



The Doctrine of Salvation

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THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Africa Theology Series

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INTRODUCTION TO ATS

The Africa Theology Series is a multi-volume series of books on Christian Theology. Unlike a typical systematic theology, each book in this series is a stand alone volume on a specific topic or doctrine. Also, unlike a traditional systematic theology, this series expands the scope to include biblical, systematic and applied theology. The goal is to give the African church a biblically faithful and contextually appropriate tool to help them, as Jude 3 states, “Content for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Briefly introducing such a comprehensive work like the Africa Theology Series poses quite a challenge which is why an entire separate volume is devoted to introducing the series. In that first and key volume, the reader is provided with a foundation for all the subsequent volumes. This introductory volume explains the uniqueness of this series and explore baseline understandings of key components in the series. The introductory volume covers the contextual emphasis, the hermeneutical grounding and the theological framework for this series.

Therefore, the purpose of this brief introduction is neither an attempt to replicate nor replace the Introductory volume. To truly benefit from this series, one must start with that foundational volume.

Instead, this brief introduction is provided to explain four underlying goals for this series. Understanding these goals will help the reader gain the most insight when reading each separate volume. These goals are:

- Bridging knowledge with action
- Interacting with major faith systems
- Moving from defense to offense
- Creating a readable and helpful resource

Know, Be, Do: Bridging Knowledge with Action

Each volume in the Africa Theology Series seeks to move the reader from theological foundations (Know) to cultural implications (Be) then finally to practical applications (Do). In the African context, the concrete is much more impactful than the theoretical. In fact, oftentimes grievous errors in the pulpit or in pastoral practice come from those who can articulate the great doctrines

of the faith both eloquently and sufficiently. These men often hold degrees from theological institutions where they were trained in sound doctrine and biblical orthodoxy. In other words, the errors that seem to plague the African church aren't necessarily from a lack of knowledge but rather from a lack of application of that knowledge into practice.

A short-sighted overcorrection would be to throw out knowledge-based teaching and instead simply focus on obedience-based action. However, this would be just as dangerous and ultimately counter-productive to healthy church. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not against one another but rather two sides of the same coin. To have one without the other is not only incomplete but insufficient to build a biblically faithful and missions minded church.

The Africa Theology Series addresses these challenges by helping the pastor or church leader see the interconnectedness of knowledge and action. There is an African proverb that says, "Two hands wash one another." We need both knowledge and obedience. Therefore, each volume will, in its own unique way, lay a theological foundation for the specific doctrine being addressed as the authors seek to answer the question, "What should I know?"

The reader will then be challenged to see how this knowledge (what I know) necessarily informs identity (who I am). Every culture has elements that the Bible can affirm and appreciate and also elements the Bible condemns and corrects. Seeing your culture and your worldview through the Biblical lens is a painful but necessary step. In fact, this step of transformed hearts is the bridge needed on the path from transformed minds to transformed actions. The authors will challenge the reader to think deeply and introspectively about the cultural implications of doctrine as they seek to answer the question, "Who should I be?"

After knowledge and being comes doing. This is where information gets to work. Sound doctrine is not merely for the academic minded nor should it be reserved only for the seminary classroom. Instead, right doctrine must be applied and spill over into right practice. The authors of each volume will assist the reader in understanding the practical application of the doctrine in their lives as they answer the final question, "What should I do?"

The following statement provides a short summation of this goal:

KNOWLEDGE *informs* **BEING** *which drives* **DOING**

My Neighbor's Faith: Interacting with Major Faith Systems

Another unique feature of the Africa Theology Series involves interaction with other major worldviews/religions. Africa is a very religious place where atheists are few and far between. Whereas books from the West might lean

more into apologetical arguments aimed at skeptics, this series looks to interact with the other major faith systems on the continent.

While there are obviously outliers, the majority of Africans fall into one of several religious categories. These categories are much more diverse than a simplistic designation and are oftentimes complex combinations of two distinct categories into one. One such example would be the syncretization of two distinct categories (Islam and ATR) into one faith system (Folk Islam).

Practically this means that two Muslim men from the same tribe and living in the same city might have drastically different understandings of their faith. This also implies that some who would claim to be Evangelical Christians actually practice a much more animistic faith. These nuances and caveats are real and rampant but beyond the scope of this series, which will examine only the orthodox positions of each faith system.

However, the problem of neatly labeling categories becomes even more challenging due to the ambiguous nature of African Traditional Religion (ATR). There is no such thing as THE African Traditional Religion with an agreed upon set of beliefs. Instead, ATR is a large designation for those who would cling to an animistic faith ranging from voodoo to ancestral worship and everything in between.

It would be impossible to try and interact with every potential version of each faith system. However, it is incredibly important to understand the basic tenets (even if not held by everyone in the same way) of the major faith systems on the continent. In other words, it is helpful to know what an “average” Muslim believes about the doctrine of God and how that’s different than the Evangelical Christian. Therefore, each volume in this series will provide side-by-side comparisons to highlight major differences between Evangelical Christians and these other religious systems.

Changing Tactics: Moving from Defense to Offense

There is an anecdotal account of how those working to detect counterfeit currency spend their time only examining real currency. The story is used to illustrate the importance of focusing time and energy studying the truth instead of spending time dealing with falsehoods. While this is a point worth noting and we would agree that knowing the truth is of utmost importance, we also believe it is a good and biblical practice to expose falsehoods.

The Africa Theology Series adopts an offensive standpoint instead of choosing to play defense alone. Far from being done in a mean-spirited fashion, each volume takes pastoral care to warn the flock of the dangers of false doctrines currently wreaking havoc on the African Church.

The prosperity gospel and many practices in Neo-pentecostalism pose an even greater threat to healthy church and missions advance than Islam or ATR.

Throughout the New Testament there is a constant warning of dangers that arise from wolves pretending to be sheep. These dangers are especially devastating because they come from within the church. Paul tells the church in Corinth of a tactic of Satan wherein he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Any good shepherd knows he is responsible to care for his flock. This means two things practically: one, he must provide for them by leading them to grazing grounds and sources of water; secondly, and just as important, he must protect them by keeping them from dangers which seek to harm the flock.

In the same way pastors must provide and protect their flocks. They must lead their people to the green pastures of God's Word and to drink from the Living Water of knowing Christ. However, pastors must be able to defend their flock and protect them from enemies who would seek to destroy and harm.

Each volume will seek to expose the various errors and dangerous ways of prosperity teachers and Neo-pentecostal practitioners. The authors will show how these false teachers twist and misuse the Scriptures and, therefore, confuse various key doctrines. The hope, then, is that these volumes will help pastors and church leaders protect both themselves and their flocks by nurturing a spirit of discernment that can detect and expose unbiblical teaching and practices.

Short and Simple: Creating a Readable and Helpful Resource

The American author Mark Twain once said, "I'm sorry this letter is so long. I did not have time to write a short one." In this quote Twain reveals a common misconception that the more words that are spoken (or typed) then the better the content. While it is true that sometimes exhaustive explanations are necessary, the reality is most subjects can be sufficiently and succinctly explained without endless words.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series are intentionally short and written in a way to be accessible to the largest audience of readers. The shortness comes from a ruthless approach to writing that seeks to explain the most significant truths with the fewest amount of words in the simplest way possible.

The goal is to create a resource that is readable and helpful. The authors seek to use story, dialog, proverbs, concrete examples, and other illustrious words to help complicated doctrines become understandable and applicable. Each volume also includes quick access reference guides for comparative charts on the various beliefs of each faith system.

The Journey Ahead

There is an African proverb that says, "A baby on its mother's back doesn't know the journey is long." Everyone, to some level, has benefited from the hard work of others. Teachers, pastors, theologians, authors, professors, par-

ents, and myriads of others have suffered greatly to carry us along. We are where we are today because of their sacrifice.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series have come about because many men who have many responsibilities deemed it worthy to set aside time to create the resource you now hold in your hand. These resources are the result of countless hours of work so that the African church might grow in her faithfulness to the task. Our hope is that their sacrifice “carries” you along in your faith journey.

Mark Phillips and Kevin Rodgers
Series editors

INTRODUCTION

In Africa, trees have an important place in people's understanding of life. We find the presence of trees in stories, proverbs, and songs. Africans often use trees as symbols in communicating. For instance, when Ousmane Sembène, a Senegalese writer, director, actor, and screenwriter used the phrase, "Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu" ("God's Pieces of Wood") as the title of his 1960 novel, he was actually talking about people.

Trees share many characteristics with human beings. Trees have life. They need food like human beings. They grow, bear fruit, and they die. In African stories, trees talk, think and express their will. There are good trees and bad trees. In the African understanding of life, trees are an amazing point of contact between the visible and the non-visible, the tangible and the non-tangible, the natural and the supernatural. For these and many other reasons, we can use the tree motif to teach and communicate effectively about the Christian doctrine of salvation. This motif can help Christians and non-Christians alike to better understand what the Bible teaches about this topic.

The Bible itself often uses metaphors relating to trees to communicate and teach theological truth. Consider the two trees in the Garden of Eden. The first residence of humanity was a garden, a place with rivers, trees and animals, a place where life flowed in beautiful balance with the ecosystem, where the sun and the moon, the human and the divine interacted peacefully and perfectly. In the garden was planted the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam and Eve not to eat from this tree. He told them that to do so was an act of disobedience that would lead to death and separation from God. Unfortunately, that was exactly what our first parents did.

In the same garden was another tree called the tree of life. But after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, humanity was forbidden from touching and eating from the tree of life. That loss of access to the tree of life was a powerful way of picturing humanity's loss of full life and communion with God. But by God's grace, that great loss is not the end of the Bible story. This same tree of life appears again in the book of Revelation, in the very last chapter of the Bible. There we read about the New

Jerusalem. In that glorious city there will be free access to the tree of life. This is a beautiful picture of our final salvation.

There are many other biblical examples where trees are used to communicate truths about salvation. In John 15, Jesus pictures himself as a vine, with his Father as the vinedresser and his disciples as fruit-bearing branches. In Romans 11, Paul pictures Israel, the redeemed people of God, as an olive tree into which Gentile believers have now been grafted. Considering the many Bible passages that speak about trees, therefore, and because of significance of trees in the African understanding of life, we have decided to make frequent use of comparisons relating to trees in this book. Like all metaphors, these comparisons have their limitations. But they also provide a rich means of communicating truths about the good news of God's salvation. We believe that pastors and teachers will find them to be useful aids to communication and understanding.

What lies ahead in this book? Chapter 1 begins with a description of humanity's need for salvation. It highlights four major aspects of our lost condition: we stand condemned by God's law and separated from his presence; we are inwardly corrupt; we have an enemy who attacks us; and we struggle with the physical, emotional, relational, economic and environmental effects of the Fall. Chapter 2 then establishes an important perspective on the doctrine of salvation by showing that salvation is the work of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Chapter 3 then examines the deep roots of salvation, which are God's grace and election. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss how a person first comes to receive salvation. On God's side, the Holy Spirit calls and regenerates sinners through the gospel message about Christ; on the human side, sinners believe and repent. The next four chapters examine what might be called the four great branches of the tree of salvation. Chapter 6 examines justification and adoption; chapter 7 looks at sanctification and glorification; chapter 8 deals with deliverance from the physical and material results of the Fall; and chapter 9 discusses deliverance from Satan and hostile spiritual powers. Finally, in chapter 10, we will briefly explore how the teaching about salvation found in the Bible both differs from and challenges the beliefs of four influential religious movements on the African continent. These are African Traditional Religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism. Each of these movements or traditions offers elements of truth, but these are mixed with serious errors.

CHAPTER 1

OUR NEED FOR SALVATION

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil, Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever: " therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. Genesis 3:22-23, ESV

The first step toward treating a sick person is to correctly diagnose the disease. In the same way, the first step in our study of the doctrine of salvation is to correctly identify the human need. What is the basic need of the human race? Why do we need salvation? What do we need to be saved from?

If I were to picture myself as a tree, I could say that without salvation I would be withered and dying. I would not be like the righteous person described in Psalm 1, planted by streams of water, having fresh, green leaves and bearing fruit to bless others. Instead, I would be dry, barren and ready to fall. I would be unable to take in water and nourishment from the rich soil of God's grace or absorb the fresh air of his Spirit or respond to the sunlight of his love.

Salvation itself can also be pictured as a tree: the tree of life. In Genesis 2:9 and 3:22 we read about the "tree of life" in the garden of Eden. But when Adam and Eve sinned, God drove them out of the garden and away from the tree of life. Driven from God's presence and separated from the tree of life! This is a perfect way to describe the tragedy of human lostness. But the very last chapter of the Bible describes a totally different scene. There we find a picture of salvation: free access to the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. In Revelation 22:1-2, John was shown the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down through the middle of the main street of the city. And on either side of that river stood the tree of life, bearing fresh fruit every month, with leaves that brought healing to the nations. This healing, fruit-bearing tree of life is a picture of salvation.

In this chapter, we take a closer look at what it meant for Adam and Eve: and the whole human race that descended from them: to lose

access to the tree of life. According to the Bible, God created our first parents and everything in the world around them good. But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they and the whole human race fell under the power of sin and death. We call this event the Fall. As a result of the Fall, every person in the world needs salvation. If we analyze the results of the Fall more closely, we might say that humanity has four desperate problems: first and foremost, we stand condemned by God's law and separated from his presence; second, we struggle with inward corruption; third, we have an enemy who attacks us; and fourth, we live in a broken and imperfect world. We need to be rescued from all of these things. We are like dry, withering trees, destined to be burned by fire, infected by disease, threatened by a destroyer, and surrounded by an ocean of desert sand.

Condemnation by God's law

Adam and Eve were given a command. God told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For them, this was a law. God told them what would happen if they broke that law: they would die. After Adam and Eve disobeyed, they knew that they were guilty. They tried to hide from God, but he found them and pronounced a judgement on them. Their disobedience brought condemnation and death.

What happened to Adam and Eve affects us all. According to Romans 5:12-14, the whole human race shares in Adam's sin. In addition to sharing in Adam's act of disobedience, we have also all committed our own acts of disobedience to God's commands. For us as for Adam, the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). We too are under a curse. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:10, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, to do them." We too must stand before God in his role as judge. All of this means that we have a deadly serious legal problem, a problem that relates to lawbreaking, guilt, condemnation and the penalty of death. If we are to be saved, we must be set free this situation. As with forests and trees in Africa, when a tree is cursed and condemned, all its fruit, leaves, roots, and branches are also affected, and every tree that grows from its seed carries the same curse.

Our legal problem has an equally serious relational side. Disobedience not only results in a penalty that we must pay, it also breaks our fellowship with God. That relational break is exactly what Adam and Eve experienced. When Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced spiritual as well as physical death: their relationship with God was broken.

God had told Adam that if he disobeyed God's command he would die on that very day. Adam and Eve did not die physically on the day they ate the fruit God had forbidden, but they did die *spiritually*. The moment they disobeyed God, their fellowship with him was broken. They were driven out of the garden, away from God's presence. The whole human race now shares in this spiritual death (Eph. 2:1). Our sin makes it impossible for us to be in God's presence (Ps. 5:4). We are like branches broken off from the vine. Unless something is done to restore us, our present spiritual death will one day become eternal death, which means eternal separation from God. So, this is first great human problem: we stand condemned by God's law and separated from his presence. Just as a cursed trees may appear green and living, Adam and Eve and their children were physically alive even though they were in reality cursed and spiritually dead before God.

Inward corruption

The second great human problem is inward corruption. One of the results of Adam's act of disobedience was that his inward nature changed. It became corrupted. Adam was originally created good, but now his heart was bent toward sin. This same corruption affects all Adam's descendants. We are unable to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. We are unable to love our neighbors as ourselves. Selfishness, pride, greed, envy, hatred and all kinds of sinful desires arise within our heart. These sinful desires taint all that we do. Even when we try our best to live in obedience to God's law, we find that we cannot do it. According to Romans 7:7-19, we are like slaves, held captive by our sinful nature. According to Isaiah 6:6, even our best acts are tainted by uncleanness. We have become like trees that can no longer fulfill the purpose for which they were created. Instead of life and happiness, we produce trouble, sadness, sickness, and death.

If we are to live free and joyful lives in fellowship with God and one another, we must be delivered from these sinful and selfish tendencies that lie deep within our heart. We need a new heart and a renewed mind. If we are to be fully rescued from our lost condition, then, our inward corruption must be removed and our hearts must be transformed. Otherwise, we will be like a tree that, while it may look healthy on the outside, is inwardly hollow and rotting away.

Satan

In addition to legal condemnation and internal corruption, we also have an external enemy who relentlessly attacks us. This is Satan, to-

gether with the demons and spiritual forces that are under his control. In Genesis, God told the serpent that he would put enmity between him and the woman, between his offspring and hers. Satan continues to do us harm today. If I picture myself as a tree, Satan is like a vandal coming at me with an ax. Or he might be like a deadly beetle, slowly and persistently trying to bore into me and destroy me.

Those who remain under the law's condemnation and stand separated from God are fully exposed to Satan's fearsome power, but even those who belong to Christ are subject to his attacks. According to 1 Peter 5:8, Satan is like a roaring lion who seeks to devour us. According to Ephesians 6:13, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of this present darkness and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Satan tries to tempt and deceive us, just as he did Adam and Eve. Then when he succeeds in enticing us to disobey God, he uses our sin as an opportunity to accuse, attack, oppress and hold us captive. Satan can even cause us trouble in the physical realm, as when he blocked Paul from travelling to Thessalonica (1 Thes. 2:18) and gave him a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9). As long as Satan and his forces are active in the world, attacking and hassling us, we can never be completely free and at peace. We need to be delivered from this enemy.

The physical, environmental and social effects of the Fall

Adam was created to live a healthy, pain-free life in a perfect environment with plenty of good things to eat. God gave him a perfectly suitable companion and helper. God assigned him work that was meaningful but not burdensome, that of tending and keeping the garden of Eden. But all this changed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. They were turned out of the garden, away from the tree of life. From that point on, they lived a very different kind of existence in a very different environment, one that is still shared by all their descendants. Adam and Eve began to experience pain in work and childbirth. Adam had to cultivate thorny ground, working by the sweat of his brow. Tensions and selfishness entered the relationship between Adam and Eve. They lost their inward sense of peace and became conscious of nakedness and shame. They grew old and weak, and finally returned to dust. These were the physical, environmental, social, economic, relational and psychological effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience. All of these effects of the Fall are all still with us today. None of these things were part of God's original design for us. We long to be delivered from them.

Two questions to guide our thinking

In this chapter, we have tried to summarize what the Bible teaches about the lost condition of the human race by identifying the four major problems from which we need to be rescued: our condemnation by God's law and loss of communion with him, our inward corruption, Satan's hostile action, and the physical, environmental and social effects of the Fall. In the chapters that follow, we will see that God's salvation provides exactly the rescue we need in every one of these areas. But as we go on to study more about God's perfect saving work, there are two questions we should keep in mind.

First, if the Bible describes four fundamental areas of human need, *what is God's specific solution for each specific need?* Imagine that a pastor teaches his congregation that God's salvation touches every area of their life. Every week, he tells the people in his church that God's salvation meets every need they have. That is completely true. But imagine the pastor never explains *how* God meets each of their needs. Is that a sufficient way to teach his church members about salvation? No. The Bible gives us many rich *details* about God's salvation. God wants his people to know the specific areas of life and specific human problems from which he rescues us. The Bible tells us what specific actions God has taken, or is still taking, or will take in the future, to deal with each specific need. For instance, God has done one thing to deliver us from the law's condemnation, but he does something additional to deliver us from inward corruption. And what God does to deliver us from Satan and demons does not take exactly the same form as what he does to deliver us from sickness or material need. To teach and preach effectively, we must highlight all the great richness of God's salvation by explaining his specific provision for each specific need we have. The more believers understand about God's salvation, the more they will be able to appropriate its full blessings, the more they will be encouraged and filled with hope, and the more they will want to praise and thank God.

A second important question to ask is, *for each of our specific needs, what measure of deliverance does God intend for believers to receive here and now and what measure will only come in the future?* Our salvation includes a multitude of blessings. Some we receive immediately the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ, others wait for the day of his return to earth. Some of the benefits of salvation come to us instantly in a single decisive moment, others come gradually over a period of time. We will say more about this in the chapters to follow, but right from the start it is

important to realize that some aspects of salvation are instantaneous and others are gradual; some are given to us now and others we will receive only when Christ returns. Misunderstandings in this area can be dangerous. If believers expect to receive here and now blessings that the Bible promises only for the future, they will be disappointed. On the other hand, if they think they have to wait until Christ returns to receive a benefit the Bible promises already for the present time, they will miss out on the full blessings God intends them to have. Or if there is a blessing that the Bible indicates will come to a believer gradually over the course of a lifetime, but they expect to receive it completely in a single dramatic moment, they will vainly pursue an experience that never comes. Or, if they do have a dramatic experience, they will deceive themselves about what it actually means.

With these thoughts and questions in mind, let us delve into the Bible's rich teaching about the great things God has done for our salvation.

CHAPTER 2

THE WORK OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT FOR OUR SALVATION

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. Revelation 22:1-2a, ESV

In Revelation 22:1-2, John was shown the river of the water of life. He saw it flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb and running through the middle of the New Jerusalem. On either side of that river stood the tree of life. This tree, with its fresh fruit and healing leaves, presents a beautiful picture of salvation. But the tree of life does not stand and bear fruit by itself. It depends entirely on the river of the water of life. And the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, depends entirely on God and the Lamb.

This passage in Revelation shows that salvation is the work of the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Notice first that the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God. In other words, salvation begins with God the Father. It is he who planned our rescue. It is his love that sent the Son into the world to be our Savior and that sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to transform us and assure us that we now belong to him.

But if salvation begins with God the Father, it *depends* on the work of the Son, Jesus Christ. Revelation 22:1 highlights two aspects of Christ's work for our salvation. First, he is the Lamb. As the Lamb, he shed his blood to cleanse and redeem us. But second, Jesus is now seated on the throne. He is the risen and ascended Lord. He shares the Father's authority and reigns at his right hand. It is because the Lamb is on the throne: Jesus Christ, once crucified but now risen: that the river of water of life can flow forth and bring healing to the nations.

This passage in Revelation also portrays the Holy Spirit's role in our salvation. It is the Holy Spirit's special task to *bring the blessings that Christ has won for us into our lives and experience*. In the picture given in Revelation, how do the saving benefits won by the Lamb reach the tree of life so that we can access and enjoy them? They are carried there

from the throne by the river of the water of life. Several scriptural factors indicate that this river represents the Holy Spirit. First, Jesus used flowing water as an image of the Holy Spirit in John 7:37-39. Second, this river contains the water of life and gives sustenance to the tree of life. According to John 6:63, it is the Spirit who gives life. Third, the river flows from the throne of God and Christ. This matches what Jesus taught in John 15:26, that the Spirit would be sent by him and the Father. Fourth, according to John 7:39, the Holy Spirit could be given only after Jesus had been “glorified.” This is exactly what Revelation 22:1-2 describes: the river of the water of life flows from the throne of the glorified Lamb. Finally, the river flows down the middle of the main street of the New Jerusalem. This perfectly matches the New Testament description of the Spirit as the one who is actively present in the midst of God’s people. So the vision John was given in Revelation 22 pictures salvation as the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christians worship and serve one God, the creator of heaven and earth. There is no other God. But the Bible shows that the God we worship exists eternally in three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We thus affirm the doctrine of the Trinity. As we study what the Bible teaches about salvation, we need to remember that salvation is the work of the Triune God. The Bible shows that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all play a role in our salvation. They perform distinct roles and yet they always work together in perfect harmony and unity. Jesus speaks of this unity in John 6:38. He says, “I came down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.” The same principle of unity characterizes the work of the Holy Spirit. In John 16:13-14, Jesus says this about the Holy Spirit: “He will not speak on his own authority, but *whatever he hears he will speak*... He will glorify me, for he will take *what is mine* and declare it to you.” So, in the great divine work of redeeming the lost human race, the Son always carries out the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit always bears testimony to and applies the work of the Son.

God the Father, the source and goal of our salvation

We can sum up much of what the Bible says about the role of the Father by saying that it portrays him as both the source and goal of our salvation. To say that God the Father is the source of our salvation means that every aspect of our redemption starts with him and comes from him. John 3:16 pictures this very clearly: “God so loved the world

that he sent his Son.” Jesus Christ came into the world to save us, but it was God the Father who sent him. And behind that act of sending lay the Father’s great love. Other Scripture passages describe the Father as the one who planned our salvation and chose us for salvation. Ephesians 1:3-12 is an outstanding example. Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” This passage goes on to speak about the Father’s purpose, will and plan. His plan is to unite all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth.

To say that God the Father is the goal of our salvation means that redemption is designed to bring us into a new relationship with him. According to Galatians 4:4-6, God sent his Son into the world so that we might receive adoption as sons, and he sent his Spirit into our hearts so we might cry out, “Abba, Father!” Or, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:5-6, the Father adopted us to himself as sons so we might praise his glorious grace forever.

Christ the Son, our representative and the reigning king

The Son’s role is to carry out the Father’s plan. He did this first by entering our fallen world. He took on human flesh so that he could act as our representative. As our *representative*, Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience. He stood in our place and fully resisted Satan’s temptations. He paid the penalty for our sins by his death on the cross. He rose again so that we might be raised to life with him. In addition to acting as our representative, the Son also carries out the Father’s redemptive plan by reigning as *king*. He establishes God’s rule on earth. Jesus rules now from the throne of heaven and one day he will return to earth to establish God’s reign completely. Through his kingly rule, Jesus defeats our enemies and gives us all the blessings of salvation.

Much of what the Bible says about the saving work of Jesus Christ relates to what he did once for all in history, especially through his death and resurrection. Jesus stood in our place as the second Adam. He lived a life of perfect obedience. He bore our sins on the cross and suffered the death that we deserved. He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Then, as it says in Hebrews 9:11-12, as our high priest, Jesus entered once for all into the heavenly holy place to present the blood of his sacrifice and thus secure our redemption. Theologians call all these saving acts in the past “the finished work of Christ.” This finished work forms the objective *grounds* or *basis* for our salvation.

What gives believers the right to be called sons of God? What makes it possible for God to declare sinners not guilty? What silences Satan's accusations against believers? What takes the weapons out of his hands? The answer to all these questions is the finished work of Christ. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again in victory (see Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 3:25-26; 8:33-34; Col. 2:14-15). But following this finished work in history, Christ continues to work on behalf of believers. He actively works in the present to ensure that his followers receive all the blessings he won for them through his death and resurrection. According to Hebrews 8:1, Christ acts today as both priest and king. Or as Revelation 5:5-6 puts it, he is the Lamb upon the throne.

The Holy Spirit, the one who testifies about Christ and applies his work to our lives

Jesus Christ took on human flesh and carried out his mission in bodily form. His mission on earth was limited to one geographical region during one period of history. Even in the present, Jesus retains his bodily form; he ascended bodily into heaven and remains there until the day of his physical return to earth. The Holy Spirit, by way of contrast, has no physical body. He can produce physical effects, but he works invisibly. He can enter human hearts. He is present and active all over the world with no geographical limitations. His work continues through all generations, from the day of Pentecost to the present.

The work of the Holy Spirit is always tightly connected to the work of Christ. From the day of Pentecost to the day of Christ's return to earth, the Holy Spirit's role in our salvation might be summed under three general headings. First, he *testifies* about Christ. The Holy Spirit bears testimony about Jesus by convincing, persuading and giving understanding to those who hear the gospel (John 15:26-27; 16:8-11). He also bears testimony by assuring believers that they are truly God's children who have been redeemed and adopted in Christ (Rom. 8:15-16). As the one who bears testimony about Jesus, the Holy Spirit enables preachers and teachers to proclaim the message about him (Acts 1:8). Yet another aspect of the Holy Spirit's testifying action is that he helped the original apostles remember and teach about what Jesus had said and done (John 14:26; 16:12-15), so that they could pass on that deposit of truth in the New Testament.

Second, the Holy Spirit *connects* people to Christ and *applies* his finished work to their lives. The Holy Spirit opens people's hearts and minds to receive the gospel message. He brings them to a point of

faith and repentance so that they can receive the salvation that Christ won for them. The Spirit then enables believers to sense their status as adopted sons (Gal. 4:6) and he transforms their lives to be more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22).

Third the Holy Spirit *executes* Christ's present reign. Jesus now rules from the throne of heaven, but it is the Holy Spirit who puts Christ's rule into effect on earth and in human lives (Acts 1:1, 6-8; 2:33). As the agent of Christ, the Holy Spirit guides the church, empowers believers with spiritual gifts, works miracles and enables the gospel to advance. But as he does these things, the Spirit is always simply carrying out the reign of Christ.

Whenever we consider the work of the Holy Spirit, we should keep three additional truths in mind. First, the work of the Holy Spirit always glorifies Jesus and leads us to greater appreciation of him. Second, all true works of the Holy Spirit reflect the character and values of Jesus. This is because the Spirit does not act independently but always in close connection with the work of Christ: just as Christ does not act independently but always fulfills the will of the Father. Third, believers receive the Holy Spirit only from Christ and only on the basis of what Christ has done for them on the cross. That is why the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost could happen only after Jesus had died, risen and ascended to heaven (see John 7:37-39; Acts 2:23; Eph. 4:8). This also explains why believers experience the Holy Spirit's gifts and blessings only after they have been redeemed and adopted through putting their faith in the finished work of Christ (Gal. 4:4-6; Eph. 1:13-14). So, everything the Holy Spirit does for us today comes from or depends on the work of Christ, and every blessing we receive from Christ comes to us only by the Holy Spirit.

Why it is important to understand the roles of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

There are several reasons why it is important for Christians to understand the roles of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in their salvation. First, it helps us see the great richness of our salvation. The Bible shows that God's salvation provides for all our needs, spiritual, physical, social and environmental. He provides solutions for needs that relate to our past, our present and our future. He delivers us from our fear, shame and guilt and brings us into a glorious new relationship with him. To grasp the full extent of God's action on our behalf: all that the Bible teaches about what he does to save us: it is very helpful

to think in terms of what the Father specifically does, what the Son specifically does and what the Holy Spirit specifically does. Christians often have a too narrow view of what salvation includes. As a result, their sense of joy, gratitude and peace may never be as strong as God intends it to be. Or they may easily become discouraged when difficulties enter their lives. The less believers know about their salvation, the harder it will be for them to trust and obey God. But the opposite is also true. The more they know, the stronger they will be. One of the best ways to learn more about the greatness of our salvation is to examine what the Bible teaches about the varied but harmonious actions of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Second, understanding the complementary roles of the Father and the Son enables us to avoid the danger of separating the work of Christ from the work of the Father. Christians can sometimes have a distorted view of God. They may picture Jesus as their loving Savior but God the Father as a remote and stern judge. They may think that the Father only wanted to punish them, but Jesus the Son convinced him to accept them. That is not what the Bible teaches! God the Father loves us deeply. It was he who planned our salvation from the very start. It was his love that sent the Son to be our Savior.

In a similar way, understanding the complementary roles of the Son and the Holy Spirit enables us to avoid the danger of separating the work of the Holy Spirit from the work of Christ. Some Christians think that because they have a relationship with Christ as their Lord and Savior, they do not really need the Holy Spirit. They do not realize that it is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that they came to know and believe in Jesus, were brought into relationship with Jesus and are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Other Christians are aware that they need the Holy Spirit but think that he works independently of Jesus and can be received independently of Jesus. They do not realize that the Holy Spirit always and only carries out the work of Christ. They do not realize that we receive the Holy Spirit only from the hand of Jesus and only on the basis of his finished work on our behalf.

So, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit work together in perfect harmony for our salvation. Each plays a vital role. The more we understand the Bible's teaching in this area, the stronger we will be as God's children and followers of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3

CHOSEN BY GOD

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Eph. 1:4, ESV

Every tree has roots. They are invisible, lying deep in the ground, but everything we see above ground, the trunk, the branches, the leaves and the fruit, depends upon them. Roots are strong and alive. They hold a tree up. They are the source of its nourishment. They sustain its life. In the same way, salvation is anchored and fed by deep, strong roots. We may not see them, but the Bible says much about them. Without them, there would be no salvation. The roots of salvation are God's grace and election.

Grace and election

Grace is God's unmerited favor to sinners. It is one of the great themes of Scripture and it underlies every aspect of our salvation. God's grace has been at work from the very start of human history. After Adam and Eve broke God's command, he did not abandon them. They hid from his presence, but the Lord God did not let them go. Instead, he called out to Adam, "Where are you?" That searching question was a sign of grace. It meant that despite their sin, shame and fear, God still had a plan for Adam and Eve. God sought them out in order to restore them to a right relationship with him.

God's grace continued to operate throughout the Old Testament period, especially in the history of Israel. It then burst out in new ways with the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus told powerful parables about God's grace. He told of a shepherd going out to search for a lost sheep and of a father welcoming home his lost son. In addition to teaching about grace, Jesus also demonstrated it through his actions. He sat at table with tax collectors and sinners. He called them to follow him and be his disciples. For example, one day Jesus looked up into a tree along the side of the road in Jericho and saw a tax collector. He said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for I must stay at your house today." That was an act of pure grace. Grace means that God takes the initiative and

reaches out to restore lost sinners. Grace is not something we earn or win on the basis of our merit; just the opposite, it is freely given to those who actually deserve to be condemned. Christians rightly treasure the Bible's teaching about God's grace.

But closely allied to the theme of God's grace is the biblical theme election. According to Scripture, God chooses people to belong to him. In Deuteronomy 14:2, Moses tells the people of Israel, "The Lord has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." In John 15:16, Jesus says to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." What the Bible says about God's election raises many questions, some of which we may not be able to fully answer. But we can be perfectly confident that everything Scripture says about this topic is designed to encourage us and lead us to praise God for his grace.

Key terms relating to election

The Bible contains many passages that speak about election. Here are three that are especially clear. The key words have been put in italics.

"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..." Romans 8:28-29, ESV

"...even as he *chose* us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he *predestined* us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the *purpose* of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace..." Ephesians 1:4-6a, ESV

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are *elect* exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." 1 Peter 1:1-2, ESV

Notice the words that have been highlighted. The verb "chose" appears in Ephesians 1:4; it refers to God's act of choosing believers for salvation. The closely related adjective "elect," which appears in 1 Peter 1:1, refers to the people whom God has chosen. Another important

term, “predestined,” appears in Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 1:5. To predestine means to decide or determine something beforehand. Yet another important term is “purpose.” In Romans 8:28, Paul uses this term to refer to God’s intention to achieve a certain end. In Ephesians 1:5, Paul uses a different Greek word for “purpose” to emphasize the goodness of God’s intention. Finally, in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, we find the terms “foreknew” and “foreknowledge”, which speak of knowing something or someone beforehand. When we put these three passages together, then, they tell us that God *chose* believers and *determined beforehand* that they would become his children. They tell us that God’s choosing was guided by a loving purpose and that it was linked to his *foreknowledge*.

Two major views

In the history of Christian thought, two major views have emerged concerning grace and election. In the European and North American theological tradition, these views have typically been associated with the French theologian, John Calvin, and the Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius. For this reason, these opposing views are sometimes referred to as “Calvinism” and “Arminianism.” Those names are not ideal, because a person may hold a view of election similar to that of one of these theologians without accepting his entire theological teaching. Furthermore, it is always good for Christians keep their primary focus on the Bible rather than on the teachings of a particular theologian. Nevertheless, because these terms are so common, we will use them here.

The easiest way to describe the Calvinist position on grace and election is to explain how it answers two important questions. First, upon what does God base his election? The Calvinist response is that God’s election is *unconditional*. It is not based on any good quality a person possesses, nor does it depend on anything they do, or have done in the past, or will do in the future. Citing passages like Romans 9:11 and 2 Timothy 1:9, Calvinists argue that God chooses people entirely by grace, simply according to his good pleasure. The second question is, how effective is God’s grace? The Calvinist answer is that God’s grace is *irresistible*. That means that it is always effective. When God calls a person to himself by grace, that person will definitely respond positively: not because they are forced to act against their will, but because God changes their heart so that they genuinely want to turn to him.

The Arminian position offers different answers to these questions. To the question concerning the basis for God’s election, the traditional

Arminian response is that God chooses people for salvation *based on his foreknowledge*. As we have seen, passages like Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 link election to divine foreknowledge. Arminians have traditionally understood these verses to mean that God knew beforehand how every person in the world would respond if or when that person was given an opportunity to receive the offer of salvation. Based on that foreknowledge, God chose to save those people whom he knew would respond positively. On this view, election is not totally unconditional but depends on the choice God knew people would make.

In addition to this view of divine foreknowledge, or in some cases as an alternative to it, some Arminians adopt a distinctive position concerning the nature of God's plan and purpose for human history. Some hold that God's predestined plan covers only the *general patterns* of human history while leaving many of the individual details undecided. According to this view, God has chosen and predestined the church to be the redeemed bride of Christ; therefore, the church will certainly be redeemed. But God has not predetermined which individuals will put their faith in Christ and thus become part of his church. According to this view, God's plan for human history may be compared to a ship sailing between two cities. If a ship leaves Abidjan for Lagos, for example, it is predetermined that everyone onboard will arrive in Lagos on the date that has been scheduled. But it is not predetermined who will get on the ship in the first place or how the passengers will move about the ship during the voyage. In the same way, it is argued, God's predestination is limited in scope; it does not cover all individual human choices.

To the second question, which concerns the effectiveness of God's grace, the Arminian response is that God's grace is strong enough to enable sinners to respond positively to the offer of salvation but does not guarantee that they will do so. Arminians thus do not speak of irresistible grace, but rather of *prevenient* or *enabling grace*. On this view, God gives every sinner a measure of grace which enables them to make a free and unaided choice to receive salvation. But that enabling grace does not always result in salvation; it can be resisted. Notice that, on the Arminian understanding, an equal amount of enabling grace is given to every person. On the Calvinist view, by way of contrast, God's saving grace touches only the elect.

Factors to consider

When deciding one's position with regard to divine election, many Bible passages and many aspects of Bible teaching need to be carefully

examined. Students of Scripture sometimes reflect on this question for many years before coming to a settled position. In this brief chapter, we cannot discuss every aspect of this challenging question, but here are some of the most important factors that deserve careful thought and study.

1. *The nature of God's foreknowledge.* The passages that link election and predestination with divine foreknowledge, like Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2, require careful exegesis. At first glance, the Arminian interpretation of these verses seems strong. But certain factors show that another interpretation should also be given thoughtful consideration. One factor is that, in some Scripture contexts, to "know" someone means to enter into a personal relationship with them. In passages like Matthew 7:23 and 1 Corinthians 8:3, for instance, to say that God knows a person means that he acknowledges that they belong to him. Yet another exegetical factor is that Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2 do not say that God foreknew something *about* believers, such as the fact that they would trust in him or turn to him, but simply that he foreknew *them*. So, these verses may simply mean that, long before believers were even born, God had already decided to enter into a relationship with them.

2. *The extent of predestination.* Does God's predestination cover all the details of human history, including individual human choices, as Calvinists think, or only the large patterns of history, as many some hold? To make an informed decision about this issue, it is necessary to examine a wide range of Scripture passages that speak about God's plan and purpose. On the one hand, many passages that speak about God's predetermined plan refer to his general purpose for an entire nation or the whole church, or to major events in history. On the other hand, there are passages that seem to picture all human choices as being within the scope of God's sovereign purpose. Both sets of passages should be thoughtfully examined with their contexts taken into account.

3. *The factor of human responsibility.* At the heart of the debate between Calvinists and Arminians lies the question of how to reconcile the Bible's teaching about election and predestination with its teaching about human responsibility. The Bible is absolutely clear that human beings are fully responsible for their actions and choices. They are responsible to obey God's law and cannot make excuses for their disobedience. For this reason, Paul writes in Romans 2:9-10, "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.” People are equally accountable for their response to the gospel. They are both invited and commanded to repent and believe (Matt. 11:28-30; Acts 17:30; Rev. 22:17). This emphasis on human responsibility is consistent throughout the entire Bible.

But the Bible’s consistent emphasis on human responsibility raises a large question with regard to election and predestination, especially the Calvinist understanding of those doctrines. If it is true that God chooses certain people for salvation unconditionally, and if he predestines all human actions, does that eliminate human responsibility? Or does it mean that God is unfair when he judges those who rebel against him and reject the gospel? This is not a new question. In fact, Paul pictures someone asking the same thing in Romans 9:19: “Why does God still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

The traditional Calvinist approach to this issue is to affirm full human responsibility while at the same time affirming unconditional election and God’s predestination of all things. This might be called a both-and approach: 100% human responsibility combined with 100% divine control over all things. Everything depends on our human choice but at the same time everything depends on God’s choice. As most Calvinists are ready to admit, this both-and approach presents an intellectual mystery that simply cannot be resolved. In terms of normal human logic, it is impossible to explain how these two claims can both be true. Calvinists will usually just say that the Bible teaches both truths so we must accept them both, even if we cannot explain how they go together. They may point to the doctrine of the Trinity as another Scripture-based truth that cannot be logically explained, arguing that some truths relating to God go beyond the limits of human understanding.

An Arminian approach to election and predestination does not eliminate every question, but it does greatly reduce the degree of mystery surrounding these doctrines. Those Arminians who link election to God’s foreknowledge of human choices can offer a clear explanation of why some people are chosen and others are not. God bases his choice on what he knows about the person’s own free choice. Those Arminians who hold that God’s predestined plan for human history does not include all individual human decisions also find it easy to explain how predestination can be fully compatible with human responsibility. On their view, predestination simply does not relate to the question of whether or not a person will respond to the gospel.

There is a third potential approach to the question human responsibility, however, a position that is sometimes termed “hyper-Calvinism.”

Although this position is rare among serious Christian theologians, it sometimes exerts an influence at the level of popular thought. The hyper-Calvinist position resolves the logical problems involved in relating divine election to human responsibility by affirming unconditional election but denying or reducing the scope of human responsibility. On this way of thinking, if God is fully in control of all things, it must be the case that humans are not fully responsible for their actions and choices. When it comes to trusting Christ or living righteously, therefore, there is nothing humans can do other than passively submit to the sovereign will of God. Hyper-Calvinism often goes hand in hand with a de-emphasis on the task evangelism. But the hyper-Calvinist approach to the doctrines of election and predestination represents a perversion of biblical teaching and should be completely rejected. Furthermore, it should not be confused with traditional Calvinism.

4. *God's love for the lost.* Christians gladly affirm the truth expressed in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." For Arminians, this verse simply means that God's love extends to every person in the world, just as enabling grace extends to every person in the world. But Calvinists disagree with the Arminian concept of universal enabling grace; they hold that God's saving grace, which they believe to be irresistible, extends only to those whom God has chosen for salvation. Because of their conviction about the nature God's grace, and because God's grace is closely related to his love, some Calvinists have questioned whether John 3:16 and other verses like it actually mean that God's love extends to every single individual in the world. They may interpret verses like John 3:16 to mean that God loves all *kinds* of people in the world or people from every *part* of the world, but not every individual in the world. On their view, God's love is limited to those he has chosen and redeemed. But is questionable whether it is wise or necessary for Calvinists to take this position. According to Luke 13:34-35 and 19:41, the Lord Jesus wept for the people of Jerusalem and longed to gather them to him, even though he knew those same people would ultimately reject him. The feelings Jesus expressed for these lost people reflect the heart of God. Paul also reveals his deep feelings for his lost countrymen in Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1. Since Paul wrote these words under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, we should see the feelings Paul expresses in these verses as a reflection of God's heart. So even if we do not understand all the mysteries of God's election, this doctrine should not lead us to question God's love and concern for all people. We should also observe that, in Romans 9, Paul combines strong teaching about divine election with

sincere expressions of his concern for the lost. Paul's attitude should be a model for all Christians.

Practical affirmations

In the preceding sections it was necessary to outline the main points of an important theological debate. But a proper biblical approach to the doctrines of election and predestination demands that we also consider the practical implications of the Bible's teaching in this area. When the Bible speaks of these matters, it does so in order to encourage believers and lead them to trust and praise God. Here then are several practical implications that flow from the Bible's teaching.

1. *We can praise God for every aspect of our salvation, because it is his work from start to finish.* In Ephesians 1:3-12, Paul links God's acts of electing and predestining to every aspect of the believer's salvation: their life of holiness, their adoption, their redemption, their forgiveness and their inheritance. All of these things depend on grace, Paul says, with the result that believers are led to recognize just how glorious God's grace is and thus to praise him for it. The Bible's teaching about election takes away all boasting and leads us to give all the credit for our salvation to God. If we have made the decision to receive God's offer of salvation, we should not boast that it was because we were smarter, better or godlier than others. Instead we should simply praise God for choosing us and drawing us to him.

2. *The Bible's teaching about election assures believers that God genuinely wants them.* Christians are sometimes tempted to think that God does not greatly love them or value them. They may feel that God cares for other Christians but not for them. But the biblical doctrine election assures us that such thoughts are not true. If God chose us to belong to him it means that we are important to him; before we ever wanted him, he wanted us. Furthermore, several Bible passages make the point that when God chooses, he makes a special selection. As Moses told the people of Israel, "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. 7:6). According to this verse, God wanted *Israel*. In the same way, all those whom God chooses for salvation are special to him and loved by him.

3. *We can be assured that God's love for us is genuine and completely free.* Human affection often depends at least in part on some benefit we can receive from the person we love. We love people who please us, make us feel good, help us, treat us kindly, give us gifts, supply our needs,

bring us advantages and make our lives better. In the same way, people love us when we can offer them these benefits. This is natural. But it may occasionally make us wonder about the nature of some of our relationships. We may wonder whether a person genuinely loves us or only the benefits we can give them. We wonder whether their love is completely free or whether there are strings attached. The Bible's teaching about election assures us that God's love is not based on anything we can offer him but is completely genuine and completely free. Moses told the people of Israel, "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people" (Deut. 7:7). He also told them, "The Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people" (Deut. 9:6). The same principle applies for those whom God has chosen in Jesus Christ: God's love for us is given freely; it does not depend on what we can offer him.

4. *Believers can be assured that their salvation is secure, because they know that the God who began a good work in them will bring it to completion.* If our response to Christ depended entirely on our own strength, we could never be sure that we would persevere in trust and obedience. But if God himself has chosen us and planned our salvation, he will never let us go; he will work in us to keep us faithful. Paul expresses this confidence in Philippians 1:6. Jesus makes a similar point in John 10:29. He says that those who belong to him have been given to him by the Father and that no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. In other words, those whom the Father has chosen to put their faith in Jesus will be kept spiritually safe.

5. *We can praise and trust God without reserve, because we know that he is perfectly sovereign, perfectly just and perfectly loving.* As we have seen in our earlier discussion, it is not easy to explain how the Bible's teaching about God's sovereign election and predestination relates to its teaching about God's justice and love. Because of this, Christians can be tempted to doubt or downplay one or the other of God's attributes. Some may be tempted to question whether God is truly sovereign over human affairs. Others may uphold the truth of God's sovereignty, but then begin to doubt whether he is 100% just and loving in his dealings with humans. But if Christians do this, they face a serious practical problem. If we begin to doubt that God is fully just or fully loving or fully sovereign, it will be impossible for us to trust him and to worship him with a glad and free heart. The solution to such thoughts is simple. Whatever our position with respect to the theological debates about

election, we must let our worship and practical trust in God be guided by those teachings of Scripture that are clear and consistent. The Bible consistently testifies to God's perfect justice, perfect love and complete sovereignty over his creation. These are the bedrock convictions that Christians must live by. We may not understand everything about election and predestination, but we can be sure that God's actions in this area harmonize with his fundamental attributes and character. God is perfectly just, perfectly loving and completely in control.

6. *When we talk with searching sinners or doubting Christians, we can confidently point them to Christ and the promises of the gospel.* Occasionally there are people who have heard the wrong kind of teaching about election or become focused on this doctrine in a distorted and one-sided way, so that instead of gladly responding to the gospel invitation, all they can think about is whether or not they are one of God's elect. This is distortion of Bible teaching, because Scripture never suggests that unbelievers should try to determine whether or not they have been chosen by God. Instead, the Bible tells them to focus all their attention on Jesus Christ, his atoning death on the cross, and promises and invitations of God's word concerning salvation. Instead of asking sinners to delve into the mysteries of God's hidden will, Scripture tells them about Jesus and invites them to come to him.

7. *Every person can be invited and urged to receive the gospel's offer of salvation.* Scripture nowhere hints that the invitation and promises found in the gospel are addressed only to the elect. They are addressed to all and are to be proclaimed to all. Passages like Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28-30 and, at the very end of Scripture, Revelation 22:17 invite one and all to come, assuring them that they will receive salvation. Other passages even command people to receive the gospel. According to Acts 17:30, God commands all people everywhere to repent. According to 1 John 3:23, God's command is that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. So, Christians are to proclaim the gospel fully and freely to all people, urging them to respond. Paul provides us with a good example in this regard. His letters contain many references to God's election and predestination but that did not detract in the least from the grand passion of his life, to preach the gospel in all the world.

CHAPTER 4

ENTERING SALVATION: GOD'S CALL

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. Acts 16:14, ESV

A tree is supported by its trunk. The trunk is visible. It is solid, firm and strong. Every branch, leaf, blossom and piece of fruit on the tree is supported by that single trunk. In the same way, every aspect of our salvation depends on and is supported by the strong and perfect work of Jesus Christ. The Son of God came into our world, took on human flesh and worked visibly in history. He carried out the mission the Father had given him to win our salvation.

When Jesus lived on earth, he was seen, heard and touched. In a manner of speaking, he can still be seen and heard today when Scripture is preached, taught and read. Look at how Paul describes his preaching in Galatians 3:1. He tells his readers, "It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified." John speaks in a similar way in 1 John 1:3. He says, "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us." Jesus and his saving work are clearly described in God's word. When people read Scripture or hear the gospel preached, they can understand what Christ has done for them. And by believing what they read and hear, they are saved. As Paul puts it in Romans 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." So, Christ acted in history to win our salvation, and his saving work is now applied to our lives when we hear about him and believe in him.

But let's think further about the nature of a tree. It is true that everything depends on the trunk. Without the strong and solid trunk, there would be no tree. But there is also another vital factor that works together with the trunk to bring life to the tree. This second factor is less visible to our eyes. For there to be life, *sap* must flow through the trunk. Sap must flow up from the roots, through the trunk and out into the branches, bringing life-giving water and nutrients to the leaves and fruit. The branches, leaves, blossoms and fruit depend on the sap

just as they depend on the trunk. The Bible highlights the importance of sap in Psalm 92.12-15, where the righteous are compared to a flourishing palm tree and a cedar in Lebanon: “They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.” For a tree to bear fruit and remain green, sap must flow within it.

The sap can do nothing apart from the trunk, of course. It is the trunk that supports the branches and channels the sap. Not a single drop of life-giving sap ever reaches the branches, leaves and fruit except by flowing through the trunk. And yet, the sap is absolutely necessary for the life of the tree.

The image of sap flowing through the trunk of a tree can provide a picture of how Holy Spirit applies the saving work of Christ to the lives of believers. The Holy Spirit works inwardly and invisibly. He opens our minds to understand the outwardly communicated message about Christ. He convicts and convinces our hearts. He transforms us and makes us new. No blessing of Jesus Christ reaches us except by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, for his part, has no blessings to bring into our lives except those that have been won for us by Christ. The Spirit never works on his own, but always in dependence on and partnership with the work of Christ.

Just as the Holy Spirit always works in partnership with the work of Christ, he also works in partnership with the *message* about Christ. It is absolutely necessary that the Holy Spirit do so. The message about Jesus Christ is outwardly proclaimed by human messengers. It is preached, taught and communicated in many different ways. But for that word about Christ to produce faith, repentance and life, it must be accompanied by the inward, invisible working of the Holy Spirit. Along with the outward communication of the message about Jesus (the story of his death for our sins and resurrection, the Bible promises of forgiveness and life in his name, and a call to repent and believe in him) there must also be an inward communication on the part of the Holy Spirit. He must convict and convince those who hear gospel message. He must draw them to Jesus.

God’s call through the Holy Spirit

In this chapter, we consider what happens when a person first hears the gospel and comes to Christ. There is a human side to turning to Christ: a human evangelist communicates the gospel message and a human listener responds by believing and repenting; but there is also a divine side. God must work through the Holy Spirit to draw sinners to

Christ and enable them to believe in him. One of the clearest descriptions of this work of God is given in Acts 16:14, which recounts how a woman named Lydia came to Christ. As Paul spoke about Jesus in the city of Philippi, the Lord opened her heart to pay close and receptive attention to his words. We find another reference to this work of God in John 6:44. There Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Paul also refers to this work in various passages. In 1 Thessalonians 1:5, for instance, he reminds his readers that the gospel came to them not only through his preaching but also “in power and the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” As Paul preached in Thessalonica, the Holy Spirit brought powerful inward conviction to his hearers.

Theologians often refer to this persuading influence of the Holy Spirit at the moment a person first comes to Christ as “inward calling.” This expression reflects the New Testament’s frequent use of the terms “call,” “called” and “calling” to describe God’s act of drawing people to himself. (For examples, see Rom.1:6; 8:30; 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:9; and Gal. 1:6.)

We must consider two questions relating to inward calling. First, how does God’s *inward* call relate to the *outward* call that comes through the proclamation of the gospel? In one sense, God’s call and invitation to lost sinners are already present in the outward proclamation of the gospel. God’s call is also clearly present in written form in Scripture. When Jesus calls out, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28) and “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink” (John 7:37), these are invitations to receive salvation. When Paul proclaims, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30), that represents God’s sincere appeal to lost sinners. At almost the very end of the Bible, God’s outward call is repeated: “The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let the one who hears say, Come. And let the one who is thirsty come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). The outward call goes to one and all whenever the gospel is announced or Scripture is read. But that outward call is not the same thing as God’s inward calling through the Holy Spirit.

People can hear the outward proclamation of the gospel without being moved by it or attracted to it. Instead, they may find the gospel foolish, weak or irrelevant to their needs. In fact, that is the natural response of those who are spiritually dead. If the spiritually dead are to believe and turn to Christ, the outward proclamation of the gospel needs to be accompanied by an additional, inward testimony, that given by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces sinners, removes

their blindness and opens their heart to receive the God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. There is thus a distinction between God's inward call through the Holy Spirit and his outward call through the message of gospel. This distinction is shown clearly in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24. Paul says that when he preaches Christ crucified, people often reject his message. To Jews it is a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness. In other words, the outward call by itself does not produce a positive response. But then Paul goes on to describe God's inward call: "But to those who are called [inwardly, that is] Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God." The Holy Spirit takes the outwardly proclaimed gospel message and carries it into human hearts. Or as Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 3:3, the Holy Spirit takes Paul's message about Christ and writes it on human hearts.

But even though the inward call must be distinguished from the outward call, the two always work *together*. The inward call given by the Holy Spirit always works in and through the outward call contained in the gospel. Apart from the Holy Spirit's inward influence, the outward call brings no response. Apart from the outward communication of the message about Jesus, the Holy Spirit cannot draw people to salvation.

A second question relating to God's inward calling is whether, in addition to being *necessary* and *enabling*, it is also *effectual*. This question has been a matter of long debate among evangelical theologians. All evangelical theologians would agree that the inward influence of the Holy Spirit enables sinners to turn to Christ by opening their blind eyes, convicting them of sin and persuading them that the gospel message is true. This enabling influence of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary if sinners are to turn to Christ. But is God's inward calling always effectual, in the sense that those whom the Holy Spirit persuades and draws will without fail turn to Christ in faith and repentance?

Theologians who favor a Calvinist or Reformed approach to God's election and call will typically answer Yes, God's inward call is irresistible. According to this position, God's grace is "irresistible" and his inward call through the Holy Spirit always accomplishes its purpose. When such theologians use the term "irresistible," they do not mean that people are forced to come to Christ against their will, but rather that the Holy Spirit works in their hearts and minds in such a way that they want to turn to Christ. One reason why Reformed theologians favor this view is because it fits their overall understanding of the Bible's teaching about election and God's sovereignty: when people turn to Christ, the ultimate deciding factor lies with God. Another rea-

son is that in passages such as Romans 8:30 and 1 Corinthians 1:24, Paul seems to equate being “called” with being saved.

Arminian theologians and others who reject a strong Calvinist stance typically say that God’s inward call is enabling but not always effectual. They sometimes use the expression “prevenient grace” to describe this inward influence of the Holy Spirit. (“Prevenient grace” means “grace that comes before.”) The Holy Spirit must work in the sinner’s heart before they can believe and turn Christ. But a person can then resist the Holy Spirit’s influence and say No to Christ. Theologians who take this position believe that it fits the Bible’s overall teaching about human responsibility better than the alternative view: salvation is a work of God’s grace, but the ultimate factor that determines a person’s response to God’s offer lies with the person himself or herself.

Bible terms

In Bible passages that use the term “call” to describe the divine influence that draws sinners to Christ and enables them to respond to the gospel, the one who calls is usually simply identified as “God.” But the Bible writers also use several other terms to describe this divine influence, and in many cases, they attribute it more specifically to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is said to bear witness to Jesus (John 15:26), to convict people (John 16:8), to convince and persuade them concerning the truth of the gospel (1 Cor. 1.4-5; 1 Thes. 1.5), and to remove the veil that covers their hearts when the gospel is preached (2 Cor. 3:15-17; 4:3-4). For this reason, we may refer to the divine action that touches people’s hearts and enables them to respond to the gospel as God’s inward call through the Holy Spirit.

One Bible term that requires special attention in this regard is “regeneration,” which means “rebirth.” Several New Testament passages use the metaphor of rebirth to describe the radical change that occurs at the moment a person comes to faith in Christ (John 3:3-8; Tit. 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:3; 23). Two of these passages, John 3.3-8 and Titus 3:5, describe rebirth as a work of the Holy Spirit. This raises a question: how does this work of regeneration relate to the Holy Spirit’s inward call that enables people to respond the gospel? Many theologians, especially those in the Reformed tradition, simply equate the two actions. They therefore use the term “regeneration” to describe the Holy Spirit’s work of opening sinners’ hearts so that they can believe and receive the gospel. On this view, regeneration must come *before* a person believes in Jesus. Regeneration is what enables a spiritually dead person to respond to the

gospel. But other theologians (including some in the Reformed tradition) disagree. They *distinguish* regeneration from the Holy Spirit's work of drawing sinners to Christ and enabling them to believe. On their view, regeneration comes *after* a person believes in Christ. Rebirth is not the cause of a person's faith, but one of its first results.

This debate is partly a matter of terminology. In this book, we will use the expression "inward calling" to describe what the Holy Spirit does in a person's heart before they put their faith in Jesus and use the term "regeneration" only to refer to the change that the Holy Spirit begins in a believer's heart after they turn to Jesus. One reason for this choice is that in John 3:3-8, the most important New Testament passage about rebirth, Jesus's reference to being "born of water and the Spirit" seems to link regeneration to Old Testament prophecies like Ezekiel 36:25-27. These passages speak of the Holy Spirit indwelling people and giving them a new heart to walk in accordance with God's law. Those are blessings that the New Testament typically describes as coming to people as an immediate result of their faith in Christ.

Practical implications

The Bible's teaching concerning the work of the Spirit in a person's initial turning to Christ carries important implications.

1. *We are responsible to communicate the gospel message with clarity and urgency as widely as possible.* We must clearly communicate the gospel, because the inward work of the Holy Spirit bringing sinners to faith and repentance always comes in connection with the outward proclamation of the message about Christ. If we do not preach the gospel, can we expect the Spirit to draw people to Jesus? If our message about Christ is blurry, distorted, mixed with falsehoods or watered down with merely human ideas, will the Holy Spirit have a clear channel through which to bear his inward testimony?

2. *We can communicate the gospel with a genuine expectation that God will draw lost people to himself.* According to Scripture, gospel preaching is the regular channel through which the Holy Spirit works to bring people to faith and repentance. The Bible does not guarantee that people will come to faith every time the gospel is preached, but we should expect the Holy Spirit to work and specifically pray that he will.

3. *We must recognize that effective evangelism is more than a matter of human performance but depends as well on the special working of the Holy Spirit.* It is God's inward call, given through the Holy Spirit, that draws sinners to Christ, not our own persuasive words or techniques. While human

persuasion does form an important part of gospel communication, it is never the evangelist's job to produce faith and repentance; that is the task of the Holy Spirit. He alone unveils hearts, illumines minds, inwardly persuades, and creates faith.

CHAPTER 5

ENTERING SALVATION: FAITH AND REPENTANCE

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38, ESV

And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, as you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31, ESV

Passing from lostness to salvation is an event that depends on both divine and human action. On the one hand, God must act by drawing sinners to himself. He does this through the Holy Spirit, who exerts a powerful inward influence as people hear the gospel message. That divine calling was the subject of chapter 4. But human action is also required. Lost sinners must actively respond to God’s call. As the verses above indicate, that response consists of faith and repentance.

The gospel message is like a seed. Evangelists sow the seed, but the Holy Spirit must then plant it deep within a person’s heart and bring it to life. The word that is communicated outwardly then becomes a divinely *implanted* word. But the seed that the Holy Spirit implants in people’s hearts must also be humanly *received*. As James 1:21 puts it, “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” If the tree of salvation is to spring to life and begin to grow, the divine act of implanting must be accompanied by the humble human response of faith and repentance.

Salvation is not something that a person simply inherits by being born into a Christian family. Nor is it an automatic benefit that comes from belonging to a particular people group. Nor is it just absorbed from attending church and being present among Christians. Salvation is a gift that must be received by faith and repentance. In this chapter, we look at what the Bible teaches about that also faith and repentance.

The nature of saving faith

Theologians have traditionally said that saving faith has three components: knowledge, assent and trust. This is a good way to sum up the

way faith is portrayed in the Bible. *Knowledge* constitutes a first important component, because the faith that brings salvation has a specific focus. It focuses on a specific person, Jesus, and on certain specific facts about him: that he died for our sins and that he rose again to be our living savior and Lord. Saving faith also grows out of an awareness of a clearly defined need: that we have sinned and therefore stand under God's judgement. It also claims a specific set of promises: that by putting our trust in Jesus we can receive God's pardon and the gift of eternal life in fellowship with him. In other words, saving faith does not consist of putting confidence in just anyone. It is not a matter of believing anything and everything. It is faith in the central truths of the gospel. It is faith in the testimony about Jesus found in God's word.

Faith thus depends on knowledge of the gospel. That is why Paul reminds the Corinthian church of the gospel they had received and by which they were being saved: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:1-4). That is why in Romans 10:14 he asks, "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" Without hearing about Jesus, there is no knowledge about him. Where there is no knowledge about him, there can be no saving faith.

How much does a person need to know about Jesus to have saving faith? The Bible does not give a precise answer. Depending on time and circumstances, those who seek to bring the lost to faith in Christ should certainly try to communicate as much about Jesus and the gospel as they can. But most would agree that, at a minimum, they should do their best to clearly communicate the following basic aspects of the gospel message. First, that God is our creator, but every person is guilty of sin and therefore stands under his judgment. Second, that Jesus is the Savior sent by God; he died for our sins and was raised from the dead to be our living Lord. Third, that God's word promises forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who puts their trust in Jesus. Fourth, that God now calls them to respond to this good news by repenting of their sins and putting their trust in Jesus. A person's religious background and prior understanding may affect how *much* needs to be said about each of these things, but together they form the fundamental knowledge base that is normally needed for a person to make a saving response to Jesus.

A second component of saving faith is *assent* (or *fides*, to give the Latin term for this aspect of faith). Assent simply means that a person recognizes the truth of the basic facts and promises of the gospel.

They recognize that they have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They accept the affirmation that Jesus's death paid the price for their sins. They intellectually believe that he rose from the dead. They believe God's promise that, despite their unworthiness and spiritual deadness, he will accept them and give them life. Like Abraham, they believe in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). Assent to the facts and promises of the gospel does not mean that a believer will never experience any doubts or uncertainties. But it does mean that they accept what the gospel says about their own lost condition and have enough confidence in what God's word says about Jesus that they are ready and willing to come to him for rescue.

The third component of saving faith is *trust* (or *fiducia*). Trust involves a positive personal response. It means resting on the gospel promises and putting confidence in Jesus as one's desperately needed Savior. Trust builds on the first two components of faith, knowledge and assent, but then becomes the most important element of saving faith. It is possible for a person to know much about the gospel, and even to assent to its truth, without exercising personal trust in Christ for salvation. James speaks of such people in James 2:14-26. But he warns them that their faith (which consists only of knowledge and assent) is incomplete and therefore dead. He says, "Even the demons believe: and shudder!" So, knowledge and assent are nothing if they do not lead on to personal trust.

What are the marks of personal trust in Jesus? The Bible indicates several of features. First, trust grows from *a sense of personal need*. The New Testament gives several examples of people who sense of need drove them to put their trust in God or in Jesus. For instance, the tax collector in the temple who beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 19:13). Or the crowd on the day of Pentecost who were cut to the heart and called out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Or the Philippian jailer who fell down before Paul and Silas and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

Second, trust involves a sense that the gospel is not just general message for the whole world, but also *a personal call addressed to oneself*. In Revelation 3:20, the risen Jesus says that he stands at the door and knocks. He then says, "If anyone *hears my voice* and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." To "hear Jesus's voice" does not mean physical hearing. Nor does it mean that one receives a private message that is different from the basic gospel that is addressed to everyone. It just means that when the person hears the

gospel promises and invitation, they sense in their heart that Jesus is specifically calling them.

Third, trust involves empty-handed dependence: coming to receive the kingdom of God like a small child, as Jesus puts it in Mark 10:13-16. In other words, a person comes with no claim to deserve anything or to have earned anything, but simply depending on Jesus and on God's promises.

Fourth, personal trust includes *an active response of the will* that takes hold of Christ and his promises. Like blind Bartimaeus, they know they have a need, they have heard that Jesus can meet that need, and so they call out to him. They do not just passively wait to see if something will happen. They do not wait until their faith is perfect, all their questions are answered and all the conditions are favorable. They simply cry out to Jesus for help and do not let anything stand in their way. The very fact that they call out to Jesus is the evidence of their faith.

Additional aspects of saving faith

Several other aspects of the Bible's teaching about saving faith are important to keep in mind. First, although faith is a genuine human response, *it is not a human work in the sense of being an effort that contributes to earning our salvation*. It is not an achievement that gains us merit. It is not a quality that we can boast about. Instead, salvation depends entirely on God's grace. We are saved by the work of Christ alone, solely on the basis of his righteous life and atoning death. Faith is simply the means by which we reach out and receive the free and undeserved gift of salvation. As Paul puts it in Romans 4:16, the blessing of salvation "depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace." God has chosen faith to be the means through which the lost receive salvation because faith is the one human response that is perfectly consistent with the principle that salvation is a gift of God's grace.

Second, while faith is a human response, *it is at the same time a gift of God*. In Ephesians 2:8, Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God." Salvation itself is a gift of God, of course. But this verse also that even the faith that receives it is part of that gift.

A third aspect of biblical teaching is that saving *faith requires a person to trust in Christ exclusively*. Saving faith means faith in Christ alone. We cannot depend partly on Christ and partly on our own achievements, sacrifices or righteousness. According to Galatians 2:21, those who seek

to be justified on the basis of keeping God's law are in reality rejecting God's grace and acting as if Christ's death was unnecessary.

Fourth, *faith comes in response to the word of God: the message of the gospel*. If we ask what factors stimulate and spark faith, the first thing to mention is the word of God. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing though the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). It is the message about Jesus awakens faith. The Holy Spirit works through the word to persuade and convince sinners. In 1 Corinthians 1:22-23, Paul writes, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified." Paul centered his missionary activity on proclaiming Christ and the cross because he knew that this was what had the power to evoke faith and draw people to Christ. Evangelists today must follow Paul's example. They must do their best to communicate the truth about Jesus clearly and persistently, in all its richness, power and detail.

Fifth, *faith is born out of need*. In the Gospels, we see that those who responded to Jesus most readily were the tax collectors and sinners, the widows and lepers, the sick, the blind, the poor and the outcasts. These were the people who were most conscious of their desperate need, and that sense of need drove them to Jesus. That is why Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:3-4, 6). To the world, such people seem to be in an unfavorable position. But in fact, they are in a very favorable position, because they are the ones most ready to respond the good news of God's kingdom. Those who were confident of their righteousness and satisfied with their social position and wealth, on the other hand, were much less willing to believe Jesus's message.

Sixth, *faith does not need to be perfect to be genuine*. Having faith to receive salvation does not mean that one never feels any uncertainty or doubt. It does mean that a person has enough faith to come to him for help and to hold on to his promises. In Mark 9:14-27, we read about the father of a demon possessed boy who came to Jesus and said, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus rebuked his uncertainty. "If you can! All things are possible for the one who believes." The man's faith was clearly less than perfect. But he did not let that stop him. Instead, he cried out, "I believe; help my unbelief!" In other words, he came to Jesus with what little faith he had and called on Jesus to help him with what he lacked.

Seventh, the faith that receives salvation is not just a momentary response that then disappears. *The faith that enables a person to initially receive salvation continues to be an ongoing part of their life*. Jesus warned against the

kind of temporary faith that receives the word with joy but then, when trials come, falls away (Mark 4:16-17). In 2 Corinthians 5:7, Paul describes believers as those who continue to “walk by faith.” In 1 Corinthians 16:13, he urges his Christian readers to “stand firm in the faith.”

A final important Bible teaching about saving faith is that *repentance is always a part of true faith*. That is why, although the Bible typically speaks of faith as the proper response to the gospel message (as in Acts 16:31), it can also sometimes speak of repentance as the necessary response (as in Acts 2:38). Jesus’s call to would-be disciples was not just, “Believe in me,” but, “Follow me.” In fact, Mark 1:15 summarizes the message Jesus preached throughout Galilee in this way: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.” The tax collector Zacchaeus provides a good picture of how repentance and faith go together. When Jesus told Zacchaeus he wanted to stay in his house (a powerful offer of acceptance in the culture of that day), Zacchaeus welcomed him with joy. He knew he was receiving an undeserved gift of grace. But then he demonstrated that his faith was marked by a genuine change of heart and behavior; he restored the money he had taken dishonestly and gave a great portion of his wealth to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). The Bible has much to say about repentance, so we must look at this topic more closely.

The nature of repentance

Repentance may be defined as an internal change that involves a person’s thinking, feeling and willing; it is a change of heart negatively against sin and positively for obedience to God. An examination of Bible passages about repentance allows us to clarify several points about its nature. First, *genuine repentance results in a change of behavior*. The repentance that is necessary to receive salvation is a change of heart and intention. It is not in itself a change of behavior: as if sinners needed to first clean up their lives and begin to live righteously before they could receive God’s forgiveness and acceptance. If sinners had to live righteously before they could be saved, then salvation would be based on human works rather than God’s grace. But even though the Bible pictures repentance primarily as a change of attitude and intention, if that change of heart is real, it will always prove itself by bearing fruit in outward action. As John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to receive his baptism, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” An emotional experience or momentary decision does not

necessarily constitute genuine repentance. The test lies in the fruit that results from it.

A second point to make is that *repentance should not be viewed as a separate act standing alongside the response of faith, but rather as a part of faith itself*. Coming to Christ for salvation does not involve two separate steps or responses, but only one. On the one hand, that single human response could be described as repentant faith, on the other, as believing repentance. As someone has put it, repentance and faith are “the negative and positive aspects of the same occurrence.

A third element of Bible teaching is that, just like faith, *repentance is a gift of God*. According to Acts 11:18, when the believers in Jerusalem heard about the conversion of Cornelius, they glorified God because he had “granted repentance that leads to life” to the Gentiles. And in 2 Timothy 2:25, Paul says that pastors should correct their opponents gently, because “God may perhaps give them repentance leading to knowledge of the truth.”

Fourth, while the act of repenting may often be accompanied by strong emotion, *an emotional experience of grief is not an essential part of the biblical concept of repentance*. Conviction of sin and a clear awareness of one’s uncleanness and failure can easily result in a powerful sense of shame, remorse, fear or grief. Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me” in the presence of God’s holiness (Isa 6:5). Peter fell down before Jesus and said, “Depart from me” when a glimpse of Jesus’ power caused him to sense his own sinfulness (Luke 5:8). At a later point, when a rooster’s crow brought him to a sudden awareness of his failure to remain loyal to Jesus, Peter broke down and wept (Mark 14:72). These were all appropriate reactions. But the Bible nowhere indicates that a particular kind or level of emotion must necessarily accompany genuine repentance. Repentance can be quiet as well as dramatic. It can be reflective and deliberate. The test of genuineness, as we have seen, lies in the fruit it produces.

Finally, just like faith, *repentance plays an ongoing part in the Christian’s life*. Salvation begins with an act of repentance and faith but that is then followed by a life-long process of growth in obedience. Just as believers must confess their sins and seek forgiveness daily (see Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:9), so too they must continually make a conscious decision to turn away from acts, attitudes and omissions that represent disobedience to God. Repenting of our failures is an essential part of growing in righteousness and faithful discipleship. For this reason, the New Testament is filled with calls for believers to turn away from sin, draw near to God and take fresh steps of obedience.

Clarifications about the relation between faith and repentance

As we have already seen, faith and repentance are two aspects of a single response to Christ and the gospel. But that does not mean they are exactly the same thing. Faith is a matter of knowing, assenting to and putting one's trust in the claims of the gospel. Repentance is a decision to turn away from sin and towards obedience. The two belong inseparably together and yet they represent distinct aspects of a saving response to Christ. We must therefore think carefully about the relationship between faith and repentance, lest we emphasize either one in a way that distorts the other.

In fact, one does sometimes encounter distorted ideas about the relationship between faith and repentance, even in evangelical churches. *First, some preachers put great emphasis on faith while downplaying the importance of repentance.* In some cases, a preacher may simply ignore what the Bible says about the significance of repentance. In other cases, however, a preacher or teacher may try to *redefine* the term repentance in a way that weakens its true biblical force. For instance, some teachers claim that the Greek word for “repentance” (*metanoia*) simply means “a change of mind.” On this view, to repent does not mean that a person makes a firm decision to turn away from their sin and submit to Jesus as the rightful Master of their lives. It only means that they change their opinion about who Jesus is: they are now ready to affirm that what the Bible says about him is true. But to reduce repentance to a merely intellectual change in doctrinal belief distorts the full biblical meaning of the term.

There are two main reasons why some preachers and teachers downplay the importance of repentance. For some, particularly those who have been influenced by the “prosperity gospel,” the Christian faith is all about what we can get from God and hardly at all about what God desires from us. So, some preachers want to eliminate anything that seems hard or difficult from the gospel. They find the biblical message about turning from sin and submitting to Jesus unattractive.

But other teachers downplay repentance for a more noble reason: they want to protect the biblical truth that salvation is purely a gift of grace and that sinners are justified by faith rather than works. They fear that if we insist that it is necessary to repent of one's sins to receive salvation, that will add an element of human works to the process of being saved. But such a fear is based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of repentance. As we saw earlier, repentance is not a good work.

It is the change of heart that leads to good works. To repent means that you sincerely intend to begin living a new life of obedience, not that you have already established a record of righteous behavior. A sinner who hears the gospel can repent and believe and receive salvation immediately. They do not have to do a certain number of good works before they receive salvation. So, a healthy biblical emphasis on repentance in no way conflicts with or detracts from a strong emphasis on salvation by grace through faith.

Whatever the intentions that lie behind them, teachings that emphasize grace at the expense of repentance must be rejected. They can lead to the mistaken belief that a person can receive the blessings of salvation while rejecting the call to discipleship, obedience and righteousness. They set the stage for a theology that radically divorces sanctification (growth in obedience) from justification. Jesus warned against such a divorce in Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does he will of my Father who is in heaven."

To see why repentance is a necessary part of a sinner's response to the gospel, it is helpful to remember we are saved from and what we are saved for. Salvation is not only about being saved from hell and for heaven. It is not only about being saved from sickness and poverty for a life of health and prosperity. Even more fundamentally, biblical salvation is about *delivered from sin and set free for a life of righteousness*. It is about being saved *from a state of rebellion against God for a new life of unhindered fellowship with him*. Sinners cannot receive God's offer a new life of righteousness and fellowship with him and at the same time saying No to his offer of deliverance from sin and rebellion. Repentance simply means that we sincerely say Yes to gospel's offer of deliverance from sin and rebellion

A second kind of distortion occurs when repentance is described as a change of behavior that must take place before a person can be saved. On this view, repentance is seen as necessary for salvation, but it is understood as an activity that involves doing good works in obedience to God. But that were true, it would mean that sinners are saved partly by faith in Christ and partly by doing a certain number of good works. To guard against this kind of erroneous teaching, pastors must clearly explain that that repentance is a decision to turn away from sin that goes hand in hand with depending totally on God's grace and trusting Christ for salvation. Genuine repentance will lead to good works and acts of obedience (Matt 3.8), but repentance itself is the change of heart that precedes and produces that good fruit.

So, there are two errors to avoid. On the one hand, we must not emphasize salvation by faith in a way that makes repentance seem unimportant. On the other hand, we must not describe repentance in a way that makes it seem incompatible with the biblical truth of salvation by faith and grace. According to the Bible, faith and repentance are like two sides of a coin. Both are the fruit of God's grace.

CHAPTER 6

OUR NEW STATUS IN CHRIST

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1, ESV

We have been comparing salvation to a tree. So far, we have talked about its roots, which are God's grace and election; its strong and solid trunk, which is the work of Christ; and the life-giving sap that runs through it, which is the activity of the Holy Spirit. We have seen that sinners enter salvation when the Holy Spirit touches their hearts, and they respond to the gospel message with faith and repentance. We now move on to examine the four great branches of the tree of salvation: the four great areas of deliverance and blessing that those who come to Christ receive. In the chapters that follow, we will discuss first how God grants sinners a new status of acceptance and belonging; second, how he transforms their inner life; third, how he delivers them from the attacks of Satan and hostile spiritual powers; and fourth, how he rescues them from all the physical and material effects of the Fall.

In this chapter, we consider the first great branch of salvation, the believer's new status of acceptance and belonging. As a result of the Fall, the whole human race stands condemned by God's law and separated from communion with him. The first great benefit of salvation is that lost sinners are delivered from this position of condemnation and alienation. The key Bible words relating to this aspect of are *justification* and *adoption*. The biblical concept of *assurance* will also come up for discussion here.

Justification

The doctrine of justification by faith lies at the very heart of the gospel and constitutes the foundation of the Christian life. The Greek verb for "justify" is *dikaioō*, a word that is related to *dikaiosūnē*, "righteousness." "Justify" is a judicial term. It means "declare righteous." It describes the act of pronouncing a positive verdict in a court of law. To say that God justifies a person, then, means that he declares them to be righteous in his lawcourt. None of their sins, past, present, or

future, is counted against them. God himself has pronounced them to be completely forgiven and absolved from any guilt or penalty.

To understand the nature justification, we need to recognize several things the Bible says about it. The first is that *we desperately need righteousness*. We need it because we cannot stand before God without it. God is a righteous judge. He rewards the righteous and punishes the unrighteous (Rom. 1:18; 2:2-6). He is a holy God. The unrighteous cannot remain in his presence (Ps. 5:4; Hab 1:13). That is why when Revelation pictures God's redeemed people standing confidently before his throne and praising him for their salvation, they are all wearing a white robe (Rev. 7:9-14). Their robes picture righteousness. We desperately need those same robes of righteousness because unrighteousness results in wrath and death (Rom 2:8; 6:23). And in and of ourselves, we are unrighteous; we possess no righteousness of our own. What Isaiah said of the people of Israel in his day is true for all of us: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6; see also Rom. 3:10, 23). This is the great and spiritually fatal problem to which justification provides the only solution.

A second important thing the Bible teaches is that justification, God's declaration that a person is righteous, is a *gift of God*. In Romans 5:17, Paul describes justification as "the *gift* of righteousness." In several other passages, Paul speaks of "the *righteousness of God*." In Romans 1:17, for instance, he says that, in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." The expression "righteousness of God" refers to the fact that God is its source: it comes to sinners *from God* (Phil. 3:9).

Third, the gift of righteousness that sinners receive when they are justified is a *legal status*. Justification refers to a person's position before God: what God counts them to be: not to their actual behavioral track record or the condition of their moral life. To say that a believer has been justified means they have been declared to be righteous, not that they have been made righteous in the sense that their sinful ways have completely disappeared. That is why some Bible passages say that God "imputes" or "counts" righteous to a person (see Rom. 4:5, 9-11, 22-24).

Fourth, our justification is *based entirely on the work of Christ*. Someone might ask, "How can God declare a sinful person to be righteous? If a person is not perfectly righteous in practice, how can God declare them to be righteous in his lawcourt? If God judges with truth and justice, how can he declare sinners to be free from the penalty their actions deserve?" The answer to these questions takes us to the very

heart of the good news: Jesus Christ stood in our place. Jesus took on human flesh and lived on earth as our representative. He was born “under the law” (Gal 4:4) and, as such, he perfectly fulfilled God’s commands throughout his whole life. He was tempted by Satan but did not sin. Then, finally, he took the punishment we deserved and, on the cross, fully paid our debt to the law. The righteousness God counts to our credit is Christ’s righteousness.

Fifth, we are justified by *faith alone*. We receive God’s gift of righteousness by putting our trust in Jesus Christ. By faith, we are united to Christ, such that his righteous status is counted as our status and the benefits that belong to him become our benefits.

Sixth, when a sinner puts their faith in Jesus Christ, they are justified *immediately and completely*. Justification is a gift that believers receive immediately at the very beginning of their Christian life. It is not something they have to wait for or that comes to them gradually a little bit at a time. There is no such thing as being 50% justified, 80% justified, or even 99% justified. If a sinner is justified by faith in Christ, they are justified 100%.

Implications for Christian life

Justification occurs at the very beginning of the Christian life, but that does not mean that believers can then forget about that starting point as they advance in their walk as disciples. On the contrary, justification is a truth to be constantly remembered and appreciated. The fact that believers have been declared righteous by God carries enormous practical implications for everything that follows in their ongoing life and relationship with God.

First, the truth that we are justified by faith means that *we can live before God with a sense of peace and security*. In Romans 5:1, Paul says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this verse, Paul refers to our objective position in relation God: a situation of peace prevails between us and God. We are no longer in the position of enemies standing under God’s judgment. Instead, God fully accepts us. We are free from all condemnation. But when believers are aware of this great objective reality, it sets the stage for them to also feel peace inwardly in their heart.

Second, because we are justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, *we can live with a sense of freedom rather than slavery*. As Paul wrote to the believers in Galatia, “For freedom Christ has set us

free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). When Christians lose sight of the gospel truth of justification by faith, they can easily slide into a condition of slavery. Instead of joyfully basing their acceptance by God entirely on what Christ has done for them, little by little, they begin to anxiously depend on the quality of their own performance, the quantity of their own righteous deeds, the level of their own commitment, or the depth of their own sacrifices.

Third, the knowledge that we are justified by faith *leads us to obey God with a sense of love and gratitude*. Justification by faith does not mean that believers no longer need to obey God. But it does mean that their obedience is no longer carried out as if they were mere wage earners seeking a reward or servants fearing punishment. It is true that the New Testament does hold out the promise of reward and the warning of possible loss as motives for Christian faithfulness (see 1 Cor. 3:8-15, for example). But an even deeper motivation for obedience is love for the one who loved us first (1 John 4:14-19). In John 21:15-22, when Jesus called Peter to feed his sheep and follow even to death, he based that call on the fact that Peter loved him. And Peter loved Jesus because Jesus had pardoned him and given his life for him. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul calls believers to a life of sacrifice and obedience “by the mercies of God.” In other words, he calls his readers to a life of obedience because of all the mercies of God he has just described in first eleven chapters of Romans, including especially God’s gracious act of justifying sinners by faith. So, the Christian life is marked obedience rooted in love and gratitude.

Fourth, recognizing the biblical truth that justification is a status that we have received by *faith helps us to be honest and realistic about our ongoing struggle with temptation and sin*. Martin Luther described the Christian as “*simul justus et peccator*”: simultaneously just and a sinner. He meant that even though the God counts believers as perfectly righteousness because of what Christ has done for them, their heart and behavior has not yet been completely transformed. Justified believers still struggle with sin and sometimes fail. So, on the one hand, the fact of our justification should not blind us to the reality of our present condition as imperfect sinners. We do not need to deny the reality of our sin or pretend it is not there. But on the other hand, awareness of sin and failure in our life should not diminish our confidence at being truly justified before God.

Fifth, a clear understanding of justification will *drive out boasting and fill our hearts with praise to God*. The righteous status we possess is God’s

gift to the ungodly. How then can we boast as if our position of acceptance were something we attained by our own effort? Paul makes this point strongly in Romans 3:27-28: “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded...For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” Or as he says in Philippians 3:8-9, Paul counted all his many religious attainments 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” (ESV).

Sixth, the biblical truth of justification by faith should always *impact the way a pastor preaches about Christian commitment and obedience*. When pastors preach about God’s commands, they must also preach the good news about justification by faith. When they preach about what believers must do for God, they must also remind their congregation of what God has done for them. There are some pastors who seem to preach almost exclusively on the themes of obedience, sacrifice, service, giving and commitment. But an exclusive focus on what believers must do for God leads to legalism. Yes, pastors must call their members to obedience, but they should do so in the context of teaching them all the rich biblical details concerning God’s grace. The Bible always grounds God’s call to obedience and commitment in the good news of what he had done for us. That was certainly Paul’s pattern of teaching in epistles like Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians.

Adoption

Those who come to Jesus in faith are not only justified but also adopted. The blessing of adoption goes hand in hand with the gift of justification. It is similar to justification in several ways. Like justification, “adoption” is a legal term. It refers to legal decision by which a person is brought into a new family: God’s family. Like justification, adoption describes an event that takes place at the very beginning of our Christian life. Also, like justification, adoption relates not so much to a change within us as to a change in our objective status or position in relation to God. And yet, despite these similarities to justification, adoption has its own special character. The benefits the believer receives in adoption go beyond the benefits they receive in justification. Adoption completes and enriches our justification. Imagine that, at the end of a trial, the judge looks at the accused person and says, “I declare you not guilty. Now leave. I never want to see your face again.” The person accused of a crime would be justified. They would be free from

any penalty prescribed by the law. Beyond any shadow of doubt, that would be an enormous benefit. But the situation described above is not what happens when a person is justified in God's lawcourt. God does not say, "I declare you righteous. Now leave." Instead, he says, "I declare you righteous. Now come, I want you to be my son." This is the immeasurable blessing God grants us in adoption. If justification delivers sinners from being condemned by God's law, adoption rescues them from their separation and broken communion with God.

While the themes of adoption and sonship run through the whole Bible, several passages in Paul's letters are especially important for our understanding of this aspect salvation. First of all, as Paul describes it, adoption pictures *the loving family relationship into which God brings those he has justified*. Our new status as adopted children enables us to pray and worship in a new way: we now call out "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4-7). The Holy Spirit bears witness to our new position in relation to God (Rom 8:16). He is our Father, and we are his beloved children. We are no longer strangers and aliens, but members of God's household (Eph. 2:19).

Second, adoption pictures *the rights, privileges and adult freedom that belong to the believer*. When Paul describes the believer's adoption, he contrasts their new status not only with that of an outsider and non-family member, but also with that of a minor child. As Paul puts it in Galatians 4:1-3, even natural-born family members lack rights and privileges as long as they are still children. They enter into their full rights and freedom only when they reach adulthood. That position of adult privileges is what Paul says believers now possess. That is probably one reason why he sometimes stresses that adoption makes believers sons (although he also does sometimes use the more general term "children"). His point is not to put the spiritual status of men above that of women, but to highlight the theme of legal rights. Within the culture of that day, such rights were often especially associated with sons. In Christ, of course, the full rights of adoption belong equally to all God's children, daughters as well as sons (Gal. 3:28).

Third, the term adoption reminds us that *our relationship with God is linked with and modelled after Christ's relationship with the Father*. Just as our status of being counted righteous depends on our connection with Christ and his righteousness, so also our status of being counted sons derives from our connection with Christ and his sonship. We have been adopted "through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:5). We are not sons in the same way as Jesus in every respect, of course, but in many ways our sonship is modeled after his. We are beloved of the Father just as he was (Mark

1:11; Eph. 5:1). We address God as Abba, Father, just as Jesus did (Mark 14:36). Our behavior is to reflect God's character, just as Jesus's did (Eph. 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Fourth, adoption reminds us that *a rich inheritance awaits us*. One privilege of being an adopted son is that of being an heir (Gal. 4:7; Eph, 1:11, 14). In Galatians, Paul explains that the believer's inheritance includes all the rich blessings God promised to Abraham. Those blessings were promised to Abraham and his seed, namely, Christ (Gal. 3:16). But now, all those who are sons of God through faith in Christ are also counted as Abraham's seed and therefore heirs of the promises made to him (Gal. 3:26-29).

Fifth, adoption means that *as God's beloved sons, we can expect to be disciplined by him*. This aspect of sonship is highlighted in Hebrews 12:3-13. In the context of helping believers in their struggle against sin, God must sometimes exercise painful discipline. But this discipline is not a sign of God's rejection. On the contrary, it is a sign that God is treating us as sons: "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives" (12:6, ESV).

Sixth, adoption provides *the objective ground for the Holy Spirit's subjective work within our hearts*. In Galatians 4:4-6, Paul describes both the objective historical basis for our adoption and its outworking in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. First, God sent his Son into the world. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus redeemed us from the penalty of the law so that we might receive adoption. Then, Paul writes, "because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!" The Holy Spirit's action in the believer's heart enables them to experientially know the Father's love and respond to him with confidence. But this work of the Spirit in our hearts is only possible because we have first received a new status as God's adopted sons.

Assurance of salvation: why doubts sometimes arise

The wonderful gospel truth of justification by faith should naturally fill believers with a strong sense of peace and confidence in their relationship with God. The truth of adoption in Jesus Christ should logically give the believer a deep and settled sense of being God's beloved child. But our feelings are not always guided by clear thinking and strict logic. It is possible for a believer to be justified and adopted but nevertheless be troubled by doubts about their own status as a child of God. They know the gospel is true and they know other people are saved, but they

are not sure about themselves. For this reason, it is important to examine the topic of Christian assurance.

A first point to stress is that *God intends for believers to have confidence that they indeed belong to him*. The epistle of 1 John has much to say about the believer's relationship to God. Toward the end of that epistle, John says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, ESV). John wanted his readers to know that they possessed eternal life.

A second important point, however, is that *lack of assurance is a genuine possibility even for those who are truly saved*. Most pastors recognize simply from experience that even faithful believers can be subject to doubts about their acceptance by God. But the Bible itself also clearly confirms that this is the case. According to 1 John 3:19-22, believers' hearts are unreliable and may sometimes condemn them. They therefore need to reassure their hearts. The specific issue that troubles these believers concerns their relationship with God; they need to reassure their hearts not just about God, but "*before him*" (3:19); they need confidence "*before God*" (3:21). John recognizes that for some Christians this is a real problem and so he writes to help them.

Several factors can lead a believer to doubt their salvation. First, they may lack clarity about the gospel, particularly about justification by faith. They may misunderstand the nature of faith, for instance. Instead of relying on Christ and his complete sufficiency to save them, they begin to focus on the quality of their own faith and wonder if it is strong enough for them to be saved. Or they may confuse justification, God's declaration that they are righteous in Christ, with sanctification, the process by which they are progressively made more righteous in their behavior. Because the righteousness that comes through sanctification is never complete in this life, and Christians continue to struggle with sin, a believer may feel they can never be fully assured of God's acceptance. In fact, it was precisely this confusion between justification and sanctification that led traditional Roman Catholic theology to deny that assurance of salvation is possible.

A second factor that leads some believers to doubt their salvation is an unrealistic concept of sanctification. According to New Testament teaching, which we will examine more deeply in the following chapter, the believer's transformation and growth in holiness is an ongoing process. We continue to fight against sin. But some Christians have the mistaken idea that if they are truly saved, it will completely disappear from their life. They may read a verse like 1 John 3:6, for instance: "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who

keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him” (ESV). They know they still struggle with sin and so they conclude that they do not belong to Jesus. But this is an incorrect interpretation. It is clear from the context of his epistle that John does not mean that Christians will lead perfect lives and never sin. In 1 John 1:8, he even says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” John calls believers to turn away from sin; it should have no place our life. But then he says, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Third, another factor that can contribute to a believer’s doubts is the deception and accusations of our enemy, Satan. From the beginning of human history, Satan has sought to create doubt about God’s love (Gen. 3:1-5). Satan tries to accuse believers before God (Rom. 8:33-34; Rev. 12:10-11), and those reminders of our failures and unworthiness reach our own hearts, too.

Fourth, even though believers have received the Holy Spirit who bears testimony about their status as beloved sons (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6), they have received the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23-25), not yet the full harvest. To put this another way, we have received a down payment that guarantees the full inheritance that is yet to come (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14). A believer who is troubled by doubts may wonder, “If the Holy Spirit is in my heart bearing testimony that I am God’s child, why do I still sometimes feel uncertain about my salvation?” The answer is, even though we have received the first installment of the Spirit’s blessings, we are still in a battle situation until Jesus returns. The Spirit’s ministry within us is real, but we may still experience periods of groaning. We live by faith and hope, not by sight.

Assurance of salvation: resources for establishing confidence

If believers are sometimes troubled by negative thoughts and feelings about their standing with God, how can they overcome those attacks? Two great God-given resources form our primary weapons in the battle: the written word of Scripture and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the work of the word and the Spirit, the Bible speaks of a secondary factor that can also build our confidence: the evidence of God’s work in our life.

The first great resource Christians have been given to assure their hearts, clear their minds of false ideas, turn away doubts, and establish a firm sense of confidence in their relationship with God is *God’s un-*

changing word. Scripture is filled with promises about God's forgiveness, acceptance and welcome of sinners, assurances of his love, and descriptions of Christ's perfect work to win our salvation. Feelings may change, but God's word remains the same. Our thinking may become confused, but Scripture remains clear. It provides the objective grounds upon which we can base our confidence about our justification and adoption. For this reason, the believer's first line of defense against attacks on their sense of assurance is to read, hear, memorize, study, understand, and reflect on God's word: especially those passages that highlight the gracious promises of God and all that Christ has done to save us.

The word of God is perfectly suited to the difficult task of easing doubting hearts and instilling confidence. The Old Testament lays a foundation with its picture of God's faithfulness, patience, and steadfast love. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus' compassion for desperate and unworthy people. The epistles detail the logic, power, completeness, and inexpressible wonder of God's solution to human guilt and alienation. God's word contains things that angels long to look into and which we ourselves never could have imagined beforehand; these are the things that can speak a believer's heart when it is troubled.

A second great God-given resource is *the testimony of the Holy Spirit*. God not only adopted us through the work of his Son, he also sent the Spirit of his Son into our heart to cry out, "Abba, Father" and bear witness to the fact that we are God's children (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:6). According to 1 John 3:24 and 4:13, believers can know they stand in a saving relationship with God by the Spirit he has given them. The fact that believers have received the Holy Spirit does not mean they will never experience doubt or discouragement. As we pointed out above, we have received the first fruits of the Spirit, not yet the full harvest. And yet it does mean that the Holy Spirit's help is available to us, and God intends for us to benefit from it. We should therefore actively pray for the Holy Spirit to bear his assuring witness in our heart, just as we ask for our daily bread and deliverance from the Evil One. Paul provides an example of that very kind of prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19. He asks the Father to strengthen the believers to whom he writes through the Holy Spirit in their inner being, "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."

It is important to recognize that these two God-given resources, God's word and God's Spirit, work together to assure believers

of their status as God's children. This is demonstrated very clearly in Romans 5:5-8. In 5:5, Paul tells his readers that, despite their current sufferings, they can know their hope is sure, "because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." The Spirit floods the believer's heart with an inward sense of the love God has for them. But this happens precisely as the believer turns their thoughts toward the biblical truth of what Jesus has done for them. In 5:6-8, Paul reminds his readers of God's great outward demonstration of love, the historical fact that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Paul's point is clear. God's love is not easily grasped. Christians might have doubts about it. Two powerful forces must therefore combine to bring it home to us: the outward scriptural message about what God has done through Christ and the interior testimony of the Holy Spirit.

If the promises of Scripture and inward testimony of the Holy Spirit are God's primary provision for assuring his children that they belong to him, the Bible also mentions what might be called secondary factors that serve to further confirm the reality of the believer's salvation. These relate to *evident changes in the Christian's life*. In his first epistle, as John seeks to encourage believers who have been troubled by the claims of false teachers, he lists three such confirming factors: the fact of holding to true biblical teaching about Jesus (1 John 2:24-25; 4:15); love for fellow believers (2:14; 4:1-2); and righteousness and obedient living (2:1-3; 4:3). Christian growth is a process, as we shall see in the following chapter, so believers are not yet completely without sin. But those who belong to Jesus should be able to see genuine changes relating to their love, obedience, and faithful adherence to the truths of the gospel. Those changes should encourage them and build their confidence in relation to Jesus.

CHAPTER 7

TRANSFORMATION

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:12, 14, ESV

In the previous chapter, we saw that sinners receive a new status when they put their faith in Jesus Christ; they are justified and adopted. That change in status represents the first great branch in the tree of salvation. We now turn to consider a second major branch, the transformation of the believer's heart and life. The biblical and theological terms relating to this transformation are *regeneration*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*.

We can list several points of contrast between the branch of salvation that relates to the believer's new status and that which relates to their transformation.

1. The first branch concerns the believer's *position in relation to God*: we are declared righteous in God's lawcourt and given all the rights and privileges of adopted sons. The second branch concerns the *condition of the believer's heart and life*: we are given new power to live righteously day by day and we have a new inward sense of being God's beloved children.
2. The first branch pertains to something that happens *outside of me*: Christ's status is counted as mine. The second pertains to something that takes place *inside of me*: there is a change in my heart.
3. The first is based upon *Christ's work in history*. The second depends especially on *the work of the Holy Spirit today*.
4. The believer's new status is a gift they receive *entirely by faith*; their own efforts and merit contribute nothing. The believer's transformation depends on *both faith and obedience*; once they have been born anew, they must actively cooperate with what the Spirit does in their life.
5. The change in status brought about by justification and adoption is *immediate and complete*. The change in condition brought through

sanctification is *progressive*, our transformation into the likeness of Christ is a process that will only be completed at his return.

6. In the case of the believer's new position, the biblical accent is on the *indicative*: "You *are* holy." In the case of their new condition, the Bible's emphasis is on the *imperative*: "Be holy."

It is important to distinguish the believer's objective position in Christ from their interior condition as the Holy Spirit continually works to bring them into fuller conformity to Christ. But even though these two branches of salvation can be distinguished, we should not think they can be separated. On the contrary, the two branches grow side by side, bearing leaves and fruit that intermingle as part of a single tree. No one can be transformed by the Spirit unless they have first been justified and adopted into God's family. And no one who is truly justified and adopted will remain unchanged in heart and behavior.

Regeneration

The term "regeneration" comes from a Latin word meaning "rebirth." It refers to the transforming effect that takes place the moment a person comes to faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit first enters their life. Jesus spoke about regeneration in John 3:3-8. He told Nicodemus that he must be "born again" (or "born from above," since the Greek expression in 3:3 might be translated either way). Jesus attributed this new birth to the working of the Spirit, a point that Paul reinforces in Titus 3:5, where he speaks of "the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit." In 1 Peter 1:23, however, we read of an additional factor that plays a role when a person is regenerated: "You have been born again," Peter says, "not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Putting these passages together, we can say that regeneration is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who uses God's word, the gospel message about Jesus, as his instrument.

Two further clarifications about the term "regeneration" are necessary. First, as mentioned in chapter 4, some theologians include the Holy Spirit's work of inwardly calling a person to faith as part of regeneration. But it is probably best to distinguish the work of inward calling, which creates faith and leads a person to come to Christ, from the Spirit's transforming work of regeneration that follows a person's coming to Jesus. This is because the New Testament typically describes people receiving the Holy Spirit and experiencing the benefits of his

transforming presence as an immediate *result* of their faith in Christ (see Acts 2:38; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 1:13). Second, we should remember that new birth is not the only metaphor Scripture uses to describe the reality of regeneration. In addition to the image of being born again, the transforming effect of the Holy Spirit's entry into the believer's life is also described as a matter of being created anew (2 Cor. 5:17), being made alive after being dead (Eph. 2:5), being given a new heart (Ezek. 36:26) and being inwardly circumcised (Col. 2:11).

If regeneration is a matter of transformation, what is the precise nature of the change that takes place when a person is born again? It is clear from the Bible that regeneration does not involve a physical change. It may well have secondary effects on a person's body, of course, as it leads them to turn away from harmful sins; but such physical changes are not part of new birth in and of itself. The believer's physical transformation awaits the day of their resurrection when Christ returns to earth. Until then, we possess the treasure of salvation in "jars of clay," physical bodies that continue to waste away even as the inner self is constantly being renewed (2 Cor. 4:7, 16). Nor does the Bible teach that regeneration is primarily a matter of emotional change. New birth may impact a person's emotional life, but it cannot be simply equated with a particular set of emotions. It is important to avoid misunderstandings in this area. For instance, we should not think that if a person is truly born again, they must feel a certain way. The Bible does not say what the moment of new birth must feel like, or even whether it must be accompanied by any feeling at all. One person's experience may be dramatic, another's quiet. One person may feel joy or a deep sense of peace, another may not. Furthermore, we should not think that regeneration will erase all a person's emotional scars and bring an end to every internal struggle. Paul makes it clear that even those who have known the Holy Spirit's renewing presence in their lives can still experience groaning and inward struggle (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:8-9).

More positively, we can describe the changes regeneration brings under three headings. First, when a person is regenerated, there is a *new presence in their life*. The Holy Spirit enters their heart (Gal. 4:6). They receive him (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:15). He comes to dwell within them (Rom. 8:9-11). Second, when a person is regenerated, they experience a *relational transformation*: a change in their perception of who God is in relation to them and who they are in relation to God. The Spirit enables us to know, not just intellectually but also experientially, that God is our Father and that we are his fully accepted children. The Spirit fills our hearts with a deep sense of God's love and leads us to call out, Abba, Father (Rom.

5:5; 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:14-19). Third, regeneration involves a *behavioral transformation*. New Testament passages like John 3:3-8 and 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 refer back to Old Testament promises about a new covenant and renewed hearts. The people of Israel lived under a covenant that required them to live according to God's law, but they were consistently unable to fulfil that obligation. God therefore promised that he would one day establish a new covenant with his people, a covenant in which he would put his law within them and write it on their hearts (Jer. 31:31-33). He promised that he would give them a new heart, put his Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in obedience to his statutes (Ezek. 36:26-27). Regeneration represents the fulfillment of that promise of behavioral transformation.

Two more things must be said about regeneration. First, new birth is a supernatural act of God. It does not come about simply as a result of God working through natural means but involves a specific divine intervention that goes beyond what is naturally possible. People have the ability to change and improve themselves in many ways, but no human effort, strength of will, or therapeutic technique can transform a person who is spiritually dead into one who is spiritually alive. Jesus highlighted the stark distinction between what is natural and supernatural when he said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Regeneration is birth from above, not from below; it does not come by human flesh or human will but by the action of God (John 1:13).

Second, regeneration does not come by degrees but is a single event that comes at a specific time and stands as the once-for-all beginning point of a new life of following Jesus. This is implied by the metaphors Scripture uses to describe it: birth, creation, resurrection, and circumcision. Birth pictures the starting point of life. Creation points to the moment when existence begins. Being made alive after death speaks of a radical new beginning. Even circumcision was an act that stood at the beginning of a person's life and marked their entry into the covenant people of God. And all these events have an all-or-nothing quality. There is no such thing as being partly born, partly created, partly resurrected, or partly circumcised. A person is either regenerated or not regenerated; there is no in-between state. It is true that it is not always possible to identify the exact moment when the change from spiritual death to spiritual life occurs. In the case of a person who comes to faith in Christ through a steady process of exposure to the gospel, for example, it may not be easy to identify the day and hour when their growing understanding, attraction and receptivity becomes

genuine saving faith. But the Bible's teaching about regeneration enables us to affirm that there nevertheless was a decisive moment when the person believed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit entered their life.

Before leaving the topic of regeneration, we should comment on the relationship between regeneration and baptism in the Holy Spirit. As discussed above, regeneration marks the point at which the Holy Spirit enters a person's life. It is the moment at which the promise of Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put my Spirit within you," is fulfilled. The New Testament uses several different terms and expressions to describe this act in which God gives and believers receive the gift of the Spirit. One of the most important is "baptism in the Holy Spirit." John the Baptist promised that Jesus would baptize his followers with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11 and parallels). Jesus repeated this promise and indicated it would find its initial fulfilment on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5). Peter connected it with Cornelius's conversion and reception of the Spirit (Acts 11:16-17), and Paul indicates that the promise of being baptized in the Spirit is fulfilled in every believer at the moment they come to Jesus. So, "baptism in the Spirit" is a biblical expression that refers to the moment the Holy Spirit enters a believer's life and begins to indwell them. In other words, baptism in the Spirit is what happens when a person is born again; it is the birthright of every believer. It is necessary to clarify this point because baptism in the Spirit is often said to be a second experience that occurs at a time after a believer has experienced regeneration. This teaching occurs especially in Pentecostal and charismatic theology. Baptism in the Spirit is viewed as an experience that elevates the believer to a higher level of blessing and power. According to this view, not all Christians have received this baptism, and those who have not received it should seek it. Careful examination of the biblical evidence, however, shows that all the promises concerning the believer's reception of the Holy Spirit, including those that refer to being baptized in the Spirit, are fulfilled at the moment of regeneration. Those who have been born again have been baptized in the Spirit. This is not to deny that believers may go on to experience a variety of spiritual gifts and experiences in the course of their lives, but these should not be confused with baptism in the Spirit.

Sanctification

Just as the event of physical birth is followed by ongoing growth and development, so the moment of spiritual birth (regeneration) is followed by an ongoing process of growth and development. Theologians

commonly use the term “sanctification” to describe this process of spiritual growth and transformation in the lives of believers. Before discussing this topic further, however, we should point out that “sanctification” can have two different senses, one describing the believer’s *position* in Christ and the other their *condition*. The words “sanctify” and “sanctification” relate to the idea of holiness. In the Old Testament laws concerning worship, to be “holy” meant to be ceremonially pure and set apart for God. New Testament writers often used the language of sanctification to describe how believers had been definitively purified from their sins by the blood of Christ and set apart once for all for God. Passages like Hebrews 10:10 and 1 Corinthians 2:1 speak of this kind of “positional” sanctification. Like justification and adoption, positional sanctification is rooted in the believer’s union with Christ in his death and resurrection. But that once-for-all event of being sanctified or set apart in Christ then becomes the basis for an ongoing action of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who progressively makes believers holy and pure in their character and behavior. This ongoing work of the Spirit is “sanctification” in the conditional sense, which is the sense in which we will use the term in the discussion that follows.

The aim and purpose of the Spirit’s sanctifying work can be described in several different ways. From one perspective, as we have already seen, sanctification is a matter of the Spirit making believers inwardly holy, pure, and clean. Looking at it from a slightly different angle, we could say that the Spirit’s transforming work is designed to strengthen believers with an increasing ability to obey God’s law. Such obedience is the focus of passages like Jeremiah 31:31-33, Ezekiel 36:26-27 and 2 Corinthians 3:3, which speak of the Holy Spirit writing God’s law on the hearts of believers, and Galatians 5:16-26, which contrasts the fruit of the Spirit to the works of the flesh. Yet another way to describe sanctification would be to say that it renews and restores everything in our human nature that was lost or corrupted through Adam’s sin. This is the emphasis in passages like Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. But perhaps the most profound and all-encompassing way of describing the purpose of sanctification is found in passages like Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthian 3:18, which speak of believers being conformed to the image of Christ. Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers, the prototype of a new humanity. Through the circumstances of our lives and the inward action of the Holy Spirit, God works to make us more and more like him in character, mindset, faith, sonship, and obedience.

It is vitally important for Christians to understand the Bible's teaching about sanctification. Ignorance and misunderstanding in this area can have a serious negative effect on a believer's practical discipleship. With that in mind, here are several points that should be taught and emphasized.

First, sanctification is *necessary*. A Spirit-worked transformation of character and comportment is a necessary complement to justification, a sign that a person has indeed been justified. It is true that a person is justified by faith and not by works; we are declared righteous before God because of what Christ has done for us, not because of what we ourselves do by the power of the Spirit working within us. And yet the Bible clearly teaches that the person who has genuinely been justified by faith in Christ will inevitably begin to display the effect of the Spirit's transforming presence on their character, attitudes, and behavior. In passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Galatians 5:19-21, for instance, Paul lists sinful behaviors his readers had practiced in the past, reminding them that if they continue in their former pattern of life, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Another way of putting this is to say that trees bear fruit that corresponds to and reveals their true nature (Matt. 7:15-20). Those who truly belong to Christ will show it by the fruit of their righteous behavior.

Second, sanctification is a *process*, not a single, once-for-all event. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, believers "are *being* transformed" (a present tense verb that implies an ongoing action); they pass "from one degree of glory to another." So, while we affirm that those who belong to Christ will show evidence of transformed behavior, that does not mean the change will be complete and immediate or that no sin and struggle will remain in the believer's life. The fact that the New Testament epistles, addressed to believers, are filled with warnings against sin and the exhortations righteous behavior shows that Christians do continue to experience daily moral struggle and sometimes failure. According to Galatians 5:16-24, there is an ongoing battle between the tendencies of our fallen human nature, our "flesh," and the influence of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

Third, sanctification will *never be complete* in this present life. Although some have taught that Christian perfection is attainable in this life, the New Testament does not support that claim. Even a Christian as committed and mature as Paul could not claim to have been made perfect. In his letter to the Philippians, he openly acknowledged that he had not yet reached the goal for which he was striving. And if Paul was referring to his own present experience in Romans 7:14-25, as many interpreters be-

lieve, his ongoing struggle with sin could be intense. We should therefore never suppose that we have arrived at a state of complete spiritual victory, that our old nature is totally dead, and the battle is over.

Fourth, while believers are justified by faith alone, their progress in sanctification depends on both *their faith and their obedience*. Once we have been spiritually reborn, created anew and made alive, we have a new capacity to act, and we are responsible to do so. We depend on God's gracious work in our lives through the Holy Spirit, it is true, so we must continue to live by faith, but at the same time, we are fully responsible to obey God's commands.

Two opposing errors must be avoided in this regard. On the one hand, there is a widespread tendency for believers to fall into a legalistic pattern of thinking about the Christian life. Many believers know they were justified and born again entirely by grace but then suppose that, from that moment on, their ongoing discipleship depends totally on own strength and effort. Their attempt to follow Jesus then begins to feel oppressive and burdensome. They feel spiritual pride when they seem to be succeeding, but then despair when they find themselves struggling in their battle with temptation and sin. Pastors sometimes contribute to this legalistic mindset by focusing almost all their preaching on what Christians must do for God while saying very little about all that God does for us and in us. The opposite error, which is less common but is nevertheless sometimes taught, is to suppose that Christians can contribute nothing at all to their sanctification. Some believers correctly recognize that it is God who supplies believers with the power to live victorious Christian lives and that fruitful discipleship is a matter of abiding in Christ (John 15:4-5) and of Christ living in them through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20), but then mistakenly conclude that their proper role is to cease all human effort and simply rest in Christ. But against that conclusion, the Bible affirms again and again that Christian life and growth depend simultaneously on God's gracious work and the believer's faithful effort. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13, "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, where he speaks about his own strenuous effort to live out his calling, "I worked harder than any to them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

A fifth point to make about sanctification is that *the Spirit works through the word of God*: especially as Scripture points us to Jesus and focuses our attention on him. According to 2 Corinthians 3:8, transformation takes place as believers behold the glory of the Lord revealed in Jesus Christ. It is then, as believers contemplate Jesus, that the

Holy Spirit works within them to make them more and more like Jesus, taking them from one degree of glory to another. If we ask how believers can contemplate the glory of Christ, the answer is by reading God's word and hearing it clearly taught and preached. The Bible centers on Christ, so when we contemplate Scripture, we contemplate Christ. Attending church worship services where Scripture-based songs are sung and the Bible is clearly preached is thus a vital component of sanctification. So are the spiritual disciplines of Scripture reading and Bible memorization. As we fill our hearts and minds with God's word, we open the door for the Spirit to change us.

Sixth, in addition to the primary instrumentality of God's word, other factors also play an important role as the Spirit works within believers to sanctify them. We may especially mention *obedience*, *prayer*, and *the experience of trials*. With respect to obedience, James makes it clear that merely reading or hearing the word of God will not produce any positive change in a person if they do not also do the word (James 1:22-25). With respect to prayer, while the Spirit's transforming action is part of the believer's assured inheritance in Christ, at the same time it is a provision they are to actively pray for (Luke 11:13; Eph. 3:14-16). As for the importance of trials, multiple New Testament passages affirm that God uses hardships and sufferings as part of the process of making us more like Jesus (for example, Rom. 5:1-2; 8:28-29; James 1:2-4).

Finally, *Christians should be cautious about teachings and practices that seem to offer a shortcut to spiritual transformation* but lack clear biblical support. One doubtful teaching that has arisen in certain circles associates spiritual renewal with a dramatic physical or emotional experience effected by the touch of a leader who claims special spiritual power. Believers are encouraged to seek such an experience, such as being "slain in the Spirit" or "holy laughter," as a pathway to spiritual change. The question that concerns us here is not whether such phenomena occur, but whether they should be promoted as God's instruments for enabling believers to overcome sin and be brought into greater conformity to Jesus. That idea lacks biblical support. As we have seen, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit progressively transforms believers through the word of God. As believers engage with Scripture, focus their minds on what it teaches about Jesus, and respond to it with willing obedience, the Spirit works to change them. Such change does not take place through a sudden application of direct power that bypasses the believer's mind and will.

Another teaching that lacks clear biblical support is the idea that sin can be cast out of a person like a demon. In the Gospels, we see

that when Jesus encountered a person with a demon, he would speak an authoritative word and cast it out. The demon had no choice; it had to go. But when Jesus encountered sinners, he did not simply command their sins to go, as if they could be expelled like an evil spirit. Instead, Jesus called sinners to make a choice. He called them to repent and believe the good news. He addressed their minds so that they could understand his message. He addressed their hearts and wills so they could make a choice to obey him. In the same way today, sanctification does not come through an external command or touch. It comes as people hear the word of God and the Holy Spirit leads them to respond to it in faith and obedience.

Glorification

The transformation that begins with new birth and continues through the process of sanctification reaches its final completion when Jesus returns to earth and believers are glorified. The Christian's glorification includes physical resurrection but also a complete inward transformation that brings believers into full conformity to the image of Christ. The Bible emphasizes several truths relating to this theme.

First, glorification is *God's settled purpose for every believer*. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:14, God has called us through the gospel so that we may "obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Or as Paul puts it in Romans, those whom God called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom. 8:30); we are "vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory" (Rom. 9:23).

Second, the believer's glorification will take place *when Christ comes again*. Writing to the church at Colossae, Paul says, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Until that day, Christians will experience groaning and imperfection. We taste the firstfruits of the Spirit and experience daily renewal, but our struggle against the flesh goes on and our outer self continues to waste away (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 4:16).

Third, glorification means the believer will be *perfectly conformed to the likeness of Christ*. According to 1 John 3:2, "when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." This final conformity to the likeness of Christ means that we will have a glorious new body like that of Jesus after his resurrection (Phil. 3:21). Our current body is perishable, but our renewed body will be raised imperishable. "It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor. 15:42-43). But final conformity to Jesus also means

perfect moral purity. Our corrupt and sinful nature will be healed once and for all, and our character, attitudes, and behavior will be completely conformed to the pattern of life set by Jesus. Individual believers will be presented “holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col. 1:22), and the church as a whole will stand before Christ as a bride “without spot or wrinkle or any such thing...holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27).

Fourth, the believer’s glorification will mean *perfect freedom and the end of struggle and suffering*. Speaking of his own sufferings and those of all Christians in 2 Corinthians 4:17, Paul can nevertheless confidently say, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comprehension.” In fact, as he writes in Romans 8:18, “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed.” He then adds that this glory will touch the entire created order: “creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

Perseverance

In this book so far, we have discussed major aspects of salvation such as election, justification, and sanctification. We must now consider a topic that is closely linked to each of these themes, the doctrine of *perseverance*. Perseverance relates to the question of whether it is possible for a believer to fall away from salvation: or, to put the matter more positively, what God does to ensure that believers do not fall away from him.

When theologians affirm “the perseverance of believers,” they simultaneously express two thoughts. First, they affirm that the person who truly belongs to Jesus will never lose their salvation. Another way of putting this would be to say, “Once saved, always saved.” But the expression “perseverance of believers” also includes a second thought, namely, that God will keep believers faithful. He will guard them and work within them so that they do not abandon their faith and leave the path of discipleship. Putting these two thoughts together, the doctrine of perseverance affirms that believers are eternally secure because God will keep their faith alive and active. They will never lose their salvation because, by God’s gracious care, they will never lose their faith.

Some evangelical theologians prefer to speak of the believer’s “eternal security” rather than their “perseverance.” These theologians wholeheartedly affirm that believers cannot lose their salvation, but

think it is best to simply leave it at that, without adding the thought that believers will surely continue in faith and obedience. At the heart of this difference of opinion is the question of whether an ongoing life of faith and obedience is a necessary sign of saving faith, or whether evident sanctification is a necessary complement to justification. Those who affirm perseverance insist that only those who continue to believe in Jesus and remain faithful to him throughout their life will be saved. Those who prefer the term eternal security may not wish to emphasize that point so strongly. We can probably all think of people who at one point in their life professed faith in Christ and gave every evidence of being sincere, but then at a later point turned away from the Christian faith. What can we say about such people? We may acknowledge that a genuine believer might go through a period of backsliding where their faith is barely evident. But what if that backsliding persists over many years with no repentance and return to active faith? Those who hold a strong doctrine of perseverance will probably conclude that this person's faith in Christ was never genuine and that, despite outward appearances, they were never truly saved. Those who simply affirm eternal security, on the other hand, will perhaps be more likely to identify such a person as a genuine Christian, severely backslidden or carnal but nevertheless still saved and bound for heaven.

Standing opposed to both views described above are those who hold that a Christian can, in fact, lose their salvation. This position is typical of theologians in the Methodist and Pentecostal traditions. Faced with a case where a professing believer turns away from following Jesus, these theologians will likely conclude that the person was indeed saved but now has lost that status.

Although the perseverance of believers remains a debated question among evangelical theologians, the weight of the biblical evidence allows us to make several positive affirmations. First, we can affirm *those who have been justified by faith are eternally secure and will never lose their salvation*. Several Bible passages show that those who belong to Christ cannot lose this status. One of the most powerful statements of this truth comes at the end of Romans 8. In a passage summarizing the implications of salvation, Paul emphatically insists that nothing in all creation can ever separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39). Equally emphatic are Jesus's words in John 10:27-29, where he assures his followers that he has given them eternal life and that no one will ever snatch them out of his hand. Furthermore, there is a tight link between the reality of eternal security and other central aspects of salvation that are taught in Scripture, such as election, justification, and

regeneration. According to Romans 8:29-30, for instance, the believer's election assures their effectual calling, their calling assures their justification by faith, and their justification assures their final glorification. According to Ephesians 1:13-14, those who believe in Christ are "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (a reference to what happens at regeneration), and the indwelling Spirit is then "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it."

Second, several Bible passages indicate that *God actively works to keep believers persevering in their faith, and that this ongoing perseverance is an essential part of their eternal security.* In Philippians 1:6, Paul tells his readers that the God who began a good work in them will bring it to completion at the day of Christ's return. According to 1 Peter 1:5, believers "are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." God protects believers by enabling them to continue in faith, because their continuance in faith is vital. In Colossians 1:22-23, Paul says believers will be presented holy and blameless before Christ if they "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard." Or as Jesus says in Matthew 10:22 and 24:13, it is those who endure to the end will be saved.

Third, the Bible shows *it is possible for church members and professing Christians to fall away because they never truly belonged to Christ in the first place.* In 1 John 2:19, John speaks of people who were once part of the church community but then abandoned it. He says that, in reality, "they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." Hebrews 3:14 says, "We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." In other words, holding firm in the present and future is the proof that a person has truly come to share in Christ in the past. Failure to hold firm, on the other hand, is an indication that a person did not exercise genuine saving faith in the past. Some interpreters think that this is precisely the kind of situation described in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31, passages which warn believers against falling away but pose particularly difficult exegetical challenges. Theologians like Wayne Grudem, for example, argue that these passages describe people who outwardly joined the Christian community and even experienced many of the blessing to be found there, without actually being saved. Other theologians, such as Millard Erickson, understand these passages to describe a hypothetical danger, even though it is one that believers need to take very seriously.

Fourth, as already indicated, *the Bible contains passages that warn believers about the danger of falling away.* In addition to the passages discussed

above, we might mention Hebrews 2:1-3, where believers are warned to pay close attention to the teaching they have received, lest they drift away from it, and 2 Peter 1:10, where Christians are urged “be all the more diligent to make your calling an election sure,” by practicing the qualities of faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love.

What are the practical implications of the Bible’s teaching about perseverance for a pastor’s teaching and ministry? First, pastors can encourage believers to be fully confident about their status as God’s children. It is based on a firmly established past event, their justification by faith, but also on the never-ending commitment of the living God who actively keeps them and works within them to ensure that their faith does not fail. Second, pastors must warn believers not to abuse the truth of eternal security by falling into presumption and complacency, as if it does not matter how they live, since their salvation cannot be lost. The biblical doctrine of perseverance calls us to daily faith and dependence on God’s keeping power together with daily obedience to his word.

CHAPTER 8

DELIVERANCE FROM SATAN AND SPIRITUAL POWERS

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15, NIV

In the first chapter of this book, we identified four great problems, affecting the whole human race, from which we need to be rescued. As humans affected by Adam's fall, we are condemned by God's law, infected with inward corruption, subject to unrelenting attack by a powerful enemy, and obliged to live in broken and imperfect world. We have already examined what God does to save us from the first and second of these problems, condemnation and corruption. We now turn to consider what he does to deliver us from the third, attacks from Satan and the dark forces associated with him. God's action for our deliverance in this area forms a third major branch on the tree of salvation.

Understanding the problem

To understand this aspect of salvation well, we must first understand what the Bible teaches about Satan and the influence he exercises in the world. There has been a good deal of confusion about this among Christians, so we must begin by reviewing some basic elements of the Bible's teaching. A first point to emphasize is that *Satan is a created being and all he does is completely under God's control*. There is only one Creator and reigning King in the universe, and that is God. Satan is a rebellious angelic being, nothing more. It is true that he is powerful and capable of causing great harm, but it is also true that everything he does is only by God's permission and nothing he does stands outside of God's sovereign purpose. The limited nature of Satan's power is clearly illustrated in the case of Job. When Satan wanted to test Job, he could do so only with God's permission (Job 1:9-12; 2:4-7). That God is completely in control is shown supremely by the death of Jesus. Jesus's crucifixion represented Satan's fiercest attack on God's reign, his strongest effort to keep humanity firmly in his grip. But at the same time, Jesus's death

on the cross was God's perfect plan to glorify his name, deliver people from sin and captivity, and bring them to everlasting salvation.

Second, *Satan is the chief of a host of demons and other hostile spiritual powers*. When the scribes described Satan as "the prince of demons," Jesus acknowledged the truth of that designation. When Jesus cast out demons, he was at the same time doing battle with Satan (Mark 3:22-27). Many passages in Paul's epistles speak of an array of hostile spiritual forces: "rulers," "powers," "authorities," "dominations," and so on (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:24-25; Eph. 6:12). These dark spiritual powers are clearly linked to Satan, the evil one (Eph. 6:16).

Third, *Satan and his forces exercise an extremely powerful influence in our fallen world*. At the beginning of human history, Satan led Adam and Eve into sin through his deceit and tempting, with massive effects for the whole human race (Gen. 3:1-7). In John 12:31, Satan is called "the ruler of this world," and Ephesians 2:2, he is described as "the prince of the power of the air" who is constantly at work in disobedient humanity. According to 1 John 5:19, the whole world lies in his power. He holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Because of his presence and activity, the whole present age is evil and subjected to the power of darkness (Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:14).

A fourth observation is that Satan's attacks fall into four main categories: *he regularly deceives, tempts, and accuses, and can sometimes also directly assault a person's physical, mental, or material wellbeing*. These lines of attack are interrelated. First, Satan tries to deceive people in any way he can, especially about the truth of God's word and the consequences of sin (Gen. 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3-4). He is the father of lies (John 8:44). He promotes false teachings and denies the truth about Christ (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 2:22). Closely linked to his attempts to deceive, Satan tempts us to turn away from God and disobey his commands. He was the serpent who tempted Eve (2 Cor. 11:3-4). He tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11), and he continues to tempt Jesus's followers throughout their lives (Luke 22:31; 1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thes. 3:5). Then, when his deceiving and tempting have led people into sin, Satan shifts his position and takes up the role of accuser. According to Revelation 12:10, he is the accuser of God's people, who "accuses them day and night before our God." Using God's law and its penalties as a weapon, Satan seeks to bring charges against us and have us condemned in God's lawcourt (Rom. 8:33-34; Col. 2:13-15). Finally, although Satan's more typical work consists of deceiving, tempting, and accusing, the Bible indicates that he can also make direct attacks on a person's physical, mental, or material wellbeing. In extreme cases, an evil spirit somehow comes to

dwell within a person and then attacks or controls their body and mind (for example, Mark 1:23-24; 5:1-13; 9:17-29; Acts 16:16-18; 19:16). At another level, Satan can attack believers physically or use outward circumstances to harass them as seek to serve Christ. The New Testament does not greatly emphasize Satan's physical attacks on believers, but in 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul mentions receiving "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" to torment him. This probably refers to a physical ailment. We find an example of Satan harassing believers with negative circumstances in 1 Thessalonians 2:18, where Paul says that Satan hindered him from visiting Thessalonica. Satan's physical attacks on believers who sin and refuse to repent present a special case. In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul speaks about a sinning church member who must be placed under church discipline. Paul instructs the church to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." This passage shows that unrepentant believers are especially vulnerable to physical attack from Satan, but it also implies that faithful believers have a greater measure of protection from this kind of harm (see also 1 Tim. 1:20).

Fifth, *it is important to distinguish between Satanic and demonic attacks, on the one hand, and all the other physical and material effects of the Fall, on the other.* Not all physical and material woes are directly tied to Satan and demons. In fact, as we have seen, the New Testament epistles say relatively little about Satan attacking believers physically or materially. According to Genesis 3:14-19 and Romans 8:20-21, sickness, pain, thorns, the difficult struggle to survive in the natural world, and death entered the world as part of God's judgment and discipline on the sin of Adam and Eve; it is God who subjected the whole created world to futility until the day it would be set free at the time of Christ's return. The natural world itself has been subjected to bondage and corruption. Therefore, the painful realities of sickness, accidents, painful labor, projects that fail, and physical death generally touch our lives simply through the operation of natural laws in a fallen world. Only on limited occasions does the Bible attribute these troubles to direct supernatural attack from Satan and demons. Furthermore, Christians do not escape the painful realities that are ingrained in our fallen world. According to Romans 8:23, even believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit will experience natural sufferings until the day Christ returns. So, although pastors should teach their members to alert to the possibility of supernatural harassment in the physical realm, they should not exaggerate this theme in a way that departs from Scripture. Believers must be taught that natural causes operate in God's creation. When our prob-

lems have natural causes, we should certainly call out to God for help. But we must also use our own natural abilities and all available human resources to find natural solutions.

A final point of Bible teaching about Satan is that *it is sin that gives him power over human lives*. His ability to accuse, harm, or hold people captive results from the fact that they have sinned against God and that God's law declares that all who sin stand condemned and subject to the penalty of death. Satan has the right to accuse all those who have disobeyed God's law (Rev. 12:10-11). For this reason, he can even be said to hold the power of death (Heb. 2:14). The record of our violations is like a weapon in the hands of our invisible spiritual enemies (Col. 2:14-15). Apart from the saving work of Christ, therefore, we are powerless to break free from Satan's grip or defend ourselves from his attacks.

What Jesus does to deliver us

If it is important to understand the nature of Satan's attacks, it is even more essential to understand what Jesus Christ has done to deliver us from Satan. The clearer we see the nature and extent of Jesus's victory over Satan, the more we will be freed from fear and ready to serve God with confidence. Six aspects of Christ's action against Satan display the completeness of his victory. First, *throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly challenged Satan's power by casting evil spirits from people who were indwelt by them*. When Jesus came into the presence of such people, the demons within them recognized who he was and cried out in fear because they knew he had come to destroy them (Mark 1:23-26; 5:6-10). When Jesus commanded demons to leave, it was like he was binding Satan and plundering his kingdom (Mark 4:23-27).

Second, *at the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus directly engaged with Satan in the wilderness*. He faced Satan's most intense temptations but emerged completely obedient to God and faithful to his mission. It is important to realize that Jesus did not overcome Satan's temptations simply by exercising divine power. Instead, he faced Satan as the fully human second Adam, a man responsible to obey God's word (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Cor. 15:22). He stood in the place of sinful humanity. Where Adam sinned, Jesus remained obedient. Whereas the people of Israel failed when they were tempted in the wilderness, Jesus, the true Israel, remained faithful. Satan thus has no charge to bring against Jesus. That means Satan also no longer has any charge he can bring against those who have put their trust in Jesus and are therefore now united with him. Christ's steady and active obedience, not only

during those forty days in the wilderness but throughout his entire life, is counted as the believer's obedience. In Christ, they stand completely free from Satan's accusations.

Third, *Jesus most decisively broke Satan's grip on our lives when he paid the price for our sins through his death on the cross.* That is why, just a few days before his crucifixion, Jesus cried out, "Now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31). At the cross, Jesus took the curse of the law upon himself, so there is no longer any condemnation or penalty of spiritual death for those who belong to him (Gal. 3:13; Rom 8:1). As Paul puts it in Colossians 2:14-15, the legal record that stood against us was nailed to the cross, and with that the rulers and authorities of darkness have been completely disarmed. They no longer have any right to accuse us or hold any power over us.

Fourth, *Jesus further defeated Satan and the invisible powers of darkness by his resurrection, ascension, and entrance into his heavenly reign.* According to Ephesians 1:20-21, Christ is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named." In other words, Jesus now reigns over Satan and every spiritual power allied with him. According to 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, his heavenly reign will continue until every hostile power is destroyed and every enemy is put under his feet.

Fifth, *not only does Jesus now reign from heaven, he also continually intercedes for us there, specifically countering Satan's continuing attempts to accuse us.* As Paul says in Romans 8:34, "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who has died, and more, has been raised, and who is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us." On the basis of his atoning death in the past, Jesus now actively and continually opposes Satan, speaking for us in the presence of God in heaven.

Finally, *when Jesus returns to earth, he will bring Satan's attacks against the people of God to a complete end.* Satan-inspired opponents such as the Antichrist (also called "the lawless one" and "the beast") will be defeated and eternally judged (2 Thes. 2:8-10; Rev. 19:19-21), and Satan himself will likewise be thrown into the lake of fire forever (Rev. 20:7-10). Then both individual believers and the whole created order will be eternally free from Satan's influence.

The application of Jesus's victory to our lives

Jesus's victory over Satan means that believers are delivered from his power. Some aspects of that deliverance come in an immediate and once-for-all fashion the moment a person puts their faith in Christ,

while others are received day by day, as and when they are needed. The most important once-for-all aspect of deliverance is that, when a person comes to Christ, *they are completely sheltered from Satan's accusations*. This benefit is grounded in their justification. Through faith in Christ, they have been declared righteous before God. Christ's life of obedience, including his total resistance to Satan's temptations, is now counted as theirs, and his death in their place frees them from all possible condemnation. That is why Revelation 12:11 says that believers overcome Satan and his accusations "by the blood of the Lamb," and Colossians 2:14-15 says his forces have been disarmed. Satan has no case to make against us. As far as accusing or condemning us goes, he no longer holds any weapon that can touch us. As those who belong to Jesus, therefore, whenever Satan tries to accuse us, we must simply affirm what Scripture says is true, that we are fully accepted by God.

A second once-for-all aspect of the deliverance a person receives when they come to Christ is that *if they have a demon that binds them and exercises significant control over their body or mind (a condition often called "possession"), they are set free*. We must distinguish between the kind of severe control that is frequently termed demon possession from other forms of demonic attack or influence. The Gospels and Acts describe several instances of the first kind of demonic hold. In such cases, the person is said to "have" or be "with" an unclean spirit (see Mark 1:23; 5:2; 7:25; 9:17; Acts 8:7). The unclean spirit dwells within them and must be cast or sent out of them (see Matt. 8:16; 10:1; 12:28; Acts 16:18). We should observe several things about this kind of severe demonic hold. First, while cases of people with an indwelling demon are not rare in the Gospels and Acts, this nevertheless seems to be a special condition that affects only a limited number of the people Jesus and his followers encountered. Second, in such cases, the demon is cast out by a direct command from Jesus or in the name of Jesus. Third, the demon-indwelt person is then immediately set free from the demon's presence and controlling grip on their mind and body. Fourth, all the accounts of casting out demons in Gospels and Acts seem to be in context of a person's first encounter with Jesus or the gospel message. Finally, the New Testament does not describe any cases of demons being cast out of those who are already Christian believers, nor does it give any teaching about such an activity.

On this evidence, we may conclude that in cases where deliverance from this kind of severe demonic control is necessary, it normally forms part of a person's initial saving encounter with Jesus. This conclusion is further supported when we consider the implications of the

believer's justification and regeneration. The person who believes in Jesus is immediately justified, which means that Satan no longer has any right to condemn them or exercise any hold over them. The person who comes to Jesus is also immediately born again; they are created new and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. How then could an unclean spirit allied with Satan continue to indwell and bind such a person?

So, believers have been delivered once for all from Satan's ability to condemn them and from any demon's power to indwell and control them. But despite this decisive deliverance at the beginning of their Christian walk, the Bible repeatedly warns that believers will continue to experience attacks from Satan throughout their remaining life on earth. Satan may not be able to indwell or possess those who have been justified and born again through faith in Christ, but he can certainly try to tempt, confuse, influence, and oppress them. Believers therefore have a daily need for deliverance and protection. To meet this pressing need, there is an important ongoing aspect to God's work of saving us from hostile spiritual powers.

When we examine what the Bible teaches about our present spiritual battle and God's day-by-day action on our behalf, three important points become evident. First, *Satan directs his attack on believers first and foremost against their relationship with God.* The main forms of Satan's attack, namely, deception, temptation, and accusation, all involve an attempt to influence our minds and wills. It is with our minds that we know and trust God, and with our wills that we obey him. What is at stake when Satan deceives, tempts, and accuses, therefore, is nothing other than our relationship with God. Our victory in this warfare consists of one thing: that we remain firm in faith and obedience. If we remain faithful to God, we completely overcome Satan and the invisible forces of darkness, even if we suffer physical harm, emotional pain, and material loss in the process.

Second, while their victory against Satan depends entirely on God's action through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, *believers are also responsible to play an active role in the ongoing spiritual battle.* When Satan tries to deceive believers, whether individually with respect to their personal circumstances and choices or corporately by trying to infect churches with distorted teachings, they are responsible to use God's word, the sword of the Spirit, to dispel the confusion Satan tries to create. They must follow Jesus's example and counter Satan's lies with the word of God (Matt. 4:1-11; Eph. 6:17). When Satan tempts believers: and even before he tempts them: their first essential defense is prayer. Believers are specifically commanded to pray as a means for escaping Satan's

temptation; through prayer they receive God's promise of protection (Matt. 6:13 and 26:41; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 John 5:18). But praying is not the believer's only responsibility when they are tempted. Prayer must be accompanied by active obedience in every area of their life. If we analyze the spiritual armor Paul prescribes in Ephesians 6:14-16, (the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes of gospel readiness, and the shield of faith), we see that it is largely a matter of faithful and obedient living. The same is true of his counsel for defeating Satan in Ephesians 4:25-27 (put away falsehood and anger in the church). A life of steady, consistent faithfulness like that described in these passages reduces Satan's opportunities to attack, and when specific attacks to come, they can be met with firm resistance. As for Satan's attempts to accuse believers, their primary resources are to remember Jesus's blood that was shed for them, his present advocacy on their behalf at the right hand of God, and the testimony of Scripture that no power in all creation can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rev. 12:11; Rom. 8:34-39). But according to Revelation 12:11, a further essential factor that will enable believers to overcome Satan's accusations is "the word of their testimony" and the fact that "they loved not their lives even unto death." This refers to their faithfulness to Jesus, both in word and deed, even in circumstances of pressure and persecution. So, when Satan attacks our mind and will, our ongoing deliverance depends entirely on God's saving action but, at the same time, entirely on our active prayer, faith, obedience, and use of God's word.

Finally, while Satan primarily targets the believer's relationship with God, *he also occasionally makes a direct attack on their physical, material, or emotional wellbeing.* Biblical examples of this form of Satanic action include his attacks on Job's possessions, family, and body, the "thorn in the flesh" that Paul experienced as a messenger of Satan, and the hindrances Paul experienced on several occasions when he wanted to visit the church he had planted in Thessalonica (Job 1-2; 2 Cor. 12:7; 1 Thes. 2:18). There are also two cases involving believers who were "handed over to Satan" as an act of church discipline because of their sin and refusal to repent. Being handed over to Satan in this way seems to have placed them outside of Christ's protection to some degree and exposed them to physical attack (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

There is some debate among Christians about the extent to which the physical, material, and emotional struggles they experience result from direct demonic attack, as well as the steps they should take to counter such attacks when they do occur. Although we cannot address every question that arises in this area, we can offer some observations

based on the Scripture passages that speak about these matters. First, the Bible does not place great emphasis on this aspect of Satan's activity. Paul only mentions it a few times in passing; he does not give specific teaching about it or treat it as a major cause for concern. Second, despite the trouble and inconvenience this kind of physical attack caused him, Paul did not regard it as a major threat to his ministry. He did not retreat in fear but pressed on with confidence, knowing that God's grace would be entirely sufficient for his needs as he pursued the tasks Christ had given him. In fact, Paul even saw how God could use such attacks for his growth. He says the thorn he was given kept him from becoming conceited. Third, while Paul made Satan's physical attack a specific matter for prayer, pleading with God to remove the thorn in his flesh, there is no indication that he directly rebuked Satan or commanded him to depart. Fourth, in addition to the passages that speak about unrepentant believers being handed over to Satan as an act of church discipline, a few other New Testament passages hint that sin and a lack of repentance may open believers to various kinds of attack by Satan, including an attack on their body (see 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Thes. 4:27). This does not mean that all or even most Satanic attacks on a believer's body, possessions, or emotions are a sign they have sinned, of course. But it does alert us to the importance of repentance and obedience in our struggle against the spiritual forces of evil.

Popular ideas with little biblical support

According to Scripture, believers are released from Satan's grip, protected from his attacks, and given new strength to overcome in the spiritual battle waged against them. This is a major aspect of our salvation. However, we must now give attention to some teachings and practices relating to these matters that have become popular in today's churches but seem to lack clear biblical support. For example, in many Christian circles, sicknesses, accidents, and material losses are almost automatically attributed to demons, even though the Bible has little to say about this subject. Practices such as identifying territorial demons, binding Satan, and casting out demons of sin have also become common, even though the Bible does not clearly teach them. While we cannot discuss each of these issues in detail here, we do want to give a word of caution. Not every teaching about spiritual warfare and the invisible spiritual world should be quickly accepted. On the contrary, Christians and especially pastors are responsible to examine and carefully test such teachings in the light of what the Bible clearly says about

our salvation. In this final section, then, we highlight five positive principles that can help us distinguish what is true from what is false and what is healthy from what is unhealthy.

A first principle is simply that *the Bible is our one true source of knowledge about Satan and the invisible world*. When it comes to understanding God, the unseen spiritual world, and the things pertaining to our salvation, the word of God is our only reliable source of information. God has given us his word in Scripture and has designed it to be completely sufficient for our needs. It is therefore the pastor's duty to preach the Bible and nothing else. That means they must examine every teaching and practice relating to the demonic world in the light of Scripture: not just by taking a few isolated phrases out of context, but by taking the whole Bible into consideration and reading each passage in its full original context. This requires thoughtful study. Some popular teachings claim to be biblical but are in fact based on misinterpretations. Some exaggerate one part of the Bible's message while ignoring the others. Some draw their main inspiration from sources outside the Bible. They may be rooted in traditional religions or depend on a dream or special revelation someone claims to have received or be based on a dramatic experience someone has had. Non-biblical teachings and practices often seem exciting, but in the end, they distract believers from the real work of spiritual warfare. Mere drama should not be confused with God's genuine presence and saving power.

A second biblical principle is that *we can face the hostile spiritual forces that surround us with confidence, because Jesus has conquered Satan and we belong to Jesus*. The Bible warns believers to be alert, of course. But they are also told to be confident. Some Christians fall into a trap by ignoring the threat posed by Satan, but others deny the full power of the gospel by living in too much fear of demons, spirits, magic, and curses. Neither attitude is healthy. Jesus taught us pray daily for deliverance from the evil one (Matt. 6:13), and Peter warns us to be alert and watchful, because the devil prowls around like a roaring lion (1 Pet. 5:8). But Jesus also told the believers in Smyrna to not be afraid, even if they had to suffer for a period at the hands of Satan (Rev. 2:10). Paul reminds believers that they are more than conquerors even in the middle of their trials and that no spiritual power can separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:37-39). So, while we must always be vigilant, we must also never draw back in fear or let ourselves be driven off the path God has set before us. If a teaching or practice leaves believers with more fear than confidence, that is a sign that it is somehow out of line with the full teaching of Scripture.

Third, *although demons are real, not all negative things that happen are the result of direct demonic activity.* In the Western Christian tradition, nearly all negative experiences and events are attributed to purely natural causes. Whether the problem be emotional imbalance, relationship difficulties, addiction, a sinful habit, loss of employment, business failure, sickness, an accident, or death, there is no thought of any demonic involvement. In most of the non-Western church (the church of the majority world), however, believers can easily go to the opposite extreme. They see almost every negative event as a demonic attack and give little attention to possible natural causes. Neither attitude matches the biblical picture of our human situation. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, sickness, pain, trials, bondage to sin, and death entered the world as part of God's judgement on Adam's sin. For the most part, these painful realities follow the course of natural laws. All creation is now subjected to futility and bondage, and even believers do not escape the effects of this judgement (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:20-23). But in addition to the God-ordained results of Adam's fall, Scripture indicates that Satan and his demonic forces are also active in the world, and in some cases, it is their activity that lies behind trials and negative experiences that touch the lives of believers. We must therefore exercise discernment. On the one hand, we must not neglect the possibility of demonic involvement; on the other, we should not emphasize that factor more than the Bible itself does.

The Bible gives relatively little attention to Satan's attacks on the physical and material well-being of believers. When churches depart from the biblical pattern and attribute almost all physical and material difficulties to demonic activity, two dangers can easily follow. First, an overemphasis on demons as the primary cause of their sicknesses, financial losses, and the like can lead church members to neglect the natural factors that contribute to their difficulties: the factors that are under their own control and that call for their own responsible action. It becomes easy for them to think, "Demons are causing my problems, so there is nothing I can do." A second danger is that an exaggerated emphasis on Satan attacking their bodies and material circumstances can distract church members from being alert to the real focus of Satan's attack, which is to weaken their relationship with God. Satan and the demons constantly seek to destroy that relationship, which is something they themselves can never have.

One practice that sometimes emerges when churches are too quick to assume that demons are the cause of every negative thing that believers experience is that of casting demons out of Christian believers.

Particularly in cases where a believer struggles with an emotional problem or a deeply ingrained habit, a pastor may automatically identify a demon as the cause and casting it out as the solution. But the practice of casting a demon out of a person who is already a believer should be carefully evaluated in the light of Scripture. As we have seen, the New Testament contains no example of this being done. Furthermore, the Bible's teaching about justification and new birth makes it difficult to imagine that anyone who truly belongs to Christ could be indwelt and controlled by a demon in the way that demon-indwelt people are described in the Bible. These considerations alert us to be cautious about this ministry practice. Certain questions may be difficult to answer, of course. Is it possible that a new believer might still suffer from lingering demonic influence? Might a believer who is not "possessed" or totally under demonic control nevertheless be subject to a particularly strong form of demonic oppression that requires special prayer and a command for the demon to depart? Sincere Christians will perhaps answer these questions differently. But they should not quickly assume that a struggling believer is indwelt by a demon.

A similar questionable practice is that of casting out demons of sin, such as a "spirit of anger," a "spirit of lust," or "a spirit of lying." Here, too, there is a tendency to place greater emphasis on demons than the New Testament does. The New Testament warns believers about the sinful tendencies of their own corrupted human nature ("the works of the flesh") and calls them to repent, resist temptation, and walk obedience with the help of the Holy Spirit. It never mentions casting out demons as a means of overcoming sin. There is no record of Jesus casting out demons as a means of combatting human sin and rebellion. Instead, when he encountered people caught up in sin, he simply called them to repent and believe the gospel. Why should a church today try to combat sin in a way not found in the Bible?

A fourth principle is that *when we engage in spiritual warfare, we should stay in the section of the battlefield where God has assigned us*. Believers are soldiers under Jesus's command. They have been assigned specific tasks and given certain weapons. They are to use all the armor and weapons described in Ephesians 6:10-20, Revelation 12:11, and other New Testament passages that describe spiritual combat. If they encounter people who are show clear signs of being indwelt and held captive by demons, they are to cast the demons out in the name of Jesus. In doing these things, they will faithfully fulfill their role as that is described in Scripture. But as good soldiers, they should not try to move into areas of the battlefield to which they have not been assigned. It is important

to remember this principle, because some popular teachings urge believers to take up tasks which the Bible portrays as belonging to angels, or to battle Satan in ways that lie beyond the range of activities that Scripture assigns to believers. For example, some churches teach that believers should specifically identify the demonic powers that exercise control over a geographical area and then engage them in direct spiritual combat. But the Bible never tells believers to do this. It is true that passages like Daniel 9-10 and Revelation 12 describe war in heaven between God's angels and the forces of Satan, but God's people on earth are not told to identify the demonic powers in heaven and take direct action against them. According to Scripture, the way for believers to contribute to the battle going on in heaven is to faithfully carry out their God-given duties on earth. In Daniel 9-10, for example, Daniel prays in a way that is appropriate for God's people on earth. He bases his prayer on what he reads in Scripture and what can see for himself about the present condition of his people. While he prays, Gabriel and Michael do battle with the prince of Persia, but that part of the fight belongs to them, does not to Daniel. In a similar way in Revelation 12, there is a correlation between the victory won by Michael and his angels over the dragon and his angels in heaven and the victory won by believers on earth. But the battles are fought in two different ways. For the believers on earth, doing battle against Satan is a matter of claiming the blood of the Lamb and bearing faithful testimony even unto death.

Various other questions arise in relation the principle that believers should not try to engage in spiritual combat in ways that go beyond the tasks clearly described in Scripture. One is whether Christians are responsible to "bind" Satan and his demons. Another is whether they should frequently address demons and command them to depart. With respect to the first of these questions, we may note that Jesus compared his own ministry of casting out demons to a housebreaker who must first bind the strong man who owns the house before plundering his goods (Matt. 12:29 and parallels). Jesus thus implies that his activity of casting out demons put limits on Satan's power, freed people from his grip, and enabled them to experience God's saving reign. By extension, then, it seems fair to say that when believers encounter persons indwelt by demons today and cast them out in Jesus's name, their activity will have a similar binding effect on Satan. But we must also observe that the New Testament passages that specifically speak about believers "binding" and "loosing" (Matt. 16:19 and 18:18) do not refer to binding Satan and demons. In their context, these passages speak instead

about church leaders establishing rules for Christian behavior and exercising discipline within the church. “Binding” and “loosing” were common Jewish expressions for establishing rules of permissible behavior. So, the idea that “binding” demons is a special category of spiritual warfare does not have biblical support.

With respect to the question of addressing demons and commanding them to depart, this practice is certainly appropriate in the case of casting demons out of people who are indwelt and controlled by them. It may also be appropriate for a believer to directly addressing Satan or demons with words of Scripture on certain occasions when they sense themselves being subjected to intense temptation. Jesus cited Scripture to Satan as part of his strategy for resisting temptation in the wilderness, and after his third temptation, he ordered Satan to leave (Matt. 4:1-11; see also Matt.16:23). One additional New Testament passage offers a further hint that it may be appropriate for believers to directly address Satan or the invisible spiritual powers with words of Scripture. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul tells his readers to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Since Paul gives this instruction in the context of telling believers how to fight against hostile spiritual powers, it is possible that one of the ways in which believers should use God’s word is to recite it to the spiritual powers. Jesus did this when Satan tempted him in the desert. Apart from situations such as these, however, the Bible does not emphasize that believers should address demons and command them to leave as part of their regular combat against the temptations, accusations, and physical attacks of Satan and the spiritual powers of darkness.

A final principle to bear in mind is that *Jesus Christ is the one true source of our authority and victory*. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, our victory and authority over Satan depends entirely on Jesus: his life of perfect obedience, his death on the cross, his resurrection and ascension, his present heavenly reign and intercession, and his future return. At the very heart of our victory stands the cross. To cite Revelations 12:11 once again, we overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb. We therefore claim the blood of Jesus and move forward against the forces of darkness in his name. This means when we engage in any kind of spiritual combat, we consciously depend on Jesus and not on our own gifts, church position, or spiritual power. We recall and affirm all that Christ has done for us and all he continues to do from the throne of heaven today.

Because Jesus himself is the source of our authority over Satan, we should never simply shout out phrases like “the blood of the Lamb” or

“in the name of Jesus” without thinking about what they really mean, as if they were magic words with power in and of themselves. Nor should we think that loud cries and dramatic physical gestures have any inherent power to defeat Satan. To oppose Satan in the name of Jesus in a biblical sense means that we focus our thoughts on our Lord and Savior and engage in battle with a conscious sense of trusting and obeying him. To claim the blood of the Lamb means that we remember and announce the fact that Jesus’s death on the cross has completely removed our sin and guilt, and that Satan therefore has no grip on us.

CHAPTER 9

DELIVERANCE FROM THE PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL RESULTS OF THE FALL

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19, ESV

A fourth and final great branch on the tree of salvation is deliverance from the physical, environmental, social, economic, relational, and psychological effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience. God's salvation delivers us from sickness and pain, fear and worry, poverty and material need, and all the sufferings caused by human injustice and oppression. The conditions that prevailed in the Garden of Eden, peace, provision, harmony, and enduring life in a delightful and supportive environment, will all be restored for those who receive the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. Revelation 22:1-2 provides a striking picture of this aspect of salvation when it describes the tree of life growing in the New Jerusalem. The tree of life grows along each side of the river of the water of life and bears "twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month" (ESV). This picture implies that where God's salvation is fully present, every material need will be richly and perfectly supplied. Furthermore, the leaves of the tree of life are "for the healing of the nations;" every kind of sickness will be healed, and every source of pain removed.

But *when* will believers be delivered from sickness, suffering, and poverty? How *much* healing, peace and prosperity does God mean for them to have during their present life on earth? And if those blessings are available here and now, what must believers do to *receive* them? Must believers give more money to the church in order to receive more money? Must they pray more forcefully to be healed of their sicknesses? If a believer is suffering or having financial problems, does that mean they are missing the full blessings the gospel promises? These questions are on the minds of many Christians in our day, and they hear many conflicting answers to them. Pastors must therefore make a special effort to develop a solid theological understanding of the physical and material aspects of salvation. Only then will they be able to guide their flocks with wisdom and faithfully guard the gospel that has been entrusted to them.

Five important principles

Before examining specific Bible passages that speak about healing and prosperity, it will be good to highlight five underlying principles. Most of the erroneous teaching about health and wealth that has found its way into churches in our generation arises because these principles are ignored. The first is simply this: *faith must always be linked to the promises and character of God*. Biblical faith is always a response to God's word. In Scripture, God has made promises and he calls us to believe them. God has also revealed his character, values, and priorities. So, whenever we seek God's saving help, we must believe his promises and remember who he is. The Bible encourages us to seek God's help when we are in need. It tells us about his compassion and shows us how he delights to shower his children with good things. It teaches us what he promises to do and gives us countless examples of his provision for people who call on him. All these things encourage us to ask God for help and not give up, even in the face of great obstacles. At the same time, however, linking our faith to God's promises and character puts certain limits on what we should ask and expect. We should not expect to receive things God has not promised in Scripture or that do not fit the values and priorities he displays there.

A second principle is that *the gospel focuses first and foremost on the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of our relationship with God*. It is true that physical and material deliverance is an important part of the good news; it forms a fourth great branch on the tree of salvation. But deliverance from physical and material problems is not the only or even the primary focus of the good news. When a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus for healing, for example, Jesus placed the greatest priority on forgiving his sins (Mark 2:1-12). After the feeding of the 5000, when people came to Jesus seeking more such blessings, he told them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life" (John 6:27).

A third principle to bear in mind is that *there are differences between the promises God made to Israel under the old covenant and the promises he makes to Jesus's followers under the new covenant*. God's character, values, and priorities do not change as we move from the Old Testament to the New. But some of his specific commands and promises do. The Old Testament describes how God made a covenant with the people of Israel. He gave them laws relating to many areas of their life and worship, and he promised them a land, good crops, protection from diseases, and victory over their enemies. When the people were faithful to him, God faithfully kept his promises to them. But Christians today live under a new covenant (Jer. 31:31; Luke 22:20; Heb. 8:13). Some of the specific

laws pertaining to Israel, such as those concerning special days and special foods, no longer apply in the church today. In the same way, some of the specific promises relating to physical health, material provision, and military success no longer apply to the church today in exactly the same way. That does not mean that God no longer heals or provides for the material needs of his people, but it does mean that Christians today should build their expectations in these areas on New Testament passages that specifically address the church. The New Testament does, in fact, contain rich promises and examples relating to God's physical provision for believers. Nevertheless, these are somewhat different from those found in the Old Testament, and they are set in a new context.

A fourth important principle is that *the kingdom of God (his saving reign) comes in stages; it broke into the world with Jesus's earthly ministry, entered a new stage when he ascended to the throne in heaven, and will come in its full power and completeness when he comes again.* The "kingdom of God" was the major theme of Jesus's teaching (Mark 1:14-15 and parallels). This expression refers to God's saving reign. God's reign touches every area of life, including physical health and material wellbeing. For example, Jesus said that his ministry fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2: "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 a liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, ESV). But Jesus also made it clear that the presence of God's saving power during his earthly ministry was only a foretaste of the full blessing that would come at the time of his second coming (Mark 4:30-32; 13:26). So, believers now live in an in-between time. Jesus has come and God's saving reign has truly begun, but until Jesus comes again, we experience only a portion of the kingdom's physical and material blessings. Jesus now sits on the throne in heaven and from there he continues to act, so healing and deliverance are real possibilities (Acts 1:1; 2:33; 3:6; 4:29-30; 12:11). But this side of his return to earth, believers will not always be healed, delivered from hardships, and rescued from death.

A fifth principle is that *the frequency with which God works miracles of physical healing and deliverance can vary from one time and place to another.* The miracles recorded in the Bible seem to occur more frequently at some times than others. In the Old Testament, we find a heavy concentration of miracles at the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and then later in the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. In the New Testament, miracles of physical healing, provision, and protection were a major part of Jesus's

earthly ministry, signaling the arrival of the kingdom of God. Miracles continue during the period of the book of Acts, but these seem to be especially associated with the ministry the apostles. Out of the seven specific healing miracles recorded in Acts, all but one were performed by apostles (the exception was when Ananias laid hands on Saul to restore his sight). In addition, all four miracles of physical protection involved apostles (5:17-21; 12:6-19; 16:25-27; 28:3-5). Healing and other miracles were not entirely restricted to the apostles, of course, but the book of Acts nevertheless gives the impression that they were not a weekly occurrence in every local congregation. For instance, when a member of the church in Joppa fell sick and died, the believers there went to the neighboring town of Lydda to get Peter (Acts 9:36-43). In Jerusalem, people carried those who were sick to where Peter's shadow could fall on them (Acts 5:15-16). In Ephesus, people brought pieces of cloth that had touched Paul to those who were sick (Acts 19:11-12). These events suggest that miracles played a special role in the ministry of the original apostles, those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus's resurrection. Paul's comment about "the signs of a true apostle" in 2 Corinthians 12:12 hints at the same thing. What does all this mean for church today? First, believers should pray for physical healing and protection, remembering God's power and compassion and the fact that Jesus actively reigns from the throne of heaven. Second, they should not become discouraged or feel that they are spiritually second-rate if they do not see dramatic healings and supernatural provisions on a regular basis, as if frequent miracles were the biblical norm for every healthy church. Third, they should recognize that an exceptional outbreak of miracles might occur for a limited time and in a limited place: for example, during a period of church revival or when the gospel first breaks into a new geographical area. The Bible does not give direct teaching about this last suggestion, but it would be consistent with what we see in the New Testament taken as a whole.

Healing

The Bible always pictures physical health and wholeness as blessing from God. Sickness, pain, and death were not God's original design for humanity but entered the world as a result of Adam's sin. Physical restoration thus forms a major part of God's work of redemption, and active prayer for healing is encouraged everywhere in Scripture. The Old Testament often pictures God as a healer (Ps. 103:3; 107:17-20), healing

formed a major part of Jesus's earthly ministry (Matt. 4:23-24; 9:35), and healing is one of the Holy Spirit's gifts to the church (1 Cor. 12:9).

Two issues relating to healing and salvation require special comment, however. The first concerns the relationship between healing and the atonement. According to one popular teaching, Christ bore our physical sicknesses to the cross and therefore Christians should never suffer from any illness. This view is based on Matthew 8:17 and 1 Peter 2:24, both of which refer to Isaiah 53:4-5. According to Matthew 8:17, Jesus's healing ministry fulfilled Isaiah's words, "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases" (ESV). In 1 Peter 2:24, Peter describes how Jesus bore our sins on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, and then adds these words from Isaiah, "By his wounds you have been healed." These passages do point to a connection between healing and the cross, but to understand the nature of that connection, we must observe their contexts carefully. Matthew 8:17 does not speak directly about Jesus's death on the cross but rather about his healing ministry which took place in the period *before* his death. First Peter 2:24, on the other hand, is not talking about physical healing so much as the *spiritual* healing that results from the cross. We must therefore interpret these verses in the light of the Bible's wider teaching about the atonement.

The Bible teaches that sickness is part of the curse that resulted from of Adam's fall. Sin brought death, together with the sicknesses are a foretaste of eventual physical death. But when Jesus died on the cross, he took the punishment and curse that our sin deserved upon himself (Gal. 3:13). Jesus thus dealt with the sin and guilt that caused the curse and, in doing so, he also delivered us from the effects of the curse, including physical sickness and death. It is therefore true to say that when Jesus died for our sins, he also delivered us from sickness. But it is a mistake to think that believers will therefore receive all the physical benefits of the atonement immediately here and now. Instead, the Bible teaches that the full physical benefits of the atonement: resurrection, a glorious new body, deliverance from weakness and fatigue, and freedom from all pain and illness: will only come when Jesus returns to earth.

A second issue concerns the relationship between spiritual health and physical health. If a Christian falls ill, does that mean they have sinned? Or if a believer is not healed, does that indicate a lack of faith? In other words, is physical sickness a sure sign that something is wrong spiritually? The answer is no. Sickness is not necessarily a sign of sin. In the case of the man born blind, Jesus said that neither his sin nor that of his parents was the cause (John 9:2-3). Furthermore, failure to

receive healing is not a sign that a believer lacks faith. Paul himself prayed three times that his thorn in the flesh be removed, but the Lord's reply was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). Not all illnesses were miraculously healed in the early church, even among missionaries. Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent illness (1 Tim. 5:23). He left Trophimus ill at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). Epaphroditus was ill and almost died while serving Christ; although he recovered, there is no indication that his recovery was guaranteed (Phil. 2:25-30). So, while Christians are encouraged to pray for healing and God often does heal us, our full bodily restoration awaits the day of Christ's return. In the present time, believers often groan, eagerly waiting for the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23-25).

Material prosperity

Many of the biblical principles relating to physical health also apply to the issue of material prosperity. Just as bodily weakness, pain, and sickness entered human experience as a result of Adam's sin, so also did poverty and material want. Economic conditions became difficult; thorns and thistles hindered agriculture and obtaining food became a struggle. But just as salvation reverses the negative health effects of Adam's disobedience, so also it reverses the harsh material and economic effects of the Fall. The tree of life in the New Jerusalem pictures both kinds of reversal; it has leaves for healing, but it also produces plentiful and continual crops of fruit. Along with these similarities, however, there is also a fundamental difference between the way the Bible speaks about health and the way it speaks about wealth. While the Bible always pictures health as a completely positive blessing, the same cannot be said for wealth. In fact, Scripture often warns believers about the *dangers* of wealth. Furthermore, when sick people came to Jesus, he always healed them, but when poor people came to him, he did not make them rich. So, we must examine the topic of prosperity thoughtfully. What exactly does the Bible teach about the material benefits of salvation? Should Christians expect to be rich and prosperous during their present life on earth?

A first point to make is that *the New Testament positively encourages believers to trust God for their material needs*. Jesus taught his disciples to pray for their bread every day (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3). By this he meant that Christians are to ask their Father in heaven to supply all their basic material needs: not just food, but also clothing and every other fundamental material need. The New Testament contains several promises

about God's provision for the material needs. For example, in the context of thanking the Philippian church for their financial support, Paul assures them, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). And Jesus tells his disciples not to be anxious about their food and clothing, because their Father knows what they need and will provide it (Matt. 6:25-33). We should observe that these promises are made specifically to believers, those who have come to Jesus for salvation. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, God's promise to meet material needs is for those who "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

A second point is that *the New Testament assumes a distinction between basic material needs (what we need for a healthy and productive life) and unlimited wealth*. There is a great difference between trusting God for daily bread and asking him for great wealth and the fulfillment of all our dreams. Jesus tells parables about asking for bread (Matt. 7:9-10; Luke 11:5-8) but never about asking for gold. Some churches teach that God intends for every believer to be rich. They say that the more money a believer gives to God, the more money and success they will receive in return, as if giving were a strategy for financial profit. But such teaching is an abuse of Scripture. It is true that 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 and Galatians 6:7-8 teach that believers will reap what they sow, but if we look at these passages closely, we will see that they do not promise wealth or encourage Christians to seek financial gain. In the first passage, Paul tells the Corinthians that as they give generously, God will supply them with all the things they need to "abound in every good work." In other words, when Paul says they will be enriched, he is speaking about a kind of enrichment that will enable them to produce a harvest of righteousness and be generous to others. In the Galatians passage, Paul applies the principle of sowing and reaping to a *spiritual* harvest: "The one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Another passage that must not be misinterpreted is Mark 10:29-30, where Jesus says that those who have left their house or family for the sake of the gospel will receive "a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands." Jesus means that those who leave their homes to serve him as evangelists and missionaries will experience love and support from a wide spiritual family wherever they go. Their brothers and sisters in Christ will always provide these servants of the gospel with a place to stay, even if they never possess a house of their own. Jesus did not mean that they would have a hundred biological brothers, a hundred biological sisters,

and a hundred biological mothers, or that they would hold the titles to a hundred houses and a hundred plots of land.

A third point is that *many Bible passages warn believers that financial wealth can in fact be dangerous*. In Jesus's parable of the Sower, for instance, the thorns that choke the word are "the cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things" (Mark 4:19). Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are you who are poor," but "woe to you who are rich" (Luke 6:20, 24). He told his followers not to store up treasures on earth (Matt 6:19). He warned them that they could not serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24). Similar warnings abound in the New Testament. So, those who equate salvation with wealth have strayed far from Scripture. They do not understand Jesus or the values of God's kingdom. Instead of promising wealth, the gospel calls us to contentment (1 Tim. 6:7-10; Heb. 13:5), generosity (2 Cor. 9:10-11; Heb. 13:16), and sacrifice (Mark 8:34-36; Phil. 3:8).

So, Christians must guard against greed and never treat the gospel of Jesus Christ as a means to gain more money. But a final point about material prosperity must also be mentioned: *when a family or community turns to Christ, a gradual improvement in their standard of living often follows*. Some missiologists and church historians have called this phenomenon the principle of "redemption and lift." When people put away sinful habits and begin to lead disciplined lives, when they stop living only for themselves and begin to care for their families, when they replace corruption with honesty, foolishness with wisdom, and laziness with diligence, greater material prosperity naturally results. This is a fundamental law of life. Proverbs 10:4 says, "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich." According to Proverbs 28:19, "Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty." Paul instructed new believers in Thessalonica to live quietly, mind their own affairs, and work with their hands. As Christians live according to these instructions, they are able to support themselves financially and contribute to their community (1 Thes. 4:11-12).

Deliverance from trouble

We have seen that healing and material provision are important aspects of salvation, even though believers receive these benefits only in part this side of Christ's return to earth. The same thing can be said about deliverance from troubles and difficult circumstances. The message of Scripture is clear: on the one hand, God delivers his people from trials, troubles, and suffering; on the other, Christians must expect to experi-

ence many difficulties as they await the return of Christ. In fact, a remarkable number of passages in the New Testament epistles are devoted to the theme of trials. In passages like 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 and 6:3-10, Paul describes the hardships that came to him specifically as part of his ministry as an apostle, while passages like Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7 speak about the role of trials in every Christian's life. When the Bible speaks about trials and hardships, this can include many kinds of difficulty: sickness, poverty, and persecution, but also many other types of troubling and painful life circumstances, disappointments, and suffering.

The passages that speak about this theme teach important truths about trials and troubles. First, they show us that *God often intervenes to give believers physical protection and deliverance from difficult circumstances*. For example, when Jesus's disciples were threatened by a storm on the sea, he commanded the wind and the waves to cease (Mark 4:35-41 and parallels). The book of Acts records multiple instances where servants of the gospel were miraculously delivered from prison or danger (Acts 5:17-23; 12:3-11; 16:19-26; 27:21-25; 28:3-6). These examples do not mean that God will always deliver his people from harm or that their suffering is a sign of sin. The deaths of Stephen and James show that that is not the case, as do Paul's descriptions of his many hardships (Acts 7:54-60; 12:1; 2 Cor. 11:23-33). But the examples of rescue and protection we find in Scripture remind us that God can and often does deliver us from dangers and difficulties today.

Second, New Testament passages about troubles emphasize that *trials play a positive role in God's plan for believers*. According to Romans 5:3-4, the suffering we endure as believers produces the qualities of endurance, character, and hope. According to James 1:2-4, our trials produce steadfastness and make us mature and complete. So, even if God does not immediately deliver us from a trial, he will nevertheless use it redemptively; that is, he will use it to accomplish a saving and sanctifying purpose in our lives. We must remember that God's purpose for our lives is ultimately to transform our character so that we become like Jesus. If we understand that, we will understand what Paul means when he writes, "We know that for those who love God all things work together *for good*" (Rom. 8:28). God wants the best for us, so he works all circumstances for our good. But what is this "good" that God seeks to accomplish in our life? It is not just to give us immediate satisfaction or make all our wishes come true. Instead, as Paul goes on to say, God is at work through our circumstances to make us "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

Finally, the New Testament passages about troubles remind us that *when we face hard situations, mere physical deliverance should not be our highest goal and number one prayer request.* Instead, our attitude should be that displayed by Paul in Philippians 1:19-26. When he wrote this passage, Paul was a prisoner, waiting for a verdict of whether he would live or die. In this situation, he tells the Philippian church, “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” At first, it sounds like Paul is referring to physical deliverance: a positive verdict and escape from death. But as we read on, we see that he actually has a different kind of escape in view: “as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always *Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*” Paul’s greatest concern was not that he be spared physical death, but that he would hold firm under pressure and not do anything that would dishonor Christ. If through the prayers of the church and the help of the Holy Spirit Paul could remain faithful under trial, as he was concerned, that was deliverance. Furthermore, Paul’s eyes were fixed on a benefit far greater than any other blessing he could imagine. He writes, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ” (1:23). Paul’s thoughts were focused on the promise of eternal, unbroken fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. He knew that this is the greatest benefit of salvation, the central hope of every believer.

CHAPTER 10

SALVATION AND THE SURROUNDING RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Titus 2:1

Christians in Africa are surrounded by a variety of religious influences. Non-Christian religions like Islam and African Traditional Religion present ideas about God and salvation that in many ways stand in conflict with biblical teaching. So also do certain branches of Christianity, such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Neo-Pentecostal churches. African Christians have daily interactions with members of these religious communities. Many who now belong to an evangelical church were once members of one of these communities themselves. In this chapter, we will show how the biblical doctrine of salvation differs from the beliefs and teachings of African Traditional Religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism.

Throughout this book, we have been comparing salvation to a tree. But if salvation is a glorious, life-giving tree planted by God, there are also many deceptive and harmful plantings that do not come from God. Just as an attractive looking tree may in fact bear bitter fruit or be filled with hidden thorns, these deceptive alternatives to the God-given tree of salvation can keep people from coming to the true source of life. They stand as competitors to the gift of salvation that was won for us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is now powerfully applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit. They offer religious teachings that seem wise and powerful but deviate from the truth of Scripture.

There are two reasons why it is necessary for evangelical Christians, and especially pastors, to understand what other religious groups are teaching about salvation. The first concerns evangelism. When the biblical gospel is shared with Muslims, Roman Catholics, Neo-Pentecostals, and those who practice African Traditional Religions, their readiness to hear and understand the gospel message will be strongly affected by the religious ideas that are already deeply ingrained within them. If we want our message to be clearly heard, we will have to know how the people we talk to think. We will have to know how they view God, and how they understand the religious terms we use. We

need to know what aspects of the gospel message may be especially attractive to them and what aspects will likely raise objections. The better we understand the religious ideas held by the people we are addressing, the better we will be able to show them the beauty and relevance of the gospel.

A second reason why it is important to understand the beliefs and practices of the religious groups that surround us concerns discipleship. When a person puts their faith in Christ, they do not immediately leave behind all the deep-seated attitudes and concepts that were part of their life before coming to Christ. Nor are they immune to the ongoing influence of the surrounding culture, including the religious ideas that exist within it. So, even in Bible teaching evangelical churches, many members continue to be influenced by ideas and values that come from other religions. In the believer's thinking, biblical ideas about salvation can easily mix with unbiblical ideas. This will hinder them from growing as disciples and living out their salvation with confidence and faithfulness.

In the sections below, we will survey key points of difference between the biblical teaching about salvation and the beliefs of the religious groups mentioned above. We will examine how each religious community answers four questions:

- 1) What benefits does salvation offer?
- 2) What does God do to save people?
- 3) What does a person need to do to gain salvation?
- 4) Can a person have assurance of salvation?

African Traditional Religion

There are many variations in the practice of African Traditional Religion, but certain common features are present across many regions and language groups. Adherents of African Traditional Religion generally believe in one supreme God, whom they view as the source of all power but also as distant from human affairs. Rather than becoming directly involved with human concerns, God distributes his power to a variety of other divinities, spirits, and ancestors. It is these invisible intermediary beings who are believed to influence everyday human affairs, either for good or for ill.

What benefits does salvation offer? African Traditional Religion does not emphasize “salvation” in the sense of a restored relationship to God, deliverance from judgment and hell, and the attainment of eter-

nal life in heaven. Nor does it emphasize conversion from sin to a new life of righteousness. Instead, those who practice African Traditional Religion focus primarily on obtaining help with practical matters pertaining to the present world. These include protection from spirits, curses, and spells; the provision of daily needs, such as crops, good weather, and children; physical healing; and guidance concerning a variety of practical matters through divination.

What does God do to save people? Unlike biblical Christianity, which places great emphasis on God's gracious saving acts in both the past and the present, African Traditional Religion contains little or no teaching about God taking direct action to meet people's needs. Since God's power is thought to be channeled through divinities, spirits, ancestors in the invisible world, it is these intermediate powers who must provide the protection and benefits that those who practice African Traditional Religion seek. Furthermore, since there is little emphasis on God judging sin, people generally do not have a strong sense that they need to seek his forgiveness. The intermediate divinities, spirits, and ancestors must sometimes be appeased, however, because they sometimes punish people if customs are violated, or they are not given respect.

What does a person need to do to gain salvation? Bearing in mind that in African Traditional Religion "salvation" is primarily a matter of obtaining practical benefits, gaining those benefits usually requires a person to seek the intervention of a religious specialist who can intervene with the divinities, spirits, and ancestors who inhabit the invisible world. Human religious specialists act as mediators to bring help and power from the invisible world into the world of everyday life. Just as the power of the supreme God is distributed to intermediate divinities and spirit beings, so their power is channeled to human religious specialists who can then distribute it to ordinary people. These human mediators may be herbalists who combine knowledge of natural cures with spiritual healing practices, priests who perform rituals and petition the divinities at a shrine or temple, or mediums and prophets who practice divination. The person who goes to one of these specialists may be required to participate in certain ceremonies or use special physical objects, such as amulets and fetishes, that are believed to convey power and protection. So, for adherents of African Traditional Religion, religion does not require a person to believe a set of teachings or experience a conversion. It is more a matter of practicing certain rituals, participating in ceremonies, using charms and fetishes, and avoiding certain taboos.

Can a person have assurance of salvation? Since there is no strong concept of salvation in the sense of being delivered from hell, gaining eternal life, and being brought into a new relationship with God, the question of assurance does not really come up in African Traditional Religion.

Islam

Although many Muslims practice a form of “folk Islam” that displays many features similar to African Traditional Religion (such as a focus on obtaining practical benefits and protection from curses and evil spirits, seeking the help of holy men, and making use of amulets), traditional Islam affirms the existence of one God, the creator and judge of all people, who has given his final revelation through the prophet Mohamed and to whom every person owes submission and obedience.

What benefits does salvation offer? In Islam, the main issue relating to salvation is whether a person will go to heaven or hell. Inward transformation is not emphasized as an aspect of salvation, because Muslims reject the idea that people are born with a sinful nature. Obtaining a restored relationship with God is not a major goal, because God is viewed as too far above his human creatures to engage in close fellowship with them. He is a powerful king rather than a loving Father. Even in heaven, there is no expectation that God will draw close to people in personal communion. Instead, the focus is on everlasting comfort, luxury, and pleasure. Heaven is often pictured as a peaceful garden with plentiful fruit, attractive spouses, gold, and silk.

What does God do to save people? God does not really need to do anything to save people other than give them guidance so they can choose the right path. No atoning sacrifice is necessary, according to Islamic teaching, because God is not bound to punish violations of his law. Sins tend to be viewed as simply as mistakes that God can easily forgive. This is very different from what the Bible teaches. According to the Bible, God is not only merciful and all powerful, but also completely just and holy. Therefore, he had to take costly action to win our salvation. He sent his Son to die in our place and set us free from the law’s condemnation. Islam thus denies the core gospel message that God sent his Son into the world for our salvation. Islamic teaching also denies that God sends his Holy Spirit to indwell and transform his people. Muslims view this as impossible and unnecessary. They deny that God draws close to his people in this way and deny that people need to be inwardly transformed.

What does a person need to do to gain salvation? Muslim teachers do not all give exactly the same answer to this question. Faith in the sense of trusting God is not emphasized but confessing that there is only one God and that Mohamed is his prophet is usually thought to be a key factor in gaining salvation. Practicing the religious duties known as the Five Pillars of Islam (the *shahada*, prayer, alms, fasting, and pilgrimage) is also important, as is practicing all manner of good works. One passage in the Quran speaks of God weighing a person's good and bad works in a balance, with their salvation depending on whether the good deeds outweigh the bad. Although opinions about the details may differ, salvation in Islam ultimately depends on a person's own works. Furthermore, Islam teaches that people are fully capable of doing what is required for gaining salvation.

Can a person have assurance of salvation? Serious, practicing Muslims are generally not fearful about their final salvation. On the other hand, Islam does not emphasize that a person can be assured of their salvation. Some teach that only martyrs and those who practice jihad are sure to be saved.

Roman Catholicism

Roman Catholics and evangelicals hold many doctrines in common. When it comes to teaching about salvation, however, there are important differences.

What benefits does salvation offer? The Roman Catholic position is for the most part similar to the evangelical view with respect to the benefits of salvation. Catholics seek forgiveness for their sins, acceptance by God, a restored relationship with God, internal transformation, deliverance from Satan and demons, a reversal of the physical and material effects of the Fall, and communion with God in heaven. The last of these benefits, a vision of God in heaven and eternal deep communion with him, often receives greater emphasis among Catholics than among evangelicals.

What does God do to save us? Like evangelicals, Roman Catholics believe that God sent his Son to pay the price for human sin, defeat Satan, and open the door for our resurrection. They also believe that God sends the Holy Spirit to indwell and transform believers. With respect to God's work of justifying sinners, however, a major difference emerges. Evangelicals affirm the convictions of the Protestant Reformation. They insist that justification is by faith alone. They hold that when sinners their faith in Jesus Christ, God immediately accepts them and declares them to

be righteous, completely free from all condemnation. Roman Catholics oppose this Protestant conviction concerning justification by faith alone. They hold that justification is not an immediate declaration of righteousness before God, but rather an ongoing process that depends on both faith and good works, and that is never complete in this life. To put this more precisely, while evangelicals hold that God *imputes* a status of righteousness to sinners, thereby immediately removing all condemnation and all threat of punishment against them, Roman Catholicism teaches that God begins a process of *imparting* righteousness, in the sense of giving sinners a new power which enables them to obey God and live righteously. Another way of expressing this doctrine would be to say that God does not *declare* sinners to be righteous but begins to *make* them righteous. Of course, evangelicals also believe that God begins a process of transforming believers and making them righteous in their behavior, but they call this process “sanctification” and distinguish it from “justification.” Roman Catholic teaching makes no distinction between justification and sanctification.

This may at first appear to be just a difference in wording, but more is at stake. If God only begins a process by giving believers new power to live righteously, who is to say the process will be completed and they will one day reach full and final acceptance by God? Furthermore, instead of God’s acceptance being a gift that depends completely on grace and is received purely by faith, gaining acceptance becomes a joint work of God and the believer. God supplies the believer with new power, but then the believer must then make use of that power to perform good works that will be acceptable to God. Instead of salvation depending entirely on grace, it also depends on human works and merit. On the Roman Catholic view, the process of justification begins with baptism (which children born into Catholic families receive as a baby), is reinforced at “confirmation” (a church sacrament which children usually receive at around twelve years old), continues through a person’s life, and only becomes final at the last judgement.

What does a person need to do to gain salvation? Roman Catholics agree with evangelicals that a person must depend on God’s grace, the saving work that Christ accomplished on the cross, and the power of the Holy Spirit working within them. But they hold that salvation also depends on the good works that a person does in response to God’s grace. The believer’s final salvation depends, not on faith alone, but on the good works they perform. So, in that sense, Christians must earn salvation by doing good works.

It is also important to observe that in Roman Catholic teaching, receiving baptism and the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) plays a major role in obtaining salvation. This is because Catholics believe that saving grace is received through the physical acts of baptism and the Eucharist, regardless of whether the person receiving these sacraments has personal faith or understanding. The initial grace of regeneration is received at baptism. Ongoing grace is received through the Eucharist. These sacraments are thus considered necessary for gaining salvation, except in cases where it is impossible for a person to receive them. Moreover, according to Roman Catholic teaching, the sacraments can only be administered by Catholic priests. The Catholic Church, therefore, plays an essential role in mediating salvation.

Can a person have assurance of salvation? Roman Catholic doctrine denies that Christians can be assured of their final salvation. This is because they deny that justification is an immediate declaration of righteousness received by faith alone but hold that a person's final acceptance by God depends in part on the good works they perform.

Neo-Pentecostalism

“Neo-Pentecostalism” is a term that is used to describe a wide range of churches and ministries that place strong emphasis on attaining prosperity and deviate in major ways from the biblical gospel. Neo-Pentecostalism should not be confused with traditional Pentecostalism, which is noted for its emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit but generally maintains a high standard of biblical doctrine and practice. Other terms for Neo-Pentecostalism are the “prosperity gospel” and the “gospel of health and wealth.” It is also sometimes referred to as the “prophetic movement,” because its leaders often claim to be prophets or apostles, who claim to receive revelations directly from God. These revelations then become the basis of new teachings that are not found in Scripture. Well known Neo-Pentecostal preachers hold large revival meetings, publish many books, appear on television, and speak on the radio. They draw people away from Bible teaching churches. Their prophecies and unbiblical teachings can even influence the thinking of Christians in evangelical churches.

What benefits does salvation offer? The Neo-Pentecostal gospel does not center on forgiveness of sins, a restored relationship with God, new power for obedience, and the hope of eternal life. Instead, it centers on physical health, material prosperity, and success in the present world. A repeated theme is, “God wants you to be healthy and rich!” There is also

a great focus on deliverance from Satan and demons. Whereas the Bible describes Satan as a source of deception, accusation, and temptation to sin, Neo-Pentecostalism views Satan and his demons primarily as enemies that make us sick, block our success, and try to prevent us from receiving the material blessings God intends for us.

What does God do to save us? Neo-Pentecostal teachers do not emphasize biblical themes like justification, forgiveness, a restored relationship with God, sanctification, and discipleship. Because of this, they usually have little to say about Christ's atoning death, which was God's great act of power, grace, and justice to free us from the condemnation of the law. If Jesus's death is stressed at all, it is typically presented as a matter of Christ bearing our physical sicknesses so that we can be healed. Neo-Pentecostal teaching also places little emphasis on the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of making believers more like Jesus in their behavior and values. Instead, the focus is simply on God's power to work miracles to give believers health, wealth, and success.

What does a person need to do to gain salvation? According to Neo-Pentecostal teaching, there are a number of things a person can do to obtain health, wealth, and success. First, one must exercise faith. While biblical faith focuses on Christ's saving work on the cross and is part of an ongoing relationship with God and Jesus Christ, in Neo-Pentecostalism faith is primarily a matter of believing that God will give you what you ask him for. While biblical faith is always tied to the promises God has clearly made in Scripture, many Neo-Pentecostals stress the principle of "name it and claim it." According to this teaching, whatever a believer names in faith will be given them. Furthermore, if a believer falls sick or fails to receive everything they ask for, this is often viewed as an indication that they have sinned or that they lack faith. Second, to defeat Satan and the demons who are blocking their prosperity, believers are taught to bind these dark powers by rebuking them with loud cries. This often involves repeating special words or performing ritual actions. Third, since sin is often thought to be the cause of a person's sickness and troubles, believers may be called to repentance. Fourth, believers may be encouraged to go to a preacher or prophet who is thought to be especially anointed by God. Such men and women are thought to act as mediators of God's power. Finally, believers are often urged to unlock God's financial blessings by giving generously to a prophet or ministry to unlock God's financial blessings. The biblical principle of sowing and reaping is applied directly and exclusively to financial rewards. A preacher may promise success and wealth

to those who give generously, while simultaneously warning that financial loss will come to those who do not give.

Can a person have assurance of salvation? The biblical teaching that a believer can be assured of their eternal relationship with God does not receive great emphasis in Neo-Pentecostalism. Even at the level of receiving material blessings in the present world, those who fall under the influence of Neo-Pentecostal teaching are often troubled by doubts concerning God's favor, since their sense of his approval is so closely tied to the changing circumstances of their lives.

KEY TERMS

Below are listed key terminology when it comes to understanding the Doctrine of God. These brief definitions are originally found in Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson's work, *Christian Theology* and have been used here with permission.

Adoption	Grace of God
Antinomianism	Guilt
Application of salvation	Justice
Arminianism	Justification
Arminius, James	Lordship of Christ
Assurance of salvation	Perseverance
Atonement	Prevenient grace
Calling	Propitiation
Calvin, John	Providence
Calvinism	Regeneration
Christ's person and work	Repentance
Christ's saving work	Righteousness
Christ's saving work, biblical images	Righteousness of God
Christ's saving work, historical views	Sanctification
Common grace	Sin
Conversion	Sovereignty of God
Election	Substitution
Eternal life	Total depravity
Faith	Unpardonable sin
Foreknowledge	Wesleyanism
Free will	Will of God
Glorification	Works of God
Gospel	

Adoption: God the Father's placing of believers in Christ into his family by grace. God accepts us and adopts us as his children. Before adoption we were slaves to sin and did Satan's will (Gal 4:3; 1 John 3:10). God's eternal love is the source of adoption (Eph 1:3-6), and because of his

vast love, he calls us his children (1 John 3:1). The basis of adoption is Christ's death as a redemption that frees us from sin's bondage (Gal 3:13; 4:4–5). We receive adoption by faith in Christ (John 1:12; Gal 3:26). The Holy Spirit empowers us to believe that the Father has adopted us (Rom 8:15). Adoption brings wonderful results. The Spirit not only enables us to call God "Father" but also testifies to his love in our hearts (v. 16). We share a family resemblance to our heavenly Father (v. 14). He disciplines us because he loves us (Heb 12:6). Adoption is present and future, for God has made us his heirs, awaiting our inheritance of the redemption of our bodies and renewed creation (Rom 8:18–23).

Antinomianism: opposition to law, especially as a rule for the Christian life. Antinomians pit grace against law and claim to be governed by the former and free from the latter. In keeping with the Old Testament (Exod 20:5–6; Ps 119:98), however, Jesus and his apostles taught that although salvation is by grace and not law keeping, believers are obligated to obey the law (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; Rom 6:14–16; Gal 5:13–14; Jas 2:8, 12). Because of his emphasis on grace, Paul's opponents accused him of antinomianism, a charge he vehemently denied (Rom 3:8). Believers are saved and kept by God's grace, which should lead to obeying God in gratitude for his grace. God's law reflects his will; therefore, his law is good, and keeping it brings wisdom and happiness. The law condemns and drives sinners to the cross, but it also is part of God's wisdom for living according to his will: for his glory and believers' good.

Application of salvation: God's bringing people to salvation. Distinguished from God's planning salvation before creation (predestination, election) and his accomplishing salvation in Christ in the first century (Jesus's death and resurrection). The application of salvation includes many elements, each of which helps explain salvation differently. The overarching aspect is union with Christ, the Holy Spirit's joining us spiritually to Christ so that all of his benefits become ours (Eph 2:6). Union with Christ embraces all the other aspects of the application of salvation. Regeneration is God's making alive those who are spiritually dead (1 Pet 1:3). Calling is God, through the gospel, effectively summoning to him those who were spiritually deaf and blind (Eph 4:1). Conversion is God's turning around lost people so they come to Christ. Conversion includes repentance (turning from sin) (Matt 4:17) and faith (turning to Christ) (Eph 2:8). Justification is God's declaring righteous all believers in Christ (Gal 2:16). Adoption is God's putting into his family all who trust Christ as Redeemer (Gal 4:4–5). Sanctification is both definitive and progres-

sive. Definitive sanctification is God's setting apart sinners to holiness (1 Cor 1:2). Progressive sanctification is God's gradually building holiness into the lives of his saved people (2 Cor 7:1). Perseverance is God's keeping his people saved and their continuing to believe the gospel and live for God (Heb 12:14). Glorification is God's conforming people to the returning Christ's perfect glory (2 Thess 2:14).

Arminianism: theological system stemming from James Arminius that was formally presented by his followers in their protest ("The Remonstrance") at the Synod of Dort (1618–19) and later was further developed by John Wesley. The Arminians at Dort summarized their teaching in five points. (1) Conditional election: God chose people for salvation based on foreseen faith. (2) Unlimited atonement: Christ died to save all humans. (3) Total depravity: sinners are unable to save themselves (in agreement with Calvinism). (4) Resistible grace: by his grace, God gives sinners opportunity to believe or resist the gospel, and some do the latter. (5) Perseverance: at Dort, the Arminians expressed uncertainty concerning this point. Later, Wesley taught that believers can fall away from grace and be lost.

Arminius, James (1560–1609): Dutch Reformed theologian and pastor whose views became the basis of Arminianism. As a theology professor at the University of Leiden, he came into conflict with his colleague Franciscus Gomarus over predestination. Although Arminius formerly held the Calvinist view, he came to defend a conditional election, according to which God elects to eternal life those he foreknows will believe the gospel. After Arminius's death, some of his followers signed "The Remonstrance," a theological document supporting his views. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) debated Arminius's views, condemned Arminianism, and adopted the five points of Calvinism. As a result, Arminian pastors suffered expulsion and persecution. Arminianism continues to influence many Christians, including Methodists, Nazarenes, and some Baptists.

Assurance of salvation: confidence of final salvation. Assurance is based on God's preservation, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, and believers' perseverance. Preservation is God's saving and keeping his people saved so they do not totally and finally fall away from grace (John 10:28–30; Rom 8:29–39). God's promises to save (the gospel) and to keep (preservation) are the main basis of assurance. The Spirit's inner witness is his working in believers' hearts to convince them that they are children of

God the Father, who loves them (Rom 8:16). Perseverance is believers' continuing to believe the gospel and live for God (Col 1:21–23).

Atonement: God's act of dealing with sin to bring forgiveness. Sin broke the relationship between God and human beings, but Christ's death brings restoration. Old Testament sacrifices brought forgiveness because they looked forward to Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for sin (John 1:29; Heb 9:15). Peter teaches, "Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

Calling: God's summoning people to him in salvation. Often, calling is God's means of bringing people to salvation (Rom 8:30; 9:23–24; 2 Thess 2:13–14). Sometimes calling refers to the sharing and hearing of the gospel and its invitation and promises (external or gospel call). Such calling includes the gospel: we are lost and cannot rescue ourselves, Christ died and arose to rescue sinners, and we must trust him to be rescued. It includes an invitation, summoning people to trust Jesus's death and resurrection for deliverance. It includes promises: the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to believers. Many biblical texts issue the gospel call (e.g., Acts 16:31; Rom 10:9). Sometimes calling also refers to God's summoning people to him so that they trust in Christ (internal call). Examples include 2 Tim 1:9: "He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (cf. John 6:44; Rom 8:30).

Calvin, John (1509–1564): French theologian and pastor in Geneva who was a leader in the Protestant Reformation. In addition to his famous systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin wrote commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. He founded a school that trained many students, including missionaries to France, who planted hundreds of churches. His influence continues through his example of expository preaching and the theology that bears his name (Calvinism), which stresses God's glory and sovereignty.

Calvinism: theological system stemming from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the Reformed branch of the Reformation. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) further defined Calvinism in response to Arminian protests. The Synod's conclusions were later summarized as the five points of Calvinism with the acronym TULIP. *T* stands for

total depravity, the view that all parts of humans are scarred by sin so that we cannot save ourselves. *U* stands for unconditional election, God's choice of people for salvation based on his own purpose and grace, not foreseen faith. *L* stands for limited atonement, which holds that Christ died to save his chosen ones from their sins. *I* stands for irresistible grace, which means that God successfully overcomes his people's opposition to the gospel. *P* stands for perseverance of the saints, which means both that God keeps believers saved and that they continue to believe the gospel. The five points of Calvinism are also called the doctrines of grace.

Christ's person and work: a comprehensive way of treating who Jesus is and what he did to save sinners. The person of Christ deals with who he is, including his preexistence, incarnation, deity, humanity, sinlessness, and states of humiliation and exaltation. The work of Christ deals with what he did to rescue us, including his incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, session (sitting at God's right hand), intercession, and Second Coming.

Christ's saving work: Christ's effective rescue of his people, comprising nine events. Two events are prerequisites for the rest: his incarnation and sinless life. Without them there would be no cross or empty tomb. The incarnation is the eternal Son of God becoming a man (Gal 4:4–5; Heb 2:14–15). Jesus lived a life like no other: a sinless life (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18). Two events are the heart and soul of his saving work: his death and resurrection. The death of Christ reconciles sinners to God, redeems them from bondage to sin, pays the penalty for their sins, defeats their foes, overcomes the sin of Adam, and purifies sinners (Gal 3:13; Heb 10:14). The resurrection of Jesus as firstborn from the dead, an event inseparable from his death, signals his conquest of Satan and demons (1 Cor 15:21–22; 1 Pet 1:3). Five events are results of his death and resurrection. The ascension moves Christ from earth to transcendent heaven, ensuring that the God-man has gone to heaven as our forerunner (Acts 5:31; Heb 9:24). Christ's session is his sitting at God's right hand as prophet, priest, and King (Hebrews 1). As heavenly prophet, he gives his servants the Spirit to spread his word. As priest, he sat down, showing the completion of his sacrifice. As King, he reigns with his Father. Christ continued his saving work at Pentecost, pouring out the Spirit to baptize the church into his body (Acts 1:5). Christ's work of intercession is his praying for his people and saving forever all believers (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). Christ's second coming

brings final salvation, as he will raise his people, transform their bodies to be like his glorious body, and usher them to the new earth (1 Thess 1:9–10; 1 Pet 1:13).

Christ's saving work, biblical images: various pictures provided in Scripture to explain the significance of Jesus's saving accomplishment. The image of sacrifice derives from the sphere of worship. We need to be purified because we are defiled by our sin. Christ is the Lamb of God and great high priest, who offers himself as a sacrifice to cleanse believers (Heb 9:12; 10:10, 14). The theme of redemption is from the domain of slavery. We need to be redeemed because we are in bondage to sin. Christ is the Redeemer, who by his death and resurrection ransoms us from spiritual slavery into the freedom of God's children (1 Cor 6:20; 1 Pet 1:19). The picture of reconciliation is from the field of interpersonal relations. We need to be reconciled to God because our sin has alienated us from him. Christ is the peacemaker, who by his death and resurrection reconciles God to us and us to God (Rom 5:10; Col 1:20–23). The result is peace between God and us and between us and God. The image of Christus Victor is from the world of warfare. We need to be delivered because we have powerful spiritual enemies: sin, death, Satan, and hell. Christ is our champion, who by his death and resurrection defeats our foes (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15). As a result, there is real victory in the Christian life. The theme of re-creation is from the domain of creation. We need to be restored because Adam's fall brought sin, death, and disorder into the world. Christ is the second Adam, who by his obedience unto death and resurrection reverses the effects of Adam's sin (Rom 5:18–19; 1 Cor 15:21–22). The result is the restoration of our lost glory and dominion. The picture of legal substitution is from the field of law and features Christ our federal head. We need to be justified because of the guilt of Adam's sin and of our own sins. Christ, the Suffering Servant, is our legal substitute, who by his death propitiates God and pays the penalty for our sins (Isa 53:5; Rom 3:25–26; Gal 3:13). As a result, God declares righteous all who trust Christ.

Christ's saving work, historical views: various views throughout church history on the significance of Jesus's death. In the early church in the West, the ransom-to-Satan view held sway. This view held that Satan usurped possession of humans when Adam and Eve sinned. Christ's death paid a price to Satan to purchase the release of the prisoners (Gregory of Nyssa). In the early church in the East, deification predominated. It held that Christ in his incarnation and resurrection

brought eternal life to humanity, who was otherwise mired in corruption and death (Athanasius). The satisfaction view appeared in the Middle Ages. It held that the fall offended God's honor; thus, the Son of God had to become a man so that his death of infinite value as the God-man could render satisfaction to restore God's honor (Anselm). The moral influence theory, introduced in the Middle Ages, flourished under liberalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It held that Christ died to show God's love for us to remove our fear and ignorance of God (Abelard). The Reformers Luther and Calvin, in the sixteenth century, taught both penal substitution and Christus Victor views of the atonement. The Christus Victor view holds that Christ our champion in his death and resurrection defeated our foes of sin, death, hell, and Satan. Penal substitution teaches that Christ our substitute died to pay the penalty we lawbreakers could not pay and thereby saved us from paying for our sins forever in hell. The Socinian view, emerging late in the sixteenth century, held that the man Jesus died to demonstrate perfect love for God that we must imitate to be saved (Faustus Socinus). The governmental view, set forth in the first half of the seventeenth century, viewed God as a moral governor who put Christ to death to display his hatred toward sin and maintain his moral government (Hugo Grotius). Liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presented Christ mainly as an example and embraced the moral influence theory. By contrast, evangelicalism holds that Christ was chiefly Savior, who died in our place as our penal substitute.

Common grace: God's general kindness and generosity to all human beings through his providence. It is distinguished from saving grace (or special grace), which results in the salvation of believers. God gives common grace to believers and unbelievers alike (Matt 5:44–45; Acts 14:16–17). It enables unbelievers to prosper and do good and helps account for human achievement in many realms, including artistic, musical, social, and intellectual. Common grace also restrains evil and thereby provides humans with a measure of peace, making life and culture possible.

Conversion: turning from sin to Christ (Acts 20:21). Turning from sin is repentance, and turning to Christ is faith. So, conversion is shorthand for repentance and faith. Scripture tells of both dramatic and quiet conversions. In a dramatic one, Christ met Paul, also known as Saul, on the road to Damascus in power, knocking him down. When Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" Christ stunned him: "I am Jesus, the

one you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). Saul believed in Christ, calling on his name (22:16). Timothy’s conversion, by contrast, was quiet. His father was an unsaved Greek, but he had a Christian mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (Acts 16:11; 2 Tim 1:5). From childhood Timothy knew God’s Word that tells of salvation through faith in Christ, in whom he believed (2 Tim 3:14–15).

Election: God’s choosing people for salvation. He is its Author, for he chose and predestined believers (Eph 1:4–5). In love God chose Israel out of all the nations (Deut 7:6–8; 10:14–15). He also chose the Messiah (Luke 9:35; 1 Pet 1:20). Jesus, the Chosen One, chose his disciples to belong to him instead of to the world (John 15:16, 19). If we received what our sins deserved, we would be condemned. But God in grace chose us, who did not seek him, and gave us what we did not deserve: eternal life (Acts 13:48; Rom 3:9–20). Our salvation is based on God’s mercy and initiative (Rom 9:15–16). Election is based on God’s foreknowledge (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:1–2). New Testament language concerning the chosen is mostly plural. It also teaches individual election (Acts 13:48; Rom 9:15), so election is both collective and personal. Paul combines election and union with Christ (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9). God chose us for salvation before creation and also planned the means to save us: to send his Son to die, rise, and send the Spirit to join believers to Christ in salvation. God chose us for salvation before creation, locating election in God, not us (Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9). Paul traces our election to God’s love, grace, and mercy, and also to his purpose or will (Rom 9:15–16; Eph 1:4–6, 11). Paul gives the negative and positive reasons for election: it is based not on human desire or endeavor but on a merciful God (Rom 9:16). In sum, election has its basis in God’s “own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9). Election has purposes: to make us holy (Eph 1:4), to boost assurance (John 10:27–29), to conform us to Christ’s image (Rom 8:29–30), to foster missions (9:1–5; 10:13–17), and to elicit praise (Eph 1:3, 6, 12, 14), humility (Rom 9:15–16), renewed service (Acts 18:9–10), and passionate evangelism (Rom 9:1–3; 10:1–17). The ultimate end of election is not our salvation but God’s glory (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). Election upholds human responsibility for faith and the necessity of evangelism and missions.

Eternal life: the quality and duration of a believer’s existence. As a quality of life, eternal life begins the moment a person trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is knowing God through Christ (John 17:3). Although all human beings will exist forever, not all will enjoy eternal life

forever. Scripture calls suffering in hell forever not “life” but “death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). In contrast, eternal life in its ultimate sense is knowing and enjoying God forever as resurrected persons on the new earth (Matt 25:46).

Faith: trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord for salvation. Without faith we cannot please God (Heb 11:6). Faith is necessary for salvation, and we are saved through faith in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Faith involves knowledge, assent, and trust. We must hear and *know* the facts of the gospel. But knowing the facts is not enough, for many know the truth but do not believe it. We must *assent* to the gospel as God’s truth. But accepting the facts of the gospel is insufficient. We must *trust* Jesus and his finished work to be saved. Faith is only as reliable as its object. Faith can be misplaced, for we may trust in unworthy objects. However, faith in Christ crucified and risen saves: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ” (Rom 10:17). There is initial saving faith (John 20:31; Acts 16:31) and lifelong faith (2 Cor 5:7; Gal 2:20). Faith is God’s gift (John 6:44; Acts 13:48), but also human beings’ responsibility (Matt 8:10; Acts 16:31).

Foreknowledge: God’s knowledge of the future from the beginning. Arminians and Calvinists define God’s foreknowledge differently with reference to God’s electing people for salvation. Arminians hold that God chooses people for salvation based on his foreseeing their *faith* in Christ. Calvinists hold that foreknowledge refers to God’s foreknowing his *people* (loving them beforehand) and choosing them for salvation. Scripture mentions “foreknow”/“foreknowledge” and salvation in Rom 8:29; 11:2; and 1 Pet 1:2.

Free will: term encompassing both freedom of choice and true freedom. At creation, God gave Adam and Eve both of these. Freedom of choice is the ability to make spontaneous choices according to the inclinations of the will. This is an unlosable part of humanness. True freedom is relational; it is the ability to know, love, serve, and enjoy God as he intended. Because of Adam’s original sin, humans lost true freedom (John 8:34). Although we retain freedom of choice, we are guilty before God, and sin defiles our lives (Mark 7:20–23). Further, we suffer inability. Due to Adam’s sin and our own sins, we cannot rescue ourselves (Matt 19:24–26). On their own, in fact, fallen human beings cannot trust Christ as Savior. They need the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts to come to know Christ. The Spirit overcomes their spiritual deadness and makes

them alive to God (John 3:8; Eph 2:4–5). In so doing, God restores to them a measure of true freedom. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, Christians know, love, and serve God. But sin remains in them, and they do not love him wholeheartedly but grow in true freedom (2 Cor 3:16–18). The final state of affairs will be best because, when resurrected on the new earth, believers will have true freedom perfected. Our situation will be better than that of our first parents, for we will be unable to sin. As always, we will have freedom of choice, but as perfected human beings we will be in a positive relationship with God and will always choose his glory and never choose to sin. We will serve God in the true freedom for which he created us (Rev 22:3–4).

Glorification: God sharing his glory with his people while maintaining the Creator/creature distinction. Created in God’s image to worship and display him, we refused to acknowledge his glory, sought our own, and forfeited the glory he intended for us. But because of God’s overcoming grace, he has given us glory in Christ in the past, present, and future. The image of God, in which he created us (Gen 1:26–27), still exists, though tarnished. It is gradually restored in Christ (Col 3:9–10; Eph 4:22–24). It will be perfected only when Christ, the true image (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), powerfully conforms us to his image in resurrection (Phil 3:21). Meanwhile, we have Christ in us, “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). In fact, our present sufferings do not compare “with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18). Amazingly, glorification means God will enable resurrected saints to see and partake of Christ’s glory and be transformed by it (1 Pet 5:1). Though at death our spirits are “made perfect” (Heb 12:23), in glorification our *bodies* are redeemed (Rom 8:23). There will be continuity between our present bodies and our resurrection bodies (v. 11), but there will also be discontinuity, for our new bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful, and immortal (1 Cor 15:42–54). They will be both physical and “spiritual” (v. 44), ruled by the Spirit. As believers, we are a microcosm of the final redemption of the cosmos, the macrocosm: “the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God’s children” (Rom 8:21). God will fulfill his purposes for creation by delivering it from the curse (Rev 22:3) and perfecting us (1 Thess 5:23) and it (2 Pet 3:13).

Gospel: (1) the message of the good news of salvation in Christ; (2) *capitalized*: a genre of New Testament literature that tells of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection: the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John. The gospel as message centers on what Jesus did for us and our response to him. Paul summarizes the gospel as Christ's death for sinners, his resurrection, and the necessity of people's believing in him for salvation. The gospel thus includes the work of Christ, the need for faith, and God's promises of forgiveness and eternal life (John 3:16; Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 15:1–4).

Grace of God: God's deep compassion for all, especially his people, leading to his giving them undeserved favor and thus heaven instead of hell. Grace typifies each person of the Trinity. God is gracious to unbelievers and offers them the gospel. His grace brings salvation in all its glory. God's grace drives the Christian life, for grace is his unmerited love *and* his power, called enabling grace. God's grace pertains to the past, present, and future: we are saved by God's grace, live by his grace, and long for his grace. His goal is to display his grace forever in his church. We must, then, set our hope on the grace that Christ will bring at his return (Exod 34:6; Ps 84:10–11; Eph 2:4–10; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 1:13).

Guilt: humans' deserved condemnation before God because of Adam's original sin and their own sins. Since the fall, all humans are guilty because they reject God's general revelation in creation (Rom 1:18–32), reject his general revelation in the internal law of conscience (2:14–16), and fail to live according to his special revelation in the Torah (law of God, 2:17–29). Moreover, they are guilty in Adam because of his original sin in Eden (5:16–19). Humans are universally guilty (3:19–20) by nature (by birth, Gal 2:15) and stand condemned under God's wrath. Moreover, according to John's Gospel, everyone who does not believe in Jesus is already spiritually dead (John 3:3–5), presently condemned (v. 18), and God's wrath is already on them (v. 36). Further, they do not believe because they love the darkness (vv. 19–20), and God judges them for this.

Justice: God's requirement that we deal righteously (justly) with one another, in light of his own righteous dealings with humans. Human justice is best understood in light of God's. He governs the world morally and treats his creatures justly. He cares for the poor and down-trodden. God is a just Judge, and, remarkably, his righteousness also brings salvation in Christ. Jesus regarded human justice as a very important matter of the law (Matt 23:23). This involves humans giving their fellows what is rightfully theirs. This means rewarding those who

follow the law and penalizing those who do not. This includes caring for the poor and freeing those oppressed.

Justification: God's declaring righteous those sinners who believe in Christ. Justification is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We all need justification because we are guilty before a holy God and cannot rescue ourselves. God in his grace is the source of our justification. The basis for his declaring sinners righteous is Jesus's death and resurrection. Jesus's death accomplishes both expiation, the removal of sin (Heb 9:26), and propitiation, the removal of wrath (Rom 3:25–26). The cross turns away God's judgment as Christ dies as a propitiation, taking the wrath that our sins deserve. Justification is a declaration of righteousness rather than an infusion of righteousness, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches. It involves the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers (2 Cor 5:21). Christ's righteousness is alien righteousness, the righteousness of another outside of us credited to us. Justification is also defined biblically as the non-imputation of sin, bringing forgiveness (Rom 4:6–8). The means of justification is faith, not works. Although God works in the lives of his people to produce holiness, this is never the basis of his acceptance of them. Therefore, they are *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time righteous in Christ but sinners in themselves (Rom 3:10–12; 4:1–8; 5:18–19; Gal 2:16).

Lordship of Christ: (1) Jesus's right as crucified, risen Lord sitting at God's right hand to rule over all; (2) redeemed people's acknowledging Jesus's rule over their lives. Exalting Christ in his ascension and session, God proclaims him "both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36). The primitive Christian response to salvation involves confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9). A day is coming when all will bow before Christ and acknowledge his lordship (Phil 2:11). In the meantime, his people gladly in their "hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy" and submit to him, who loved them and gave himself for them (1 Pet 3:15).

Perseverance: a doctrine that encompasses both God's keeping his saints saved (preservation) and also their continuing to live for him. God graciously saves and keeps his own. Jesus gives his sheep eternal life and says that they will never perish, for they are safe in his and the Father's hands (John 10:28–30). Paul likewise affirms God's preservation: "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). He advances arguments for preservation from God's plan, sover-

eignty, justice, and love (vv. 29–39). Hebrews says that Christ “is able to save completely” his people (7:24–25). Peter too affirms preservation (1 Pet 1:3–5). Scripture teaches that true believers must and will continue in the faith. Our perseverance in faith, love, and holiness highlights the reality of our profession. True believers persevere in faith (John 6:66–69; Col 1:22–23; Heb 10:36). We may waver but will never completely and totally reject the gospel. True believers also persevere in love. When God gives new life, he gives a new heart that loves him and others. Our love for God and others is never perfect in this life, but it is real. A lack of love reveals a lack of salvation, and persevering love strengthens assurance (1 John 3:10, 13–15). Finally, true believers persevere in holiness. God saves us not based on our holiness but to holiness (Eph 2:8–10; Titus 3:4–8). Consistently failing to live for God is a bad sign, for everyone God saves pursues holiness (Heb 12:14).

Prevenient grace: grace that comes before and leads to salvation. John Wesley and Wesleyanism teach that, although since the fall people are born sinners, God’s preceding grace nullifies the effects of original sin on the will, enabling all to believe and be saved if they exercise this gracious ability. Wesleyanism thus teaches that prevenient grace is universal and can be accepted or rejected. Augustine, Calvin, and Calvinism teach that prevenient grace is particular and efficacious, overcoming the bondage of the will and enabling all those chosen by God to believe and be saved.

Propitiation: the satisfaction of God’s wrath, particularly through Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross, which is the basis for God’s declaring sinners righteous in Christ (justification) (Rom 3:25–26 ESV; 1 John 4:10 ESV).

Providence: God’s ongoing work of maintaining and guiding his creation. Includes both preservation and government. Preservation is God’s work of maintaining his creation, whereas government is his work of directing his creation toward his goals. God’s preservation especially pertains to his people, whom he saves and keeps (Psalm 23; 33:10–22; 104:10–30; Isa 40:22–26; Acts 4:23–31; Col 1:17; Heb 1:3).

Regeneration: God’s giving new life in Christ. Before rebirth, we were dead in sin and unable to revive ourselves (Eph 2:1). In grace God made us alive with Christ (vv. 4–5). He caused us to be born again. Regeneration is like circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29). God revives

his people within, replacing a hard heart with a responsive one (Ezek 36:26–27). The Trinity is involved in our new birth. God the Father’s vast mercy is the source of regeneration. The Son’s resurrection is the basis of our new life (1 Pet 1:3). The Spirit is the mysterious and sovereign agent of the new birth who quickens us (John 3:8). The Spirit uses the Word of God to give us new life (1 Pet 1:23). Regeneration produces fruit, for those born of God believe that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1), obey God daily (2:29), and love other believers (4:7–12).

Repentance: turning away from sin. We distinguish repentance and faith, for they differ in direction. Repentance is directed toward sin and rejects it. Faith is directed toward God and believes in Christ. Sometimes both repentance and faith are listed together as conditions of salvation (Acts 20:21; Heb 6:1), but more frequently faith or repentance is mentioned solely (Matt 4:17; 2 Cor 7:10). Repentance and faith are distinguishable but inseparable. They are not two isolated conditions but the two aspects of conversion. Conversion is turning from sin (repentance) and turning to Christ (faith). When Scripture names only repentance or faith as the saving response to the gospel, the other is implied. Repentance often refers to our initial turning from sin, leading to salvation (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25). Ongoing repentance is a normal part of the Christian life and follows initial repentance. Ongoing repentance is turning from sins out of love for Jesus and a desire for God’s glory. Repentance is a way of life, lasting until death, as we battle sin, yield to temptation, and repent to walk rightly. It involves spurning sinful thoughts, speech, and actions repeatedly (2 Cor 7:9; Rev 3:19). The idea of ongoing repentance often occurs in Scripture without the word *repent* or *repentance* being used (Rom 6:15–23; Heb 3:12–15; 1 John 1:8–10).

Righteousness: (1) The virtue that humans produce, which falls short of God’s standard for salvation: “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10). Only Christ’s perfect righteousness pleases God. Paul explained his goal to “be found in him, not having a righteousness of [his] own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ: the righteousness from God based on faith” (justification, Phil 3:9). (2) Moral uprightness that should describe Jesus’s followers. God’s people must be fair and unbiased in their decisions. They must “detest evil; [and] cling to what is good” (Rom 12:9).

Righteousness (justice) of God: God's moral order, by which he governs the world and treats all creatures justly. He cares for the poor and downtrodden. God is a just Judge, and, amazingly, his righteousness also brings salvation. God in wrath, an extension of his justice, hates sin. However, his relentless grace deals with his own wrath toward sinners to rescue them. Jesus saves us from God's wrath by dying as a propitiation to bear that wrath for us. In the future God will defeat evil, Satan, and all his foes. He and his people will win, the lost will suffer forever in hell, and God's justice will prevail (Ps 145:17; Acts 17:31; Rom 3:25; Jas 1:27; Rev 14:9–11).

Sanctification: God's setting us apart from sin to himself, producing holiness in us now, and perfecting us in holiness at Christ's return. Holy God is the source of all holiness, and human holiness is not only separation from sin but also consecration to God. Sanctification occurs in union with Christ. When the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, he frees us from sin's tyranny and, with our having been raised with Christ, empowers us to live new lives (Rom 6:1–4). The Trinity is active in our sanctification. The Father guides us through difficulties to "share his holiness" (Heb 12:10). The Son died on the cross to sanctify us (Eph 5:25–26). And the Holy Spirit also plays a role (2 Thess 2:13). God, the author of sanctification, enables us to be active participants (Phil 2:12–13; Col 1:28–29). Sanctification is past (definitive), present (progressive), and future (final). Definitive or past sanctification is the Spirit's work of setting us apart as holy to Christ, constituting us as saints. This occurred when we trusted Christ (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11). Present or progressive sanctification is the Spirit's work of enabling us to grow in applied holiness (1 Thess 4:3). Future or final sanctification is the Spirit's work of conforming us to Christ's image in perfect holiness at his return (Eph 5:27; 1 John 3:2). God sanctifies us as his people both individually (Heb 6:11–12) and corporately (10:24–25). Sanctification involves tensions, including knowing and doing; sanctification realized but not yet fully realized; and God's sovereignly sanctifying us and our being active, responsible agents.

Sin: any disobedience to God's law. There is a key distinction between original sin and actual sin. Original sin is the result of the primal sin of Adam and Eve for humans. God made our first parents sinless and in fellowship with him. Nevertheless, they rebelled against their Maker, sinned, and brought God's curse into the world. Adam's first sin is the cause of sin and death entering the world of humans. There are vari-

ous views of original sin. Pelagianism (named for the Irish monk Pelagius) erred and held that Adam was merely a bad example that others follow. Augustine (and Augustinianism) opposed Pelagius, insisting that Adam's sin plunged the human race into sin. Headship views say that Adam's standing for his race is the cause of humans' inheriting sin's guilt (condemnation before God) and corruption (moral defilement). Natural headship (or realism) holds that we really were in Adam in seed form; thus, his sin is ours. Federal headship holds that Adam was our representative, and his sin is counted (imputed) to our spiritual bank accounts (Genesis 3; Rom 5:12–19; Eph 2:1–3). Actual sins are the acts of sin that humans commit. It is noteworthy that before Paul treats original sin in Rom 5:12–19, he deals with actual sins in 1:18–3:20 (cf. Gen 6:5; Gal 5:19–21).

Sovereignty of God: God's supreme authority and rule over all. He plans and guides all things to his goals. God governs nature and the history of nations and ordains our lives. His sovereign plan is never foiled. God is sovereign and humans are responsible, though putting these truths together is beyond our understanding. God's reign means that ultimately he wins, evil loses, and justice prevails (Ps 33:10–11; 103:19; 139:16; 1 Tim 6:15).

Substitution: Christ's atoning death in the place of sinners. We cannot save ourselves from our sin and its ultimate consequence, but in love Christ (our federal head) gives himself to die for us so that we might receive forgiveness and eternal life (Isa 53:5; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 3:18).

Total depravity: sin's effect on all aspects of human nature so that we cannot earn God's favor. This misunderstood term does not mean that human beings are as sinful as they could be or that unsaved people can do no good. Rather, it means that since the fall, sin pervades humans and every aspect of their lives, including their minds, wills, attitudes, words, actions, and ways (Rom 3:9–20). Paul especially underscores the effects of sin on the human mind (Rom 1:21–22; Eph 4:17; Col 1:21). We each have an inner, ongoing propensity to sin, as Jesus taught (Mark 7:20–23). The most significant consequence of total depravity is that we are unable to save ourselves from sin (Matt 19:24–26; 1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:3–4).

Unpardonable sin: the sin described by Jesus's assertion that "whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:29). According to various views, Jesus

refers to denial of the faith, unbelief until death, or heinous sin, like murder or adultery. Apostasy is a great sin; although apostates sometimes repent, many do not, showing that their faith was not genuine. Not trusting Christ and dying in sin is *unforgiven* sin, but that differs from committing the *unpardonable* sin while still alive. Murder and adultery are wicked, but Scripture gives examples of offenders who were forgiven, such as David. The context of Jesus's statement suggests a better view. Immediately before Jesus's words, his enemies attributed his miracles done in the power of the Holy Spirit to Satan. This is the unpardonable sin: deliberately attributing Jesus's work to the devil. Those who fear they have committed the unpardonable sin have not done so; for if they had, they would not seek pardon.

Wesleyanism: the theology and churches associated with John Wesley, founder of Methodism. Arminian in orientation, Wesleyans emphasize prevenient grace: grace that gives all individuals opportunity to believe the gospel; and entire sanctification or Christian perfection, the view that believers may love God so totally in this life as to be freed from sin.

Will of God: (1) God's sovereign will, whereby he ordains all things that happen (Acts 4:27–28); (2) God's revealed will, whereby he commands obedience (Matt 28:19–20); (3) God's disposition of what pleases or displeases him (1 Tim 2:4).

Works of God: that which God does (in contrast to his attributes, which are the characteristics that make him God). These include creation, providence, redemption, and consummation.

