This fourth, like the third statement gives us more background on the original intentions of the biblical authors. When the Old Testament authors sought explain a future they hadn't lived in, they explained it with images and language from the world they did live in. For example Isaiah 2:4 speaks of a time when God's people will “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” Did Isaiah mean that one day we will literally hammer out weapons of war into tools for agriculture? Or is it more likely that Isaiah is speaking metaphorically of a time when God will bring such a lasting peace that war will be no more? I think the metaphorical reading is the correct one. But see that Isaiah describes this future with words and images from his own time.

This brings us face to face with a larger issue which many people wrongly interpret when it comes to the biblical language: the meaning of metaphor. On the surface of every metaphor there is an untruth used to teach a truth.¹⁸¹ If a college student says ‘That class was a breeze’ they do not literally mean the class itself was a light wind, they intend to communicate the easy nature of this class. Or if I say neglecting true and sound doctrine is a ‘slippery slope’ I do not mean that you'll literally slip and fall down a slope. No. I intend to communicate the grave hazard it is to neglect the sound teaching of the Bible. All of this to say two things: first, to approach the Bible using a ‘wooden literalism’ is to interpret the Scripture in a manner God never intended. Second, to approach the Bible understanding the metaphorical nature of prophetic and apocalyptic passages is to interpret the Scripture in the manner God intended. I do think most of the errors interpreting the book of Revelation misunderstand this very thing.

Fifth, typology and eschatology go hand in hand.

In Romans 5:14 Paul says, “...Adam was a type of the one who was to come.” This word ‘type’ in Greek is *tupos* which means ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ or ‘example.’ Typology then, is the study and recognition of certain types (people, actions, institutions) in the Old Testament that are complemented and transcended in the New Testament.¹⁸² So in Romans 5:14 we see that Adam is a type of Jesus Christ. Since this is the case, we should learn much of the Person and Work of the second Adam Jesus Christ by looking at the person and work of the first Adam. We can learn much of the Church, or the helpmate of Christ, by looking at Eve, Adam's helpmate. We can learn much of heaven by looking at the promise land of Canaan. Types of all kinds abound in the Old Testament and they all find their fulfillment in the New Testament. We can not only learn much in this way, but often the New Testament authors will specifically point out that these former Old Testament patterns existed in order to prepare the way for the greater reality to come. Now, to bring this back to eschatology. Of all the books in the New Testament do you know which one contains the most quotations, references, and allusions of the Old

Testament? The book of Revelation. Thus, one cannot properly understand eschatology if we don't know of typology. Or to say it another way, the more we know our Old Testament, the more glory we'll see in the New.

These five introductory statements will do much to help guide us in our study of eschatology. Let's begin!

Death

*“For the wages of sin is death...”
(Romans 6:23)*

Mankind has a host of problems to deal with in life. Some of the major ones we've got to deal with are: nuclear weapons, war, disease, population increase, cleaner and more sustainable energy, terrorism, injustice, domestic and global economic crisis, hunger, poverty, and clean water around the world. Some would dare to include other problems like: tangled ear bud cords, running out of siracha, and posting something on Facebook only to receive a couple of likes. But above these ridiculous first world problems, and above these real global problems man encounters in this life, one problem rises to the top that every man will one day have to face: death. That statistics will always stand, 10 out of 10 die. Regardless what man in his scientific genius accomplishes in this life the reality of death awaits us all. Of death R.C. Sproul says, “Death is the greatest problem human beings encounter. We may try to tuck thoughts of it away in a far corner of our minds, but we cannot completely erase our awareness of our mortality. We know that the specter of death awaits us.”¹⁸³

All the way back in the beginning God told the man Adam and the woman Eve in Genesis 2:16-17, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” They could eat of any tree they so desired as they did life in the garden God had made for them. But they believed the word of the serpent over the Word of God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Upon sinning that first time they spiritually died and became unfit to be in God's presence, so they were banished from the garden. But spiritual death wasn't only in view. Up until the point they ate the fruit they were going to be with God for all time, but now that they had fallen, physical death would one day come to them. Paul speaks of this sad moment in Romans 5:12-18 where he says sin came into the world through Adam, and death through sin, which led to death spreading to all men. Thus we read God's pronouncement upon our first parents in Genesis 3:19, “...for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Therefore, the origin of spiritual and physical death is sin.

But let's stop and make sure we understand something about death. “Life and death are not opposed to each other as existence and non-existence, but are opposites only of different modes of existence.”¹⁸⁴ Or to say it another way, in death there truly is something that dies, but not all of us dies. The body ceases to be, but the soul lives on in a different mode of existence. This means all mankind, among all the nations of the world, throughout all of history will exist for all eternity. Or to say it even simpler, once

created, the soul never ceases to be.

I recall an opportunity I had to attend the funeral of a family friend. Many were gathered to honor this man's life, memories were shared and tears were shed inside the church and throughout the few days we came together. But for me, the most poignant moment of the whole funeral, the moment filled with sobering reality, was when we gathered around the gravesite for the burial. I knew once the casket went into the ground that this man wasn't coming back out. The finality of the moment was thick. It seemed impossible to escape. The unbelieving worldview simply thinks of death as the last part of a natural process but standing there watching the casket and hearing the sobs of the loved ones I didn't feel anything of natural order. It made me feel that death is a cruel master, waiting to carry out its sentence on all of us one day where it will harshly sever the unity of body of soul. Perhaps this is why Louis Berkhof mentions that "...death is something foreign and hostile to human life: an expression of divine anger, judgment, condemnation, and a curse."¹⁸⁵ I think we feel such things at moments like this because death wasn't part of our original state before God. We were made to live with Him forever but because we chose to sin by rebelling against God's command all of us now will (because of God's judgment on us for our sin) feel the pang of death one day. That is, unless Jesus returns first.

But see the beauty of the grace of God in that while He could've put forth an exact judgment as soon as Adam and Eve ate the fruit, ending humanity once and for all, He didn't. In His common grace He restrains the full effects of sin and death, and adding glory upon glory, in His special grace to His people He has conquered sin and death through the work of Christ. So it is true what many preachers have said throughout the ages, "Believers are born twice and die only once while unbelievers are born only once and die twice." Is this not the outworking of Romans 6:23? "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." The wages, or payment, of sin is death. So all those who remain in sin and unbelief will experience death in hell forever. While all those who forsake sin and believe will experience life in heaven forever.

In Philippians 1:21-24 Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."

When it comes to death, these words from the pen of the Apostle Paul do much to show us the biblical nature of death. For Paul to live is Christ. This means in his life Paul can proclaim the name of Christ where He has not been named. It means he can plant churches and establish elders. It means he can minister to the saints as he goes back to all the churches he's planted to see how they're doing as well as visit other churches that he hasn't planted to see how they're doing. For Paul, "to live is Christ" means fruitful labor in the kingdom of God. But while most people in the world tend to view life and death with the categories of good and bad, Paul here views life and death not as good and bad, but as good and better. All of Paul's fruitful ministry is good and glorious work to be involved in. But for him there is something better than that. What's better? To be with Christ Himself. He even says here in this passage that it is "far better" to go and be with

Christ, and that this is his true desire. Yet, even though he is hard pressed between these two options, and desired to go and be with Christ, he knows it is necessary to remain for the Philippian church.

What is true for Paul here in this passage, ought to be true for every believer in every generation. God has saved us and given us the ministry of reconciliation, sending us into the world with the message of the gospel as He sent His Son into the world with the message of the gospel. For us, to live is Christ. For us, to live is to be involved in fruitful ministry. But even as good as fruitful ministry is, for us there is something better. Being with Jesus Himself. Yes for us to live is Christ, but to die is gain because being with Christ is far better. This means for the believer the best is always yet to come. But this also means, for the believer, being with Christ in the end means going through death first.

The Puritan pastors used to teach their congregations to think on death often for the sake of gaining the right perspective in our current lives. Many of Jonathan Edwards' resolutions show this, but the place I didn't expect to see it was in the Puritan prayer book, the *Valley of Vision*. Part of the prayer entitled *Sleep* reads, "May my frequent lying down make me familiar with death, the bed I approach remind me of the grave, the eyes I now close picture to me their final closing. Keep me always ready, waiting for admittance to thy presence... I retire this night in full assurance of one day awaking with thee."¹⁸⁶ For the Puritans, our earthly life is only the title page and table of contents, preparing us to for chapter 1 of the never ending book that is eternity with God. May the same be true of us as well.

This brings us to our last question. Since the wages of sin is death, and Jesus bore our sin as our substitute, absorbing the wrath of God in our place, since that is true, why do believers still have to physically die? Why can't God just take us to heaven when we're saved or sometime before physical death occurs since believers have no more wages for sin to pay? This is a good question, and there are good reasons why God ordains for most of us to go through physical death.¹⁸⁷

For Witness

This first reason God allows His children to experience physical death is for witness. By witness I mean just that – evangelistic witness. If we are born again and immediately taken to heaven who would preach the gospel, who would share the gospel, who would gather with the Church? In fact, if God took us away upon conversion there wouldn't be any Church left on earth, and if there is no Church left on earth, there is no way the great commission would be engaged in, let alone finished. By saving us and leaving us here God gives us the opportunity to be a witness to truth throughout our lives.

For Humility

The second reason God allows His children to experience physical death is for humility. Nothing humbles the pride of man than an awareness of an impending death. Even if God's providence brings you death years into the future, the knowledge that death will one day come and bring your life on earth to an end, does much to bring one's life into focus. That all mankind: rich and poor, young and old, male and female will one day die

is a great equalizer.

For Holiness

The third reason God allows His children to experience physical death is for holiness. I said just now that death brings one's life into focus. The peripheral things get pushed away and the chief things of man come into prominence. And among those chief things that come into prominence, knowing and pleasing God becomes most prominent because He is ultimately the One we must reckon with in the end of all things. Therefore, an awareness of death in the end will lead one to have a greater zeal for holy living in the present.

For Heavenly Mindedness

The fourth reason God allows His children to experience physical death is for heavenly mindedness. In Colossians 3:1-4 Paul makes this point stating, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

The big idea Paul is getting is that we live this life rightly by considering, inclining our heart to, and wholeheartedly entertaining the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Paul doesn't just mean thinking of heaven all the time, he means for us to set our minds on Christ, who is seated above at the right hand of God. So to set our minds on things above means using all of our energy to know Christ, continually seeking to mature in Christ, getting out there and pursuing the lost with the message of Christ, reading and meditating on God's Word to grow in the knowledge of Christ, devoting ourselves to prayer to draw closer to Christ, and giving our lives to the service of the Church following the example of Christ. To flip the popular saying, "The only way to be of any earthly good is to be heavenly minded."

Let me leave you with a quote from Louis Berkhof. "Death is not the end for believers, but the beginning of a perfect life. They enter death with the assurance that its sting has been removed, and that it is for them the gateway of heaven."¹⁸⁸

The Immortality of the Soul

*“For while we are still in this tent, we groan,
being burdened—not that we would be unclothed,
but that we would be further clothed, so that what is
mortal may be swallowed up by life.”
(2 Corinthians 5:4)*

In the last chapter we saw that death is a hostile event for man, unnatural to us, in which, the body and soul are violently separated. We also mentioned that death marks the end of our earthly bodies, and after saying that I made a brief comment that even though the body is done away with and goes back to the dust, the soul continues to live on. Here, I want to explore that more with you as we look at the immortality of the soul.

Generally speaking, though there are always thinkers who deny it throughout history, in every nation, people, tribe, and tongue regardless of religious belief and quality of life there has always been a belief in the immortality of the soul. This fact leads most theologians to conclude that this belief is fundamental part of human nature. Plato taught that upon death the physical body dissolves into parts while the soul remains intact and cannot be dissolved into parts because it is spiritual in nature and not physical. C.S. Lewis argues in *Mere Christianity*, that “...if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world.”¹⁸⁹ By stating this Lewis is saying God gave men certain qualities (talents, aspirations, longings, etc.) that will not reach fruition in this world, and that from recognizing such realities he concludes that God has made another world where these qualities will reach their full potential, a world where we’ll live with Him forever. We could also speak of the lack of justice on the wicked. Our consciences testify that too often the evil grow in their evil deeds and those who suffer too often increase in sorrow in this life. Psalm 73 is a perfect example of this reality. That this is so often the case has led many to a belief in an afterlife where the wicked and the righteous receive what they’re due. Generally speaking, these thoughts sum up man’s opinions about why there must be an immortal state after this life and what that life entails.

Now, let’s get a bit more specific and go to the Scripture to see these things. But let me first give a caution.¹⁹⁰ The Bible speaks about the immortality of the soul in a similar manner as it speaks about the existence of God. While you cannot find a passage that explicitly lays out in argument for God’s existence in Scripture, any aware reader of the Bible will find that the Bible assumes God’s existence. Similarly, while you cannot find a passage that explicitly lays out in argument for the immortality of the soul in Scripture,

any aware reader of the Bible will find that the Bible assumes the soul's immortality. Or to say it another way, it speaks as if it's already a given.

So let's ask what appears to be a simple question on the surface. How does the Bible define the term immortality? This may seem simple on the surface but when seeking to answer the question it shows itself to be anything but.¹⁹¹ We could use the term immortality in the sense that Paul uses the word in 1 Timothy 6 where speaking of God he says, "...He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion forever. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Here Paul makes it clear that it is God who *alone* has immortality, and because He alone has immortality He is the only Sovereign, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, to whom belongs honor, weight, and glory forever. If anyone one else has existence, that existence comes from the God who has always existed. All others had a beginning, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit never did.

But, since this passage clearly states God alone has immortality, does this imply that no one else will experience or have immortality? That answer from the Bible is clearly no. Adam and Eve could rightly be considered immortal beings before the fall. If they had obeyed God's command and abstained from eating the fruit they would've continued to be immortal. But they chose poorly. So now upon physical death the body does return to dust (Gen. 3:19). But we know, because of the work of Christ, the souls of believers gain a blessed conscious immortality with Christ in glory while the souls of unbelievers gain a horrific conscious immortality apart from Christ in hell. So yes God alone has immortality in the sense that only He has always been and never had a beginning. But also no, God is not the only One who has or experiences immortality because in another sense we too have immortality. The difference between our immortality and God's is that ours is a created immortality. God's immortality is such that He always has been, is now, and always will be while our immortality is such that believers, once in glory, are "impervious to death and cannot possibly become its prey" ever again.¹⁹² Paul makes this clear in his second letter to Timothy when he says Christ Jesus "...abolished death and brought life and *immortality* to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10).

We can see the immortality of the soul in these ways:

Man in the Image of God

Man, as opposed to all the other creatures God made, was made different. Genesis 1:26-27 says God made man in His own image. This does mean mankind is higher than the beasts because man has the ability to reason and ponder his own existence. Implied in this as well is the truth that mankind is higher than the beasts because man was made to commune with God, to worship God, to glorify God. How does man find out about the purpose he was made? God has placed eternity in his heart (Ecc. 3:11). Nowhere does the Bible give us any hint that God places eternity in any of the other creatures He made. That man is made in God's image, and that God is eternal and immortal necessarily implies man, and man alone, will also have an eternal and immortal existence.

The Presence of Sheol and Glory

Throughout the Old Testament we see the wicked go to a place called sheol. We'll discuss the nature of sheol later on in our study of eschatology, for now, just notice it's presence. In Psalm 49:14-15 the Sons of Korah declare, "Like sheep they (foolish man in his pomp, see v5-13) are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me." Here sheol is explained as a place of judgment not blessing. There is even a contrast to the wicked who are appointed for sheol and the upright who will rule over them. Then in v15 the Psalmist gladly declares that God will rescue him from such judgment. That the place of sheol exists and that it is contrasted with a place of blessing throughout the Scriptures, implies that man has an immortal existence apart from the body after death. In the New Testament we see a similar reality being taught. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says, "And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." The contrast between Satan who can only kill the body and God who can destroy both soul and body in hell assumes the soul of man continues on after physical death. Likewise in Luke 23:43 Jesus tells one of the thieves next to Him on the cross, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise." Both Jesus' and this thief's body will expire very soon, but that Jesus pronounces the presence in paradise implies their souls lived on. Lastly a passage where no comment is needed, John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet he shall live..."

Confident and Delightful Expectation

The immortality of the soul is also seen in the numerous passages that speak of the confident and delightful expectation of the righteous. Job 19:25-27, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has thus been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" Psalm 16:9-11, "Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Paul in 2 Cor. 5:1-5 speaks of the same expectation saying, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." Here the tent that is our earthly home is our body and the building from God eternal in the heavens is our entire glorified state. So while is here in this body he is longing to be clothed with the eternal, "...that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." We could also point to Paul's monumental boast that is the entirety of Romans 8, where he delights in the no condemnation, no separation grace of God that will one day end in future glory where the sons of God will be revealed. These confident and delightful declarations of expectation imply the soul's continuance after physical death.

Do not be duped.¹⁹³ The activity of the soul is not a mere by-product of brain function that ceases when the brain dies with the body. We cannot after death live on in this life through our children and grandchildren though we love them dearly and will in a sense always remain in their hearts. Even if we make a name for ourselves in this life and leave behind a lasting and famous legacy or influence, we cannot after death live on inspiring many, eventually we all will one day be forgotten.

That our souls will continue on for all eternity ought to sober us in this life. Indeed, living in light of eternity brings our present existence much clarity about what really matters.

The Intermediate State

“Since...purgatory is built on so very many blasphemies and is everyday reinforced by even bigger ones, creating untold scandals, it should never be ignored.”

(John Calvin)

In 1562 Zacharias Ursinus, who was born on July 18, 1534, was asked to draft a new catechism by and for Frederick III. Ursinus, then a professor at the University of Heidelberg, began work immediately and one year later the Heidelberg Catechism was published. It was received so well it was soon translated into Latin, Dutch, French, and English. Since it's publishing it has become the most loved and devotional catechism of the Reformation as well as the fourth bestselling book in history (after the Bible, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*).¹⁹⁴ The 57th question of the catechism introduces us to our subject at hand.

Question: How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?

Answer: That not only my soul, after this life, shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head, but also that this my body, raised by the power of Christ, shall again be united with my soul, and made like the glorious body of Christ.

Question 57 of the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the great biblical reality that one day our souls will be reunited with our bodies in the great resurrection. Our aim this evening isn't to discuss what our glorified bodies will be like or even to discuss the great and final resurrection. My aim here is to talk about the in between time, when our souls are still separate from our bodies. This time is called the intermediate state.

In the early Church the doctrine of the intermediate state wasn't taught or written on because the return of Jesus was believed to be imminent. As the years progressed and a realization settled in that Jesus was tarrying, theologians began to discuss the intermediate state. One early account of it goes like this. After death “...in a subterranean Hades the righteous enjoy a measure of reward not equal to their future heaven and the wicked suffer a degree of punishment not equal to their future hell.”¹⁹⁵ The intermediate state, therefore, was viewed as a temporary foretaste of the greater joy or greater terror to come. Among those who held this view were Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Novation, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, and Augustine.¹⁹⁶ As time continued on into the Middle Ages this widely held belief was taken up by the Roman Catholic Church and it is here that we see the birth of purgatory. Which teaches that after physical death the souls of imperfect believers must go to a waiting place (or a limbo) where they will

be purified to the point where they can enter into glory. In this sense purgatory is seen as the last step in a believer's sanctification.

How did they come to create such a doctrine? They view Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 3:15 as proof of purgatory. Here Paul says, "If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." In context Paul is speaking of a minister's work, whether it is true or false or weak or strong, and the fire of God's judgment as the agent which will reveal these things. They also cite Matthew 12:32 where Jesus says, "And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Here Jesus makes it clear that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in the age to come, or in other words, at the judgment. In an effort to prove that God does forgive and not forgive certain sins after death, Roman Catholic theologians say this verse is evidence of purgatory. I once heard Wayne Grudem comment on this saying something like "To use this verse to prove the opposite of the verse doesn't seem like a good way to interpret Scripture to me." I concur.

The Roman Catholics do defend and seek to prove the existence of purgatory from these passages, but they mainly go to 2 Maccabees 12. You may recognize that 1st or 2nd Maccabees isn't in any of our Bibles. That's because it's found in what's called the Apocrypha, or the Pseudepigrapha as some Protestants call it. These books are historical books that show the details of what took place between the Testaments. The reason they're not in our Bibles today is because the early Church fathers, Jesus and the apostles, as well as 1st century Jews didn't believe them to be part of Scripture, so we don't as well. They are helpful to read to get a historical perspective of what took place during that time, but in no way are these inspired texts of Scripture. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church officially said they believed the Apocrypha to be Scripture in 1547. The context of 2 Maccabees 12, is that there has just been a large war where 25,000 Jews had been killed. To see this context, read 2 Macc. 12:39-46:

"On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his companions went to gather up the bodies of the fallen and bury them with their kindred in their ancestral tombs. But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden. Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection in mind; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin."

Here we see the reason 25,000 men were killed was for secret idolatry. But notice that afterward Judas leads the people to pray for these dead men "...that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out." Then Judas took up an offering for the dead, and had a special atoning sacrifice made them so that atonement would be made and they would be absolved from their sins. Now you can see where the Roman Catholic Church gets their doctrine of purgatory as well as the doctrine of indulgences, which function as a kind of special offering for yourself or the dead taken up to shorten time spent in purgatory. This passage even says that by doing these things Judas showed himself to be excellent, noble, holy, and pious. Well, it probably doesn't catch you by surprise that we disagree with all of this, not only because we don't believe 2 Maccabees to be inspired, but that we believe the Catholic theologians to be misinterpreting inspired texts to their own ends.

This view of purgatory was held as common belief until it's rejection during the Protestant Reformation, though some reformers like Philip Melanchthon, believed it to be a matter of secondary importance and not worth arguing over. To this John Calvin said, "Since...purgatory is built on so very many blasphemies and is everyday reinforced by even bigger ones, creating untold scandals, it should never be ignored."¹⁹⁷ In our present time Roman Catholics and some Universalists still hold that purgatory exists (along with varying opinions of limbo), while the almost all the entire Protestant world rejects this concept due to lack of Scriptural evidence.

So what does the Bible say about the time between our physical death and the time when we're reunited with our bodies at the resurrection? We could summarize it like this. Upon death our bodies go into the grave while our souls will go immediately to heaven to be with Christ. In this state we will continue as conscious bodiless souls until the second advent of Christ where He will usher in His Kingdom in full measure, judge the world in righteousness, reunite the soul and body, send the wicked into hell forever, and bring the Church into the New Heavens and the New Earth for all eternity. I do not believe the intermediate state to be a place of purification where we're perfected until we're holy enough to go to enter God's presence, or even a place of soul sleep where we're unconsciously waiting for Jesus' second advent. No. I believe the intermediate state we get in the pages of Scripture is the time our bodiless and conscious souls spend in the direct presence of Christ in heaven, before the Second Coming of Christ.

We see this clearly in Revelation 6:9-11 where John the apostle says, "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, 'O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were killed as they themselves has been."

Here we see the martyrs. Those who have borne witness boldly and bravely to the truth of the gospel in a place that didn't welcome such things. For this they lost their lives. Upon their martyrdom their souls immediately go to the throne of God where they cry out for God to judge the world and avenge their blood. Hear they will be until the full number of martyrs come in. This place they are right now, is the place where all believers go upon death – heaven, in the direct presence of the Lord. God hears their cries, knows their pain,

and comforts them with robes of white until Jesus descends on the earth in a cloud of glory with His heavenly host to right all wrongs and make all sad things untrue.

The hope of heaven is that we will once again be united with our bodies and will reign upon the earth in the New Heavens and New Earth forever.

The Second Coming

“While the Old Testament prophets do not clearly distinguish a twofold coming of Christ, the Lord Himself and the apostles make it abundantly clear that the first coming will be followed by a second.”
(Louis Berkhof)

In Acts 1:9-11 we find the following words, “As when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

In this passage we find the promise of the second coming, or the second advent, of Christ. “While the Old Testament prophets do not clearly distinguish a twofold coming of Christ, the Lord Himself and the apostles make it abundantly clear that the first coming will be followed by a second.”¹⁹⁸ “This Jesus” as the angels in white robes said, will return Himself in the same visible way He left. How did He leave? With a sense of awe and wonder. He was taken up in a cloud of glory and He will come again in a cloud of glory. This is why Matthew in 24:27 can say of the return of Christ, “For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Yet in spite of such a rich and comforting promise Jesus warned that His return would be a controversial matter. In the beginning of His famous Olivet discourse given to us in Matthew 24 we read, “As He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’” And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:3-6).

Jesus’ return will be a controversial matter precisely because many phonies will rise up and claim to know the exact time of His return, leading many astray. We find one such example in the Thessalonian church. Both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians give evidence of certain false teachers who were disrupting the church by spreading rumors that Jesus’s return had already come. Paul addressed this briefly in 1 Thessalonians (in 4:13-18 and 5:1-11) combating this false teaching and seeking to bring comfort to the Church saying “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in

Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Even so, the false teaching continued to spread and was causing disruption in this congregation. Because of this, in his second letter to them Paul urges the believers to stand firm and not be idle, for the great Day of the Lord has not come yet (see 1:5-2:12).

Other erroneous predictions throughout history have followed suit. Some of the noteworthy predictions have been made by: Hilary of Poitiers, Hyppolytus of Rome, Irenaeus, Michael Servetus, Christopher Columbus, Cotton Mather, John Wesley, Isaac Newton, Charles Manson, Tim LaHaye, Jerry Falwell, John Hagee, and Harold Camping. Most of those in this list gave a precise year they thought Jesus would return, whether it be in their own day or sometime in the future. There are even predictions to be found among the theologians of Church history that we admire. For example, Martin Luther said Jesus would return before the year 1600 and Jonathan Edwards said Jesus would set up His Kingdom on earth in the year 2000. Perhaps the most well known predictions of our generation have come from and dealt with an over-exaggerated belief in the eschatological importance of Israel. It’s reconstitution in 1948 and the Jews recovery of Jerusalem in 1967 has caused quite a stir among certain branches of the Church. Yet standing over and above all of these predictions is Jesus’ own words, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in My name saying, ‘I am he!’ and ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once” (Luke 21:8-9).

So what will the second coming be like? Scripture has three definitive things to say about it.¹⁹⁹

The Time of the Second Coming

Matthew 24:36, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, not the Son, but the Father only.” Only God the Father knows the precise moment of Christ’s return. Hence all attempts to figure out the possible time of Christ’s return are exercises in vain. Two things only are certain, He is coming back and His coming is always near. This last statement, that His coming is always near, is an implication of 2 Peter 3:8 which says, “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Because of this passage’s explanation of time to God, who is Himself outside of time as well as the creator of time, implies that His coming is always near because time as it is to us is not what it is to God. What may be very short to us could possibly be very long to God, and what may be very long to us could possibly be very short to God. The passage also could seemingly be teaching us both of these realities simultaneously. This is why we’re given the command to be ready at all time. Matthew 24:44, “...be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” The time of Christ’s return is, therefore, unknown to all except God the Father.

The Manner of the Second Coming

It will be personal, visible, and physical. Recall Acts 1:11 that we began this evening with. “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.” The Person of Jesus was leaving them, and the Person of Jesus will return.²⁰⁰ So, the Jesus who left is the Jesus who will return. Acts 3:19-21, “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets long ago.” Philippians 3:20, “...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...” Colossians 3:4, “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”² Thessalonians 1:10, “...when He comes on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed...” Christians are spoken of us people who “love His appearing” in 2 Timothy 4:8, as those who are “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” in Titus 2:13, and as those are “eagerly waiting for Him to appear a second time” in Hebrews 9:28. Christ Himself will return as He left, in His physical glorified body visible for all to see.

It will be sudden. Throughout the Old Testament the prophets gave many signs that would indicate the coming of the Christ. But by and large no one paid any attention to these signs so that when Jesus came on the scene many people, even many devout Jews, were surprised. The same seems to be true with Jesus’ second coming. Jesus gives many signs that lead up to and accompany His return, and yet He also says that it will surprise many. 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6, “For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.” Similarly in Mark 13:35-37 Jesus says, “Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

These passages intend to teach us that the return of Christ will be sudden. But though it will be sudden God tells us to stay alert and watchful for His return so that we are not surprised when it occurs. So our lack of watchfulness is directly correlated to our measure of surprise when He comes again. That the return of Christ will be sudden also encourages us to live lives that are holy and pleasing to God in the present while we wait. Again Titus 2:11-13 shows us this. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...” So how are we to live while we’re waiting for the blessed hope of Christ’s second advent? v12 gives us the answer. We’re to renounce ungodliness and worldliness while we embrace godliness and holiness.

The Purpose of the Second Coming

The second coming of Christ will be personal, visible, physical, and sudden, but we find the purpose of His second coming in this: it will be triumphant. There's something of a historical parallel for us to see here. In the Roman Empire when the Roman armies would come back from a military campaign they would camp outside the city and send word to the senate that they were victorious and waiting to enter the capital. Upon hearing of their return the senate and other leaders of the city would set up a large archway for the soldiers to walk through which marked the beginning of a victory parade. The armies and the senate of Rome would agree upon a time to enter the city once all the preparations had been made and when that time had come for this large conquering host to begin marching into Rome a large trumpet would be blown. This trumpet was the signal for the citizens of Rome to come out and join in and participate in the victorious march themselves. Paul uses this imagery to discuss the return of Christ throughout his letters. That when Christ returns He is returning in triumph, at the trumpet sound, with His Church who joins in His victory because of their union with Christ.

So this moment when He comes, He will not be coming in condescension to save. No, He will come in exaltation as the King of all kings and Lord of all lords, the Judge, and ultimate Victor. He will bring in the full measure of His Kingdom. The dead will rise, the Church will meet Him in the air, and all will go to the judgment. The righteous will go into eternal life in the New Heavens and the New Earth, while all the wicked will go into an eternal punishment in hell. This second coming is the single global event in which, what is immortal will swallow up what is mortal, all that is wrong in the world and wrong in us will be made right, and the entire history of mankind will come to a close.

To sum up, when Christ returns He will answer in full measure our long awaited cry that He instructed us to ask in Matthew 6:10, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."²⁰¹ Now as to when His return will occur in redemptive history largely depends on your view of the millennium, which we'll cover in the next chapter.

The Millennium

*“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection!
Over such the second death has no power, but they will be
priests of God and of Christ, and they will
reign with Him for a thousand years.”
(Revelation 20:6)*

Though controversial and debated, any study of eschatology worth your time must include an examination of the views of the millennium. So to set the stage for a brief overview of these views we must examine the passage dealing with the millennium most explicitly, Revelation 20.

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea” (Revelation 20:1-8).

Throughout the history of the Church there have largely been three positions concerning the millennium. Among the many distinctives these positions hold the chief distinctive (from which these positions derive their name) is when the second coming of Christ will occur. For the Premillennial it will occur before the millennium, for the Postmillennial it will occur after the millennium, and for the Amillennial there is no literal millennium, but we’ll get to that in a moment.

Premillennialism

The Premillennial position has not always assumed the same form throughout Church history, so there is a need to distinguish between Historic Premillennialism and Dispensational Premillennialism.

Historic Premillennialism believes Christ's kingdom began after the ascension of Christ with the work of the apostles. They call this first phase the Church age. In this age the Church of Christ will be successful in many ways but will ultimately fail in its mission and succumb to complete apostasy. This fall into apostasy will be a steady decline as history progresses toward the end of the Church age. After this Church age the great tribulation will begin, which marks the beginning of the end times or last days. During this great tribulation believers will suffer greatly from the antichrist and unbelief will reign on the earth. After the tribulation is over Jesus will return to rapture His Church away and reward the righteous. Jesus will then descend to earth with His glorified Church, fight the battle of Armageddon, defeat Satan, and bind him for 1,000 years. This thousand year period is the millennium in which Jesus will set up His kingdom in full measure on the earth from Jerusalem. At the end of this millennium Satan will be freed from his bonds, he will deceive the nations, but he will ultimately and finally be defeated by God's wrathful judgment. It is this moment of final judgment where God will also judge the wicked and rescue the Church fully and forever.

Dispensational Premillennialism is a different belief system. The term was coined in the mid 19th century by Lewis Sperry Chafer, Finnis Dake, C.I. Scofield, and other various theologians. This system is known for two things. First, a belief that redemptive history is separated into varying dispensations where God deal with His people in different ways. Second, there is a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church as two separate peoples with two separate promises from God. To the dispensationalist, all of the Old Testament prophecies about Israel will be fulfilled in the current Jewish geo-political nation state of Israel. They believe the entire Old Testament sacrificial system will be reinstated in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

In the dispensational view, Christ's kingdom is entirely future and comes after the church age, whereas in the historic view Christ's kingdom began after the ascension. In lines up with the historic view at this point when it says the Church will be successful in many ways but will ultimately fail in its mission and succumb to complete apostasy as history progresses toward the end of the Church age. At this point most dispensationalists believe the rapture will occur to remove the Church from the world before the tribulation begins so they won't have to face such turmoil. I say 'most' because some believe the rapture not be here but will occur in the middle of the tribulation, while others believe it will occur after the tribulation. All dispensationalists divide the tribulation into two equal periods of three and a half years. The first three and a half year period called the tribulation, is where the antichrist is revealed. The latter three and a half year period called the great tribulation, is where the antichrist will take up power, persecute what's left of the Church, set up his own kingdom, and sit down to rule and be worshiped in the Jerusalem temple. After this seven year tribulation Jesus will return, destroy the antichrist, bind Satan, and set up his kingdom and will reign on the earth for 1,000 years. After this millennium Satan will be released, he will attack vigorously, but Jesus will call

down judgment from heaven and destroy His enemies. Then the final judgment will occur.

This is the most popular millennial view in the Church today, probably due to the mass production and popularity of end times material published throughout the past generation, culminating in the Left Behind novels and movies.²⁰²

Amillennialism

In contrast to the Premillennial position the Amillennial position believes Christ's kingdom began with the first coming of Christ. This time we're now in is synonymous with the end times or last days. This reveals one of important underlying foundational beliefs, namely, that the 1,000 year millennium spoken of in Revelation 20 isn't a literal thousand years, but the time where Christ is ruling and reigning between His two advents. This is why the label, coined in the early 20th century, begins with 'a'. For the amil believer there is no millennium, because we're in the symbolic millennium now and have been for almost 2,000 years already. There is also a large covenantal, as opposed to dispensational view of redemptive history, where there is no distinction or separation between Israel and the Church in regard to the promises made by God to His people. Amillennialism sees the Church as the fulfillment of Israel. This new and true Israel of God is made up of all believers. "It is not an ethnically, politically, geographically defined people any longer. It has no geographic center. It has no single ethnic identity. It is not a political nation state. It has no system of sacrificing animals, no tabernacle, no succession of priests, no divinely authorized feast days, no requirement of circumcision or dietary particulars. All of these Old Testament patterns were temporary. Jesus has fulfilled them and ended them."²⁰³ And it will not ever return to these things any time in the future. Though these beliefs are prominent in the Amillennial view, the view does leave an opening for Jews to return to Christ in the end. There are varying opinions on this within the amil camp but it is agreed upon that if they're to return to Him they will come to Him by faith alone.

As to how the Amillennial believes redemptive history will play itself out, here's the structure. Satan was bound during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and where the gospel is preached and embraced Satan's influence is held at bay. Believers, therefore, have a true impact on this world and even on the culture in which they live. But they will not ultimately transform the culture. Because, like the premil position, Amillennialism believes the Church will succumb to apostasy, grow in evil, and listen to the antichrist in the very end of days. But Christ will return once to end history, raise the dead, judge all men, and usher in His kingdom in full measure in the New Heavens and New Earth, which is a glorified earth.²⁰⁴

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism is very similar to Amillennialism and very different from Premillennialism. Rather than seeing the second coming of Christ as coming before the millennium, the postmil position sees the second coming of Christ after the millennium. In regard to the millennium most postmils believe it to symbolic while a few believe it will be a literal thousand year period. The Postmillennial view believes Christ's kingdom

began with the first coming of Christ and that the time we're now in is synonymous with the end times or last days. It holds to a covenantal view of redemptive history along with the Amillennial view, and sees the New Testament Church as the fulfillment of Old Testament Israel. You may ask, what then is the difference between the amil and postmil views? There is one large difference that has been the one distinguishing belief of the postmil position that sets it apart from all the others. While both the premil and amil believers think the great commission will ultimately fail and that the Church will fall into apostasy, the postmil believer thinks the great commission will succeed and that the Church, though persecuted at times, will win in the end. So much so, that by the time of Jesus' second coming the earth will be Christianized.²⁰⁵

Concluding Thoughts

So we have Premillennialism, Amillennialism, and Postmillennialism. These three views have been and likely will continue to be hotly debated within the Church. I hope you can see that with each position comes not only a view on what the millennium is all about in Revelation 20, but how one ought to approach, interpret, and apply the whole of God's Word to the whole of God's people today.

After my own study I have come to embrace the Amillennial position, because I think this view not only has the most evidence throughout Scripture, I think this view is the only one of these views present in Scripture. I do think Premillennialism has an over exaggerated view of the nation of Israel as well as a thorough misunderstanding of how the two Testaments relate to one another. I also admit, I want Postmillennialism to be true! But I don't see evidence for an ultimate triumph by the Church throughout the world. No, I see great things for the Church, but I also see great error in the Church as well as the rise of unbelief in our world. So, for better or for worse I am an Amillennial.

I say this fully convinced but knowing I may be truly wrong about this. Many of the theologians I admire and have learned much from hold to a Postmillennial view, while others of them hold to historic Premillennialism. One thing is 100% sure, God did not inspire His Word in order to give us options of belief about Him and His ways in the world.

Whatever position you hold, hold it strongly with deep conviction. Panmillennialism, the belief that it will all 'pan out' in the end is not an available option.

Final Judgment

*“...from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.”
(The Apostles Creed)*

As we near the end of our time in eschatology there are three matters we must still take into consideration: the final judgment, the punishment of hell, and the reward of heaven. These three matters are very related to one another, for the first is somewhat of a beginning of the latter two. But, though related to one another, they each stand out with enough clarity that we would do well to deal with them in their own right. So we begin with the doctrine of the final judgment and when we come to this doctrine we continue on in the passage we began last week when we examined the views of the millennium.

Revelation 20:11-15 says, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. From His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Paul in his famous sermon at the Areopagus in Athens, concludes by saying, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed; and of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30-31). Therefore, mankind may be as wishful as they’d like to be, the matter of final judgment isn’t a matter of opinion. It will come. Paul’s sermon conclusion told us as much when he said God has given us assurance that He will judge the world in righteousness by a man He appointed. What’s the assurance we have and who is the man? The Man is Jesus Christ and the assurance is His resurrection from the dead.

From the earliest moments in Church history the final judgment was linked with the resurrection of the dead.²⁰⁶ Most believed that the dead would be raised for this very reason, to be judged in the end for what was done in the body. We confess something similar to this belief each time we recite the Apostles Creed, “...from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.” Few of the early Church fathers taught on the final judgment.²⁰⁷ The theology given us in the Apostles Creed stood throughout the Middle Ages and Reformation as well. But as the enlightenment progressed and the high

view of Scripture was lowered some theologians began to detour in regard to the judgment. Rather than being seen as a final moment in history where all men would give an account of themselves, liberal theologians began to define the judgment as an exclusively present matter. In this sense the judgment of God began to be taught as something occurring in our current life and its evidence can be seen in things such as wars, disease, poverty, greed, and the like. This is perhaps the root of the belief of some in our own day who believe hell is metaphorically seen in the present life rather than the future destination of those who reject the gospel. Now, we disagree with a metaphorical view of hell, but we do not disagree that the judgment of God is a present matter. Scripture affirms it even. God throughout Scripture deals out varying judgments on entire nations and certain individuals in various times and in various ways through His divine work of providence. But we wholeheartedly disagree that God's judgment in the present world is all that will come of God's judgment. Scripture presents the judgment of God as present, through His providential ruling over all things, and as future, culminating in one decisive world ending moment where the deeds of all men will be exposed and eternal destinies are entered into.

Also, just as there are differing views on the millennium, there are also differing views on how many judgments there will be. The Dispensational Premillennial believes there will be three different judgments. First will be the judgment of the nations (see Matthew 25:31-46), second will be the judgment seat of Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:10), and third will be the great white throne judgment (see Rev. 20:11-15). The other views, Historical Premillennial, Amillennial, and Postmillennial believe there will only be one final judgment, and that these three separate judgments the Dispensational sees are really all speaking of the same final judgment at the end of history.

Now we have already stated in our survey of the Second Coming that the moment Christ returns will also be the moment the final judgment begins. This leaves us with a new question. What will occur at this final judgment?²⁰⁸ Three Things:

Christ will Judge

Jesus speaks of His judgment as something the Father has given to Him. John 5:26-28, "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself. And He has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." For this reason Paul, when giving Timothy the charge to preach the Word in and out of season, speaks of Jesus as the "Judge of the living and the dead" in 2 Timothy 4:1. We shouldn't also miss the implied meaning in Paul's statement of the "judgment seat of Christ" in 2 Corinthians 5:10, that Christ is the One who judges.

All Mankind will be Judged

It will be a rude awakening for those who believe the judgment of God is only a metaphorical or a matter for the present moment, for all mankind will be judged. Hebrews 9:27 says "...it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes

judgment.” This judgment will be so thorough that we’ll have to give an account for every idle word we’ve ever spoken (Matt. 12:36). Luke 12:2-3 similarly shows us, “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops.” It is a common belief that only the unbelievers will be judged at the final judgment, but Scripture tells us all mankind, believer and unbeliever alike, will be judged. Romans 2:6-10, “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.”

For the unbeliever, the wrath of God has already been poured out on them in various measures in life because they have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). They have lived foolishly, trusting in their own selves rather than in God and the gospel of His Son. So their end will be the total culmination of the wrath they received in part during their life. For the believer, there is no wrath and fury but instead no condemnation (Rom. 8:1) because they have lived wisely, trusting in God and in the gospel of His Son. So too, their end will be the total culmination of the grace they received in part during their life.

The Saints will Judge

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul lays out his argument about how to ought to deal kindly and graciously when we wrong one another. In v2-3 he makes an interesting statement when he says, “Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!” Here Paul uses the careful and considerate judgment we ought to use with one another with the judgment we will use in the final judgment. This does mean that believers will have some measure of judgment over the world where careful consideration must be employed. But I think it also speaks of our union with Christ. When He judges the world and all in it we will in part join with Him in that judgment and feel a sense of agreement and approval when it takes place. But its not only the world that we’ll join in judging, it’s angels too. Referring to our judging angels in 2 Peter 2:4 we find that God “...did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...” Jude agrees in v6 where he says angels, “...did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, He (God) has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” Why does God allow these things to take place on angels? Jude 5 gives us the answer when he says God destroys those who do not believe.

All of these things are good and profitable for us to consider because an awareness of what will take place at the final judgment moves us to live lives that are pleasing to God in the present. So let me end our time together by reading Hebrews 10:19-25.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Eternal Punishment in Hell

*“If you truly understand the nature of hell,
you’ll become the greatest evangelist in the world.”
(Josh Romein)*

I will never forget first time I heard the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell explained to me. I was a sophomore in college. I was converted on a Wednesday evening and on the evening after, Thursday evening, I was invited to attend the Campus Outreach on campus weekly meeting. I went. It was the first time I worshiped with other believers, and the first time I had heard preaching as a Christian. The time came for the campus minister to preach and his first words were as follows, “If you truly understand the nature of hell, you’ll become the greatest evangelist in the world.” Those words hit me like a ton of bricks. They’ve permanently left an impression on me, and has by and large shaped my understanding of what it means to be a Christian in a lost and fallen world. It is my prayer that God would work in you tonight how He worked in me 13 years ago in that campus auditorium.

Hell throughout History

In the early Church the doctrine of an eternal hell was embraced and taught. One document, *The Shepherd of Hermas* account we read, “...the age to come is summer to the righteous, but winter to the sinners. For just as in summer the fruit of each one of the trees appears, and so it is known what kind they are...the heathen and the sinners...will be found to be withered and fruitless in that world, and will be burned as firewood, and will be obvious because their conduct in their life was evil.”²⁰⁹ So too the early Church father Cyprian states, “The damned will burn forever in hell. Devouring flames will be their eternal portion. Their torments will never decrease or end. Their lamentations will be vain and entreaties ineffective. Their repentance comes too late. They will have to believe in an eternal punishment, as they refused to believe in the eternal life.”²¹⁰ Augustine also, in his work *City of God* says, “The more enjoyment man found in God, the greater was his wickedness in abandoning Him; and he who destroyed in himself a good that might have been eternal, became worthy of eternal evil.”²¹¹

This belief continued onto the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Thomas Aquinas believed eternal punishment must be infinite in time because wicked finite man cannot endure an infinite punishment in one moment.²¹² It was during this period we find the great works depicting the wicked suffering an eternal punishment in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Martin Luther spoke of hell as a fiery oven where the wicked will experience constant judgment and constant pain.²¹³ Calvin spoke

of the punishment inflicted as the fury of God's might bearing down on those in hell.²¹⁴ These thoughts and those similar to them continued to be taught by the Church until the dawn of the nineteenth century and the rise of humanistic modernism in western Europe which came over to America in the twentieth century. One theologian goes as far to say, "Since 1800 this situation has entirely changed, and no traditional Christian doctrine has been so widely abandoned as that of eternal punishment."²¹⁵ Theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, William Clarke, A.T. Robinson, Karl Barth, and others began teaching that such an eternal judgment is intolerable to the mind and heart of man and that Scripture doesn't teach it or is just wrong about this. After this a minority view called Annihilationism, which has always been present in corners of the Church, came back into some kind of influence through the largely orthodox theologian John Stott, and some more modern writers such as Edward Fudge. Annihilationism teaches that God's judgment is sure and wrathful but is not eternal or conscious. Rather, in the judgment God annihilates the wicked for their rejection of the gospel and they cease to be. In this sense the judgment is temporally eternal because from that point on the wicked no longer exist.

This brings us to our present moment in history. Much of our current time reflects the liberal position believing the Bible to be wrong about hell. The recent survey Ligonier ministries completed²¹⁶ shows that only 41% of self identified evangelicals believe hell is a real place. More than half of those who participated in this survey that identified as Christians, believe hell isn't a real place. This is telling and saddening for sure. Rather than going with the tide of our time, we ought to stand in agreement with the Church of history. Not because we love Church history, though we do, we stand with them because we believe the position of an eternal conscious punishment in hell is an entirely biblical one.

Hell throughout Scripture

A prominent place to see these things is Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage we see in v31-40 the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats. On the one hand, the sheep will go into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (v34). Why? Because the sheep lived a life characterized by gospel grace before God and man (v35-40). On the other hand the goats will go into hell (v41, v46) for not living a life characterized with gospel grace before God and man. Let's explore the destination of the goats further.

In Matthew 25:41, 46 Jesus speaking of the goats says, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels... These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous go into eternal life.'"

Separation From God?

See here that Jesus speaks of hell as if it's departing from the presence of God. "Depart from me...into eternal fire..." This is why so many have spoken of hell as separation from God. But is that really case? I don't believe so. I don't believe hell is separation from God because God is omnipresent, which means there is nowhere God is not. So yes, even in hell, we see the full presence of God. What then is the separation being spoken of

here? There is a true separation being spoken of here in v41, but it is not a full separation. I believe it to be a separation from God's gracious presence, or a separation from His eternal gospel favor. How does this view impact our definition of hell? It makes it not the place of separation from God, but the place where the wicked, apart from the righteousness of Christ come into the full presence of God, who is a consuming fire in His holiness. So in hell the wicked are consumed forever by the direct presence of God's infinite holiness. In this sense we must recognize that hell is the place where the wicked will be forever and tremendously intimate with the wrath and fury of God.

The Permanence of Hell

We see here that hell is permanent. v41 speaks of fire that is 'eternal.' v46 speaks of punishment that is also eternal. This passage shows that the reward or the punishment coming to all men will be eternal. This means hell is not a temporary place, it is forever. Similarly 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says those in Hell will experience "eternal" destruction and Mark 9:48 says hell is a place where, "The worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." The punishment of hell is eternal and forever, and once you're there you cannot leave.

The Punishment of Hell

This passage shows hell is a place of punishment. v46 says the eternal activity going on in hell is 'punishment.' Why punishment? Because the goats rejected the gospel, rejected Christ, and rejected His cross. This means the sins of the goats were not atoned for on the cross, and that hell is the place where they will receive the punishment for their sins. A gospel contrast is evident here. Sin is always punished. Sin is either punished on the cross of Christ by Christ, or hell by yourself.

We could also speak of a few other passages. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life." Even in this robust gospel centered verse we find two options for all of humanity: belief in Christ which leads to eternal life, or unbelief in Christ which leads to perishing. Everyone you will ever meet in this world falls into one of these two categories.

Luke 13:3, "Unless you repent, you will likewise perish." Talking to a group of people about a tragic event that took place in his day and age, notice how Jesus responds to their questions with a personal, individual call to repent. Some people think it is not loving to speak of hell, but Jesus and others do, not always, but do sometimes use the threat of hell as an evangelistic tool. Of course every city seems to have a street preacher who abuses this by preaching wrath and no grace. We must seek to add both of these to our evangelistic arsenal.

Final Plea

Let me leave you with this. "The dreadfulness of hell deepens our grateful praise for the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. Hell is what we deserve. And hell is what He experienced on the cross in our place. Believing the truth about hell...motivates us to persuade people to be reconciled to God. By God's grace those of us who are trusting Christ have been rescued from this horrible destiny. How can we love people and refuse

to speak plainly to them about the realities of eternal damnation and God's gracious provision of salvation? Clearer visions of hell will give us greater love for both God and people."²¹⁷

Eternal Reward In Heaven

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”
(Revelation 21:1-2)*

For as long as I've been a Christian I've always been captivated by the great hymns about heaven, about glory, and the sweet eternal bliss we'll enjoy forever with God. Many hymns come to mind like 'On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand', 'In the Sweet By and By', 'I'll Fly Away', and 'When the Roll is Called Up Yonder.' All of these provide a wonderful glimpse into what awaits all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. But one hymn stands above the others in my own heart, and its closing words have long given strength to my soul. The hymn is 'O the Deep Deep Love of Jesus' and the final stanza goes like this, "O the deep deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best, tis an ocean vast of blessing, tis a haven full of rest. O the deep deep love of Jesus, tis a heaven of heavens to me, for it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee." These lyrics describe our final hope. Not the glory of being in heaven, not the glory of being in fellowship with loved ones gone before, but the glory an eternal and intimate fellowship with God Himself.

Let's turn to these things now in the Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation we truthfully could summarize the whole scope of redemptive history in four encompassing terms: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. With these four terms in mind we can conclude that the whole Scriptures lean toward the final consummation of all things, the glories of heaven and the terrors of hell. Consider the following:

Heaven: An Eternal Sabbath

Early on in Genesis, at the end of the creation week we see God command Adam and Eve to keep the Sabbath, just as God had labored and rested from His work. This pattern was to be the norm for His people. This command is repeated again in the 4th Commandment, and throughout the entire Old Covenant God's people were to keep the Sabbath regularly to rest from their labors. When Jesus comes onto the scene He caused quite a stir regarding the Sabbath. In Mark 2:23-28 He and His disciples are walking through a field on the Sabbath and the disciples plucked off the heads of grain to eat. After being questioned about this Jesus responds by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not

man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). By saying this, Jesus clearly declares that He is greater than the Sabbath.

Paul then, in Colossians 2:16-17, states the Old Covenant physical Sabbath rest was a mere shadow of the New Covenant spiritual Sabbath rest that is enjoyed in our union with Christ. Now the New Covenant believer rests not just once a week but rests everyday from our works as we trust in the saving work of Jesus on our behalf. We all know this rest is hard. Our remaining corruption within us tempts us to trust in our own works. So even in the New Covenant spiritual Sabbath rest, we struggle. But the day is coming when the struggle will end. This life we now live in union with Christ on earth is a foretaste of the greater life we’ll experience in heaven where we’ll finally and fully be able to rest from our works in the perfect work of Christ. Heaven therefore, is the eternal Sabbath.

Heaven: An Eternal Tabernacle

Come back again with me to the closing chapters of Exodus where we see God confirm the covenant with the people of Israel. Here God gives Israel detailed instructions for many things, chief among them are the instructions for the tabernacle. God commanded such specific instructions for the tabernacle because He intended to dwell among His people through the tabernacle. The tabernacle was completed, and the glory of God came down and filled it, signifying God’s presence among His people.

Fast forward to John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...” The word ‘dwelt’ here is the Greek word ‘eskonosen’ which literally means ‘tabernacled’ or ‘tented.’ So just as God formerly dwelt and made His presence known among His people in the tabernacle, now God dwells and makes His presence known among His people in the Person of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the greater and truer tabernacle. And just as a display of God’s glory came after the completion of the first tabernacle, a truer and clearer revelation of glory occurs again in the Person of Christ. “...we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” This means, Jesus is the true shekinah glory of God. Or we could say it all another way: God once filled the tabernacle with His glory to speak with Moses face to face. Now God not only reveals His glory but speaks with His Church in a vastly more intimate way, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:6, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Because of this, God no longer lives in a temple or tents and He won’t ever return to one. Why? Divine space is no longer confined or located or seen in a place, but a Person. The only temple God now dwells in and will dwell in forevermore is His Son. And by the Holy Spirit Christ is making His Church into a new and glorious and diverse spiritual temple. He will build His Church, this spiritual temple until all the elect have been brought in. And we, as the spiritual temple and people of God, await the day when He will usher us into the heavenly temple, the eternal tabernacle, that will fill the entire earth. Heaven therefore, is the eternal tabernacle.

Heaven: A Better Than Eden

Many people believe heaven to be something of a return to the garden of Eden. I'm sure you've heard people speak of this, but for a moment consider the implications of such a statement. If heaven is truly a return to Eden, remember what happened in Eden, the fall of man. Such horrors are impossible in heaven, therefore heaven cannot be a return to Eden. What is it then? It is a better than Eden. How so? Before the fall man was able to sin and able to not sin. After the fall man is unable to not sin. After conversion and after we become new creations in Christ man is again able to sin and able to not sin. Finally in glory, man will be unable to sin. Why? Because the very presence of sin will be removed once and for all.

Heaven: An Eternal Confidence

Many today believe there is no life after death and think our hope of heaven is nothing more than a projection of our mistaken wishes. Yet, though the world may rile against us on this, we have great confidence to hold onto. Jesus gives us such confidence in John 14:1-4 when He says, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going." In v1 Jesus lets them know that He would be leaving them soon, so it's understandable to see them as being a bit distraught about His departure. Knowing this, He gives them such encouragement in commanding them Do you to not be troubled but to have a sure confidence about their future state. If the hope of heaven were false, Jesus would have told them so. But He encourages them to have a great hope in this by telling them how He is leaving to prepare a place for them. This promise of hope held out to the disciples here is a promise of hope every Christian can hold onto as well.

Heaven: An Eternal Glory

Though we learn greatly of heaven from many places throughout Scripture, in Revelation 21 we find what is perhaps the most extensive and breathtaking description of the life to come in the entire Bible. This is of course the apostle John's vision of the New Heaven's and the New Earth. Read through it slowly:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel’s measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

What else could I say but this, “Come Lord Jesus!”

Appendix: For Further Reading

Many books have been cited throughout these many chapters, I wholeheartedly recommend you read them in full. But, though I've cited many, there are even more resources to aid you in study. With the help of pastoral apprentice Sam Knox I've compiled a list of what I think are the most helpful and insightful books on each of the 7 Summits of Systematic Theology. As the shelves of your library expand, may you give yourself to studying deeply and find that you're reaping vastly in your devotion to Christ.

Foundations:

- God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture, Matthew Barrett
- Knowing Scripture, R.C. Sproul
- Biblical Theology, Geerhardus Vos
- Canon Revisited, Michael Kruger
- A Peculiar Glory, John Piper

Theology Proper:

- Reformed Confessions and 16th and 17th Centuries, James Dennison
- Knowing God, J.I. Packer
- A Body of Divinity, Thomas Watson
- God Is, Mark Jones
- Institutes of the Christian Religion, John Calvin

Anthropology:

- Created In God's Image, Anthony Hoekema
- Human Nature in It's Fourfold State, Thomas Boston
- Indwelling Sin in Believers, John Owen
- The Plight of Man and Power of God, Martin Lloyd-Jones
- Not the Way It's Supposed to Be, Cornelius Plantinga

Christology:

- The Glory of Christ, John Owen
- Cur Deus Homo, Anselm
- The Christ of the Covenants, O. Palmer Robertson
- Knowing Christ, Mark Jones
- In Christ Alone, Sinclair Ferguson

Pneumatology:

- The Holy Spirit, Sinclair Ferguson
- Rediscovering the Holy Spirit, Michael Horton
- The Beauty and Glory of the Holy Spirit, Joel Beeke
- The Holy Spirit, John Owen
- The Holy Spirit and Reformed Spirituality, Joel Beeke and Derek Thomas

Soteriology:

- Death in Adam Life in Christ, John Fesko
- Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification, Thomas Schreiner
- Redemption Accomplished and Applied, John Murray

- Introducing Covenant Theology, Michael Horton
- Union With Christ, Robert Letham

Ecclesiology:

- The Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, Mark Dever
- The Church, Edmund Clowney
- The Church of Christ, James Bannerman
- Water, Word, and Spirit, John Fesko
- The Lord's Supper As a Means of Grace, Richard Bercellos

Eschatology:

- Last Things First, John Fesko
- Kingdom Come, Sam Storms
- The Case for Amillennialism, Kim Riddlebarger
- Pauline Eschatology, Geerhardus Vos
- The Last Days According to Jesus, R.C. Sproul

Notes

-
- ¹ Charles Spurgeon, quoted in J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity, 1973, page 13-14.
- ² See R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, Sanford, FL. Reformation Trust, 2014.
- ³ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, Phillipsburg, NJ. P&R, 2013, page 8.
- ⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, page 16.
- ⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, page 14-15.
- ⁶ Andrew Peterson, *Don't You Want to Thank Someone*, After All These Years: A Collection, 2014.
- ⁷ Matthew Barrett, *God's Word Alone: The Authority of Scripture*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 2016, page 225.
- ⁸ John Owen, *A Day of Sacred Rest*, in *A Puritan Theology*. Reformation Heritage, Grand Rapids, MI. 2012, page 27.
- ⁹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 619.
- ¹⁰ While many pastors and theologians speak often of the beauty of Scripture, Ligonier's teaching fellow Stephen Nichols is the only person I've ever heard include beauty as an attribute of Scripture.
- ¹¹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 343.
- ¹² Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners – Preaching the Word Commentary*, page 76.
- ¹³ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah – Vol. 1 chapters 1-18*, page 235.
- ¹⁴ Bryan Chapell, *The God We Worship – God's Glory Revealed*, page 3.
- ¹⁵ John Piper, *Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts*, sermon from 1/1/1984 accessed via desiringgod.org on 6/5/18.
- ¹⁶ Ortlund Jr., page 78.
- ¹⁷ Alec Motyer, *Isaiah – TOTC*, page 81. See also Piper, sermon cited above.
- ¹⁸ Andrew Davis, *Isaiah – Christ Centered Exposition*, page 40.
- ¹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament – Vol. 7*, page 192-193.
- ²⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.3 (page 39 in the Battles two volume edition).
- ²¹ This diagram is taken from The Gospel Coalition website, a similar triangle is found in the back of the *ESV Study Bible*, page ____.
- ²² Herman Bavinck, quoted in Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI. 2012, page 89.
- ²³ I am indebted to Tim Challies *Visual Theology* for these distortions.
- ²⁴ There has been a recent debate on this very issue within reformed evangelicalism. Particularly between Wayne Grudem, who does seem to teach a kind of subordination, and Carl Trueman, who sees any kind of subordination as unorthodox. You can see hints of this in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* as well as in the footnotes of the *ESV Study Bible* which he edited. For Trueman's response to Grudem, see his blog *Mortification of Spin* hosted by alliancenet.org.
- ²⁵ Matt Boswell, *Messenger Hymns Doxology #1*, Messenger Hymns, Vol. 1 EP, 2012.
- ²⁶ I am indebted to Benjamin Joffe for much of the material covered in this chapter.
- ²⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, page 71.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, page 72-73.
- ²⁹ I wholeheartedly recommend J.C. Ryle's book *Holiness* for more on this neglected topic. Also see Kevin DeYoung's *The Hole in Our Holiness*, it's a shorter and similar read.
- ³⁰ Jeff Lippencott and R.C. Sproul have a discussion about this at the end of their album *Glory to the Holy One*, Ligonier Ministries, 2014.
- ³¹ See Kevin DeYoung's short book *Just Do Something*, very helpful on this point.
- ³² R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, page 74.
- ³³ John Piper, *What is the Will of God and How Do We Know It?*, August 22, 2004, desiringgod.org.

-
- ³⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, 1996, page 165-166. Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* is also very good in this topic, see pages 315 - 354.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, page 166.
- ³⁶ Hymns of Grace #??
- ³⁷ Hymns of Grace #51
- ³⁸ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 702-704.
- ³⁹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, page 29.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, page 6.
- ⁴¹ Michael Jackson, *Man in the Mirror*, Bad, MJJ Productions, 1987.
- ⁴² Pastoral Apprentice Sam Knox said this to me once, and it's stuck ever since.
- ⁴³ For further reading on this subject read *Beyond the Bounds* edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth. Particularly see chapter 4 by Bill Davis call *Why Open Theism is Flourishing Now*.
- ⁴⁴ For example Pinnock and Sanders have published a book called *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*.
- ⁴⁵ Herman Bavinck, quoted in Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 164.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, page 168.
- ⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 205-206. See also John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 268-269.
- ⁴⁸ Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, Wesleyan, 1988, page 193.
- ⁴⁹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, page 156.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, page 152 & 155.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, page 184.
- ⁵² John Piper, found in literally everything he has written.
- ⁵³ Dr. John V. Fesko often told us this in his Systematic Theology classes at RTS Atlanta.
- ⁵⁴ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 329.
- ⁵⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 193.
- ⁵⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 69.
- ⁵⁷ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, Carlisle, PA. Banner of Truth, Reprinted in 1980, page 74.
- ⁵⁸ R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, page 99.
- ⁵⁹ John Murray, Quoted in John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 784.
- ⁶⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.15.3.
- ⁶¹ John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 785.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, page 786-790.
- ⁶³ I first heard this argument made to me in seminary by John V. Fesko. It can also be found more extensively in his book *Last Things First*.
- ⁶⁴ John Piper made this argument in a sermon once, and I cannot seem to remember or find where he did so.
- ⁶⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 221.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, page 261.
- ⁶⁷ I heard many of these things in John Piper's message at *Together for the Gospel 2016*.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Albert Mohler.
- ⁶⁹ The Gospel Transformation Study Bible, notes on John 1:1-18, page 1407.
- ⁷⁰ R.C. Sproul, *John – Saint Andrew's Expository Commentary*, page 2.
- ⁷¹ R.C. Sproul makes this argument, and I don't think he is out of bounds to do so.
- ⁷² R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian*, page 142.
- ⁷³ Dr. John Fesko often told us this in class at RTS Atlanta.
- ⁷⁴ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.15.1-2.

-
- 75 John Fesko writes on the connection between Adam's work in Eden with the priests work within the tabernacle and temple in his book *Last Things First*.
- 76 R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe – Preaching the Word Commentary*, page 306.
- 77 Carson, page 438.
- 78 J.C. Ryle, quoted in Hughes, page 95.
- 79 Joel Beeke, *A Puritan Theology*, page 354.
- 80 Thomas Goodwin, *Ibid.*, page 354.
- 81 FIND...
- 82 FIND...
- 83 FIND...
- 84 This model is described in the writings of Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, and even shows up in C.S. Lewis on a few occasions, I first read of it in Joe Rigney's book *The Things of Earth*, page 37-39.
- 85 Joe Rigney, *The Things of Earth*, page 37
- 86 Gerald Bray, *Augustine: Theologians on the Christian Life*, page 207.
- 87 *Ibid.*, page 207.
- 88 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, page 175-176.
- 89 Edwards, *An Essay on the Trinity*, page 108.
- 90 Edwards, *An Essay on the Trinity*, page 118.
- 91 I have often found Mark Dever's two volumes *Promises Made* and *Promises Kept* very helpful in understanding many of these whole Bible images and types. Along with Leonhard Goppelt's book *Typos*.
- 92 Tony Merida, *Acts – Christ Centered Exposition*, page 24.
- 93 Mark Dever, *Promises Kept*, page 132.
- 94 I think the same argument is in view in the other 'filling passages' in Acts 8, 10-11, and 19.
- 95 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *A First Book of Daily Readings – May 15*, page ??
- 96 Lloyd-Jones, page ??
- 97 John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, page 38.
- 98 Augustine, *Acts – Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, accessed via Logos Bible software.
- 99 Derek Thomas, *Acts – Reformed Expository Commentary*, page 28.
- 100 Thomas, page 28.
- 101 Gospel Transformation Study Bible, *notes on Acts 2:1-13*, page 1453.
- 102 John Owen, quoted in, *A Puritan Theology*, page 19.
- 103 *Ibid.*, page 23.
- 104 John Flavel, *Ibid.*, page 447-449.
- 105 FIND...
- 106 I am indebted to Walter Marshall for all of the content in this chapter. His book *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* is a gem among stones. I wholeheartedly recommend it to you.
- 107 Following John Murray some theologians speak of sanctification in two senses: definitive or positional sanctification and progressive sanctification. I do not address the former, only the latter. I do this because to me definitive or positional sanctification overlaps too closely with justification and muddies what is clear already. To see an adequate explanation of this view see John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 986-987.
- 108 Jason Meyer, *Lloyd-Jones on the Christian Life*, page 96.
- 109 Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, page 122.
- 110 FIND...
- 111 John Fesko told us this in his Systematics class at Reformed Theological Seminary.
- 112 Michael Horton, *Ordinary*, page 79.
- 113 FIND...
- 114 FIND...
- 115 John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 926.

-
- 116 Ibid., page 992.
- 117 Herman Ridderbos, *NICNT*, page 208.
- 118 FIND...
- 119 FIND...
- 120 O Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, page 4.
- 121 Ibid., page 14.
- 122 Ibid., page 52.
- 123 In Berkhof's one volume edition, this is found on page 435-436.
- 124 See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 658-663 for a full description of these blessings.
- 125 No one truly knows where this quote came from, if Assisi even said it in the first place.
- 126 FIND...
- 127 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 487.
- 128 John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 959.
- 129 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 487.
- 130 John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 959.
- 131 I am grateful for the work of R.C. Sproul in tirelessly teaching on the life of Luther through his ministry. I have gleaned much from it, and most of this section comes from that.
- 132 Many have said the same. It is a resounding theme which demands a presence in any presentation of the doctrine of justification.
- 133 John Calvin, *2 Corinthians and Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Smail, ed. David W. Torrence and T.F. Torrence, CNTC 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 78.
- 134 John Fesko, *Justification*, 205.
- 135 John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 980.
- 136 I heard Kevin DeYoung say this at the Together for the Gospel conference in 2016, see t4g.org for details and more resources.
- 137 FIND
- 138 Anthony Hoekema, *Save By Grace*, page 64.
- 139 FIND
- 140 John Murray, *The Gospel According to John – NICNT*, page 320-321.
- 141 Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian*, page 265.
- 142 Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian*, page 262.
- 143 G.K. Beale, from Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, page 206-207.
- 144 John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, page 1019.
- 145 Ligon Duncan, *Give Praise to God*, page 29.
- 146 R. Kent Hughes, *Worship By the Book*, page 142.
- 147 D.A. Carson, *Worship By the Book*, page 29.
- 148 I mean it when I say that Scripture doesn't give us much guidance on how to put all these elements together, but that does not mean there is no guidance on how to put it all together. For example we're to serve one another in love, so if we only employ contemporary music to reach our modern world, we neglect the older members of our congregation and ignore the history of the Church. And the opposite is just as true – to only employ hymns would be to neglect the younger members of our congregation and to idolize some bygone era of Church history that was just as fallen as our current culture is now. Inspiration in song didn't end with the hymnal and doesn't begin with modern music.
- 149 Dr. Fesko often told us this in class at Reformed Theological Seminary.
- 150 FIND
- 151 Dr. Fesko often told us this in class at Reformed Theological Seminary.
- 152 Ligon Duncan said this in his message at Together for the Gospel, 2018.
- 153 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 645.

-
- 154 Ibid., page 645.
- 155 Ibid., page 652.
- 156 Ibid., page 652.
- 157 Ibid., page 653.
- 158 This is the opening illustration in chapter 4 of Mark Dever's and Paul Alexander's book *The Deliberate Church*, page 59.
- 159 Ibid., page 59.
- 160 Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, page 64.
- 161 The first one (1984) not the strange sequel.
- 162 Burk Parsons, *Twitter Account*, accessed on 5/31/17.
- 163 Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, page 175.
- 164 I do think a similarity exists between the New Testament elder and the elders Moses chose to lead with him in Exodus 18:25 as well as the Levitical priesthood as a whole. The New Testament elder is a fulfillment of these former offices. One could also glean much about the elder from Titus 1:6-9 and Acts 20:28.
- 165 The word 'overseer' is the Greek 'episkopos.' Though different, this word is used throughout the New Testament in a synonymous and interchangeable manner with the Greek 'presbuteros' or 'elder.'
- 166 Jeramie Rinne says this many times in his small 9marks book, *Church Elders*.
- 167 Joel Beeke has written a number of books to help men take up the call of God in leading their families. You can see all of them at <http://www.heritagebooks.org>.
- 168 John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World: What Should the Church be Doing Now?* Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity, 1975, page 30.
- 169 David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, page 369-379.
- 170 Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and Earth*, Preaching the Word Commentary, page 911.
- 171 Ibid, page 913, and 1036.
- 172 David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, page 374-375.
- 173 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, page 15.
- 174 Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and Earth*, Preaching the Word Commentary, page 918.
- 175 Kim Riddlebarger, *Reformation Theology*, page 721.
- 176 These five statements are from Sam Storms, *Kingdom Come*, pages 15-42.
- 177 Ibid, page 20-21.
- 178 Ibid, page 29.
- 179 Ibid, page 31.
- 180 Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), page 25.
- 181 Ibid, page 63-64.
- 182 Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos*, page 10.
- 183 R.C. Sproul, *Everyone's A Theologian*, page 295
- 184 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 668.
- 185 Ibid, page 670.
- 186 The Valley of Vision, page 163.
- 187 I say 'most' because the believers who are alive when Christ returns will not have to endure through physical death.
- 188 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 671.
- 189 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book 3, chpt. 10, page 136-137.
- 190 Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology* (page 674) gives a great explanation of this caution.

-
- 191 Ibid, page 672-673.
- 192 Ibid, page 673.
- 193 Louis Berkhof outlines these objections more fully in his *Systematic Theology*, page 676-677.
- 194 Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL., page 16.
- 195 Addison, *Life Beyond Death* (page 202), quoted in Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 680.
- 196 Ibid., page 680.
- 197 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1541 edition, Banner of Truth, page 345.
- 198 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 695.
- 199 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 703-707. As well as R.C. Sproul, *Everyone is a Theologian*, page 315 & 319.
- 200 Ibid., page 705.
- 201 ESV Study Bible, page 2533.
- 202 John MacArthur holds to historic Premillennialism and provides a defense for it in his book *Christ's Prophetic Plans*. John Piper is also a historic Premillennial but he holds that belief along with a covenantal view of Scripture.
- 203 John Piper, *Peculiar Glory*, page 62.
- 204 Sam Storms provides a good defense of the Amillennial position in his book *Kingdom Come: An Amillennial Alternative*.
- 205 Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* (page 708-719), and R.C. Sproul in his book *The Last Days According to Jesus* and *Everyone's a Theologian* (page 309-314) provide a good defense for the Postmillennial position.
- 206 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, page 728-729.
- 207 Augustine is a large exception with his work the *City of God*.
- 208 Wayne Grudem lays out these points and more in his *Systematic Theology*, page 1142-1148.
- 209 *Shepherd of Hermas*, parable 3, quoted in Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology*, page 703.
- 210 Cyprian, *To Demetrius*, quoted in Ibid., page 704.
- 211 Augustine, *City of God*, 2:463, quoted in Ibid., page 706
- 212 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in Ibid., page 708.
- 213 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Psalm 118*, quoted in Ibid., page 711.
- 214 John Calvin, *Institutes*, quoted in Ibid., page 712.
- 215 Richard Bauckham, *Universalism: A Historical Survey*, quoted in Ibid., page 714.
- 216 TheStateOfTheology.com
- 217 Tom Ascol, *The Horror of Hell*, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/horror-hell/>, accessed on 6.9.17.