

the
Gospel
of
JESUS
CHRIST

*Salvation from Hell and
the Way to Heaven*

JOHN BORUFF

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*Dedicated to the glory of God
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:
in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*In memory of Leonard Ravenhill
and his impassioned and holy sermons,
which greatly impacted my life.*

“Regarding Christ’s lordship, Leonard never gave an uncertain sound. He held to the biblical position of lordship salvation all his life. Christ is not a Savior only, but Lord of all. To Ravenhill, the idea that a sinner can ‘accept’ Jesus as Savior while rejecting his lordship is foreign to the Bible and classifies as a false gospel.”¹

1. Mack Tomlinson, *In Light of Eternity: The Life of Leonard Ravenhill* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2010), p. 355.

Introduction

The Decline of Evangelistic Preaching

The body of Christ is living in a time right now when theology is not taken seriously. I do not mean that seminary students and Bible colleges don't take theology seriously; but on a popular level, Christians don't seem to care at all about "sound doctrine," and so many of them are "tossed about by every wind of doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3; Eph. 4:14). But more important than a need for a popular interest in theology is one in **SOTERIOLOGY**, which is that subcategory of theology which deals with the doctrines of salvation, or the gospel of Jesus Christ—the message of repentance from sin, justification by faith alone, the born again experience, and the Christian life—the only message that can save men from an eternity in hell.

Long gone are the days when the common stock of Christian bookshops would carry titles like Joseph Alleine's *An Alarm to the Unconverted* or Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted*. Far gone are the times when Puritans were popularly considered "heroes of the faith," when towering revivalists like Jonathan Edwards could melt a crowd to fearful repentance by preaching "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," or John Wesley could be found open air preaching "The Lord Our Righteousness" to crowds of people weeping over sin and falling to the ground in a spirit of contrition. If it happened in the 17th and 18th centuries, why can't it happen today? Are we ashamed of the true gospel of lordship salvation?¹—that repentance from sin and obedience to

1. John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* caused a theological controversy in 1988. Eventually scholars and theologians came to label what the book taught as "lordship salvation." Pro-MacArthur people said this is the true gospel, the same preached by the Reformers and Puritans—that salva-

God's commandments are just as necessary to salvation as faith in the cross is? What happened to all that? What happened to valuing Martin Luther's *Commentary on Romans* as the ultimate Protestant revelation?

An enemy entered into the vineyard of the Lord and "sowed tares among the wheat" (Matt. 13:25), and the tares were heretics. In the 18th century, universalists and antinomians began to sprout up, not for the first time in church history, but for the first time since many of the reformations had been laid down by the first of the Protestant reformers. Universalists and antinomians are still with us today, although they may be completely unfamiliar with the terms "universalist" and "antinomian." What's more, these heretics are usually high profile Christian church leaders!

Universalists distorted the doctrine of hell by saying that Scripture declares salvation for all men (even the devil); that hell is only a temporary place of purification for the wicked, not a place of eternal punishment in fire. Their hell resembles something more like purgatory instead of anything Jesus taught. (Some universalists deny the existence of hell.) This was a rehashing of the heresies of Origen, which were condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. The practical result: a non-judgmental tolerance of non-Christians in their unconverted state, without seeing the need to preach repentance, faith in the cross, forgiveness of sins, or salvation to them.

Antinomians distorted the doctrine of God's law, by saying that faith alone in the death of Christ on the cross (without good works) is all that is necessary for the Christian life, and ultimately for salvation from hell. Failing to distinguish the moral law

tion from hell requires not only a simple belief in Christ, but that true saving faith produces *good works*, without which there is no salvation. Anti-MacArthur people called it "works-salvation" and instead sided with Charles Ryrie and Zane Hodges, who taught "free grace theology"—that a simple faith in the atonement secures salvation forever, without any good works needing to be produced in the Christian life. Critics of "free grace theology" say it is modern antinomianism. I am an unashamed believer in lordship salvation: that salvation from hell requires *obedience* to Christ as Lord.

from the ceremonial law in Scripture, they took New Testament abolitions of the ceremonial law to also count against the moral! Far be it from them to admit that “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:17); they chose to settle for a dead faith which produces no good works at all, and so brought damnation on themselves by living unspiritual, carnal lifestyles. By persisting in lawlessness and sin, they came to interpret Christianity as nothing but a religion of “cheap grace,” mercy, and God’s love—and shunned the serious realities of law, justice, keeping God’s commandments, repentance, righteousness, holiness, the day of judgment, and hell. The practical result: abusing the grace of God and living hypocritical, unethical “Christian” lives.

Evangelical Christianity went through a phase in the late 1800s and early 1900s when it came under severe attack by liberal theologians. This was called the “downgrade controversy” of modernism, and Charles Spurgeon was the primary target of those who were doing this attacking. Spurgeon was like the Billy Graham of the time. He was an international evangelical figure, and to this day is considered “the last of the Puritans.” Another Charles in England at the time—Charles Darwin—had just published *On the Origin of Species*, which claimed to be a scientific argument for a naturalistic origin of the world, without the creation miracle described in Genesis 1–2. Many of the pastors and priests at the time were becoming persuaded by Darwin and losing their faith in biblical creation, and hence the rest of Scripture. The German “higher critics”—who were also atheistic—poked at the Bible, claiming it was full of contradictions and could no longer be trusted. R. A. Torrey and various other evangelical theologians rallied together and published a series of booklets called *The Fundamentals* which would become the foundational writings of the “fundamentalist” movement, and the standard Reformed and conservative evangelical response to these and many other modernist (liberal theology) heresies.

It seems that during this theological firestorm, the gospel of Jesus Christ got lost in the details. Unlike the days of the Puritans and the Great Awakening preachers, when all theological

energy was concentrated on conversion, soteriology, salvation and evangelism, now it seems evangelicals became preoccupied with “defending the Bible,” “proving that evolution is wrong,” refuting strange cults, expository teaching on various themes or chapters in Scripture, etc. Evangelicals did not lose their vision of the cross of Christ or the need for salvation from hell, but many of the precise Puritan doctrines of salvation were lost from the pulpit (repentance, penal substitutionary atonement, justification, regeneration, sanctification, etc.). It really was a break with the Reformed tradition. Practical ethics remained a concern for some, and it still is today, a tension between “fundamentalist” and “evangelical” Christians about how to relate to certain things in culture (for example: TV, music, alcohol, etc.)—to “be in the world but not of it” (John 17:14–19), also with political views (usually conservative). Yet, for all of this, where is the gospel? Christianity is surely more than a religion of personal opinions about ethics, isn’t it?

As evangelicals entered the 1960s and 1970s, the Jesus Movement brought a new generation of young people, hippies and non-hippies, into the Christian life, largely through college campuses. There were a lot of “contemporary” innovations, such as Christian rock, and other things. Campus Crusade for Christ’s “Four Spiritual Laws” (1965) became the basic message of salvation for this new generation of evangelicals. It taught: (1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life, (2) but man is separated from God by sin, (3) so Jesus alone died on the cross for your sins so you could know God’s love and plan, (4) but we can only know God’s love and plan by personally receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord. I want to humbly and respectfully suggest, with all due respect to those involved with Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru)²—that while there is saving gospel truth in this message, I think it has some important differences with how the message of salvation was understood and preached during the Great Awakening, which appears to me more driving,

2. See www.cru.org

straightforward, and clear: that repentance, faith, justification, and regeneration are the only way to escape from eternal damnation in hell (and it will be my attempt to communicate this message throughout this book).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the seeker-sensitive movement sought to be more welcoming of non-Christians, spiritual seekers, agnostics, and skeptics into the church. It seems it is a mixture of the Jesus Movement, the entertainment industry, and the concept of “friendship evangelism”—the idea that being accepting, tolerant, and non-judgmental towards non-Christians is the most effective way to really “win them over” by love and influence them to become Christians. It has proven to be very effective at attracting large numbers of people to church services (megachurches), but I think it is about as far from the kingdom of God as one side of the Grand Canyon is from the other! There are very few sermons on “repentance from sin,” “faith in the blood of Christ,” “the forgiveness of sins,” or “obedience to God’s Word” in such churches. Sermons are all tailored so as “not to offend” those who are visiting. Some of these churches are removing crosses from their churches because statistics show people find the cross to be an offensive symbol of death.³ The words of the apostle Paul are still considered “the offense of the cross” (Gal. 5:11)!

The prophetic movement grew out of the Charismatic Renewal and Jesus Movement in the 1970s. Its leaders are men like

3. Adelle M. Banks, “Van Impe leaves TBN over ‘Chrislam’ remarks,” June 20, 2011. Religion News Service, ChristianityToday.com. Jack Van Impe was kicked off of TBN after 23 years of telecasting because he was going to broadcast a program which claimed that, in a 2009 speech to Muslims, Rick Warren “said churches can attract new believers by taking crosses down from inside and outside their buildings.” Warren denied the accusation, saying, “If you remove the cross from the church, it’s no longer the church. Just a social club.” Whether Warren really said the cross-removal comment, and whether Warren was trying to save his neck, is anyone’s guess. But it’s a fact that Van Impe felt this message was important enough to risk his career with TBN. It’s also evident already that many megachurches do not have crosses in them, and that there is at least a controversy over this subject that should not be ignored.

Bill Johnson (Bethel Church), Rick Joyner (MorningStar Ministries), James Goll, and many others. It can be difficult to judge this movement, because not every leader agrees about doctrines or ethics. But generally speaking, it is a very subjective movement, which seeks an apostolic renewal of the miraculous gifts in 1 Corinthians 12–14. I believe most of this movement is racked with carnality, simony, vanity, false prophecies, and presumption. It greatly lacks spiritual discernment; and that is because, as a product of its generation, IT LACKS THE REFORMED, PURITAN GOSPEL! Tossed about in a subjective sea of dreams and visions and voices, it seems Charismatic Christians have no objective gospel heroes or gospel standards to look to for their discernment and discretion (except for Mike Bickle of IHOP-KC, who claims Leonard Ravenhill as an influence).⁴ While several of them will claim “not to believe an experience that contradicts the Bible,” we can’t say this principle is applied across the whole movement, nor that it is applied through any objective traditional lens of interpretation, like creeds (for example: the Thirty-Nine Articles or the Westminster Confession), but rather through their own subjective interpretations of Scripture and experiences of spiritual dreams.⁵

I believe the New Calvinism movement going on right now is a good thing. Although I am thoroughly an Arminian, and a cautious Charismatic, I appreciate a lot of the theology taught by Reformed preachers that I can’t find elsewhere. “Lordship salvation” is our common ground. The works of John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Charles Spurgeon have much to offer the church for sound teaching on hell, the atonement, salvation, and the Christian life. I tend to agree on

4. Mack Tomlinson, *In Light of Eternity: The Life of Leonard Ravenhill* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2010), pp. 215–216, 489–490.

5. However, in saying all this, I want to say that I am thankful to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, speak in tongues, worship in the Spirit, feel God’s presence, and hear God’s voice; I’m thankful to be a Charismatic Christian, but I am obviously very wary about popular leaders in the Third Wave or Neocharismatic movement right now.

finer points of doctrine, however, with Arminians like John Wesley, Adam Clarke, John Goodwin, Richard Baxter, and James Arminius. I can only loosely call myself a “Wesleyan,” “holiness,” or a “Reformed Arminian,”⁶ because I have to reach over to Edwards, Bunyan, and Whitefield for my doctrine of hell, the atonement, etc. Plus, I agree with Puritans and Reformed Christians on progressive sanctification.⁷ I do not agree with the Wesleyan doctrine of “entire sanctification” or “Christian perfection.” If I were to put myself into a certain theological camp, my views of salvation would probably align closest with the Free Will Baptist Church.⁸ In chapter 5, I do take a stand for conditional security, or the view that a born again Christian can lose his salvation, which will without a doubt make some of my Reformed brothers feel uneasy. Although I do not believe preaching conditional security is essential for evangelism, I try to make a case for the doctrine from Scripture, reason, experience, and historical church leaders like Irenaeus, Luther, and Wesley—all of whom believed a born again Christian could lose his salvation, through unbelief, or falling into a sinful lifestyle.

I originally started to work on this book as a manual for street preachers. Seeing the need for a “preached theology” for open air preachers, I thought to try and perfect my own preaching by studying the works of other great open air preachers, mainly John Wesley and secondary sources about his theology (Kenneth J.

6. “Reformed Arminian” is a phrase used by Stephen Ashby (*Four Views on Eternal Security*, 2002) and “evangelical Arminian” by Roger Olson (*Arminian Theology*, 2006) to describe non-liberal Arminians, or those who hold to the teachings of James Arminius and John Wesley. Personally, I’m comfortable calling myself a Wesleyan, Arminian, Reformed Arminian, or evangelical Arminian. The Free Will Baptist Church (i.e., The National Association of Free Will Baptists) is probably the best modern example of fundamentalist or evangelical Arminianism (who don’t hold to Wesleyan perfectionism).

7. *The 1689 London Baptist Confession*, ch. 13: “Of Sanctification.”

8. Although, I am not a member of the Free Will Baptist Church. Instead, I’m a non-denominational Charismatic Christian with Reformed Arminian views of salvation.

Collins, Thomas C. Oden, Harald Lindström, Steve Harper, etc). Living Waters, the ministry of Ray Comfort, and the documentary *Go Stand Speak* shows us that my generation is starting to see the rise of a new breed of open air preachers (street evangelists), who want to bring a Reformed gospel to the public arena and be used as instruments of modern reformation and revival. We've been smitten with an old-time gospel message, and want to heed the admonition: "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature!" (Mark 16:15).

John Boruff
Durham, NC
May 27, 2013

It is my prayer that this caustic, biting, and fiery book would drive you to repentance from all known sin and ignite an urgency in you to preach repentance and preach faith in the cross for the forgiveness of sins, so that all the people God loves will be given a sufficient warning of the wrath of Jesus, which abides on all the ungodly; for, “the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him!” (Jude 14–15)

CHAPTER 1

Hell

The Wicked Will Be Thrown Into Hell!

The thought of hell, of people burning in fire forever in the center of the earth, is for most men of a compassionate disposition, the most intolerable and repulsive thought on this side of eternity. But it is also true that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). On the one hand, the hearts of men are deceitful; not only deceptive and dishonest in some things, but above all things in God’s fallen creation: “the heart is deceitful.” The hearts of men are deceitful; they are also “desperately wicked.” Not only are they hell-bent on breaking the commandments of their maker, they are desperate to do so, and then to excuse their wickedness by civility and good manners. But for God this will not satisfy men’s unconfessed and unrepented insults against his glory.

From his viewpoint, men have a tendency to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” so they can go on sinning their sins; but sooner or later, “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18). God’s wrath is under control for now. His patience is as long as a lifetime. But after the pale-faced rider of death comes for a soul, hell follows closely by (Rev. 6:8), and “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God!” (Psa. 9:17). The Hebrew word for “turned” suggests that God will have the wicked be “thrown into hell,” because it is where they belong; and the means by which this will happen: God will send angels to throw the wicked into hell (Matt. 5:29; 13:41–42); such is the beginning of their eternal misery, to be hurled “into the bottomless pit

of hell-fire”¹ by the power of God Almighty. “The wicked WILL BE HURLED into hell, and all the nations that forget God!”

The Wicked Store Up God’s Wrath for Themselves

In a day and age when “the wicked” and “the righteous” are long forgotten categories of people, in a day when postmodern moral relativity governs people’s thoughts and life choices, to speak of “the wicked” and much less of “hell” are such foreign ideas that they don’t really make sense. But I hope to change that by a few thoughts. The God of the Bible has certain attributes that modern man has lost awareness of. While many will own that “God is love” (1 John 4:8), they often forget that Scripture also shows God is good (Rom. 11:22), holy (Rev. 4:8), righteous (Rom. 1:17), perfect (Matt. 5:48), jealous for worship (Exod. 20:5–6), all-powerful (Rev. 19:6), all-knowing (Psa. 147:5), and the only sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15), who has wrath for his enemies who hate him and rebel against his law (Psa. 69:24).

Woe to those men who are “storing up for themselves wrath” for judgment day!—they do this by keeping their hearts hard and unrepentant before God (Rom. 2:5); they may hear a street preacher shout: “REPENT OR PERISH!” “TURN OR BURN!” (Luke 13:3); but they will not turn away from their sins. They will not flee the wrath to come. They will not hear God’s passionate warnings. They tell themselves there is no God, there is no judgment day, there is no hell, there is no wrath to come. Until, like the evil rich man in Luke chapter 16, who after experiencing his first few moments of torment in hell, he becomes conscious of where he is, lifts up his eyes, and begins to cry in pain.

God’s Revenge Against His Enemies

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord”

1. “The Second Sermon of the Passion” in *Certain Sermons, or Homilies, Appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth.*

(Rom. 12:19). “Vengeance” is a word most people don’t hear anymore; it is another word for revenge, but in the Greek it carries more of a meaning like judicial revenge. The revenge of men is always carnal and done in a wrong spirit; but the revenge of God is that of a holy and righteous judge, who sees perfectly into the secrets of men’s hearts and lives, who sees clearly all of the insults that the wicked have hurled against God and his people, all the persecutions and mockeries they breathed against the saints, all the blasphemies and adulteries and perversions of their hearts, all the detestable, murderous lies they have schemed. The Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” (Gen. 6:3). God has set the time limits for each man’s life upon the earth; there has been allotted to each of them just enough time to repent from sin and put their faith in the cross of Christ.

Their stubborn hearts have to strive with the Spirit of God, working by the conscience, until it comes to a head, and they have to make a choice to serve the Lord or go their own way (Josh. 24:15). But God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” and “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). It is then that God will no longer be patient. Then will his strivings with evil men cease, and they will be “thrown into hell” (Matt. 5:29). God said, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. **TURN, TURN FROM YOUR EVIL WAYS!**” (Ezek. 33:11). God is “longsuffering toward us,” and “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). But sadly, most men die in an unrepentant state: “Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matt. 7:13). For this reason, “Hell has enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure” (Isa. 5:14, KJV).

Hell Fire! and Flesh Eating Worms!

Dr. Shedd said, “Jesus Christ is the person who is responsible for the doctrine of eternal perdition. He is the being with whom all opponents of this theological tenet are in conflict. Neither the

Christian church nor the Christian ministry are the authors of it. The Christian ministry never would have invented the dogma; neither would they have preached it in all the Christian centuries, like Jeremiah, with shrinking and in tears, except at the command of that same Lord God who said to the weeping prophet, 'Whatsoever I command thee, thou shalt speak' (Jer. 1:7)."²

It makes sense that the Son of God, who went through all the trouble of dying for the sins of the world to save men from hell's torments, should also be the one who would introduce the revelation of hell through his teachings, with the most striking clarity...

Christ said:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."³

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where "Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43–48).

Christ said:

As the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and

2. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 680.

3. Isaiah 66:24: "They shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." This verse was quoted by Jesus as a description of hell.

those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:40–42).

Mental and Emotional Anguish

Not only will the torments of hell be physical, they will also be mental and emotional. “There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:42), not only for the physical pain caused by burning in flames, or from the maggots writhing and eating away at the living hell-corpses of the damned; but, also there will be wailing and crying because of total depression, sorrow, misery, and hopelessness. All is lost! Too late to repent and believe the gospel! TOO LATE! “Hell has no exits!”⁴ The damned have no hope of future salvation from this miserable place; they know that; it makes them nauseous to think it, as they all too well remember they must look at hideous demons, disfigured faces, caverns, sores, and smell the stench of burning flesh and rotten egg-smelling brimstone smoke (sulfurous gases)—FOR EVER AND EVER! It’s worse than any prison or dungeon or mental institution on earth. It is hell!

The only respite they will have is when they stand before the throne of God at the last judgment and are then afterward thrown in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15). “The souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the Great Day” (see Luke 16:23–24; Acts 1:25; Jude 6–7; 1 Pet. 3:19).⁵ One other mental torment the damned experience is the ability to see in a vision far off, into heaven, all the godly saints they persecuted in their lifetime: “Being in torments in hell, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue;

4. Leonard Ravenhill, “Hell Has No Exits.” November 15, 1985.

5. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 32.1.

for I AM TORMENTED IN THIS FLAME!’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented’” (Luke 16:23–25).

Fire! Fire!
Everlasting fire!
Can you see the funeral pyre?
Millions of corpses burning in fire!
Contemplate a scene so dire!

Worms! Worms!
Flesh-eating worms!
Can you see them in their arms?
Millions, billions of maggot worms!
Nauseous, putrid, revolting germs!

Sadness and sorrow!
Eternal sorrow!
Suffering in fire—there’s no tomorrow!
Only burning, and worms, and sorrow!
Turn to Christ or burn with sorrow!

A Walk Through the Biblical Hell

Throughout the centuries, Catholic saints, mystics, and other visionaries have claimed visions and prophetic dreams of hell. In these experiences, which they sometimes claim to be out-of-body, like Dante’s *Inferno*, they claim to be guided through the underworld of hell with the help of Jesus, a saint, or an angel.⁶ Many of the details of these experiences contain pictures and concepts that have no parallel in Scripture; they are extra-biblical revelations, and are not to be bound upon any Christian that they “should be believed as an article of faith.”⁷ But what is to be believed of a journey of hell as an article of faith? If you were to

6. See Eileen Gardiner’s *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (1989).

7. Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Art. V: “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.”

make such a journey, through the biblical hell, what sort of things would you see and experience? I think the modern vision of hell depicted in Bill Weise's *23 Minutes in Hell* much more accurately depicts the biblical hell than, say, Dante's *Inferno*. But for now, let it suffice for me to depict what I think it would be like to walk through hell, if you were, by a strange occurrence, allowed to do so through a kind of vision or out-of-body experience.

At first, you would fall down a dark, stinking tunnel for a very long time; this tunnel would smell like stinking rotten eggs or sulfurous gases; it would make you gag or feel like suffocating (Psa. 143:7; Rev. 9:2). As you fall into the bottomless pit, you find it does actually have a bottom; but you are not so sure, for hell may go much deeper—it's only that you have landed on solid ground. Once you have landed, you find you are very weak, so weak in fact that you can barely stand up (Psa. 88:4); but you feel that the Holy Spirit is strengthening you just enough to be able to walk through hell and see its sights. If the Spirit were not holding you up, you would fall down where you stand, and you would not be able to get up. As you begin to look around, you see that you are in a large, dark cave system. Only what is immediately in front of you is visible, perhaps several yards; everything else is dark and grey and dreary and shadowy (Job 10:21–22). It is a saddening, depressing place. It is lifeless. It is barren. It is death.

You find a pathway; and after walking on it for some time, you find an entryway—a gate—and you walk through it (Matt. 16:18). Upon entering the gate, you hear God's voice say, "This is the outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12). It is pitch black; you are afraid, but the presence of Christ gives you boldness to proceed. As you walk through, you hear hundreds, perhaps thousands of people crying in a deep gulf. It's down below you in the dark; you can't see them. But it's like a football stadium full of people, only they are all crying, such depressing, pitiful weeping; hopeless, useless crying and screaming and shouting. And there is the strange sound of people grinding their teeth—not one, not two, but hundreds, thousands of people grinding their teeth at the same time! What does it sound like? It's like hundreds of chalk boards

being scratched on with fingernails. It's like millions of rocks clashing together—only you know they are teeth, not pieces of gravel, and are probably shattering like teeth in a hockey player's mouth (Matt. 24:51).

After walking through the outer darkness, you come to a section where you can see the dead. Their appearance is like zombies—like in the horror movie *Night of the Living Dead*, only its real, and it's in hell. They lie down on deathbeds, and they have flesh-eating maggots that wiggle all throughout their arms and legs and bowels and faces; and they are too weak to stand. God has sapped them of all life, of all their strength. They are experiencing “eternal death” (Dan. 12:2) and “eternal destruction” (2 Thess. 1:9); they are completely wasting away, useless, just writhing in weakness and purposeless pain (Eccl. 9:10). They have tormented minds and bodies. Their minds are tormented constantly, because they spent their lives on selfish, sinful pleasures, and did not repent from their sins and did not put their faith in the gospel of Christ. They are continually tormented with these thoughts. All the times that they had opportunities to give their lives to God, and failed to do so, keep coming back to them in memories and vivid mental pictures (Luke 16:19–31). They are emotionally tormented as they realize they have no friendship down here in hell. All their loved ones are gone. Wives, lovers, best friends—all gone. Although they are in pretty close proximity to other damned souls, writhing and wallowing in despair on the ground, they have no fellowship with the damned. They hate one another with everlasting hatred. They wish they had never been born and sent to this place; and they hate themselves and one another for it.

Over in the distance, a large demon suddenly picks up a living corpse from its deathbed; the corpse moans and the demon cuts him up into about six or seven pieces with a large sword (Matt. 24:51); other demons come in and do the same thing to other damned souls! It is a very grotesque thing to see; the sense of fear and intimidation from the presence of the demons, and just the sheer horror of the act, is more than enough to make you nauseous and vomit. But there is no vomit; there is no water,

only dehydration. No blood comes out of the people who were mutilated, because their hellish bodies are all dehydrated. Somehow, you know that in a matter of thirty minutes or so, their body parts will come together again, so they can be mutilated later on, and experience the “everlasting destruction” of the “soul and body” in hell (Matt. 10:28).

You walk down the pathway to another section. This section is not as dark and shadowy as the other places you’ve been. There is a pond of lava with hundreds of these living corpses burning in it! When they were “thrown into hell” by God’s angels (Luke 12:5), they immediately came here; unlike the others, these have received a stricter judgment. This is not “the lake of fire” mentioned in Revelation 14 and 20, but is a foretaste of it. You know that there are many other of these lava ponds scattered all throughout hell, but you are just seeing one of them. These people have been judged by God with “eternal fire,” “everlasting fire” (Matt. 25:41), a “fire that is not quenched” (Mark 9:44), and like the other corpses, you can see that they have a “worm that does not die”—it is their “eternal punishment.” It is amazing that the maggots in their flesh are fireproof. But, I suppose, the same miraculous power that prevents their hell bodies from being completely disintegrated, also prevents the hell maggots from disintegrating. They scream, they cry out, they curse God for making them, while at the same time, they curse themselves for being full of so much rebellion that they had to be sent here. One cries out: “I’M SO THIRSTY!” But he will get no water (Luke 16:24). While they were unrepentant in life, so they remain unrepentant in death. They are still God-hating, Christ-hating, gospel-mocking blasphemers! Although warned by preachers, and evangelists, they did not “flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7). Their fiery torments are only fueled by their stubborn impenitence. They will remain here until the day of judgment, and then, after that, will be thrown into the lake of fire for an “eternal judgment” (Heb. 6:2) with all the others whose names are not found written in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15).

Those Who Practice Lawlessness

Jesus said “those who practice lawlessness” will be cast “into the furnace of fire.” What does this mean? Since “repenting, and believing in the gospel” (Mark 1:15) are the necessary requirements for salvation from hell, it follows that continual impenitence and unbelief are the means by which men become damned to hell. The apostle Paul said of the wicked: “In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” He also said that the Lord Jesus will be “revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power” (Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:7–9).

“Those who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 13:41) are people who stubbornly live their lives in rebellion to the Ten Commandments and every good law that God gave to mankind. They are those who “do not obey the gospel” or the teachings of Christ, namely, 1. Turning away from sinful thoughts, words, and actions, and 2. Placing one’s faith in the atoning sacrifice of the cross of Christ, for the satisfaction of the wrath of God, and the forgiveness of their sins. “Those who practice lawlessness” refuse to repent from their sins and place their faith in the cross; and so, they are anti-Christian, evil-minded, enemies of God. “The wicked who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (Matt. 25:41–46; Rom. 2:5; 2 Thess. 1:7–9).⁸

The apostle Paul said:

The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions,

8. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 33.2.

heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–51).

and...

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

The apostle John said:

The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Universalists are people who are skeptical of what Christ meant when he said, “These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). They ask, “Did Jesus really mean that sinners will be in hell for eternity: in everlasting, or eternal punishment?” I reply, “With such great sins as these weighing down on them, in the universe of an eternally holy and righteous God, HOW COULD THEY NOT GO AWAY INTO ETERNAL PUNISHMENT?” The punishment fits the abominations. Perhaps eternal punishment is not long enough. Perhaps the sins are so enormously awful and repulsive that they really deserve ETERNAL, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT, FOR EVER AND EVER. But God, in his mercy, saw fit to only give them eternal punishment. Perhaps one eternity in the torments of hell is enough. However, after that eternity there is always more eternity! There is NO end to it! When you slight God with abominable practices such as these, against “the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy” (Isa. 57:15), and you die without repenting, or trusting in the Son of Mercy, don’t try to tell me the punishment doesn’t fit the crime!

When you stand before Jesus' throne in judgment over your life, "O man, who are you to reply against God?" (Rom. 9:20). "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" (Heb. 10:31).

Ungodly Heretics Who Reject the Doctrine of Hell

There is a belief in an imagined universal salvation, that all those in hell will eventually be purified from their sins, as in a kind of purgatory, and then, by God's enduring love and mercy, will be eventually allowed into heaven. This is not taught by Scripture. In 553 A.D., the Fifth Ecumenical Council issued its Fifteen Anathemas Against Origen, a heretic of the early church who taught the universalist doctrine. Sometimes universalists try to make Scripture say what it does not, and they bring out the most obscure meanings from texts which are speaking about some completely different subject. I agree with George Whitefield, who said in a critique of universalists and annihilationists:

If the positive threats of God concerning the eternity of hell-torments are already found insufficient to deter men from sin, what a higher pitch of wickedness may we imagine they will quickly arrive at when they are taught to entertain any hopes of a future recovery out of them; or, what is still worse, that their souls are hereafter to be annihilated and become like the beasts that perish? But woe unto such blind leaders of the blind. No wonder if they both fall into that ditch.⁹

Francis Turretin said in a critique of annihilationists:

To what end would they be described by the most dreadful pains and torments if it is to be a mere punishment of loss or annihilation? Why should Christ say of a man doomed to the punishment of hell, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24)?¹⁰

9. George Whitefield, "The Eternity of Hell-Torments." (1738).

10. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Volume 3, Topic 20, Question 7, Section 10. (1685).

The infinite demerit of sin is visited as it were with a punishment infinite in duration. And on this account the more justly, that as he will never cease to sin against God, so neither to be punished by him. The guilt of fault will always remain and not be extinguished by any expiation because no place will be given for repentance, but sinners will always be inflamed with madness and hatred against the judge and will curse him in the midst of the flames. Thus the wrath of God, the most just avenger of crimes, will rest upon them for ever. Hence will arise despair and raging as the inevitable consequence because no way of escape will be found out of that most horrible prison... for “judgment without mercy” will belong to them who did not exercise mercy (Jas. 2:13).¹¹

Probably the strongest biblical evidence against the universalist doctrine would come from these Scriptures:

Matthew 25:41, 46: “Then he will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels... these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’” Notice that this incredibly strong statement about the eternal torments of hell was uttered by Jesus! Whatever other unbalanced and sentimental views you may have about “God’s love” and “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” need to be laid aside at this moment. There is a time when Jesus will manifest his other attributes of holiness, justice, and power, in the “day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).

Another thought is that the wicked, who have come under the everlasting curse of rejecting the gospel and living unrighteous lives, and who have no more time allowed to repent of sin (Luke 16:24–25), are cast into “the everlasting fire” which originally was “prepared for the devil and his angels.” Because these men joined in that same rebellion against God and his word that the demons did, then these too, along with the devil and his angels “will go away into everlasting punishment”—not temporary punishment, not purgatory, but EVERLASTING

11. *Ibid.*, Sections 11–12.

PUNISHMENT IN HELL FIRE. Out of a sentimental attachment to non-Christian family and friends, universalists try to reason that if these loved ones are cast into hell, then it will only be for a time, and that God must somehow be “too loving” to let them burn in fire for ever and ever. But no! On the contrary, the Lord Jesus said they will go to “everlasting punishment”—to the exact same place the “devil and his angels” are put: THE ETERNAL HELL. To unbiblically imagine that men will be saved after suffering in hell for a time period, but not to imagine that demons will also be saved out of hell, is not logically consistent. And no honest universalist really believes that demons will be saved after suffering in hell!

Revelation 20:10: “The Devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Note: the beast and the false prophet are ungodly men. And after death, they are put into the lake of fire—the same place as the devil. Are these men spoken of as suffering there only for a time period, and then by “God’s love and mercy” allowed to go to heaven? FORGET IT! The Word says, “They will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” Further down in the text it says the same of all the ungodly: “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). That is, forever and ever!

Easy-believers¹² are false Christians who think that somehow “God’s grace” is so great that impenitence and carnality and ungodliness have no eternal consequences, and that simply “believing in Jesus” at one time will save them from God’s wrath and judgment to come. A lot of these people like the “Romans Road to Salvation” message (based on Rom. 3:10–12, 23; 6:23;

12. John Wesley said: “beware of Solifidianism; crying nothing but, ‘believe, believe!’ and condemning those as ignorant or legal who speak in a more Scriptural way” (*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Chapter 25, Question 34)—other names for easy-believers are solifidians, no-lordship salvation (often associated with dispensationalism), free grace theology, cheap grace, libertines, antinomians (anti-law), and carnal Christians.

5:8; 10:9–10, 13; 5:1; 8:1, 38–39), an incredibly easy “belief”-based gospel that requires no holy living or repentance from sin. I believe the “Romans Road” is a FALSE GOSPEL. Take a look at it closely sometime. It’s a shame there are so many gospel tracts based on this. It’s all about “God’s love” and “believe in your heart”: no repenting from sinful ways or any exhortation to “holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

I would put “the Four Spiritual Laws” in almost the same category, but the “Romans Road” is worse, in my opinion.¹³ In our former thought, we took a look at how the Devil and his angels are thrown into the lake of fire, and that the ungodly go to the same place, and all of them together will burn day and night forever and ever (Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 20:10, 15). James takes the easy-believers of our day and puts them into the same category as demons: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘you have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (Jas 2:14–20).

What You Must Do to Be Saved!

“Repent, and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:15).
 (1) Turn away from all known sin in your life, stop sinning, give your life over to God, resolve within yourself that you are going

13. However, there could be some evangelists who use a “Romans Road” structure in their evangelism, but also exhort people to repent; in such a case, there is nothing wrong with that. As long as repentance from sin *and* faith in the cross are preached (the gospel, Mark 1:15).

to live for God, obey the Ten Commandments, and all righteous laws in the Bible. Resist temptations, and let Jesus be the absolute Lord and master over your life: “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). (2) Believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man; that he is the “one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5); that “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6); that God chose “him to reconcile all things to himself, by him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20); that God “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14); that “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7); realizing “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7); “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanses your conscience from dead works to SERVE THE LIVING GOD” (Heb. 9:14); “for Christ also suffered once for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18); “therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even SO WE ALSO SHOULD WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE!” (Rom. 6:4).

CHAPTER 2

The Atoning Death of Christ

The Fall of Man

Before the beginning of time, from the foundations of the world, when God had created it, he has desired a continuous friendship with mankind. He has always wanted this to be so, but that plan was spoiled on the day that Adam and Eve fell from their state of original righteousness and sowed the seed of rebellion and disobedience to God within the human race through disobedience to one simple commandment: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17). Before there was ever any need for the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, these two parents of ours used their free will to heed the voice of that demonic serpent, and sow into their flesh the seed of all corruption.

“Sin entered the world through one man”: Adam (Rom. 5:12). And so, with this corruption of the nature of every man established, and continued by the act of sexual reproduction, mankind is in such a state that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This not only applies to the thoughts of the heart, but to the body: “I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Rom. 7:23)—so that the “lusts of the flesh” are generally only of a very sinful nature (Gal. 5:16; 1 John 2:16); namely, desires to live without any awareness of God; to have as many idols of toys, games, and unethical entertainments possible; to lift yourself up in pride over others for being stronger, prettier, richer, smarter, or more talented; to be selfish, and to superimpose

your will upon others; to commit fornication, homosexuality, or adultery, or go to a prostitute, or look at pornography; to practice witchcraft or the occult; to hate others, and mock them, to make fun of others in a demeaning and abusive fashion; to covet what others have, and harbor jealousy about what they have that you don't; gluttony, greed, drunkenness, bad temper, etc.¹

“Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). This infected nature, this lust of the flesh, of sin, of the “pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 10:25, KJV) are DESTROYING US ALL—killing the very life, meaning, and beauty of mankind on earth! Anyone who abides in such a state should rightfully deserve the eternal wrath and damnation of the Lord, and should be counted as nothing more than a decrepit old tree, without any leaves or fruit, with dried up twigs, ready to be cut down and burned in the fire of hell (Matt. 3:10), for a sweet smelling savor and aroma before the Lord, unto all eternity (Exod. 29:18; Rev. 14:11). The screams of the damned will far outweigh their curses; and the crackling flames and smoke will cover up their nakedness. God will be pleased by what he sees and hears. His perfect justice will have been served, and his perfect revenge upon all those “who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:8). So, DO NOT BE AS THEY ARE, without hope, and without God in hell; but “fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” “Fear God and give him glory,” for this is THE ETERNAL

1. The total depravity of man as defined by Catholic, Wesleyan, and Reformed theology understands the New Testament teaching on “the flesh” (*Gr. sarx*) to mean that the human body actually has a sinful nature. This doctrine was rejected by Charles Finney (d. 1875) and A. B. Simpson (d. 1919, founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance). Although I have a great respect for these men of God, I strongly disagree with them on this point for biblical reasons (Romans 7). Simpson said: “There is no sin in these bones and flesh and ligaments... Sin is not in the body; it is in the heart and the soul and the will” (*The Fourfold Gospel*. Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984, p. 22). However, the biblical view is that the spirit, soul, and body are depraved and sinful; and only by renewal in the Holy Spirit can there be a recovery of holiness (Romans 8).

GOSPEL. “Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell” (Eccl. 12:13; Rev. 14:7; Luke 12:5). He will not allow anyone into heaven who is defiled or infected by sin: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Rev. 22:14–15).

The Moral Law of God

As you look within your heart and see the content of your thoughts, and your desires, and the sinfulness of your actions, you should see the insurmountable odds that have been stacked against you: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV). The law of God has pointed the finger of accusation and condemnation at you, before the holy court of God. The judge sits upon the throne, the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who gave the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Exodus 20:1–17:

1. You shall have no other gods before me (20:3).
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol (20:4).
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain (20:7).
4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy (20:8).²
5. Honor your father and your mother (20:12).
6. You shall not murder (20:13).
7. You shall not commit adultery (20:14).³

2. In the New Testament, the “Sabbath” has been extended to mean *the peace of God* through faith in Christ, and is no longer binding to keep any special day as a Sabbath (Heb. 4:1–11; Rom. 14:5–6; Col. 2:16–17).

3. Adultery is not only physical adultery with a married person, but is any kind of fornication in the heart (Matt. 5:28).

8. You shall not steal (20:15).
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (20:16).
10. You shall not covet anything that is your neighbor's (20:17).

How about the Sermon on the Mount, which is called the law of Christ? (Gal. 6:2). Have you kept it perfectly? Who has? This body of law in Matthew 5–7 is a very long passage to expound, but we might summarize it by the following. Remember that this will be the law by which Christ the Lord will judge all men on judgment day:

1. Be poor in spirit, and yours will be the kingdom of heaven (5:3).
2. Mourn, and you will be comforted (5:4).
3. Be meek, and you will inherit the earth (5:5).
4. Hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you will be satisfied (5:6).
5. Be merciful, and you will receive mercy (5:7).
6. Be pure in heart, and you will see God (5:8).
7. Be a peacemaker, and you will be called a son of God (5:9).
8. Be persecuted for righteousness, and yours will be the kingdom of heaven (5:10).
9. Rejoice when you are persecuted for your faith in Christ, because you are being treated the same way the prophets were treated, and you will have a great reward in heaven (5:11–12).
10. Do good works, in such a way, that will make other people glorify your Father in heaven (5:16).
11. Do not think that I came to abolish the law and the prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill (5:17).
12. Live by and teach all of my commandments to others, and you will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (5:19).

13. Live more righteously than the scribes and Pharisees, or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (5:20).
14. Do not be hatefully angry with your brother, or you will be guilty before the court (5:22).
15. Do not say, “you dummy!” to your brother, or you will be guilty before the supreme court (5:22).
16. Do not say, “you idiot!” to your brother, or you will be guilty enough to burn in hell fire (5:22).
17. If you are in church, and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave church and go get right with your brother, and then you can go back to church (5:23–24).
18. Make friends with your legal opponent, so you won’t get thrown into jail (5:25).
19. Do not look with sexual lust at a woman—that is adultery of the heart (5:28).
20. Do not divorce your wife, unless she has committed adultery against you (5:32).⁴
21. Do not marry a divorced woman—that is adultery (5:32). (However, this does not mean an innocent party cannot remarry a godly spouse.)
22. Do not swear by any oaths—simply say “yes” or “no” when questioned (5:33–37).
23. Do not resist those who insult you (5:39).
24. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other cheek (5:39).
25. If anyone wants to take your shirt, give him your coat also (5:40).
26. If anyone forces you to walk one mile, be willing to walk two miles (5:41).

4. Paul added that the circumstance of *desertion* can also justify a divorce (1 Cor. 7:15).

27. Give to those who ask from you (5:42).
28. Do not turn away from those who want to borrow from you (5:42).
29. Love your enemies (5:44).
30. Pray for those who persecute you (5:44).
31. Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (5:48).
32. When you give to the poor, do it secretly (6:1–4).
33. When you pray, do not do it publicly to be seen by people (6:5).
34. When you pray, go into your room alone secretly, and close the door (6:6).
35. When you pray, do not keep on talking like the pagans (6:7).
36. Pray like this (6:9–13):

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

37. Forgive other people when they sin against you, and your heavenly Father will forgive your sins (6:14–15).
38. When you fast, do not look depressed or wasted away, like when a religious hypocrite tries to show other people that he is fasting (6:16).
39. When you fast, be sure to wash yourself, so people won't know you're fasting (6:17–18).
40. Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth, but in heaven (6:19–20).

41. Have generous eyes, then your whole body will be full of light (6:22).
42. Do not be stingy, or you will be full of darkness, and enslaved to money (6:23–24).
43. Do not worry about your life—what you will eat or drink or wear (6:25).
44. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness—and all the food, drink, and clothing you need will be given to you (6:33).
45. Do not worry about tomorrow (6:34).
46. Do not be nitpicky, or people will find fault with you (7:1).
47. Do not preach to anti-Christians, or they will mock you, and hurt you (7:6).
48. Pray for God to give you the Holy Spirit's presence, fruit, and spiritual gifts (7:7–11).
49. Treat people the way you want to be treated: with God's righteous love (7:12).
50. If you want to make it to heaven, then live your life by faith in Christ, and strict obedience to his commandments (7:13–14).
51. Beware of false prophets; they are the people who prophesy and work miracles in Jesus' name, but do not live by his commandments (7:15–23).
52. If you live by Christ's commandments, then you will be wise, and your faith will endure the trials and tribulations of life (7:24–27).

If I count this rightly, the moral law of God is about 62 commandments: first, the Ten Commandments, and then the 52 from the Sermon on the Mount! Undoubtedly, Christ will judge the world by this body of law (Acts 17:31). But there is even more than this! I have not tried to count all the moral commandments of the Old Testament, nor all of the moral commandments of Christ and the apostles. This is the bare minimum, or the essence

of the moral law. If you are a Christian, it is your responsibility to study the Bible, and to exclaim: “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Psa. 119:97). So, what will you do, when you see Christ on judgment day, and he opens up the books to judge all men according to their works? “The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books” (Rev. 20:12). When the angels open the book of your life, and bring it to Christ the judge, will he find any records of you breaking one of the commandments I have listed? You know in your conscience; and God knows better than you can remember.

As I noted before, and I repeat: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV). If you have transgressed, or broken even one of the commandments of this holy law, then you are guilty before the judge of all the earth. You have SIN on your account! It is impossible to keep all the commandments, let alone remember all of them perfectly. “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (Jas. 2:10). Be honest: this is totally impossible! And God knows that; but the commandments remain the commandments, and the moral law is still in effect: “Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18). “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith”⁵ (Gal. 3:24). “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Are you conscious of your sins now?

It should go without saying that we are only dealing with the moral law within the Bible, and definitely not with the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. Animal sacrifices, Sabbath days, kosher foods, circumcision, and other things pertaining to the Jewish rituals which do not have an ethical or moral nature—no Christian is bound to obey those laws. The Holy Spirit has come

5. Lit. “made righteous by faith”; cf. Romans 1:17: “The righteous will live by faith” (NIV).

into the hearts of Christians so that only “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us” (Rom. 8:4)—that is, the moral law. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul wrote: “Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16–17). And what is the sum of that moral reality? “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10). But who is perfectly righteous and perfectly loving? Only Jesus Christ: yet “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

The Forgiveness of Sins by Faith in Christ’s Death⁶

The judge of all men is also the same person as the Savior of all men: Jesus Christ. The fall of man, the wickedness of sin, the corruption of the human race, and transgression of God’s law are all clear. “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the Man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31)—this Man who will judge the world with justice is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. To “repent” means to change your heart, and manner of life, to turn away from wickedness, and onto the path of righteousness.

Some preachers say that it is impossible for a man to do this! They say that man is so corrupt and sinful that he is unable to repent, even all the while God “commands all people everywhere to repent”! (Acts 17:30). They say, “God’s Spirit forces them to repent if they are to be saved, and this will all happen in good time; so it is not for preachers to preach the commandment of repenting.” But can I respectfully say this is nonsense? The conscience is a gift from the Holy Spirit—“the true light which gives

6. Or, the Doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone.

light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9, NKJV)—and that which was perfectly manifested in the person of Jesus. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the Lord” (Jer. 23:24). The Holy Spirit is omnipresent, all-present, everywhere; drawing all men to Christ by the conscience he has enlightened them with, so that “when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves” (Rom. 2:14). But “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23); and no one can keep the law perfectly, even if all they are working with is the conscience they have been given. It is for this reason that Christ said of his dying on the cross: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).

“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ” (Gal. 3:24). But when the man with a sensitive conscience comes to Christ, he will hear him say, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). That is, you cannot come to a right relationship with God through any other faith: not through Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Judaism, or any cult. Why? Because they do not have atonement. Only the death of Christ, the Messiah prophesied through the Old Testament (Isa. 53; Psa. 22)—only his death on the cross atoned for the sins of the world, the transgressions of the law. This is why no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). And “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36, NKJV).

In the Old Testament, God prescribed various animal sacrifices to substitute for the punishments of the sins of the Israelites. These sacrifices were tokens of the grace of God, to show that, even in those days, “God is not willing that any should perish” (2 Pet. 3:9). If it were not for those sacrifices, the Israelites would have been destroyed on many occasions, just as the heathens

around them were. But the wrath of God, the judgments of God, were averted from them because of the substitute animal sacrifices prescribed in the law of Moses, given by God. The burning of those animals in fire were a prophetic sign, no doubt, of the eternal fire that awaits all who die without repentance and substitution for their forgiveness. Total victory and salvation were accomplished through Christ, the perfect substitute, as Horatius Bonar said: “Transference of guilt from one who could not bear the penalty without being eternally lost, to one who could bear it, and yet come forth from under it, free and glorious—this was the deep truth into which God educated the patriarchs, as that which lay at the foundation of his procedure with the sinner.”⁷ In the Bible, the blood of Christ, Bonar says, is “the symbol of substitution.” “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). “By him everyone who believes is justified from all things” (Acts 13:39).

What exactly is “atonement”? In order for us to understand this fully, and apply it to our lives by faith, let us define some terms:

Atonement—to become “at one,” or in union with, or reconciled to God, having thus a right relationship with him. Formerly there was a breach or separation in this relationship because of the guilt of sin; but now, with the coming of Christ as the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), dying for man’s sins, through faith only in this, is the breach healed, and a right relationship with God restored. To preach this gospel message is called “the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). Those who continue in this faith are considered “saved” from the wrath of God, and from an eternal punishment in hell fire (Rom. 5:9).

Propitiation—to appease the wrath, and calm down the anger of someone; and in turn, make them turn to you with a favorable attitude. In our understanding of the atonement, Christ died on the cross and shed his blood to appease the justice and wrath of God at our sins, so that he might turn favorably to us with the love he has for all men, while at the same time maintaining all

7. Horatius Bonar, *The Everlasting Righteousness*, Chapter 2.

his holiness and righteousness: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10, NKJV). The NIV says “atoning sacrifice” instead of propitiation.

Expiation—to make amends for one’s crimes; to repair the damage that has been done to another. In relation to the atonement, we lost and guilty sinners are to make amends for our sins against an eternally holy God through one way only: FAITH that Jesus’ death on the cross is sufficient to save us from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9), provided that we repent from sin, and go and try to sin no more throughout the course of our Christian life (John 8:11). “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deserving.”⁸ There are no other good works that can be done to appease the wrath of God; only faith in the blood of Jesus will do. Although God requires Christians to live a holy and righteous life (and to pursue sainthood), by trying to keep his commandments out of obedience and love—this is all too imperfect, and is certainly not good enough to appease God’s wrath. “Good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment.”⁹ ONLY FAITH in the shed blood and death of Christ can calm down the righteous anger of God at you (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 2:8–9). At first when we come to Christ, and we initially turn away from a life of sin, we must come to the cross by faith alone, and, as Wesley said, “under the notion of a sinner.”¹⁰ Jesus reaches out his pierced hand to save you! As a guilty, drowning sinner, you cry, “Help me Jesus!” and grab his

8. Article XI: “Of the Justification of Man” in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

9. *Ibid.*, Article XII.

10. “It is not a *saint* but a *sinner* that is forgiven, and under the notion of a sinner. God justifieth not the *godly*, but the *ungodly*; not those that are holy already, but the unholy” (John Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” 3.2); “To him who does not work but believes on him who *justifies the ungodly*, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5, NKJV).

hand as tightly as you can, holding on for dear life, lest you sink under the waters of sin!

Why is this necessary? I don't think I will ever understand the full meaning of the revelation on the death of Christ. But I know this: I am a sinner and God is holy. God was angry at me until I turned from my wicked ways and believed Jesus died on the cross for my sins. If Christ had not stepped in to receive the punishment I deserve for my sins, I should deserve to be punished eternally in hell fire, because the wrath of God would abide eternally on my soul! Just as animals such as bulls, sheep, and goats were burned on the altar in the Old Testament as sin offerings (Lev. 4:29–31), so I would have to be burned forever in the lake of fire and brimstone, and the smoke of my torment would rightly ascend forever and ever into the nostrils of a very angry, all-powerful God! (Rev. 14:9–11).

In hell there is no forgiveness of sins, because the wrath of God abides eternally on those immortal souls who chose not to believe the Son of God died on the cross for their sins. They had their chance to live by faith and stand justified before God, but they gave up on faith and chose to live in sin; and their guilt remained, and they died in their sins and remained that way till now, and will, forever and ever. "It is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement" (Lev. 17:11, NASB). If the life-blood of God, Jesus Christ, is not applied to your life by faith—how can there be anything except the almighty wrath of God abiding on you? You are too wicked; your life is just one enormous sin. Your sins mount up to heaven as a stinking trash heap, ready to be burned in the fire of hell!

"The Avenger of Blood" is after you, sinner! (Deut. 19:12). The Father has seen that his Son has been mocked and killed, and he is urgent to exact revenge upon all the ungodly—all who will not believe, all who mock Christ, and in spirit join with the wicked people who crucified him. Choose you this day (Josh. 24:15)—to serve God or Satan; to live in sin; or to have faith in the blood of Christ, which alone can turn away his Father's fierce anger, and enable you to pursue God in a life of righteousness

and obedience; yes, an imperfect obedience to his law, but still growing; and a holy submission to Christ, not only as your Savior from hell, but as your Lord, King, Governor, and Lawgiver in your life. Not only did Christ come to save you from hell in the afterlife, but also from sin in your present life. It is for these two reasons that “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). What was the purpose of the cross of Christ, for this life, and in heaven? It was “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24).

Charles Spurgeon said:

“His own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). These words in plainest terms assert that our Lord Jesus did really bear the sins of his people. How literal is the language! Words mean nothing if substitution is not stated here. I do not know the meaning of the fifty-third of Isaiah if this is not its meaning. Hear the prophet’s words: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6); “for the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa. 53:8); “he shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11); “he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many” (Isa. 53:12)... But our Lord’s sin-bearing has also brought us into life. Dead to evil according to law, we also live in newness of life in the kingdom of grace. Our Lord’s object is “that we should live unto righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). Not only are our lives to be righteous, which I trust they are, but we are quickened and made sensitive and vigorous unto righteousness. Through our Lord’s death we are made quick of eye, and quick of thought, and quick of lip, and quick of heart unto righteousness. Certainly, if the doctrine of his atoning sacrifice does not vivify us, nothing will.¹¹

The blood, the gore, the death of Christ—like the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament—has been commanded and ordained by God to show men the consequences of their sins: how horrible they are—that either an innocent animal or the

11. Charles Spurgeon, “The Sin-Bearer.”

innocent Christ would have to suffer on your behalf, because the COST of the sin guilt is too high for any man to pay back and satisfy God's justice; and also, to show man the WRATH that God has for sin, how angry he must be—that if reconciliation with man is to be made, it must only be done by means of extreme violence to a pure and innocent being, either a spotless lamb or Jesus the Lamb, as if to reverse the violence and offense that man has done in sinning against the only pure and innocent God.

And note: faith in Christ's blood only appeases God's wrath for "the remission of sins that are past" (Rom. 3:23, KJV). The blood of Christ does not atone for presently committed or future sins; there is no way you can cheapen God's grace and somehow avoid holy living; God sees what you are doing. The blood only applies to sins you have committed in the past. Jesus did not die on the cross for your "past, present, and future sins," as some people say, but only for "the remission of sins that are past." This requires us to maintain a clear conscience before God and to live "in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:75, KJV). "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1). And if, as Christians trying to live for God, after we give in to a temptation, and sin, if "we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again, and amend our lives."¹²

And so, although Christians are called to live in holiness and righteousness, when we fall into sin—for that is probably going to happen—we can return with the eyes of faith to the cross of Christ, and receive atonement again for our freshly committed sins, and once again return to the war against evil within our hearts, minds, and lives. This is possible because his death was "offered for all time one sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:12). "Christ

12. Article XVI: "Of Sin after Baptism," in *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England*.

died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). His death stands as a perpetual atonement that we can return to again and again for our sins; so that in faith, in prayer, in life, we may continue to walk in spiritual peace with God, and pursue holiness. If the blood of animals appeased God’s wrath in times past, then “how much more shall **THE BLOOD OF CHRIST**, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, **CLEANSE YOUR CONSCIENCE** from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

Only after the extreme violence done to Christ on the cross was carried out by the Devil’s workers, under the administration and direction of God, can peace with God and forgiveness of sins result upon confession of faith in this. We have “peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:20). Only in Christ’s death can we stand boldly before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16); only in this has God’s revenge against Christians’ sins been completed: “It is finished” (John 19:30). Only in this can sinners and saints alike receive his forgiveness, and come to God by a true and living spiritual friendship, and be like the founder of the faith: “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend” (Jas. 2:23). We must be careful to examine our lives, and to remember what Christ has done for us, and continues to offer us, **ON THE CROSS**. It is for this reason that we take the Lord’s Supper: “In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:25–26). Christ said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**” (Matt. 26:28, NIV).

*In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe*

*This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones he came to save:*

*Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.*

(Stuart Townend, “In Christ Alone”)

Christ’s Punishment or Eternal Punishment? The Cross or Hell?

When people sin against God, they break his law, and so divine justice requires that their sin be punished. But because the sin of mankind is so enormous, if men do not seek the forgiveness of their sins from God the judge, then God’s wrath and justice require ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN THE FIRE OF HELL. If men desire to have their sins forgiven, and so avoid the judicial sentence of eternal punishment in the prison of hell, then divine justice still requires a punishment—a substitute punishment. If ungodly, but repentant, sinners would put their faith in the cross of Christ as the only substitutionary punishment for their countless sins against a holy God, then they put themselves in good standing with God in his justice. Because as sinners put their faith in the cross for their acquittal, pardon, and forgiveness of sin, they are then freed from the judgment of an eternal punishment in hell, the wrath of God being redirected away from them and onto the cross; and so they are “saved from wrath” through Christ (Rom. 5:9). And the way of salvation is opened up to them—they are then able to receive and experience the mercy of God, forgiveness of their sins, justification (being made righteous), and peace with God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley wrote of his experience of being saved from God’s wrath:

I do not term God, as Mr. Law supposes, “a wrathful being,” which conveys a wrong idea; yet I firmly believe he was angry

with all mankind, and that he was reconciled to them by the death of his Son. And I know he was angry with me till I believed in the Son of his love; and yet this is no impeachment to his mercy, that he is just as well as merciful.¹³

Lindström explains Wesley's biblical teaching on the atonement of Christ... it's the CROSS or HELL:

He suffered on behalf of all. His sacrifice was a full, perfect and sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Christ bore our punishment. He paid the price for us.¹⁴

Consequently man has nothing to offer to God but the merits of Christ. Because of their inward and outward evil all that men deserve is THE WRATH OF GOD AND ETERNAL DAMNATION. Yet they can do nothing to assuage that wrath, atone for their sins, and ESCAPE THE PUNISHMENT they rightly deserve. They have no means of making satisfaction to the justice of God for their sins. Thus THEIR ONLY HOPE IS THE VICARIOUS SUFFERING OF CHRIST.¹⁵

Christians should not think or speak of the cross of Jesus lightly, but with reverence and faith. 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." But "the reconciliation of God and humanity comes at a great price. Forgiveness or justification, then, though it is marked by the grace and love of God, is neither cheap nor easy: IT REQUIRES NOTHING LESS THAN THE DEATH OF THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD."¹⁶ Plainly and clearly, John Pearson (d. 1686) provides good enough reason for us to revere the cross with a serious attitude:

13. Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press), p. 70.

14. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, NIV).

15. Lindström op. cit., p. 65.

16. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 82.

Christ taking upon him the nature of man, and offering himself a sacrifice for sin, he gives that to God in the place of the eternal death of mankind, which is more valuable and acceptable to God than eternal death could be, and he makes a sufficient compensation and full satisfaction for the sins of man; which God accepts, and becomes reconciled to us; because of the PUNISHMENT WHICH CHRIST ENDURED, God removes our obligation to ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.¹⁷

Why all of this talk about punishment? Why can't God just forgive people if they say "I'm sorry"? Because God would be unjust if he forgave people based only on their contrition or repentance. Righteous justice requires that ALL WRONGDOING MUST BE PUNISHED—this is called PENALTY. So, the Father-heart of God is manifested to forgive sin, but only after the justice of God as judge is fully satisfied by the sinner's FAITH IN THE SUBSTITUTE PUNISHMENT of the perfectly righteous, sinless, Son of God—Jesus Christ dying on the cross as a sin-sacrifice. Charles Finney explains:

It is an unalterable rule under his divine government, that where there is sin there must be inflicted suffering—this would be so complete a SATISFACTION OF PUBLIC JUSTICE, that sin might safely be forgiven... An atonement was needed, not to render God merciful, but to RECONCILE PARDON WITH A DUE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE."¹⁸

The Moral Influence of the Cross

After considering the messianic prophecies of Isaiah 53, Psalm 22, and others, how it is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3), why it is that God's wrath and justice have to be satisfied in either the eternal punishment of the wicked (hell) or the substitute punishment of Christ (the cross),

17. Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 68. Paraphrased.

18. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Lecture 34: "Atonement." 1851.

we then come to consider what are the practical implications of faith in the cross. The practical result of unbelief in the cross leads to a life of sin and corruption, and ultimately ends in hell. But the practical result of faith in the cross leads to a life of holiness and righteousness, and ultimately ends in heaven.

Those theologians who have championed what is called the “moral influence view” have come to understand that the cross of Christ is not only a means of satisfying the wrath and justice of God for repentant sinners (although this is certainly the main theme of the atonement, as borne out in Isaiah 53—penal substitution).¹⁹ But after repentance and faith in the cross have occurred, the practical question of what Finney called the “moral government” of God comes to bear upon a Christian in his life. Seeing that there is nothing in this world more morally influential than the cross of Christ, with the help of Wesley and Finney, I will add my own explanation to the biblical doctrine of moral influence found in the cross of Jesus.

1 Peter 2:24–25, NIV: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree (the cross), so that WE MIGHT DIE TO SINS AND LIVE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.” This might be the clearest passage in Scripture on the moral influence of the cross. Peter shows us that (1) Jesus “bore our sins in his body” on the cross, but immediately he jumps to the practical implication of this, which is (2) “that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.” That is, it all happened, Christ dying on the cross, so that it would not only result in our consciences being cleared and our sins forgiven, but that we would then take up our responsibility as Christians to “mortify” ourselves—that is, to kill what remainder of sinful

19. With John Wesley and Charles Finney, my view of the atonement is first-ly that of *penal substitution*, and secondly that of *moral influence*. The first view has been articulated by Anselm, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and all Reformed and Puritan theologians. The second view was articulated by Augustine, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Hugo Grotius. Wesley, and especially Finney, synthesized both views.

tendencies there remains in us, so that by resisting all temptations, and keeping all of God's moral commandments, turning from "all sin to all holiness,"²⁰ we might "serve him without fear, in HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS before him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:74–75).

Hebrews 9:13–14: "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, who through the eternal Spirit OFFERED HIMSELF without spot to God, CLEANSE YOUR CONSCIENCE FROM DEAD WORKS TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD?" Here, like the former passage, we have the two elements of (1) Christ offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross, shedding his blood for our forgiveness (substitute punishment). But then, immediately afterwards, the practical conclusion is drawn and (2) the moral influence or responsibility is laid on all who believe in the cross, which has the power to "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

How is it that the cross of Christ has the ability to cleanse a man's conscience? This is possible because, when the man with a defiled conscience, with sin on his record, is convicted of his sins, he is weighed down with the guilt and condemnation of God's law. Then, when he considers what Jesus did on the cross, in offering himself as a sinless, spotless sin-offering, even as the Jewish priests used to offer to God pure spotless animals like bulls and goats as sin offerings, in keeping with the law, so also Christ in keeping with the law of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53, and others, "fulfills the law" (Matt. 5:17), and opens up the way to a peaceful relationship with God. This is why "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51).

20. "Repentance is of two sorts; that which is termed legal, and that which is styled *evangelical repentance*. The former (which is the same that is spoken of here) is a thorough conviction of sin. The latter is a *change of heart (and consequently of life) from all sin to all holiness*" (John Wesley, *Notes Upon the New Testament*, Matthew 3:8: "Bear fruits worthy of repentance").

Christ's main purpose in dying on the cross was as the God-Man and only mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), representing both God and mankind, reconciling the two formerly hostile parties, and allowing sin to be punished in such a way (substitutionally and sinlessly)—so that there would be room for repentance from sin, clearing of a sin record, and a clean slate or conscience, to be able to live a new life—a life of holiness, or obedience to God. The cross made a way for sin to be righteously punished and for repentant, believing sinners to pursue a new life of holiness and righteousness and godliness; and not only that, but to continue to rely on the cross for any future failures, backslidings, or giving in to temptations, and as Wesley said, to have a “LIVING FAITH IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.”²¹ Lindström summarizes Wesley's teaching:

No one can be justified by his own acts; the justification of man occurs by the grace of God. Implicit in, but partly independent of, this view of grace, a conception of justice also emerges. We see it in the way atonement is regarded as a form of satisfaction. The law broken by man must be fulfilled. This is done through Christ. God sent his only Son to fulfill the law for us and that by shedding his most precious blood he should provide God with that satisfaction or compensation for our sins which was necessary if God's wrath against us was to be appeased.²²

By fulfilling God's law and the righteous demands for justice, Jesus' death on the cross brings satisfaction to the wrath of God for our innumerable offenses against his holiness by our wretched, disgusting, nasty sins. Provided that we put our faith in the cross, we can have a clear conscience through knowing justice has been served but with judicial grace: the judge of all men (Christ) died on the cross, to provide a complete satisfaction to the wrath of the Father at all sin, so that by faith we may receive this grace from the judge. Our conscience being cleared, from the forgiveness of sins that are in the past (Rom. 3:25, KJV), we can look

21. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, p. 80.

22. Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 62.

forward, knowing that a holy God has dealt with our sins, and forgiven us, and has given us a way to morally reform our lives for the better. And so, just as when he forgave the adulteress, he immediately commanded her, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Judicial grace is something that only a convicted criminal who has received pardon from a judge can fully understand. Finney said:

The atonement is an illustrious exhibition of commutative justice, in which the government of God, by an act of infinite grace, commutes or substitutes the sufferings of Christ for the eternal damnation of sinners... Christ was the lawgiver, and his suffering in behalf of sinners is to be regarded as the lawgiver and executive magistrate suffering in the behalf and stead of a rebellious province of his empire... The law was calculated, when once its penalty was incurred, to shut the sinner up in a dungeon, and only to develop more and more his depravity. Nothing could subdue his sin, and cause him to love, but the manifestation to him of disinterested benevolence. The atonement is just the thing to meet this necessity, and subdue rebellion.²³

What greater motive to holiness and divine love can there be than is found in the following? “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands... This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 2:1–3; 4:9–11, NIV).

23. Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Lecture 34: “Atonement,” 1851.

CHAPTER 3

A New Creature in Christ

The Holy Spirit Enters the Hearts of Real Christians

When the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached fully, in all of its saving power, with all its legal and moral implications, and with all of its straightforward statements about the blood of Christ for cleansing the conscience of believers—what results is a supernatural miracle to those who respond by faith: the Holy Spirit takes up residence in the hearts of those who believe! When he comes in, he produces a faith that is so deep, supernaturally impressing on the heart and mind of the Christian the realities of the gospel, and the existence of the soul, God, heaven, hell, angels, and demons. He is awakened to a new life of righteousness and reliance on the cross for mercy; a new consciousness, an awareness of things that are spiritual; his mind and heart are deeply changed by the work of the Holy Spirit within him. He has been converted: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV). For this reason alone faithful Christian martyrs have been tortured and killed the world over, for their supernatural faith and commitment to the gospel.¹ Another word for “supernatural faith” is “divine revelation.”

The Supernatural Power of the Gospel Message

So faith is not merely an intellectual thing of the head; it is not simply the acceptance of the “Christian philosophy” by reasoning

1. John Foxe, *The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Edited by Harold Chadwick. Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1997.

through the most sound and convincing arguments. Apologetics, the art of Christian philosophy, is a fine discipline, but is in no way the foundation of regeneration—the implantation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s heart: “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom. 5:5). This supernatural experience, and this spiritual life, can only be entered into by hearing the gospel preached and obeying the call to repent from wickedness, and believe that Jesus died for your sins on the cross and rose from the dead. This happened to people when the apostle Paul preached the gospel; it was such a message, blessed with the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, that Christ said it would “open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18). And so, when a lady named Lydia was listening to him preach, “the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (Acts 16:14). “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32).

Spiritual Awakening and the Beginning of Holiness

Jesus and the apostles referred to the experience of regeneration, or the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the Christian’s heart, as being “born again,” “born of the Spirit,” or “born of God” (John 3; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9). This signifies two things at least: (1) it is a new birth; that is, it is the beginning of a completely new way of life; not the physical life of the body, but the spiritual life of the soul together in fellowship with the God who created it. It has with it a new set of five spiritual senses: sight (dreams and visions), hearing (spiritual voices), feeling (impressions), tasting (impressions), and smelling (impressions). The entire spirit world has begun to unfold before you, around you, all around you, and you can see things and feel things in a completely new light. God has enlightened your senses and your understanding, not only to the power of God’s Spirit and the truth of the gospel, but also to

the glory of God in creation. An overwhelming sense to praise the Creator may come upon the soul, when various nature scenes are presented before him that is born again of the Holy Spirit. (2) It is the beginning of sanctification; that is, a power has been imparted into the soul by God's Spirit to enable, to desire, and to pursue "holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:75, NKJV). Before the Spirit came into him, he had no desire to be holy; but now things are completely different. His sins have been forgiven and his conscience is clear. Now he has the Holy Spirit in his heart—that is, the spirit of righteousness abides in him, so that "the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

But there are two sides to this new life of a Christian. On the one hand, God has drawn the sinner to Christ by the Spirit (John 6:44). He did this through the drawings of the Holy Spirit in the conscience of the sinner, the circumstances of his life, and someone sharing the gospel with him. On the other hand, the sinner has yielded to the Holy Spirit's influence, gave in to his convicted conscience, repented of his wicked ways, and sought the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ's blood. This act of repentance is a divine-human cooperation that begins here, but continues throughout the entire Christian life. In essence, it is the "turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). I say repenting is a divine-human cooperation: and this makes me admittedly an Arminian. Unlike the Calvinists, who believe that repenting is more like a Divine Puppeteer experience (monergism), where the Holy Spirit is seen as taking control over the will, and driving Christians to faith and holiness forever, without the possibility of losing those graces—"sealed" forever in such a state. I wish! But with all due respect, I don't see it in the Bible; nor have my experiences with formerly devout Christian friends lined up with it.

In my reading of Scripture, I see God taking the initiative to call ALL MEN to himself, and supplying the grace and power of the Holy Spirit for all men to respond to that gospel call, but

giving also a freed will for all men, and a power to choose good or evil: “You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do” (1 Pet. 4:3). Only SOME MEN choose Christ. I say a “freed will” but not “free will”—and by that I mean, natural man, in his flesh is not really free to be righteous and holy. His will power must be “freed” up by the power of the Holy Spirit gracing and blessing his heart. So in order to truly repent, you need to experience regeneration. The two experiences happen at the same time: regeneration (God’s Spirit coming into man’s heart) and repentance (the sinner turning to Christ in faith, and intending to live in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life). The two things go together; and in Arminian theology this is called synergism, or cooperation with God. Christians should hope and pray for sinners, that “God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). For this God gets all the glory: *solī Deo gloria!* Because without the power of God’s Spirit, NO MEN on earth could repent or believe the gospel. It is, as Peter said, “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). And who has reason to be prideful, arrogant, or boastful for this gift? But rather, “thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15, KJV). “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

The Witness of the Spirit: Real Faith

With all this talk of the Holy Spirit coming into a Christian’s heart, it becomes necessary to turn to proofs of this. The Holy Spirit is invisible, generally speaking; so we need to look for “signs” or “marks” of the evidence of his presence in the heart—indicators that there really is a Holy Spirit, and that he has entered into your converted heart. Something as supernatural as this, as magnificent as this, cannot be unknowable and go without detection. If it ever did, then one could scarcely say that God is in it! The first and most powerful sign, which would be common to all real Christians, would be what John Wesley called “the witness of the

Spirit.” This is mentioned in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” This is a deep and lasting impression in the soul, in the intuition, in the heart that affirms, “I am a child of God. Jesus loves me, died on the cross for my sins, and my sins are forgiven. I am reconciled to a right relationship with God.”

This is not necessarily the voice of God or a dream, although it may take those forms as well; but generally it is an intuitive knowing within one’s heart, a “know that you know” experience—something that produces a strong and lasting faith; a deep inner confidence that could endure all trials, tribulations, temptations, depressions, confusions, sufferings, and even martyrdom for Christ. Without this witness, there is no real faith, and hence no salvation; this is the undergirding power, and even the essence of saving faith. As mentioned before, faith is not simply a set of intellectual or philosophical arguments that are accepted in the head; mainly, faith is a divine revelation from the Holy Spirit in the heart: “Child, your sins are forgiven you; now, go and sin no more” (John 8:11). This is permanently felt and inwardly known to be the truth, deep, deep within the subconscious heart and mind of the truly saved Christian. The witness of the Spirit is, as Wesley’s father said on his deathbed, “the strongest proof of Christianity.” It, more than anything else, is the assurance of salvation, because it is the speaking voice of the Holy Spirit himself, the voice of holiness and love.

There is another miraculous experience that sometimes accompanies the general witness of the Spirit: “the fire of love” as it was termed by Richard Rolle (d. 1349).² This is different from the general impression that a Christian has in his heart that he is God’s child and forgiven of his sins. The fire of love is, in a way, an even more powerful witness of the Spirit that only happens occasionally. Personally, I have been blessed to feel this fire at least thirty times in the past several years! Richard Foster

2. Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*. Translated by Clifton Wolters. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

summarizes Rolle's experience (and mine): "He describes such unusual experiences, of intense heat around his heart, that would cause him to reach down to feel his chest, to be sure that it was not literally on fire!"³

What is the meaning of this? In Luke 24:32, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, after they had encountered the risen Christ, said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"⁴ James Goll explains: "Their hearts burned within as Jesus unfolded to them prophetic revelation concerning himself from the Word of God... The reason their hearts were burning was because someone was taking up residence within them. Their hearts burned within because the Spirit of revelation opened their eyes to understand the Scriptures... When he vanished from their sight, they were left with the fire of God—living coals of fire—in their hearts!"⁵

Reflecting on my personal experience, I can agree with Goll; but I will try to clarify it further: the fire of love is first and foremost the "pouring out of his LOVE into our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). That is, not only is it a fire, but it is a feeling of divine love, the love of God for you, and the love of God for all creatures. Secondly, it is HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS—the fear of God and love of God are one in this majestic feeling of God's presence in the heart, burning within. Thirdly, it is a REVELATION or confirmation, a sign that whatever is being presently talked about, read, studied, or thought is agreeable to the Holy Spirit within you. In the case of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, it was the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah

3. Richard Foster, *Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 133.

4. Psalm 39:2–3: "When I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue"; Jeremiah 20:9: "If I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a burning fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

5. Jim Goll, *Wasted on Jesus* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2000), p. 164.

prophesied by the Old Testament, and that he had to die for the sins of the world, and be raised on the third day. But the fire of God can confirm literally any revelation agreeable to Scripture.

John Wesley's "Aldersgate experience" was similar to the revelation the disciples had. He wrote in his journal for Wednesday, May 24, 1738: "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ,⁶ I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."⁷

So, if you are feeling the fire of God burning in your heart, then you are in good company! Richard Rolle, John Wesley, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus! (Luke 24:32), as well as king David and the prophet Jeremiah (Ps. 39:2–3; Jer. 20:9). But don't be deceived: demons can counterfeit this experience when accompanied by false revelations or doctrines, as it is with the Mormons. They have a counterfeit experience which they call a "burning in the bosom" which supposedly confirms *The Book of Mormon* is true! But that book contradicts the Bible in so many, many places!⁸ So, all subjective spiritual experiences, even strange burnings in the heart, need to be tested strictly by Scripture, which is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice in the Christian life. "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20, NKJV). The Ten Commandments (Exod.

6. Probably paragraphs 13 and 14 in "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*. Edited by John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), pp. 23–24.

7. John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* Edited by John Telford. vol. 1. (London: J. Kershaw, 1827), pp. 97–98.

8. Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983. Part I, Chapter 6: "Mormonism."

20:1–17) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) should be the starting point in judging and discerning the truth of spiritual experiences; and the rest of the Bible for anything else.

The Fruit of the Spirit: Good Works

In addition to the witness of the Spirit, and even the fire of love, there is a rational way a Christian can go about assuring himself of his salvation from sin and hell: the fruit of the Spirit in his life. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23). “These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Wesley maintained these three were “the marks of the new birth.” All of this can be verified by whether or not the Christian is already automatically obeying the moral law of God in his life: “By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3, NKJV). Living holy, by the power of the Holy Spirit within, enables Christians to “keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9).

While these are certainly proofs of present salvation, and of a genuine living faith, they are not ends in themselves. They are only good works as far as they “spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith.”⁹ Again, as Wesley’s father said on his deathbed, the witness of the Spirit remains “the greatest proof of Christianity.” Only out of this inward witness of faith do good works spring out automatically, and necessarily: the fruit of the Spirit; faith, hope, and love; keeping God’s moral commandments; and maintaining a clear conscience before God in every thought.

The Desire for Righteousness in Your Heart

The primary way to know if you have experienced regeneration, or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit coming into your heart, is **THE**

9. Article XII: “Of Good Works” in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

DESIRE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). By the biblical definition, “righteousness” is obeying God’s moral laws and commandments in your life FROM THE HEART; if you do this well, you are called a “righteous man” (Gen. 6:9; Prov. 20:7; Jas. 5:16; 2 Pet. 2:7). Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The King of heaven and his laws reign supreme in the Christian’s heart. “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Jewish, non-moral, Old Testament laws do not apply; it’s only the righteous requirements of the law (Rom. 8:4), the moral commandments. This was prophesied by Jeremiah of the New Testament saints, or Christians: “‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts’” (Jer. 31:31, 33; Heb. 8:10). In this way, Paul says that Christians are “Jews inwardly... by the Spirit” (Rom. 2:29), and that the King of the Jews lives inside them: “Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

The Practice of Righteousness in Your Life

But the desire for righteousness is not the end of the story, it is the beginning. The beginning leads to the means, which leads to the end: heaven. And the end justifies the means: living a holy life. The beginning is this Holy Spirit experience of faith and righteous desires (regeneration). But next comes THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (sanctification, or the Christian life). We will deal with this in the next chapter at length. God’s part in all of this was the implantation of the Holy Spirit into the new Christian’s heart (regeneration). The Christian’s part is now to use the power he has been given, to obey God’s high commandment: “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16) (sanctification)—but remember: although the Christian is commanded to “continue to work out his salvation with fear and trembling,” he must bear in mind that this holy power is not from himself, but that “it is

God who works in him to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:12–13). Bearing this in mind, he should praise God for his grace and mercy, and not pride himself in his own religious achievements or spiritual growth. “When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26). Remember that all holiness in your life begins with, continues with, and finishes with the help of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—the Holy Trinity.

CHAPTER 4

Created in Christ to Do Good Works

God is Holiness

The Lord God of heaven and earth, the creator of worlds, and of man, has an eternal and unchanging moral law. This has always been and always will be an unchanging ethic of righteousness, purity, and morality. It is the very essence of the Spirit of God, the desire, the light of conscience, and the immutable standard by which every government on the face of the earth has ever enacted one law or rule, policy, or regulation that was ever good, noble, and pure, and in keeping with a good conscience, and perfectly majestic for the execution of truth and justice for all men. This law, this unchangeable ethic, is GOD. It is GOD HIMSELF. GOD IS HOLINESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS, PERFECTION, MORALITY. Before he ever thought to create things in the beginning, his heart was pure and holy and good. It is his heart and his thoughts that are the origin of every good moral, every noble ethic, and every expression of righteousness and justice. For this he must be praised and worshiped with inexpressible exaltation and glory coming from our hearts.

The Fall of Adam Through Disobedience to God

Shortly after God created Adam and Eve, he gave them one commandment: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17). This was the first commandment God gave to mankind. Adam, our great ancestor, was created originally in a perfectly righteous and godly state of heart and mind. No sinful

thoughts or tempers were in his being, and he could feel God's presence with him continuously in the garden. But one day, as Eve was in the garden, an evil spirit in the form of a snake spoke to her and tempted her to disobey the only commandment God had given:

He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (Gen. 3:2-7).

Their innocence and purity of life was lost. They had fallen from the original righteousness in which God had created them. The Holy Spirit departed from their midst; and they became carnally, naturally, physically minded, without consciousness of God's presence. Now they were self-conscious, because they had disobeyed God's commandment. The forbidden fruit was a simple test of their obedience; but they used their free wills, even while God's presence was with them, to sin against his one and only rule. Then God's punishment came upon them. Adam heard God's voice later that day in the garden, and God told Adam and Eve that she would have pains in childbirth, and he would rule over her; and that Adam would have to work hard and suffer much pain in order to eat his food, and then he will die at the end of his life (Gen. 3:16-19). Before this, they were immortal; the Spirit of God would have kept them in an eternal state of health and life. The sinfulness and disobedience to God, and the inclination to evil had now entered into Adam and Eve, and it would

pass on to their offspring, from generation to generation. And because of this, men would have to die: “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned... by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:12, 19, NKJV).

Human Disobedience Demonstrated by Israel

Throughout the history of Israel, we see God choosing a group of people out from among the pagan Babylonians and Egyptians, to create a holy nation—a people that would understand the will of God, as it was expressed through the law of Moses and the holy prophets. But over the centuries, from the stages this people went from—Hebrews to Israelites to Jews—on a whole, they were found to be very disobedient to God’s commandments, rules, laws, and morals. As for the ceremonial law, which consisted in rituals full of prophetic symbols, they kept it somewhat (Leviticus 1–16); but they had the most difficulty with the moral law (Leviticus 18, 19, etc.). Over time, they allowed pluralism and syncretism to enter into Israel, when they worshiped the gods of Canaan alongside the God of Israel, or even as the same God. This was the religion of Baal.

Prostitution, idolatry, and all kinds of sins were committed in this religion, because the people FORGOT THE LAW OF GOD (Hos. 4:6). And they were pleased to do so, because of all the fornication and prostitution (even the homosexual kind) that the Baal religion allowed for (1 Kings 14:23–24). In this time of great apostasy, and defection from the law of God,¹ which was the true faith of Israel, God raised up the prophet Elijah to pull aside, and form a community of holy prophets in various

1. It seems that times of great apostasy from the faith are usually due to *fornication, prostitution, and other forms of sexual immorality* (outside of holy matrimony). This was the case with the popes during the Protestant reformation, and with the progress of atheism in the Western world. In modern times, the “Sexual Revolution” of the 1960s, with pornography, strip clubs, etc., seems to have played a large part in the general erosion of *all* Puritanical ethics in America.

places. For centuries, God raised up prophets from these original communities started by Samuel and Elijah, to show them visions of God's will for the nation—primarily rebukes for their sins, reminders of what he had done in taking them up out of slavery in Egypt, and calling them to repent (turn away from sin) and obey the law of God.

But the rebellion, unbelief, apostasy, and disobedience to God persisted; they had lost their contact with the holiness of God and his Spirit. And if any of the Israelites respected the supernatural in those days, it was through wizards and mediums! (Isa. 8:19–20). **TOTAL REBELLION!** The patience of God ran out, and he raised up the Babylonian army to conquer the Jews and bring them off into exile in Babylonia, to teach them a harsh lesson. Ironically, this was that same pagan country that God had called their father Abraham out of centuries before! (Gen. 11:31). The weeping prophet Jeremiah, who foresaw the exile, and warned them just before it happened, received the following revelation:

“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people” (Jer. 31:31–33).

This prophecy was written down, and remained in the Hebrew Scriptures to the present day. Only some of the Christians have come to understand, even experientially, the full meaning of this text. That is, God revealed to Jeremiah that the Old Testament way of life would eventually give way to the New Testament way of life. No longer would the outward form of keeping the ritual law dominate the religious life of the Jews; it would only be required to be kept morally from the HEART. Thus the ceremonial law was done away with; and now only the moral law remains

(Col. 2:16–17). With the coming of real Christian life, this is a reality that Christians, even Gentiles being grafted into the Israelites' new covenant by faith (Rom. 11:17–24), are able with Christ in the Spirit to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8, KJV).

Holiness Is the Heart of the Christian Life

If holiness could be summed up into a few Bible verses, it would be: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37–40). To LOVE GOD and to LOVE PEOPLE is the HEART of the matter! But notice: this love is within the context of the HOLY LAW of God. And it is because of this holy law that the spiritual affections are directed, felt, impassioned, and thought of in such a way to be preeminently ETHICAL, MORAL, and RIGHTEOUS. This certainly goes against the grain of the world’s definition of love, which is to have tender feelings for someone because of some natural REASON; or some particular sentimental thing you like about someone or something, completely based on SELF-INTEREST. But with DIVINE LOVE it is not so. The law of God defines and directs everything: the will of God, the law of God, the love of God, consuming the heart and mind of the Christian with holy fire and passion to preach the gospel to the lost on their way to a burning hell and eternal judgment—to save their lives!

GOD IS PURE HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS! The Bible says this of God, in purity, and Spirit: “GOD IS LIGHT; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Not much later, the inspired writer says: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because GOD IS LOVE” (1 John 4:8). And finally, putting the responsibility on man, on the Christian, and the love he is to show through the Spirit dwelling in him: “This is THE LOVE OF GOD, that we keep his COMMANDMENTS. And his commandments are not burdensome”

(1 John 5:3, NKJV). The orthodox, true Bible believing Christian, who is not confused, but knows Christ to be the “God of his salvation” (Psa. 25:5), takes spiritual, heartfelt delight in **KEEPING CHRIST’S COMMANDMENTS!** God’s laws, decrees, and counsels; his rules, ordinances, and precepts; his policies, procedures, and principles! “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day!” (Psa. 119:97, NKJV). It is these **RULES OF GOD** that will be the standards by which Christ will judge the world on the day of judgment. The law of God only makes sense to the mind when seen in light of the throne of God and “the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16, NKJV). Jesus sits on the throne, at the right hand of God, where he intercedes for the world, and where he judges all men for the way they live their lives. Before he went to the cross to die for the sins of the world, he told the disciples: “If you love me, keep my commandments... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 14:15; 15:10, NKJV).

Paul Washer on the Law of God

As we have learned, the narrow way is marked out by the will of God as revealed in his commandments, statutes, precepts, and wisdom. However, we must be careful to understand all of this Christologically or within the context of the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples in no uncertain terms that he was the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through him (John 14:6). Thus, we must constantly be reminded that in this narrow way we follow a person and not a code of conduct or procedural manual for life. Propositional truth is absolutely essential to Christianity, and we have been given great laws, principles, and wisdom to obey. However, they are not the sum of the Christian faith; and if they are viewed outside the context of Christ, they can lead us down a dangerous path of legalism and self-righteousness. As Christians, we follow a person, and we seek to imitate that person. The propositional truths of Scripture have great value in that they explain to us

who he is and how we are to follow him, but they are not an end in themselves and can never be detached from Christ without doing the greatest violence to Christianity and the Christian. The gist of this warning is summarized powerfully in the words of Christ to those of his day who had reduced the faith of Israel to an empty code of conduct. Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about me; and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). Christ cannot be separated from the instruction and commands of Scripture, but neither can these commands be separated from the person of Christ!²

The Commandments of Christ

If the commandments of Christ are so important for living the Christian life, then why aren't more Christians taking these commandments seriously, and to heart? Why aren't more pastors in churches preaching and teaching on these holy commandments? The answer is simple: “The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3). CHURCH BOARDS! Carnal, unconverted, and totally unsaved deacons and elders! Who amass to themselves pastors, evangelists, and the like, who preach a FALSE GOSPEL to them, to scratch their itching ears a bit on Sunday mornings with sermons on “grace,” “love,” psychology, self-help, and positive thinking! This is why many of them watch ungodly TV shows and movies, even though Scripture says, “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes” (Psa. 101:3, NKJV), and Christ said, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already

2. Paul Washer, “The Narrow Way and the Broad Way,” *HeartCry Magazine* (October–December, 2013), p. 5. Biblical references used in support of this excerpt: John 14:6; Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; John 5:39–40.

committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).³ And why do many of their young women dress like prostitutes? To get a SEXUAL RESPONSE from the young men who ogle them! CHURCH GIRLS! This is why many of their youth listen to ungodly sexually charged music full of profanities, even though the Bible says, “It is better to heed a wise man’s rebuke than to listen to the song of fools” (Eccl. 7:5), and commands Christians to rid themselves of things such as “filthy language from their lips” (Col. 3:8).

But notice how I quoted OLD TESTAMENT commandments too. That is because the MORAL LAW of the Old Testament is still in effect, and will be until the end of the world—and hence, it is also to be considered within the “commandments of Christ.” Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18). But we have to also understand this: what Christ accomplished on the cross was the atonement of the sins of the world. And so, any Old Testament commandments pertaining to atonement, and ritual ceremonial laws, are truly done away with, and are fulfilled by faith in the cross of Christ: “Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16–17).

So, the ceremonial law was a prophetic foreshadowing of the CHRISTIAN LAW to come; this reality is found through living by faith in Christ, his cross, and his Spirit, whereby the MORAL LAW finds its fullest expression, so that Christians might live for God “in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:75, NKJV). Any Bible rule and Scripture commandment that has an ethical, moral, or righteous nature about it, bearing witness by the Holy Spirit of God at work within your conscience—let it be known that this is a commandment

3. I’m not indicting *all* church boards, but *many* church boards.

of Christ, and that he requires Christians to try to obey that commandment, to keep that commandment as carefully and conscientiously as possible. It's not just the red letters of Christ in your Bible; it's any moral commandment.

As I had codified it previously—the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount—this is, in a sense, the heart of the moral law (pp. 37-41). But it is not the entirety. To know God, and to know the entirety of his law, you must study the Bible, and especially the New Testament, which is much more concentrated and focused on the moral law, and does not veer off into the ceremonies of the Old Testament. Before you were saved, the moral law had a purely ACCUSING nature to you; it showed you the error of your ways and made you “conscious of sin” (Rom. 3:20),⁴ because “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV). But now that you are a Christian, and you are living by faith in the cross of Christ, knowing that your past sins are forgiven (Rom. 3:25)—you are compelled by Christ to “go and sin no more” (John 8:11, NKJV), to “go now and leave your life of sin” (NIV).

Now the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), the ultimate moral law of God, has a COMMANDING nature to you, not merely an accusing one. Now it is the words of life to you, and with new eyes you can understand the Bible. It is the rule for your life come down from God!⁵ In light of the GRACE of God found in Christ Jesus by faith in his merciful FORGIVENESS OF SINS—now you are compelled, as a child of God, and by the Spirit of Christ to offer the parts of your body “in SLAVERY TO RIGHTEOUSNESS leading to holiness!” (Rom. 6:19). Like the old prophet Moses, who once could have continued in fornication and wickedness in Egypt as a pagan, and who instead obeyed the voice of God and left his evil way of life: “He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time” (Heb. 11:25). He wandered for 40 years in the desert with grumpy,

4. In Reformed theology, this is called the “first use of the law.”

5. Ibid.: “the second and third uses of the law.”

complaining people. But he experienced some of the greatest miracles in all of human history!

But look: “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses” (Heb. 3:3), because he was without sin, and his sacrifice on the cross, although it was only once, lasts forever to those who continue to have faith that God’s wrath toward them is satisfied by Christ’s blood (Heb. 7:27). **DO YOU HAVE THIS FAITH?** Do you have enough faith in what Jesus did on the cross for you? That your sins are forgiven? Yes? **THEN GO AND SIN NO MORE!** (John 8:11). **CHANGE YOUR LIFE!** Your sins are forgiven you, but God demands perfect obedience to his law... still... even more so! He is the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25), and he loves you like his own Son (Rom. 8:14). So he expects you to behave like the son of a Judge would behave—and that is this: “Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Christ Does Not “Free Us” From the Moral Law!

There is a false gospel being preached in pulpits all over America. This gospel goes something like this: “All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God. We’re all sinners bound for hell. But God loves you, so he sent his only begotten Son to die on the cross for your sins, so you could be forgiven of your sins, receive eternal life, and go to heaven. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that he rose from the dead, you will be saved. Open the door of your heart, and let Jesus Christ come in, and all your sins will be forgiven.” **BUT WAIT! THIS CAN’T BE A FALSE GOSPEL! CAN IT!?** Actually, it is an incomplete gospel message, if you want to get technical. But it’s important that the good parts in this message are not ignored. This incomplete gospel message just quoted to you is preached in **MOST** of the fundamentalist, Bible-believing, evangelical churches in the world. It is based on the “Romans Road to Salvation” (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:13; 10:9–10) and the image of Jesus coming into the hearts of Christians, as he knocks on them like doors (Rev. 3:20). This message is correct in various ways: (1) Man’s sin and judgment in hell. (2) God’s love sent Christ to die

on the cross. (3) The forgiveness of sins by faith in the cross. (4) Jesus comes into the hearts of saved Christians.

But it would be incomplete, and would do a disservice to people, to preach this concise message as if it were the gospel of Jesus Christ, presented in Romans 3–8, and preached by Paul in the book of Acts. This short message actually might contribute to getting people saved, but they will have to be left to the grace of God to lead them somewhere else to hear and understand the REST of the gospel message! WHAT IS THE REST OF THE GOSPEL? It is this:

1. **The Moral Law Makes Us Conscious of Sin.** The Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17), the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), and the moral commandments in the apostolic letters (for example, Colossians 3), all show us that we *are* sinners. They don't merely say that "all have sinned" in general terms, but explain specifically that "through *the law* we become conscious of sin" (Rom. 3:20, NIV), and that "sin is the transgression of *the law*" (1 John 3:4, KJV). We cannot separate the concept of sin from the concept of God's law; otherwise "sin" becomes whatever we want it to be, or whatever some preacher says.
2. **Faith in the Cross Only Atones for *Past* Sins.** Many are taught an "easy believism" understanding of faith in the cross of Christ—that if they will "only believe" that Jesus died on the cross for their sins, then they will receive *eternal life, forever and ever, unconditionally, no matter what*. This is tied to a predestinarian view of salvation. A "simple faith" in Jesus' blood will atone for all sins in your whole life: past sins, present sins, and future sins. But the Bible teaches no such concept. Rather it says that faith in Christ, whenever it is maintained, only applies to "the remission (forgiveness) of *sins that are past*" (Rom. 3:25, KJV). But which sins? All sins before you apply your faith again in Christ's blood on the cross—*however many times* this needs to be repeated throughout your life: thousands, hundreds, and

hopefully less than that if you grow holier over the course of your Christian life (growing in obedience to Jesus).

This means that being a Christian is not a matter of “only believing,” it is a matter of “*repenting* and believing” (Mark 1:15). Do you want eternal life? Then don’t live in sin, because “without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14b, NIV). LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE! AND BE HOLY! “He who stands firm to the end will be saved!” (Matt. 24:13, NIV). And when you sin after being tempted, confess your sins to God (1 John 1:9), repent from this freshly committed sin, put your faith in the cross once again, and continue to go and sin no more (John 8:11). “*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy*” (Heb. 12:14a, NIV).

3. **The Born Again Experience!** Yes, this is lacking in the “Romans Road to Salvation” as well. Now, it could be argued that when preachers make a plea for the unconverted to let Christ come into their hearts (Rev. 3:20), that this will effect a “born again” experience. But IT WILL NOT—unless, of course, it is explained just *what that means*. But in my personal experience, I have no memory of any preacher explaining just what it means to have “Jesus come into your heart.” And that is the problem. What does it mean? It means REGENERATION. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, comes into the heart to give a DESIRE FOR FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS in the Christian life.

God says: “I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts,” so that “the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met *in us*, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit” (Heb. 8:10; Rom. 8:4). What does it mean to be born of the Holy Spirit of God? To have the Lord Jesus Christ living in your heart? It means that *he who commanded that the moral law be obeyed by men, comes to live in the hearts of Christians, so that they may obey it easily*, and with much grace from within their hearts: “Lift up your heads, O you gates; be

lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of Glory may come in!” (Psa. 24:7).

4. **The Struggle Between Good and Evil.** The negative aspects of the Christian life are seemingly always ignored in Sunday morning sermons. Preach grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness; preach eternal life, heaven, and encouraging things like that. A lot of people *pressure* their pastors to preach sermons like that! But many of them NEED a good strong dose of MEDICINE from on high! The medicine for sin: HOLINESS. Christian holiness is not being preached in very many churches! It is a call to self-denial, being a living sacrifice unto God, renunciation of sinful pleasures, and a pursuit of all things moral, ethical, and pure in Scripture and daily life. And because holiness is not being preached by many preachers, and instead this “easy believism” gospel—this ABCs and 123s “Romans Road” gospel ... our churches are FILLED WITH FALSE CONVERTS.

Many think they’re saved, when in reality, because *they don’t live holy*, are so totally deceived that it is harder to get them saved than a drunk at the local bar! Jesus said: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32). Personally I believe Jesus was referring to the “righteous” in a *facetious* way in this verse—to those churchy types who think they’re “OK” just because they go through the motions. This is why the moral law of God must be preached—to *demonstrate* that many of these “righteous” church people are the most ungodly pretenders and law breakers on the face of the earth! And that they are not righteous—they are SINNERS! And, if they continue on the path of life they have chosen, these immoral, churchy, religious types (although they think themselves “righteous”) are headed for a SINNER’S HELL! Only by preaching the law of God can these religious folks see how far THEY ARE from the glory of God, and how drastically THEY must make U-TURNS to secure their eternal salvations. They don’t need to “turn to God”; they believe they’ve already done

that; they need to TURN TO GOD'S LAW, to "look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continue to do this, not forgetting what they have heard, but DOING IT!" (Jas. 1:25).

But this poses a problem, on a spiritual and psychological level. The apostle Paul explains: "*I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.* For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is *sin living in me* that does it. So I find this law at work: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For *in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members*" (Rom. 7:18–23). Here Paul presents the Christian's dilemma. In his HEART, the Holy Spirit gives him "the desire to do what is good," which means that he was born again when he wrote this text. But his BODY, or his FLESH, or his MEMBERS have "the law of sin at work within" them! So, what is he to do?! What a problem! To have the Holy Spirit of God igniting holiness and righteousness in his *heart*, a total love for God's law; but also to have a *body* full of sinful and perverted inclinations! What is he to do!?

HE IS A CHRISTIAN! This means HE MUST FIGHT AGAINST SIN for the rest of his life! He will have to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12); for "*the weapons we fight with* are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have *divine power* to demolish strongholds. We *demolish arguments* and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and *we take captive EVERY THOUGHT to make it OBEDIENT TO CHRIST*" (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Not only do we have the sinful ways of the world and the flesh to battle with, but also the Devil and his armies: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the

Devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood (physical opponents), but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil (demons) in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil (temptation) comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with *the Belt of Truth* buckled around your waist, with *the Breastplate of Righteousness* in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from *the Gospel of Peace*. In addition to all this, take up *the Shield of Faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take *the Helmet of Salvation* and *the Sword of the Spirit*, which is the Word of God. And *pray in the Spirit* on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Eph. 6:10–18). Let us live in this way, so that we, like Paul, can say this at the end of our lives: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7). "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). O, how we need God's help! How we need his presence, his Spirit! HELL! BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD, THERE GO I!...

*Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
Forward into battle see his banners go!*⁶

Antinomianism Is Not the Gospel!

There are those who may see the good in what I am saying, that we need to be as Christian soldiers in this world, and resist and fight against sin both inwardly and outwardly. But then there are those who are shaking their heads and just thinking: "John is a legalist, legalist, LEGALIST! What a self-righteous Pelagian

6. Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, "Onward, Christian Soldiers," 1865.

and Pharisee! He doesn't trust very much in God's grace. He worships morals, not Christ." These people, whom I would label Antinomians, I want to address biblically. The reason why Antinomians exist is because they have some fundamental misunderstandings about Bible verses that make reference to "the law" or God's commandments, especially ones in the New Testament or the letters of Paul.

If there ever were a heresy that could be placed at the top of worst heresies ever, this would be it! It is a total distortion of the Bible, and completely overthrows the holy law of God in a Christian's life! Because no one will see the Lord without holiness (Heb. 12:14), it follows that Antinomianism (which might as well be called anti-law, or anti-holiness) is a teaching that leads professing Christians to ETERNAL DAMNATION IN HELL (Matt. 7:21–23). For, at its core, the teaching seeks to "justify" (or excuse) sinners to continue in their sins, not merely so they can "be forgiven" of their sins, but so that they can CONTINUE IN SIN, without any consequences, except maybe a little bit of discipline from "Father God" who may give them a gentle "slap on the wrist." But certainly there is no HELL for the Antinomian to fear, because he is too distracted by the allurements of the world (especially sinful pleasures), and the worldly church; and with his defiled conscience, scoffing at old-time religion, the old paths, "Puritans," "fundamentalists," and "legalists" who insist on holiness and righteousness.

Romans 6:14: "Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."

The Antinomian sees: "The law reminds me of my sins, which brings me under guilt and condemnation. Now that I'm in Christ, I don't need that. I will not be mastered by the guilt of sin, because I'm 'not under law, but under grace.' I love the cross! It makes me know that I'm forgiven. Yeah, I'm a sinner too! The chief of sinners; and I go on sinning! But Christ has forgiven me. I believe in him. He died for my sins, and I am not under the law. I serve a God of grace and mercy, not a God of law and judgment. If I were to live my whole life trying to worry about

not committing certain sins, repenting, and confessing them to God continuously, then I would be a stressed out basket case; but I trust in God's grace, and understand that as long as I don't put myself under law, and condemnation, then 'sin shall not be my master' and I won't suffer from guilty feelings any more; I can move on with my life. I don't have to be religious. I trust in God's grace; and I can have fun too!"

The real Christian sees: "For the saved Christian, 'sin shall not be his master,' because his life is directed by faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ (justification, regeneration, and sanctification). He is not as the Old Testament Jews were, under the commandments of the moral law without the power to obey it from the heart. In those days, even the most religious Jews were mastered by sin, except for the holy prophets and spiritual ones, who experienced the Spirit of the Lord. The Christian is 'under grace'—that easy holiness found in the immediate faith-based forgiveness in the cross of Christ; and by the indwelling Holy Spirit of righteousness in his heart, so that now righteousness shall be his master, and not sin. The Christian has this advantage: his life is not under the direction of a written law only, but is under the empowerment of a supernatural grace of the Spirit, which inspired that law to be written in the ancient days of Moses."

Romans 7:4, 6: "My brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God... But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

The Antinomian sees: "My Christian brothers, you are dead to the law of God, the law of man, the rules and regulations everywhere in our society. Let nobody tell you what you can and can't do. Only Christ will judge you. We are the Body of Christ; his righteousness is imputed to our account, no matter how much we sin in our lives. Once the law bound us and made us pressed down with condemnation; but now we are free from that. We don't live like Old Testament Jews; we are Christians,

and we live by the Holy Spirit—what he tells our hearts is right and wrong. We don't even need the Bible as far as the 'written code' of laws and commandments are concerned; the Spirit is enough to instruct us on right and wrong."

The real Christian sees: "The Jewish way of life has 'died off' with the coming of Christ. And so, as a figure of speech, the Christian is like a wife who has been wed to Christ; whereas the Old Testament Jew was like a wife wed to the ceremonial law. But now God's way is the New Testament way; and he desires you to be 'married to Christ,' so to speak. The Spirit of Christ is alive, because he has been raised from the dead, and if he lives in you, then you will bear good fruit, or good works unto God: a life of 'righteousness leading to holiness' (Rom. 6:19). The new way of the Spirit is the law of God written inwardly on the heart (Heb. 8:10); and not just outwardly on the papers of the Bible, or the 'written code.'"

Romans 10:4: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

The Antinomian sees: "The Old Testament was all about law and works; and no one could attain to righteousness, because all our works are like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). But Christ came so we could be set free from that legalistic and condemning way of life. He who puts his faith in Christ realizes there is no law of God binding on the Christian life. It has been done away with! For 'everyone who believes,' Christ's righteousness and his sinless life are imputed to their account book on the day of judgment. When God sees Christians, he sees his only begotten Son Jesus. He doesn't see their sins; he sees Christ's righteousness that has been imputed to them, which they wear like a cloak."

The real Christian sees: "The ceremonies, rituals, and animal sacrifices of the Old Testament law are ended by the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Through faith in the cross, the Christian is free from sin-guilt, and his conscience is cleared to pursue a life of righteousness before God. This gospel is available to 'everyone who believes' in the cross of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins by it."

2 Corinthians 3:6–17: “He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

The Antinomian sees: “‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’ (v. 6) means that the Christian life is not about ‘dos and don’ts’ as being a Jew was during the Old Testament days. That is death, man; that kills your life! You won’t have any fun, or even go to the movies, or the beach. For a Christian, ‘the Spirit gives life,’ not the law, not the Ten Commandments. It’s all about the Spirit now: speaking in tongues, worship, feeling God’s presence, and peace, and getting high on the Most High! Woo! It’s not about the law, it’s about the Spirit! The law was Old Testament; the Spirit is New Testament! Being a Christian isn’t about obeying the law or keeping God’s commandments! No way! That would only bring you under guilt and condemnation for your whole life! (Not to mention, life would be pretty boring—you can’t do this, you can’t do that.) But no, being a Christian is all about, and only about, experiencing the Holy Spirit, and his gifts, because ‘where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (v. 17)—freedom from

the guilt and condemnation that comes from trying to live by God's law, and trying to be perfect."

The real Christian sees: "The old covenant was glorious, the Ten Commandments being marked by the supernatural light and power of God through the prophet Moses. But the new covenant is even more glorious than that, because the moral law becomes 'written' on the Christian's heart by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 8:10; Rom. 5:5; 8:4). In the Old Testament, the moral law was only written by God on the tables of stone, but in the New Testament it is written by God on the Christian's heart! 'How much more glorious!' Truly, truly, 'the Spirit gives life!' This is 'THE MINISTRY THAT BRINGS RIGHTEOUSNESS!' Oh Lord! To have your Spirit burning holiness into our hearts! 'Since we have such a hope, we are very bold'—to face God now, and on judgment day, because of our faith in the cross, and his righteousness imputed and imparted to us. We have 'turned to the Lord,' so 'the veil is taken away' from our hearts; we can understand the intent and use of the holy law of God. It is not only to make us conscious of sin (Rom. 3:20),⁷ but through the 'ministry of the Spirit,' the law becomes our guide for holy living (Jas. 1:25).⁸ All of this is in light of the grace given us through the cross; we are not perfect, but God forgiving us, we are going on to perfection (Heb. 6:1), not that we have already attained it (Phil. 3:12); and so, 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' from the power of guilt, sin, and temptation."

Galatians 3:1–5: "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does

7. The first use of the law.

8. The second and third uses of the law.

God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?"

The Antinomian sees: "I agree with the apostle Paul. There are so many religious legalists in the churches these days. These are people like the Arminians who think they are so righteous, or like those fundamentalists who are so strict and legalistic. They are such 'foolish Galatians'! They don't trust in the cross of Christ. And they have forgotten that they didn't receive the Holy Spirit by keeping the law at all—just by believing in Christ (justification by faith alone). What's more, is that they don't have miraculous gifts, or move in the charismatic power of God, because the Holy Spirit doesn't work through the law; he works miracles by faith."

The real Christian sees: "The apostle Paul was rightly angry as he rebuked his Christian friends: 'You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?' That is, there were some preachers from the circumcision cult (the Judaizers), which were teaching Christians that unless they lived according to the ceremonial law, they could not be saved from hell, and the outward sign of their submission to that ceremonial law was circumcision (Acts 15:1). These Galatian Christians had fallen into this Judaizer heresy, and stopped trusting in the atonement of Christ's cross, and had gotten themselves into a state where they thought they could earn God's forgiveness by keeping the ceremonial law like Sabbath days, kosher foods, circumcisions, etc. The Holy Spirit works miracles to attest to the power of the cross and the atonement—not because Christians observe the law perfectly, or because the ceremonial law is necessary for salvation. Although Christians are commanded to keep the moral law in their lives (Rom. 8:4) after placing their faith in the atonement, ultimately no amount of commandment-keeping will ever justify a Christian; it is too imperfect to justify. The only thing that justifies is faith in the cross of Christ; however, the immediate result of faith in the cross is keeping the moral law in the Christian life (sanctification)."

Galatians 3:23–25: “Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

The Antinomian sees: “Before the Christian faith came, we humans were held prisoners by the law of God. We were in bondage, unable to do anything right, completely unable to escape from the guilt and condemnation of being law breakers and sinners before a holy God. But the law of Moses was given to make us conscious of our sin guilt (Rom. 3:20) in order to lead us to a simple faith in the cross of Christ. Now that this simple faith has come, without any pretensions to ‘holiness’ or works of the law, we can be ‘justified by faith’ in the cross, and make our peace with God. We are ‘no longer under the supervision of the law,’ because the ‘ministry of condemnation’ has ended. Now it’s time for faith alone in the cross! My sins are forgiven by this faith! No matter what! In fact, I trust God’s grace so much... let’s go to the bar and get wasted!”

The real Christian sees: “Before the Christian faith in the atonement of the cross of Christ came, the Jews were held prisoners to the ceremonial law, with its nearly impossible-to-keep commandments and rituals. But what was good about the ceremonial law, especially the Old Testament rituals about animal sacrifice and atonement, is that they prophetically symbolized the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who was slaughtered as the Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world. Now that faith in the cross of Christ has come as the means of our atonement, we are no longer, as Jews or Christians, under the supervision of the ceremonial law with its hundreds of rituals. The purpose of all those rituals was to point us to the atonement. But now there is no need for Old Testament sacrifices to be performed. Christ died for sins once for all (1 Pet. 3:18).”

Ephesians 2:15: “By abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations, his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace.”

The Antinomian sees: “It used to be that the Jews and the Gentiles were opposed to one another, because the law of Moses made the Jews anti-Gentile in their outlook. It only produced a kind of racism against Gentiles. God knew that there was a better way, so his purpose was to bring Christ into the picture, by faith alone in the cross, ‘abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations,’ destroying its hold on mankind forever. The dividing wall between Jew and Gentile were destroyed, as the law too was destroyed—by faith alone in the cross of Christ. He who has faith alone, without any works of the law, whether he is a Jew or Gentile, are one mankind, one people, in Christ Jesus. The law divides, but faith in the cross unifies... even Jews and Gentiles!”

The real Christian sees: “By the death of Christ on the cross, in his flesh he only abolished the ceremonial law, with its particularly Jewish commandments and regulations. These particular Jewish observances set the Israelites apart from all other nations, as a chosen people. As can be seen from the history of Israel, there was an animosity that developed between Jews and Gentiles, because of the strictness of their religion; and especially how they had kept to themselves, and did not allow marriage with non-Hebrews. But God’s eternal purpose was not to have the Jews as his chosen people; rather, it has been to form the body of Christ, a holy people, gathered from all over the earth, both of Jews and Gentiles. By faith in the atoning cross of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles can make peace with each other as Christians. The Jewish ceremonial law, and only this law, is what Christ abolished in his flesh on the cross—all of its Jewish ‘commandments and regulations’—but not the commandments which are called moral (Rom. 8:4).”⁹

Colossians 2:13–14: “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive

9. Article VII: “*No Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral*” (“Of the Old Testament” in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England).

with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”

The Antinomian sees: “He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations’ means that the Christian’s sins are all forgiven, and what’s more... God has completely canceled out any need for God’s laws, rules, and regulations. They were only to accuse us, and to make us feel guilty before God. But now that they have been ‘nailed’ to the cross so to speak, all we need to do is put our faith in the cross. There is no need for ‘dos and don’ts,’ for the written code of God’s law with its regulations. All we need is the cross, and God’s forgiveness by faith. This is the gospel, says the Antinomian... no more rules! Only forgiveness! ‘O! What freedom in Christ! It’s party time! Take me to the next kegger... I can’t wait to share freedom in Christ with my college buddies!”

The real Christian sees: “Before a man is saved and becomes a Christian, he is dead in sin, in bondage to the flesh and original sin. But when he becomes saved by faith in the cross of Christ, he is made ‘alive with Christ’! Both the ceremonial and moral law stood against him for his condemnation to hell. But by faith in the atonement, the guilt is removed! And now, as a Christian, he becomes alive in righteousness as Christ was; he becomes holy like Christ, by the power of the Spirit of Christ enlivening his heart! This is salvation! Not only has he forgiven us of all our sins, but by faith in the cross he canceled out the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. Christians are not bound by conscience to keep any rules about circumcisions, kosher foods, Sabbath days, etc. (Col. 2:16–17). Those things made it hard to be in right standing with God, but ‘he took it away, nailing it to the cross’ and this is certainly Good News! But now that we are ‘alive with Christ,’ as Christians we joyfully keep the moral law from the heart.”

Doing Good Works in the Christian Life

James wrote: “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (Jas. 2:14–17). In the KJV, the more well-known expression in 2:26 is: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” And in 2:24 he gives a death blow to antinomianism, solifidianism, cheap grace, and easy-believism: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone!” (After he has been saved by faith in the cross, born again of the Spirit, and lives out the Christian life.)

BELIEVING IS NOT ENOUGH TO GET YOU TO HEAVEN! “Even the demons believe!” (Jas. 2:19). But what about Ephesians 2:8–9?: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (NKJV). Doesn’t this contradict? No, not at all—because Ephesians 2:8–9 is making reference to that stage in the Christian’s life when he was freshly converted to Christianity, and had done nothing but live in sin up until that point. On the other hand, James 2:24 is making reference to people who have been living the Christian life for some time, and should be proving their faith in the cross by resisting temptation, trying to do good works for Christ, by keeping the moral law of God and Christ’s commandments in their lives. This, however, brings glory to God, and not to the Christian, because it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that he can be good (even partially good). Adam Clarke says, “God gives the power, man uses the power thus given, and brings glory to God: without the power no man can believe; with it, any man may.”¹⁰ GLORY TO GOD!

The difference between a demon and a Christian is this: the

10. Adam Clarke, “Commentary on Ephesians 2:8” in *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, 1832.

demon does not obey God's commandments, but the Christian does obey, or at least tries to, by the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Both the demon and the Christian believe in God's existence, but the demon is continually wicked and the Christian is becoming holy. Remember, "even the demons believe—and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19, NKJV)—because they know their judgment is coming! "Eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

But what about the thief on the cross? He did no good works; faith alone in the cross seemed to have saved him (Luke 23:40–43). On the contrary! At first, he was merely executed for stealing something; but as he looked on his cross, and Christ's cross, he openly and publicly confessed faith in Christ to the crowd, DYING A MARTYR'S DEATH! There is no greater work in all the Bible than this! That thief died on the cross, with a "deathbed repentance," and was converted to a martyr that day! And he proved his inward faith in Christ by the good work of outward confession to the crowd that he believed in Jesus! That is a good work! So, even the thief on the cross was inwardly saved by faith alone, but outwardly proved it by good works. No, he did not have much time left in his life, nor any more opportunities to fill up his life with good works, to store up for himself treasures in heaven, but still, Christ said to him: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

So, good works naturally (or should I say supernaturally) give evidence to an inward work of salvation by faith in the cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit lives on the inside of every Christian, whether new in Christ or old in Christ, and progressively, gradually, grows them over time in the performance of righteous acts and good works. There is a process of going on to perfection in God's law (Heb. 6:1). These works are not defined by church traditions or societal customs, but by the commandments of God and Christ in the Bible. Their ultimate purpose is to bring glory to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the love of God for all mankind, and bear witness to the reality of the Holy Spirit, the reality of the Bible, and salvation from sin and hell. Clarke said, "God gives

the power, man uses the power thus given, and brings glory to God.”

This is the reality of the Christian life; Christ didn't die on the cross so we could be carnal, sinful, namby-pamby Christians, who never put forth any EFFORT for holiness and righteousness! On the contrary, we are expected to live in “holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life!” (Luke 1:75, NKJV). Not to be morally lax, watching any and every movie without ethical judgment, or listen to sinful cussing or sexually charged music, or read romance novels which produce thoughts no different than porno magazines! Our inward thoughts and outward works must be given wholly over to God for the glory of the gospel! We are to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). CHRISTIAN LIFE IS SPIRITUAL WAR—ESPECIALLY IN THE MIND, AND THE THOUGHTS!

But if our thoughts are holy, then that is a sign we are on the right path of life; it means we are walking on the straight and narrow path to heaven with Christ; we are yielding to the Holy Spirit's influence and to the moral law of Scripture. And these holy thoughts, if they continue, will become holy feelings, and ignite a fire, and fear of God (and hell), and love of God (and heaven), and love for mankind—to zealously, passionately, and urgently DO GOOD WORKS to the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the demonstration of God's love, and for the evangelistic purpose of securing the repentance and faith of people in Christ, and the salvation of their souls from eternal damnation in hell!

Can you hear the wicked, unsaved, and lost of this world crying out in their thoughts to the Christians? “So, you believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven? And that God loves me so much that Christ died for my sins, and that if I repent (turn) from my evil ways and live for God, then I won't go to hell? ... Do you know how crazy that sounds? Man, why don't you Christians just let me live my life, and you live by your crazy religion! I bet you Christians don't even believe in the Bible... because if you did, then you would DO WHAT IT SAYS!” Ouch!

This is the inward cry of many non-Christians: "There are too many hypocrites who don't live by the Bible; and this must prove that the Holy Spirit does not exist... and that God does not exist." **CHURCH! DON'T YOU SEE?** The way you live your life is a demonstration of the reality or unreality of God to non-Christians.

"Nobody is perfect," "we all make mistakes," "we're only human," and fall into sin—but unless Christians are careful, and conscientiously trying to make an honest attempt and a sincere effort to pursue righteousness, holiness, and godliness, the devil exploits, scandalizes, and publicizes these weak and carnal Christians, and inspires even more evil thoughts in the unbelievers, so they can say, "HA! I KNEW CHRISTIANITY IS FALSE! CHRISTIANS DON'T LIVE RIGHT, AND THAT PROVES IT! Now I can dismiss the Bible and go live my life pursuing sinful pleasures and not worry about going to hell for my sins... because there is no God, hell, or even sin... Sin is make-believe. The Bible is full of fairy tales, etc., etc." You Christian—do you have **SINFUL PLEASURES** you enjoy? If so, then why do you think you're saved? The only answer is this: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7). **SINFUL PLEASURE IS SATAN'S BAIT INTO HELL. RESIST IT! PROVE YOUR FAITH IN THE CROSS BY RESISTING SIN AND DOING GOOD WORKS!**

So, what are "good works"? This is a crucial question for anyone that seeks to be saved from eternal death, judgment, and hell; an important question for any Christian sincerely concerned for his own salvation and the salvation of other people. The Church of England said:

Good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known

as a tree discerned by the fruit.¹¹

From this orthodox statement on good works in the Bible and the Christian life, we can understand the following:

1. **Good works are the fruits of faith in the cross.** When we come to believe that the death of Christ provides satisfaction of the wrath of God for the sins of our past, then we respond to that faith by repenting from our evil ways, and pursuing a life of holiness and righteousness.
2. **Good works cannot put away our sins.** We must understand that it is only by *our faith in the cross* that good works in our life either stand or fall. Faith in the cross is the foundation of all good works, because it is *only faith* in the cross that satisfies the wrath and judgment of God, and clears our conscience from guilt and condemnation.
3. **Good works cannot endure the severity of God's judgment.** That is, by themselves they are not enough to save us from hell after death or from the lake of fire on the day of judgment. In the end, our faith in the cross, and the blood sacrifice of Christ, will be all that counts under the righteous, scrutinizing judgment of God. This is because all good works that we do in the Christian life are never performed as *perfectly* as God wants us to perform them. At best, all our good works that we perform as saved Christians are *imperfect* applications of the commandments of God. Still, only faith in the blood of Christ can save us after death and the day of judgment. But this does not mean our (*imperfect*) *good works* will not be rewarded; they certainly will, so much that Christ will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:23).
4. **Good works spring out necessarily from true faith in the cross.** Like in the first observation, good works are the fruit or evidence of saving faith in the cross of Christ. Because the Christian knows in his heart his sins are forgiven by

11. Article XII: "Of Good Works" in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

faith, his conscience being cleansed, and the godly fear of backsliding is a present reality to him—out of reverence and love for God—he knows that it is NECESSARY, or absolutely MANDATORY, that he does good works, to *prove* to God, himself, and others that the gospel of Jesus Christ has changed his life, transformed his soul, and that God loves all men everywhere, and is willing that all should repent and believe, and that none should perish in hell. *If there are no good works in a Christian's life, then it means that person is not truly saved by an active living faith!*

Easy Believism Refuted by Ephesians 2:8–10

Let's reflect on Ephesians 2:8–9 again. This passage is misquoted by easy believism advocates and carnal Christians everywhere: "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Many of the so-called Christians who take to "easy believism," and who believe and live like devils, take this passage of Scripture out of its context, and twist it to their own destruction! (2 Pet. 3:16). They say that all a Christian is ever to do is believe that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. Christians don't have to repent of sins ever again, confess sins again, or resist temptations in their lives! It's an easy life! A believing life! It's easy to go to heaven, they say: all you have to do is believe! THAT IS A DEVIL'S LIE FROM HELL! Remember what Jesus' brother wrote: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (Jas. 2:19). It may also be put: "You believe Jesus died for your sins. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder." It's not good enough to take it EASY and only BELIEVE. You must also REPENT from your LIFE OF SIN, or you will all likewise perish in hell! (Luke 13:3). Repenting proves you have saving faith; it's a continuing process of resisting sin.

The truth about Ephesians 2:8–9 is found in its context; and confusion over good works is removed when 2:10 is included in

the reading of the text: “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:8–10). DO YOU SEE THIS? What the apostle Paul is saying? He is saying this: when we were lost sinners, without God in the world, and totally lost in our sins, God came into our lives by the grace of the Holy Spirit, to bring us to the cross by faith. When we were in our sins, and lost in the ways of the world, in those days we did no good works that were pleasing to God; if we think we ever had done good works, such as “worthy causes” or “humanitarian” deeds, they still had “the nature of sin,”¹² because we had not yet received the grace of the Spirit to have faith in the cross in those times.

But after we came to believe in Christ, by faith alone, and certainly not by works that we had done before in those days of evil, God has since then made us to be his “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to DO GOOD WORKS!” (Eph. 2:10). So, really the confusion of the text is solved. “Not by works” in Ephesians 2:9 is NOT A DENIAL OF GOOD WORKS ever to be performed throughout the Christian life! Absurd! Rather, it is merely saying that BEFORE YOU BECAME A CHRISTIAN, there were no works, no deeds, no good things that you did that earned God’s favor, to move him or persuade him to bring about the circumstances in your life that would inspire you to repent and believe in the death of Christ. The whole situation that led you to repent and believe in the gospel was arranged by God’s sovereign grace and love and his sheer mercy to save you from hell.¹³ BEFORE you came to believe in

12. “Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but *they have the nature of sin*” (Article XIII: “Of Works before Justification” in The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England).

13. In Reformed theology, this is the “effectual calling”; in Arminian theology:

the cross, and had your sins forgiven, all your righteous acts were like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). And that is the proper view of that text too! It is not a denial of righteous acts AFTER YOU BECOME A CHRISTIAN!¹⁴ On the contrary: “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to DO GOOD WORKS, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

Good Works Defined by God’s Commandments

Up until this point, I have been preparing you for good works; but now I will explain just what the Bible says good works are, and what you are obligated by God to do in your life as a saved Christian. There is no way around it: the New Testament makes it very clear that there are many good things that Christians are supposed to do in their lives, to show the world that we are disciples of Christ. The Church of England said:

Voluntary works besides, over and above, God’s commandments, which they call Works of Supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety: for by them men do declare,

“prevenient grace.”

14. Adam Clarke, John Wesley, and James Burton Coffman agree, and point to the prior verse for context: God, “*You meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, who remembers you in your ways. You are indeed angry, for we have sinned—in these ways we continue; and we need to be saved*” (Isaiah 64:5, NKJV). The first group of people are called those “who rejoice and do righteousness” (the godly); but the second group of people, whom Isaiah presently counted himself with, were the rebellious Jews whom had sinned against the Lord (the ungodly), and were going to be judged and exiled to Babylon. Then he caps it off, explaining the second, ungodly rebellious group of Jews: “*all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away*” (Isaiah 64:6). Sweep us away from Israel to Babylon, is what the prophet meant. THIS PASSAGE DOES NOT MEAN THE GOOD WORKS THAT SAVED CHRISTIANS DO, ARE WORTH NOTHING BUT FILTHY RAGS! What about preaching the gospel? Is that work a filthy rag? In no way! It is a white robe of righteousness to God in Christ Jesus (Rev. 6:11). By God’s mercy in Christ alone, saved Christians can be counted with the first godly group who are not judged: *those “who rejoice and do righteousness”* (Isa. 64:5).

that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake, than of bounden duty is required: whereas Christ saith plainly, ‘when ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, ‘we are unprofitable servants.’¹⁵

This quote is to prove that all good works a Christian may perform are only to give evidence to the inward faith that Christ’s death has atoned for and provided forgiveness for his sins. Even the most saintly Christians are unprofitable to God—mere beggars to be used for his glory; and there are no additional good works that Christians can do other than what are in the commandments of the Bible. The good works they do must be defined not only by Scripture, but specifically by God’s commandments, especially the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). J. I. Packer says:

God’s moral law is abundantly set forth in Scripture, the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), other Mosaic statutes, sermons by the prophets, the teaching of Jesus, and the New Testament letters. It reflects his holy character and his purposes for created human beings. God commands the behavior that he loves to see and forbids that which offends him. Jesus summarizes the moral law in the two great commandments, love your God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37–40).¹⁶

So, it goes without saying that in general, Christians are to keep Paul’s charge: “My dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). In this text the Christians at Philippi are charged to OBEY God’s commandments (the moral law, not the ceremonial), and this is likened to WORK. In fact, the Christian life is a life of faith-based obedience to all the moral commandments of God, in fear and trembling before the judge of all the earth! In fear

15. Article XIV: “Of Works of Supererogation,” in *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England*.

16. J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), pp. 91–92.

and trembling of falling... into unbelief, into temptation, into sin, into hell! The Christians are charged to OBEY GOD and WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING before him! This is the meaning of life! This is the only way to heaven! "Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, KJV). Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, said:

Quoting St. Augustine: "He is called an enemy of God who does not obey his law."¹⁷

In the righteous who love the law, the law does not work concupiscence.¹⁸

We are delivered from the law in the sense that by faith in Christ we obey the law, and by grace freely and willingly do what the law demands of us.¹⁹

The law is established and confirmed when its demands or injunctions are heeded. In this sense the Apostle says: "We establish the law"; that is: we say that it is obeyed and fulfilled through faith... the law is established in us when we fulfill it willingly and truly. But this no one can do without faith.²⁰

So, to give a simple answer to the question: what are good works? The answer: obeying the moral commandments of God in the Christian life. However, this is always an imperfect obedience to God at best, and is certainly not good enough to stand alone without the blood of Christ. Without faith-based living in the blood and forgiveness of the cross, there can be no good works, no obedience to God, even in part. But do you love God, do you love Christ for what he did for you? If so, then what will you do for him? Will you live for him all your days? "This

17. Martin Luther, "Commentary on Romans 8:9" in *Commentary on Romans*. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 120.

18. *Ibid.*, "Commentary on Romans 7:7-8," p. 111.

19. *Ibid.*, "Commentary on Romans 7:6," p. 109.

20. *Ibid.*, "Commentary on Romans 3:31," p. 80.

is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3, NKJV). NOT BURDENSOME COMMANDMENTS! Why? Because now you love God from your heart, and you love his rules too: “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day!” (Ps. 119:97, NKJV).

To make things plain, the early Methodists had arranged twelve biblical good works from God’s law, and applied them for growth in Christian discipleship:²¹

The Six Works of Piety: Growing in the Grace and Knowledge of Christ

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18).

1. **Public Prayer.** When Christians pray together with other Christians at church in a *prayer meeting*, in fellowship, or anywhere else. God has promised to only hear the prayers of the righteous, or those who have a humble and repentant heart: “The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:13–14).
2. **Family Prayer.** There is no place in the Bible that directly commands parents to pray with their children, but it is as obvious to the circumstances of life, that this is needed just as much as talking with them. Parents should talk with their children about important subjects; and if they are Christian, should certainly *pray with their children* too. This may be included in the general instruction for household devotional life: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of

21. Kenneth Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), pp. 162–163.

the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Usually Christian families are accustomed to pray in Jesus’ name before eating dinner together. But should there not also be praise and worship in the home?

3. **Private Prayer.** When a Christian seeks God’s face alone in solitude, he is able to speak freely before God, without any worry as to what people may think or misinterpret. Secret sins can be confessed and repented of, and secret prayers of *petition, intercession, and contemplation* can be performed, which would be wholly inappropriate to pray in the presence of man. It is in this practice more than any other, that *God’s voice* can be heard in the quiet, and *visions* seen in the mind! It is sometimes helpful to journal such revelations; for it may be that God has a word of instruction, or a prophecy of the future to give by the Holy Spirit! But *the moral law* of Scripture must be the rule for *discerning* between Satan and God (Isa. 8:20; 1 John 4:1). The man with a disciplined private prayer life can at times receive marvelous visions: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me!” (Acts 10:30).
4. **The Lord’s Supper.** In a church service or a gathering of believers, we use bread and wine (or grape juice) to remember the body and blood of Jesus that was sacrificed on the cross for our sins. It is “proclaiming the Lord’s death” (1 Cor. 11:26), the central truth of the gospel of our salvation. By our consumption of the communion elements, we not only *remember* the atonement for the forgiveness of our sins, that God’s wrath may be satisfied by our faith. But we also *partake* of the anointing of Christ by faith; we “eat his flesh and drink his blood” so to speak (John 6:53), and we reach out for the presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit. We not only *remember* the atonement of Christ, we *ingest* the atonement of Christ, so that we realize it is inside of us! This ingestion is not a literal consumption of Christ’s flesh and blood; it is symbolic of *the Holy Spirit’s presence revealing*

the atonement to us. Jesus said of this practice, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). The apostle Paul also gave a warning to Christians to examine their hearts in repentance before taking the Lord’s Supper; but those who don’t, and eat of it carelessly, God will judge them with weakness, sickness, or death! (1 Cor. 11:26–31).

5. **Bible Study.** There are several approaches to this, but the most common Evangelical approach is viewing Scripture through a process of *revelation, interpretation, and application*.

- (1) **Revelation** is the faith-based reading of a passage of the Bible, perhaps a chapter, or ten verses together under a subject title. As you read the passage in faith, you take it as revealed from the Holy Spirit, from the other world to ours, as the inspired writings of prophets and apostles: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). You may pray for Christ to speak to you through the Bible before you open it.
- (2) **Interpretation** is the intellectual and intuitive process of understanding the passage of Scripture that you just read. When interpreting a passage of the Bible, it is important not to take one Bible verse out of its original context. If an interpretation and application is to be made, make sure that a particular verse makes sense in light of the verses before and after it. Especially if the Bible verse looks like a commandment, see if there are other verses in the Bible that speak on that subject; you can do this through cross-references in the middle of the pages of study Bibles, such as *The NIV Study Bible*. Also, commentary notes at the bottom of the pages written by Bible scholars can help. It is important, in your interpretation of the Bible, that it lines up with

what other scholars and theologians in traditional or *conservative Christianity*, have said or taught about the subject. By this I mean Reformed, Puritan, Wesleyan, or evangelical. Any interpretation that can be called “liberal,” “heretical,” or “heterodox” should be rejected. Although conservative Christianity continues to be divided over things like Calvinism, Arminianism, and miraculous gifts—on issues about the essentials of salvation (justification, sanctification, etc.), and other subjects, they are in general agreement, and can be counted on to speak as one body of Christ.

- (3) **Application** is personalizing a passage of Scripture that you have interpreted. It’s when you *apply the Bible to your life*. Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit does “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16) in us. The Scripture becomes the Word of God and the law of God in our lives. Jesus prayed to the Father, “Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth” (John 17:17). It is through understanding biblical teaching, accepting biblical rebukes, and yielding to biblical corrections, that Christians are enabled to be *trained in righteousness*, and grow in holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their hearts (Rom. 5:5).
6. **Fasting.** To abstain from food for a number of days, usually no more than three in a row; but water should still be drunk to hydrate the body. Although the physical practices, techniques, and disciplines of fasting vary among Christians, at the central core of the issue is this: fasting from food is a prophetic discipline that increases faith, spiritual sensitivity to God’s Spirit, angels, demons, the spirit world, etc.

It is a *prophetic aide to prayer*; to bring an especially supernatural dimension to your praying. As with all prayer, during times of fasting, the Christian’s mind should be looking unto Jesus in contemplation (Heb. 12:2). But the

more fasting is practiced as a help to prayer, the more you may see *supernatural effects*, such as revelations through dreams, visions, and the voice of God (for personal guidance);²² deeper insights into the Bible; direct answers to prayer (intercessions or petitions); and even *miraculous faith* to pray for physical healing (Jas. 5:14–15); or the awareness of evil spirits,²³ and the faith to command them in Jesus' name (or cast them out of people or places!)²⁴

It remains a mystery of God why fasting is necessary for these supernatural effects (miracles) to come about in prayer. But there is evidence of it in the Bible and church history among the saints; and some Christians today claim to experience such things. Because *the body (or the flesh)* has a sinful, carnal, and earthly principle in it (Rom. 7:23–24), perhaps *fasting is needed to subdue its tempting powers*—to weaken it, deaden it, and put it to sleep—so that the spirit may be strengthened, enlivened, and awakened. Also, by denying the body of its carnal pleasures for a time, the sex drive is also said to be weakened in its sinful temptations, and through self-denial, the pride in the soul is said to be humbled with fasting (Psa. 35:13, KJV). The Desert Fathers maintained that fasting and prayer was the means of removing eight principal sins from their hearts: gluttony,

22. “Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. *He saw heaven opened...*” (Acts 10:9–11); “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said...*” (Acts 13:2).

23. “To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another *discerning of spirits*” (1 Cor. 12:10, KJV); “After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. *The tempter came to him and said...*” (Matt. 4:2–3); “His disciples asked him privately, ‘why could we not *cast it out?*’ So he said to them, ‘this kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting’” (Mark 9:28–29, NKJV).

24. Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. 3rd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 55–56. See also Arthur Wallis’ *God’s Chosen Fast* and Derek Prince’s *How to Fast Successfully*. These books are filled with prophetic, spiritual, supernatural, as well as natural, medical, and practical advice on fasting.

fornication, greed, anger, depression, apathy, bragging, and pride.²⁵

The Six Works of Mercy: Reaching Out to Mankind with Christ's Love

“The King will say to those on his right, ‘come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me’” (Matt. 25:34–36, 40).

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15, NKJV).

1. **Feeding the Hungry.** Because of the sin of mankind and of God's plan for salvation, and his means of disciplining people so they may focus the eyes of their souls on Christ, God has put into effect certain mechanisms of pain, suffering, trial, and tribulation in this world to test man upon the earth. Poverty, homelessness, and hunger is one form of tribulation. Christ said, “*The poor you will always have with you*” (Matt. 26:11). They are here for a reason; and no amount of communism or socialism can end it. What Christ said will last forever. The poor are here, under the will of God, to teach us lessons. One of these lessons is the plain lesson of *faith-based charity and love*, to teach us something of *the grace of God* to us—WE who are really nothing more than “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17) ourselves, till God by his gracious Spirit draws us to Jesus! (John 6:44).

Christ, as the judge, rewards the righteous for their good works: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,

25. John Cassian, *The Institutes*, Book 5.1.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink” (Matt. 25:35). But note, spiritual discernment is in order; he says it is for those hungry and thirsty ones who are “the least of these *brothers* of mine” (Matt. 25:40). Is this to mean we should not feed unconverted beggars? No, because Christ fed the 5,000 miraculously with the loaves and fish, but shortly after rebuked them for their unbelief: “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and *still you do not believe*” (John 6:35–36). But perhaps some will believe if we show them God’s love by giving them food and preaching the gospel to them (i.e., repenting from a sinful way of life; God’s wrath at sin is satisfied by faith alone in the cross, the forgiveness of sins, and the supernatural desire to live a holy life—which is being born again). Yet the point is this: we are to give food and drink to every beggar, to every poor man, the Holy Spirit leads us to give to—but “the least of these brothers of mine” take priority over non-Christian beggars (Matt. 25:40).

2. **Clothing the Naked.** There may be times when you meet a poor beggar or a person who has been left for dead (robbed, stripped, and beaten), like the man whom the good Samaritan took care of (Luke 10:30). Or there may be other circumstances where you find a person who is so sick, weak, and destitute that they cannot think right, or are too weary to move, and they have on clothes, but not enough, especially with the cold wind and weather you find them in. Such a person is no threat to your health; it is time for you to choose: *will you be the good Samaritan too?* Ask the Holy Spirit how to get this person properly clothed, and restored to health; and especially if you discern this person may be a believer in Christ: “I needed clothes and you clothed me” (Matt. 25:36).
3. **Entertaining Strangers.** This especially applies to Christian brothers and sisters who may be going through a hard

time—"the least of these brothers of mine" (Matt. 25:40). Sometimes Christians are just "down on their luck" so to speak; God has arranged the circumstances to be so. Family and friends don't understand them; but an open door has been placed for Job to enter into the home of the hospitable Christian, the House Beautiful! How many times were Christ and the apostles entertained as guests in the houses of strangers! How many times the apostle Paul! And how good it is to see the *supernatural provision of God* in the hands of people you had never before seen, yet feel as if you've known them all your life! This is the eternal life that Jesus promised.

But what of strangers from the street? What about strangers without a personal recommendation from a mutually respected friend? What about *strange* strangers? Well, certainly Christ doesn't expect you to welcome someone evil or harmful into your house. But the Scripture says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained *angels* unawares" (Heb. 13:2, KJV). This is referring to the time when Abraham entertained the Lord and his two angels as guests, before they destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1–22). Don't be a sucker; don't be a pushover; don't be gullible! Go by your gut; ask the Holy Spirit; and look for good fruit. If you feel like a stranger is *worth* entertaining, then entertain him! Don't do anything Abraham wouldn't do. Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these *brothers* of mine, you did for *me*" (Matt. 25:40). Remember that! The entertaining of strangers ought to be geared toward the body of Christ in times of need! Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you invited *me* in" (Matt. 25:35). Don't invite the Devil in your house!

4. **Visiting Prisoners.** There are many criminals in prison who know they have done wrong, others who feel they are innocent, and others who don't care but need to be awakened. Prison ministry is especially needed these days! If

only there were more gutsy preachers willing to declare the whole counsel of God, preach the law and gospel to these men, and call them to repent and believe in Christ before it's too late... and they go to hell! While there is always the "jailhouse religion" of false converts who profess to be morally reformed, if the true gospel is preached, true reformation of morals could come about, and preachers could be made out of those convicts! What an opportunity to preach the moral law and judgment day to men who have been humbled of their sins and crimes by civil law. Such men are ready and fit to hear the preaching of Romans 3–8 on justification and sanctification, and that by faith in the cross of Christ there is forgiveness of sins, and a new life of righteousness ahead of them. Then there are those who are born again Christians, and may be in prison for other reasons. Jesus said, "I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matt. 25:36).

5. **Visiting the Sick.** Hospitals, hospices, and nursing homes are great places to seek ministry for the sick. There are independent ministry groups who do this regularly; and some churches have outreaches for this. Within reason, go to visit the sick, as long as you're healthy, and immunized, and so are not endangering your immune system. What a perfect place to practice divine healing: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven" (Jas. 5:14–15, NLT). Jesus said, "*I was sick and you looked after me*" (Matt. 25:36), which implies that there are times when visiting the sick makes it also necessary to look after them: to visit them regularly, to counsel them, to medicate them, to bandage them, and to help them in any way possible to do things they need done, but which are unable to do themselves on account of their sickness.

6. **Preaching the Gospel.** It may be argued that obeying the Great Commission is the greatest good work a Christian can do: to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15, NKJV). Generally those who have fulfilled this good work the most effectively have been called *evangelists* or missionaries. Other words such as preacher, revivalist, and exhorter have been used. The great lights of gospel preaching history have been Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, and others. The Puritans of the 1600s and the Methodists of the 1700s have stood out as the greatest gospel preachers in history since the apostle Paul. Although the Puritans (Calvinists) and Methodists (Arminians) differed on fine points of theology, they generally agreed on *the basics of salvation: repentance from a sinful life, faith alone in the cross to satisfy God’s wrath, the forgiveness of sins by faith in the cross, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit in believers to live a holy life.*

This all comes out of Romans 3–8, and related Scriptures like James 2 and Ephesians 2:8–10. Doctrinally, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of *repentance, penal substitution, justification, regeneration, and sanctification* in the Christian life. When these doctrines are preached in this “order of salvation,” they may be called a “golden chain” fit for fetching the lost to Christ, and leading them to heaven like sheep. Are you called to be an evangelist? Good. But what of other Christians? Go witnessing; and yet, find opportunities to *preach* salvation! Hell awaits! Go open air preaching at state universities (with permission, of course), pass out tracts, and find opportunities to *preach* at churches. Tell the whole world of Christ’s salvation! Consult Ray Comfort’s ministry for resources.²⁶

*If you love the Lord, you will love his will for you.
 Instead of questions why,
 There'll be praise for all he brings you through.*

*And if you love the Lord,
 You will love his holy commands.
 Delight yourself in them,
 And everything you do will surely stand.*

*We are his workmanship!
 Created for good works in Christ.
 He calls us to offer up ourselves a living sacrifice.²⁷*

Good Works Are a Means of Grace

John Wesley believed that good works such as these were a “means of grace” for Christians. That is, we are not saved by doing good works, but we *strengthen our faith*, and hence strengthen the state of our salvation by *growing in the grace and knowledge* of Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18). The Holy Spirit gave the commandments to be written in the Bible; and when he sees us trying to obey them, he will come and empower our Christian hearts to obey his commandments. Of course, no Christian can obey the commandments *perfectly*, because we still have the sinful body (see Romans 7). But *we can somewhat obey* God’s moral law with the help of God’s Holy Spirit living inside of us; and when we sin, the cross of Christ is there every time to provide God’s forgiveness by faith: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NKJV). When we first come to Christ, we are *born again* of the Spirit; we are babes in Christ. But then, after that initial experience, we *grow again*, not physically but spiritually by these good works, training ourselves in righteousness by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Rom. 5:5; 8:4).

27. Keith Green, “If You Love the Lord,” 1980. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to *do good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

It is also important to note that another approach to Wesley's means of grace view of sanctification was not to see the twelve works of piety and mercy I have listed, but rather, to see the means of grace as five basic devotional practices: prayer (listening prayer and vocal prayer), Bible study, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and *small groups* (house church or cell groups). On this last point I quote Wesleyan scholar Steve Harper:

The fifth instituted means of grace was *group fellowship*, or what Wesley called "Christian conference." As it turned out, this means became the primary instrument of early Methodist renewal. Wherever Wesley preached, he sought to organize believers into bands, classes, and societies for their continuing nurture... Societies met weekly for Bible exposition, singing, testimony, and prayer... On one occasion he stated that "preaching like an apostle without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer."²⁸

28. Steve Harper, *The Way to Heaven: The Gospel According to John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 74–75.

CHAPTER 5

Continuing in Repentance and Faith

Keep Your Faith Strong in the Gospel

All throughout the New Testament, Christians are warned to keep their faith in Christ strong. They are also warned that if they don't keep their faith strong, it may weaken through doubt and result in unbelief. A clear example is: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). Paul calls them "brothers" in this passage, indicating that they are brothers in Christ, adopted as sons of God, whom they call Abba Father. But even to these saved, true, real Christian brothers, Paul warns them strictly to beware that none of them ever develops a "sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God!" There are those who say a truly real Christian cannot lose his faith or his salvation; but if this were true, then Hebrews 3:12 makes no sense whatsoever. "Brothers" is a very clear indication of saved Christians all throughout the New Testament (see Rom. 7:4; 12:1; Gal. 6:1, 18; Eph. 6:23; Php. 1:12; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 3:7; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 4:6).

To cap it off, in the chapter preceding Hebrews 3:12, we read: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:11); and in Hebrews 3:1 he calls them "holy brothers." Clearly the "brothers" being referred to in this warning passage of Hebrews 3:12 are considered by Paul to be true, real, saved, and holy Christians—part of the family of God. And yet, he warns them strongly: "SEE TO IT, BROTHERS, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that

turns away from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). It’s as clear as the noonday sun that Paul is warning holy Christian brothers, who are not living in sin, and who have believing hearts in Christ—he is WARNING THEM—don’t allow yourselves to become sinful and unbelieving! Why? Because it can happen! And because we are justified by faith alone in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are “saved, through faith” (Eph. 2:8); it means that we can also become “lost, through unbelief,” which is precisely what Paul has warned his Christian brothers against here. Adam Clarke, the great Methodist preacher and Bible commentator, said of Hebrews 3:12:

What was possible in their case is possible in yours. The apostle shows here five degrees of apostasy: 1. Consenting to sin, being deceived by its solicitations. 2. Hardness of heart, through giving way to sin. 3. Unbelief in consequence of this hardness which leads them to call even the truth of the gospel in question. 4. This unbelief causing them to speak evil of the gospel, and the provision God has made for the salvation of their souls. 5. Apostasy itself, or falling off from the living God; and thus extinguishing all the light that was in them, and finally grieving the Spirit of God,¹ so that he takes his flight,² and leaves them to a seared conscience³ and reprobate mind.^{4 5}

But then there are those who say, “Hebrews 3:12 truly is warning saved Christians against sin and unbelief and turning

1. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

2. “The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him” (1 Sam. 16:14).

3. “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2).

4. “As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom. 1:28, KJV).

5. Adam Clarke, “Commentary on Hebrews 3:12” in *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, 1832.

away from God; but the consequence of such sin would never result in them losing their salvation, in the sense that they would go to hell after death.” “All,” they say, “whoever experience truly saving faith and holiness in their life, are predestined to heaven, and although they may temporarily fall into sin, unbelief, and departure from God—the Father in his disciplinary graces will eventually lead all such fallen Christians back to the gospel before they die—so ultimately they will go to heaven, and never go to hell.”

To such an interpretation, I would calmly reply, “I would like to hope you are right, because then I would be able to say I’m going to heaven no matter what; because I know I currently believe in the gospel and live according to Christ’s commandments. But that would be a vain and imaginary hope, not consistent with sound biblical interpretation. When we look at the context of Hebrews 3, as a whole chapter, it becomes clear that Paul was thinking of the Israelites in the desert who rebelled against the Lord for 40 years, and how this may also apply to the body of Christ today. God became displeased with those who had backslidden, and had chosen not to renew their faith and obedience to him; and their punishment was that their ‘bodies fell in the desert’ (Heb. 3:17), which appears to point to modern Christian backsliders, who may also fall into a seething desert-hot hell, both soul and body (Matt. 10:28),⁶ and ‘not be able to enter’ heaven as those backslidden Jews did not enter the Promised

6. John Gill, the Reformed commentator, admits this much for Hebrews 3:17: “And so never entered into the land of Canaan. They died in the wilderness; and they did not die common and natural deaths, at least not all of them; *their deaths were by way of punishment; in a way of wrath; in a judicial way*: the Syriac version renders it, ‘their bones fell in the wilderness’; *they lay scattered and unburied, and exposed to view, as an example of divine vengeance*” (“Commentary on Hebrews 3:17” in *The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible*, 1999). If Gill will admit the parallel Paul is making between the rebellious Jews and apostate Christians, then he should follow it to this: **BACKSLIDDEN CHRISTIANS, WHO DIE IN THEIR SINS, WILL BE EXPOSED TO DIVINE WRATH AND VENGEANCE—WHICH IS ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN HELL FIRE!** (Rev. 20:14; 21:8).

Land, ‘because of their unbelief’ (Heb. 3:19).⁷ So the notion that truly saved Christians will be disciplined, and no matter what, brought back to God before they die—is completely contradicted by the whole chapter of Hebrews 3. Disciplined yes; but brought back to God before death? That remains a matter of free choice, and always will; but those who choose to rebel, choose hell. If such backsliders ‘die in their sins’ (John 8:24), they will receive eternal damnation and not the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10).”

So, if keeping the faith is so important, how is it possible to maintain it? To this very important question, there are two answers: (1) obey God’s commandments and (2) resist temptations.

Continue to Obey God’s Commandments

The first positive direction given in Scripture to prevent Christians from backsliding into sin and unbelief is to obey all the moral commandments of God from the heart, with all your mind, will, and life (Matt. 22:37–38). The heart is the most important thing to guard, as the warning is against a “sinful, unbelieving heart” (Heb. 3:12). The mind is also important to guard, so that doubts and anti-Christian thoughts are not allowed to fester there, and find their way into the heart: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). This we can do through Bible study, theology, preaching the gospel, witnessing, and apologetics. (To get you started on evangelism, see anything from Ray Comfort; and for apologetics, look into Josh McDowell’s materials.)

The faith of the mind may be strengthened through Bible study, soteriology, and apologetics—but the faith of the heart can only be strengthened by a continual obedience to the moral

7. “The cowardly, *the unbelieving*, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in *the fiery lake of burning sulfur*. This is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

law of the Bible (the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the teachings of the New Testament epistles, etc.). This is the true testing ground of the Christian life; Bible study and soteriology are essential here too, but mainly just Bible reading and Bible obeying. It is in the reading of divinely inspired Scripture that Christians learn how Jesus “teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). By this we learn what God’s dos and don’ts are, what his will is for us, and what it means to LIVE BY THE BIBLE. Paul said to Timothy: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching... Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:13, 16). And Peter warns his readers against the influence of antinomians: “Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position” (2 Pet. 3:17).

But how can it be that maintaining a willingness to live by the Bible would increase our faith? I don’t know for sure how; it’s just the way things work in the spirit realm: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). It may be argued that it’s because the Holy Spirit comes upon you, or stirs within you, increases in grace and measure, to supply the Christian energy and power to perform the law God has commanded man to obey; and within this divine empowerment for obedience to the law by faith and prayer, comes also an increase of faith, to a higher level of revelation, and even prophetic wisdom, or knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God.

“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:8, NKJV). We draw near to God by continued inward and outward obedience to his Word and heartfelt prayer; he draws near to us by his felt presence, the Holy Spirit; and it is by the Spirit that we receive revelation, stronger faith, and assurance of salvation. But this must be maintained by our cooperation with his Spirit in prayer, living by the Bible, and ongoing relationship with Christ by faith. In order to keep our faith alive, we

must do the works of obedience to God's Word: "Faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:26, NKJV). Conversely, faith with works is alive—and what is the source of lively faith? The Holy Spirit of God. And the more Holy Spirit, the more faith; and the stronger your faith is, the more secure your salvation. We are not saved by works (and certainly not by perfect obedience to God); but they are necessary to prove to God and ourselves that we truly believe our sins are forgiven, by faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. And this strengthens our faith in Christ's power not only to forgive our sins, but in his ability to live in us and through us by his Spirit.

Continue to Resist Temptations

"Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12, NKJV). Paul is again warning Christians who are saved, and are in the state of grace: watch out! You can fall, you can lose your standing with Christ! So, "take heed"—to what? To the context of this Bible verse: 1 Corinthians 10. In this passage, Paul again draws a parallel between the Israelites in the desert with Moses and the contemporary body of Christ (10:1–4). And he states that "God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert" (10:5), just as most of those in the body of Christ may fall away from the faith, and their souls and bodies will be scattered over the dry and scorching desert of hell!⁸ Paul continues: those rebellious Jews in the desert served as examples for us not to set our hearts on evil things like idolatry, gluttony, drunkenness, fornication, and adultery (10:6–8). God exacted total vengeance on all of them, and killed them by snakes and the death angel (10:9–10); in one day alone, God killed "twenty-three thousand of them" (10:8). Paul continues

8. Adam Clarke agrees: "Nothing can be a more decisive proof than this that people who have every outward ordinance and are made partakers of the grace of our Lord Jesus, may so abuse their privileges and *grieve the Spirit of God as to fall from their state of grace, and perish everlastingly!*" ("Commentary on 1 Corinthians 10:5" in *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, 1832).

with a serious and grave warning to his Christian brothers: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (10:11–12).

How is it that saints can fall? They fall out of good standing with God by disobedience to his law. They do not follow the ways of the Lord; they rebel against his commandments, and rouse the Lord to anger. This does not happen in one second, or overnight. But gradually over time, the patience of God wears thin: “The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Num. 14:18). IT IS THROUGH THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL that saints are brought to sin. They are enticed by the pull of sinful pleasures: drunkenness, fornication, ungodly entertainments, etc. And I would add this especially: ungodly, evil-minded, carnally minded friends (whether non-Christian or “church people”); “you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.” And again: “Do not be deceived: ‘bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Cor. 5:11, NIV; 15:33, NASB). John Wesley refers to such a case from his times (a definite argument against any passive, non-judgmental approach to friendship evangelism):

A young coal miner in Kingswood, near Bristol, was an eminent sinner, and afterwards an eminent saint. But, by little and little, he renewed his acquaintance with his old companions, who by degrees wrought upon him, till he dropped all his religion, and was two-fold more a child of hell than before.⁹

Let us be like Moses, who was a model for Christians, even though an Old Testament saint: “By faith, Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather

9. John Wesley, “A Call to Backsliders,” 2.5.3.

than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Heb. 11:24–26). We continue the passage in 1 Corinthians 10: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (10:13); or in the KJV: “a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” That is, whenever you find yourself being tempted to break a commandment of God, to sin, and disobey something in the Bible, know this: there is always a way to escape from that particular temptation—and rest assured that God will always provide the circumstances for you to escape from temptation. Martin Luther had much to say about resisting temptation, as a necessary feature of salvation and the Christian life:

It is not easy to overcome sin, and if the Lord were not with us, “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able” (1 Cor. 10:13), the flood would swallow us up. While he permits the wicked to be tempted and to fall, he is faithful to all who stand in the faith and call upon him.¹⁰

If you have no heroic measure of virtue, then at least strive after that standard that is demanded of all believers... Live virtuously, in order that sin might not rule in you to the destruction of your faith and righteousness... We must not surrender our members to sinful passions so that they, by obeying sin, become instruments of unrighteousness. We must obey God, in order that our members may become instruments of righteousness in a life of enduring faith.¹¹

[Referring to Romans 7]: The whole passage shows very clearly a strong hatred against the flesh and a sincere love for the law

10. Martin Luther, “Commentary on Romans 6:14” in *Commentary on Romans*. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 104.

11. *Ibid.*, “Commentary on Romans 6:19,” p. 106.

and all that is good. No carnal man ever does this. He rather hates the law and follows his flesh and evil lusts. The spiritual man fights against his flesh and deplors that he cannot do what (as a new man) he desires to do. The carnal does not fight at all, but readily yields to sin... [he] knows what is evil, and he does it intentionally, willfully and by choice... the carnal man is always against the law; and if it were possible, he would rather have no law at all. He never desires what is good, but only what is evil. Even when he does what is good (externally), he finds no pleasure in it.¹²

J. Theodore Mueller, the Luther scholar, makes this observation of Luther's commentary on Romans 7:

In this whole passage Luther shows by twelve different proofs, based on Paul's words, that the Apostle, here, does not speak of himself as one who is still carnal, or unconverted, but as of one who is already spiritual, or converted, yet deeply laments the struggle of the old man in himself against the new man. Here, as in Galatians 5:17ff., the Apostle argues against the error of perfectionism.¹³

Luther again:

Sin remains in the spiritual man, in order that he might exercise himself in grace, put off his pride, and check his arrogance.¹⁴

12. Ibid., "Commentary on Romans 7:9–10, 15–16," pp. 112–113. A strong argument, straight from the Reformer, that antinomianism is a carnal man's doctrine that leads to hell and eternal damnation.

13. Ibid., "Commentary on Romans 7:25," p. 115.

14. Ibid., "Commentary on Romans 7:17," p. 116. Luther did not understand the word "grace" to mean an easy, costless, or morally lax forgiveness of self or others; it means *to rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit, exercising it as an ethical power by prayer* and total reliance upon God for the performance of righteousness in the Christian life. This reliance on *the Spirit of Grace for righteousness* causes the Christian to "put off his pride, and check his arrogance" as he acknowledges the original sin still dwelling in him, and the utter foolishness of thinking he can live virtuously without the Holy Spirit's help (as the Pelagians and humanists wrongly think they can).

There Is Always Hope for Backsliders

Those who believe in Christ are not regarded as incapable of apostasy. A believer whose faith is wrecked, is ipso facto no longer a child of God. He is now in danger of hell and will go there if he continues without faith.¹⁵

There are more backsliders than not; this is because “broad is the road that leads to destruction” (Matt. 7:13), and it is easy to get back on that evil road through many detours, back roads, and winding trails. John Bunyan, one of the great Puritan evangelists, wrote his spiritual allegory of the Christian life, as if it were a prophetic dream: *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. It is the story of a man named Christian on his way to heaven. He stays on the narrow “road that leads to life” (Matt. 7:14) for most of his journey, but many times over the course of his life, he is tempted and deceived by sin, and even backslides on some occasions. That is, he loses (or at least weakens in) his faith, hope, and love. The narrow road is the life of Christian faith and holiness (walking the straight and narrow); but at times he gets side-tracked in the Swamp of Despondency, Mt. Sinai (which typifies legalism, works-justification, or trying to earn God’s forgiveness by obeying God’s commandments), and Doubting Castle with the Giant Despair. But in each situation, this saint chose to persevere; and with the help of the Holy Spirit and Christian friends, he was able to pick himself back up, and keep on walking by faith and holiness.

After each situation of giving in to temptation, he chose to repent and confess his sin to God: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). In each situation, by faith he looked back to the cross, and remembered that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). By this the wrath of God is satisfied; by this the forgiveness of sins

15. Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1980), p. 214.

is received; by this faith alone in the blood of Jesus. Now, says Christ, “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11, NKJV); and as you go, remember: “Without holiness no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14); “Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him” (Luke 12:5); “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise” (Ps. 111:10). This is what Jesus died on the cross for: that God may “heal the backslidings” of the body of Christ (Jer. 3:22, KJV).

But here remains Bunyan’s sharp warning for Christians still on their journey:

Next the shepherds led them into a valley where there was a door in the side of a mountain. As one shepherd opened the door, the odor of smoke and brimstone nearly overwhelmed them.

“What is it?” asked Christian.

“A detour to hell,” answered a shepherd. “For hypocrites like Esau, who sold his birthright;¹⁶ or like Judas, who sold his master;¹⁷ or like Alexander, who blasphemed the gospel;¹⁸ or like the

16. “Jacob gave *Esau* some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34).

17. “*Judas* Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them” (Mark 14:10).

18. “Holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have *shipwrecked their faith*. Among them are Hymenaeus and *Alexander*, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:19–20). That is, they were excommunicated, in the hope that they may repent from their unbelief and blasphemy, and return to the church, with the understanding that Christian fellowship must be holy and stay holy. This is probably the greatest biblical evidence for the possibility of losing salvation, as well as the possibility of getting saved again.

liars Ananias and Sapphira.”^{19 20}

I almost named this chapter “Continuing in Faith and Obedience (to God’s Commandments),” but I felt like this part of the gospel message needs to lean to the side of God’s grace and the forgiveness of sins, and away from any notion of sinless perfectionism. So instead, I titled this chapter: “Continuing in Repentance and Faith.” But wait—“Godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality” (Jude 1:4)—I completely disapprove of them, and am not siding with them! But in light of the grace and forgiveness of sins available to us always through the cross, we are to build ourselves up in our most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, and keep ourselves in God’s love (Jude 1:20–21). “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1–2).

If you are being hindered and entangled by a sin, then throw it off by the power of God! If someone or something is tempting you, then **RUN AWAY FROM IT! RUN TO JESUS!** If you get entangled in a sin, and indulge its pleasures for a time, and then, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, come to your senses... then

19. “A man named *Ananias*, together with his wife *Sapphira*, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet. Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.’ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened... About three hours later his wife came in... At that moment she fell down at his feet and died” (Acts 5:1–5, 7, 10). This would be an example of a “sin that leads to death” (1 John 5:16).

20. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: A Modern Abridgment* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 1998), pp. 54–55.

REPENT (turn from your sin, ask Christ for forgiveness by faith in the cross, and go and sin no more): “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exod. 34:6–7). “The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him” (Dan. 9:9). “Jesus said to her, ‘your sins are forgiven’” (Luke 7:48). “God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel” (Acts 5:31). “My brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38). “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Eph. 1:7). So, “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered” (Rom. 4:7).

“What If I’ve Committed the Unpardonable Sin?”

There are some people who have fallen from grace, lost their faith, lost their devotion to God, and their piety; they have felt distant from the presence of God, have resisted the voice of God, and have ceased from reading Scripture; they may go to church, but there is no inward light; they have no dreams from God; they may pay their tithes, but there is no passion in it; they might as well not be Christians, because they love their sins more than Christ. They’re not really even sure if they’re Christians, deists, agnostics, or atheists. They are lost in a sense-world of rationalism, worldly economic thought, sensual entertainments, and irreligiosity. They do not seem to regard the spiritual life any more than they ever did.

Such people are sometimes acutely aware that they have lost their relationship with God; some are willing to admit they’ve “backslidden”; while fewer are willing to admit they might have

lost their salvation. What is likely, in most cases of backsliders,²¹ is that they have weak faith and weak obedience to God, but have not so backslidden to the point of reprobation (total loss of salvation).²² Salvation is by faith alone in what Christ did on the cross for us (Eph. 2:8), the forgiveness of sins offered us on the cross, and the human response to live a holy life, without which no one will see the Lord in heaven (Heb. 12:14). If we resist the deceitful temptations of sin like we are supposed to, and we persevere to the end of our life in faith and holiness, then we will inherit eternal life in heaven with all the saints. While there are many gifts and graces given from the Holy Spirit over the course of our Christian life to strengthen our faith and devotion, at the base of it all is a fear of God's judgment of eternal damnation (hell). If we lose the fear of hell, we lose faith, we lose righteousness in our life, and we may even lose salvation if we persist in our sins. Jesus said, "Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him" (Luke 12:5). Remembering this should help us in times of temptation to resist the lawlessness of the wicked, as well as the law-hating sinful nature within us all (Rom. 7:22–25).

The backslider is behaviorally the same as an unconverted man, the same unholy thing he was before he became a Christian. This is an adequate description (Rom. 3:10–18):

21. *Backsliders*—People who have fallen away from their former relationship with God through doubt or continual sin; if they were to die in this state, they would go to hell. However, these people are not so far gone that their backslidings can't be healed (Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:4); that is, it is possible for them to repent, believe again, and become Christians again. They *can* get saved again; especially if they want to.

22. *Reprobates*—That rare group of people who have backslidden to such a degree, through continual unbelief, sin, and public rejection of Jesus, and have gotten themselves into a state of mind where their hearts are so hard that it is impossible for them to be "brought back to repentance" (Heb. 6:6). These are usually hardened Bible critics or atheists; they may also be New Agers or followers of non-Christian religions. They *can't* get saved again; nor do they want to.

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.

All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”

“Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know.”

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

While many understand this passage to be describing the general state of mankind in its corruption, this is also the state of those who have backslidden from the Christian faith and life. They are like other men, without the Holy Spirit—their lives are full of unconfessed and unrepented sins—unrighteousness, ignorance of the Bible, prayerlessness, evil-doing, continuous lying, cussing, hating, fighting, even murder; and no fear of God or his eternal judgment. With a loss of biblical consciousness comes also a loss of right standards of living, and a spiritual disconnect between the conscience and the Holy Spirit. The conscience is seared (1 Tim. 4:2) or severely insensitive to the moral convictions of God’s Spirit. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). But with a backslider, these sensibilities have been weakened through rebellion and disobedience to the Bible.

As Stephen said to the Pharisees, who considered themselves to be religious men, “You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51). They may consider themselves righteous because of their philanthropy, or their orthodox church doctrines, or because they go to church regularly, and do various outward actions in the name of Christ—but inwardly, they may be “full of dead men’s

bones and everything unclean” (Matt. 23:27). During special church events they may make a great outward show of their so-called devotion to God, and so deceive themselves that they are saved. But because no one will see the Lord without holiness (Heb. 12:14), they will not make it to heaven, until they learn to give up this false notion of salvation.

Holiness is a heartfelt, loving obedience to God’s moral law in the daily outworking of our lives, contingent on faith in Jesus and the cross for the continual forgiveness of our sins (Matt. 22:37-40). “We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Eph. 1:7). We cannot be holy any other way but by faith in the blood of Jesus. By the blood of Jesus, God’s wrath at our sins is punished—if we maintain faith in it. If not, then “the wrath of God abides” on us (John 3:36, NKJV). If you die without faith in the cross of Christ, you die without atonement, and you go to hell. If you die without obedience to God’s law, even an imperfect effort; if you totally die in a state of wickedness and sin, you go to hell. The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The best thing a backslider can do is to stop resisting the Holy Spirit, and start obeying the Holy Spirit, and never stop obeying the Holy Spirit. The Devil is the only spirit he should be resisting, if he expects to make it to heaven (Jas. 4:7). “Heaven is a holy place prepared for holy people,” Leonard Ravenhill would say.²³

Since the mentalities, degrees, grades, and kinds of backsliders are varied, the doubts, and confusions, and darkened minds abound—those who have fallen from the state of righteousness and truth are now in a state of wickedness and lies, and their minds are full of all kinds of incorrect concepts about salvation and eternity. If they would only study the New Testament, most of their questions would be answered! “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105); “The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword,

23. Sermon: “Holiness & Righteousness.”

it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Nothing is more fit to turn a backslider back on the path of righteousness than studying the Holy Bible!

But there are some common Scriptures that even Bible-educated backsliders stumble over. These are Scriptures that speak of irrevocable apostasy—reprobates—who have lost their faith and holiness to such a degree that all the spirit of repentance has been lost, and they have no will to return to the Lord (2 Cor. 13:5, KJV). Some backsliders look at these Scriptures and have convinced themselves that they too are reprobates, or backsliders who have committed the “unpardonable sin,” and have no hope of future recovery or forgiveness. They believe that they are damned to hell no matter what (even predestined to damnation), and that there is no use to repent from sin or try to be a Christian again. But most of the time, these people are just simply deceived, and they do not realize that they still retain a measure of conviction as well as the fear of God. The Scriptures they stumble over are the following:

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin (Mark 3:28–29).

This is that Scripture which speaks of the “unpardonable sin” or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The nature of this sin is described in v. 30: “He said this because they were saying, ‘he has an evil spirit.’” That is, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is either calling Jesus demon-possessed, or stubbornly calling the Holy Spirit a demonic spirit, when observing healings, miracles, or exorcisms, when there is evidence to prove that it is in fact the Holy Spirit doing the work. As in the case of the Pharisees whom Jesus was rebuking in this passage, it was much more easy for them to commit this sin, because they were Bible scholars,

and probably had greater understanding of God's laws on spiritual discernment between the Holy Spirit and demons. But it is incredibly inaccurate to say that this passage of Scripture applies to any other kind of sin; it does not. It only applies when men who have more than enough proof of the Holy Spirit working a miracle, but, in their wicked and obstinate religiosity as religious hypocrites, they turn around and say, "that is not the Holy Spirit; it is demonic."

That is the unpardonable sin; that is unforgivable; and that is a dangerous, reprobate apostasy deserving eternal damnation, because it is committed out of hard-hearted unbelief. In modern times, I would think that all those who call themselves cessationists (who reject the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit at work today) are the ones who are most in danger of committing the unpardonable sin. But not automatically; sometimes cessationists simply don't have adequate information or knowledge of a miracle to make an accurate judgment. (And there are some godly cessationists.) But in Christ's time, it is apparent that he felt the Pharisees did know better, and yet still deceived themselves, and said that a demon was working through Jesus, not the Holy Spirit. Only this sin is the unforgiveable sin, and nothing else.

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Hebrews 6:4–6).

This passage describes "those who have once been enlightened"—that is, those true Christians who have experienced repentance, justification, regeneration, and sanctification. They were enlightened to the forgiveness of sins by faith in the death of Christ, the born again experience (the desire for righteousness), and the process of sanctification in their life (growing in holiness by obedience to God's Word). But when they were tempted by evil men, and evil influences, they came to have

doubts about Christ, and fell into total unbelief. What's more, these apostate-reprobates "are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." How do they do this? They literally profess their unbelief before men—that is, they renounce Jesus Christ publicly.

For this kind of reprobation, there are many examples of ex-Christians who now consider themselves atheists, agnostics, skeptics, or followers of non-Christian religions. If they go so far as to acknowledge that Jesus even existed, then they view his crucifixion as nothing more than what the Jews and Romans did in the time of Jesus—that he was a lunatic and liar, and was merely given the death penalty for breaking the religious law of the Jews and the civil law of the Romans: for the Jews, because he claimed to be God and Messiah; for the Romans, because he claimed to be a King. What is the sin spoken of in this passage? It is to view the crucifixion of Christ through merely historical or naturalistic or skeptical means, and not through the eyes of Christian faith: that he, being the Son of God, died on the cross for the sins of the world (Isa. 53; Psa. 22).²⁴

So, if you're a backslider, and you're afraid that maybe Hebrews 6:4–6 applies to you, then you are wrong if you still feel any distaste for such a notion: renouncing Christ publicly—no way! You may have slid back into sin or doubt, but you're not that far gone! Some atheists and skeptics *are* that badly off. They will not repent and believe; they are damned reprobates for sure. But perhaps you renounced Christ publicly once, and you didn't know what you were doing, like Peter; and then you afterwards felt sorry and repented to God (Matt. 26:74–75). There is hope for you still; come back to Jesus Christ now!

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How

24. John Wesley, "A Call to Backsliders," 2.8.2.

much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'it is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'the Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:26–31).

Wesley considered Hebrews 6:4–6 and 10:26–31 to be addressing exactly the same sin: public renunciation of faith in Jesus Christ. He said, "Whenever the Jews prevailed on a Christian to apostatize, they required him to declare, in express terms, and that in the public assembly, that Jesus of Nazareth was a deceiver of the people; and that he had suffered no more punishment than his crimes justly deserved."²⁵ Adam Clarke, commenting on Hebrews 10:26, makes a good distinction between backsliders and reprobates (or whom he called deliberate apostates):

The case is that of a deliberate apostate—one who has utterly rejected Jesus Christ and his atonement, and renounced the whole gospel system. It has nothing to do with backsliders in our common use of that term. A man may be overtaken in a fault, or he may deliberately go into sin, and yet neither renounce the gospel, nor deny the Lord that bought him. His case is dreary and dangerous, but it is not hopeless; no case is hopeless but that of the deliberate apostate, who rejects the whole gospel system, after having been saved by grace, or convinced of the truth of the gospel. To him there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; for there was but the ONE, Jesus, and this he has utterly rejected.²⁶

Those ex-Christians who have publicly and verbally rejected their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ are now counted as the "enemies of God" (Heb. 10:27). They are not only ex-Christians; they are anti-God, anti-Christians, and are God's enemies. They have the spirit of the antichrist in them (1 John 2:22; 4:3). They

25. Ibid.

26. Adam Clarke, "Commentary on Hebrews 10:26" in *The Adam Clarke Commentary*, 1832.

live without the atoning blood of Jesus, without God's forgiveness, and "deliberately keep on sinning" (Heb. 10:26). Though they try to suppress the truth, they will face judgment day with hell fire, raging in the eternal vengeance of God (Heb. 10:27, 30–31). In the Old Testament days, God did terrifying things to the Jews who rejected the law of Moses (Heb. 10:28). But in New Testament days—which is now—God will exact the fiercest revenge of everlasting damnation in hell upon all who reject the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), which is founded on the atonement and forgiveness of the gospel, accomplished by his Son on the cross (Heb. 10:29). To publicly reject what the Son of God did on the cross is the greatest insult to God the Father. The fiercest damnation in hell is the rightful punishment for all who would do this.

Do You Still Doubt You Can Lose Your Salvation?

While there is one group of backsliders who wrongly fear that Mark 3:28–30, Hebrews 6:4–6, and 10:26–31 condemn them before God as reprobates, there are other backsliders who lean so much on a theology of God's grace and forgiveness that they "deliberately keep on sinning," and yet feel they will go to heaven when they die, because they are predestined to go there!²⁷ My response to them would be, "What makes you so sure you are one of the elect and predestined ones? Make your calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10); show me some proof, some fruits, some witness to the fact that the Holy Spirit is working in your heart righteously and ethically. Then I may infer you are among those predestined to heaven. Otherwise, all your wicked living and talk of election and predestination are worthless. Without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14); so, only holy people can

27. These are antinomian Calvinists (as opposed to Reformed or Puritanical ones), who maintain that salvation is more about predestination than it is about keeping a strong faith in the gospel or maintaining holiness in the Christian life. God's easy grace and forgiveness seems to override all the ethical requirements for the Christian life, in this false theology of "cheap grace," to use the phrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*.

claim to be predestined to heaven, provided they continue in holiness until the end of their lives.”

Then they may say, “All the great Bible teachers say that Christians can’t lose their salvation; and there are no Scriptures that say you can lose your salvation.” To which I reply, “On the contrary, some very great Bible teachers insisted earnestly that a godly, truly saved Christian can lose his saving faith, his godliness, his holiness, and the state of salvation he had once been living in: Irenaeus (d. 202), Tertullian (d. 220), Cyprian (d. 258), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Martin Luther (d. 1546),²⁸ John Goodwin (d. 1665), John Bunyan (d. 1688), John Wesley (d. 1791),²⁹ and many other Methodist and Holiness scholars who followed in Wesley’s tradition of Bible teaching: Adam Clarke (d. 1832), Thomas Ralston (d. 1891), Samuel Wakefield (d. 1895), A. B. Simpson (d. 1919), etc.” And to the objection that there are no Scriptures that say you can lose your salvation, I quote Martin Luther (the man who sparked the entire Protestant Reformation):

We must continuously seek after him; indeed, we must seek him evermore, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 105:4: “Seek the Lord... seek his face evermore.” Those who do not make progress in seeking after God are bound to RETROGRESS; indeed, those who do not seek, will LOSE that which they already have obtained. We must never stand still in seeking after God.³⁰

28. Luther was a major author of the Augsburg Confession, which says *Lutheran churches “condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that men once justified can lose the Spirit of God, and do contend that some men may attain to such a perfection in this life that they cannot sin. [Here are rejected those who teach that those who have once been holy cannot fall again.]”* (Article XII, “Of Repentance”). Note then, that Martin Luther, who was the very *founder* of the Protestant reformation, rejected the “once saved, always saved” idea preached by the Anabaptists, John Calvin, and subsequent Calvinists!

29. John Jefferson Davis, “The Perseverance of the Saints: A History of the Doctrine,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34:2 (June 1991), 213–228.

30. Martin Luther, “Commentary on Romans 3:11” in *Commentary on Ro-*

Others who in the beginning lead a pious life and do many good works are not saved (Saul: 1 Samuel 13:13)... compare for this also Judas (Matthew 26:14).³¹

Thomas Oden, the Wesley scholar, summarizes the biblical basis for the possibility of losing salvation (apostasy), from John Wesley's *Predestination Calmly Considered*:

Those who, having once truly believed and been endued with the faith that produces a good conscience, may later fall (Ezekiel 18:24; 1 Timothy 1:18, 19). Those once grafted into the good olive tree may later be broken off through willful unbelief (Romans 11:16–22). Branches that “abide not” are cast forth and burned (John 15:6). Those having once known Christ can again become entangled in the world (2 Peter 2:20). Those who have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have produced fruits of the Spirit may nevertheless fall from grace back into former pollutions (Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:29).

Even those most actively receiving sanctifying grace may yet fall (Hebrews 10:26–29). We share finally in Christ only if we hold to our first confidence (Hebrews 3:14). We are instructed to take care that we do not lose what we have (2 John 8), to hold fast so that no one seizes the crown (Revelation 3:11). Grace is almighty but not irresistible.³²

Irenaeus, who for centuries has been considered by theologians to be a model champion of orthodoxy from the early church fathers, said:

mans. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 71.

31. *Ibid.*, “Commentary on Romans 8:28,” p. 130.

32. Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 269–270. Wesley follows the teaching of the Church of England (Thomas Cranmer, The Thirty-Nine Articles XVI, “Of Sin after Baptism”); and agrees with the Lutheran Church (Martin Luther, Augsburg Confession XII, “Of Repentance”). But Wesley differs from Calvinists or Puritans—Presbyterians and Reformed (Westminster Confession of Faith XVII, “Of the Perseverance of the Saints”). I personally identify more with the Church of England on this point.

We should fear ourselves, lest perchance after we have come to the knowledge of Christ, if we do things displeasing to God, we obtain no further forgiveness of sins, but are shut out from his kingdom. And for that reason, Paul said, “for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also not spare you” (Romans 11:21).³³

A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance, chooses to balance the grace of God and free will (synergism), in a state of conditional security:

God is able to *keep* everything that *we* commit to him. “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). The great question is this: how much have *we* really committed?³⁴

To a careless and unwatchful soul God speaks no word of unconditional assurance... Whatever doctrine we may hold personally with respect to the final preservation of the saints, we have never felt free to give any rigid and absolute answer to this question apart from the actual situation of the person to whom it may apply.³⁵

Continue in Repentance and Faith!

If you are worried that you may have backslidden, and if you would die right now, that you would “die in your sins” (John 8:24) and be thrown into hell—then listen to me.

Firstly, the answer to your problem is simple: “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15, NASB). This is the way of salvation from sin, death, and hell; it is the only way to heaven.

1. *Repent*—turn away from the sinful ways in your life;

33. *Against Heresies* 4.27.2.

34. A. B. Simpson, *The Fourfold Gospel* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1984), pp. 90–91.

35. A. B. Simpson, *John Sawin File Project: The Life and Times of A. B. Simpson* [online], p. 296; *CA*, 1889, February, p. 20.

and instead, press onward towards growing in holiness and righteousness, resisting every temptation that comes against you. Change your mind, your heart, your life; and live righteously, obedient to the moral law of the Bible.

2. *Believe in the Gospel*—that Jesus is the Son of God; that he is who he said he is; that he died by shedding his blood on the cross to receive the punishment for sin that we deserve; that he died for us that we may not burn forever in hell; that by faith in this, we are at liberty to pray for God to forgive our sins; and that indeed our sins may be forgiven, every time we confess them to God, and repent from them; and we may have peace with God now and forever in heaven, provided we keep the faith.

Secondly, believe what the Word of God says about the infinite forgiveness of God on this side of eternity. Once men are lost in hell, it's too late; they have no second chances at receiving forgiveness for their sins. But in this life, on this side of eternity, the forgiveness of God is continually available to all those alive on the face of the earth. Provided that they are in a state of repenting from sin and believing in the cross, then it is proper to offer prayers for the forgiveness of sins, and to receive by faith God's answer to such prayers: "Your sins are forgiven... Where are they? Has no one condemned you?... Then neither do I condemn you... Go now and leave your life of sin" (Luke 7:48; John 8:10–11).

But doesn't God's patience run out for some people? Isn't it possible to be abandoned by God, as in the case of Saul? (1 Sam. 28:15). God did not abandon Saul; his Spirit departed from him in the sense of his presence, because he kept disobeying God's commandments. Saul resisted the Holy Spirit; it was he who pushed God away from him. But whether you put yourself into Saul's category of backsliding or not, remember: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail" (Lam. 3:22). God's compassions NEVER FAIL! So long as you're alive and breathing, and you have time to repent and believe; then with all your repenting and all your believing—DO

IT NOW! “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7, NKJV). God’s forgiveness is always available to those who repent from their sins—to those who forsake their wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts.

“Peter came to him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’” (Matt. 18:21–22, NKJV). $70 \times 7 = 490$ times. It does not mean that when someone sins against you for the 491st time, then you are allowed to not forgive him. It is a metaphor of infinite forgiveness; and if Jesus would command Christians to follow this rule, then how much more do you think he keeps the rule himself? “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins” (1 John 1:9). There are no exceptions to this rule; as long as you mean it with your heart, God will forgive whatever sins you have committed, and whatever backslidings you have fallen into, and will “heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22b).

But here is the condition: “Return, you backsliding children” (Jer. 3:22a). You must repent again from your newfound sinful ways, or there is no forgiveness. God is not mocked; he cannot be tricked; and he will not forgive that which men are not truly sorry for. If you are truly sorry for a sin, for breaking one of God’s commandments, then you will make it a point to try and not sin that sin any more, and to resist any temptations that may come your way. “God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV). There is always a way to escape from temptation—always. That’s what the Word of God says. God will not forgive a half-hearted prayer for forgiveness; he will not forgive an unrepentant sinner. “The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29). Feel free to pray for forgiveness, and God

will forgive—but YOU MUST TURN YOURSELF AWAY FROM YOUR SIN! And continue to do this. Repentance first, then forgiveness: “Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings” (Jer. 3:22, NKJV). God only forgives those who truly and sincerely repent (or turn away) from their sins.

Thirdly, you may still doubt that this is sound doctrine. But it was taught by Irenaeus, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. Whom else do you need as church authorities than an eminent church father, and the founders of the Lutheran and Methodist churches, spearheads of the Protestant reformation and the Great Awakening? This is true biblical doctrine: if a backslider repents from his sin, he can restore his relationship with God, be forgiven of his sin, and in effect, get saved all over again. Luther believed that King David and the thief on the cross were examples of backsliders who lost their way and came back to God:

This act of God proves the divine election that he permits many to commit great sins and yet they are brought to repentance and are saved—David (2 Samuel 12:13)... and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:41).³⁶

Wesley personally saw thousands of backsliders come back to God:

If it be asked, “Do any real apostates find mercy from God? Do any that have ‘made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,’ recover what they have lost? Do you know, have you seen, any instance of persons who found redemption in the blood of Jesus, and afterwards fell away, and yet were restored—‘renewed again to repentance?’” Yea, verily; and not one, or an hundred only, but, I am persuaded, several thousands... Innumerable are the instances of this kind, of those who had fallen, but now stand upright.³⁷

36. Martin Luther, “Commentary on Romans 8:28” in *Commentary on Romans*. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976), p. 130.

37. John Wesley, “A Call to Backsliders,” 2.10.1.

If you are a backslider, and you suspect that I have made this doctrine up—the concept that backsliders can be forgiven of sin, and get saved again, and become Christians again—know this: it has the backing of John Wesley more than anyone in the history of the church; and to this day, he is a well-established revivalist, evangelist, theologian, and church founder. This is not a matter of private biblical interpretation; the doctrine of returning to the Lord and being healed of backsliding (Jer. 3:22) has behind it, not only the history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist traditions, but also the Lutheran tradition. The only Christians who deny this experience are those who believe in “once saved, always saved,” which comes from Calvinism.

Fourthly, it is not likely you have committed the unpardonable sin. The unforgiveable sin is a hard-hearted, continual resistance to the Holy Spirit, and disobedience to the Word of God, that finally reaches its climax in public rejection of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and demonization of him and the Holy Spirit. Most sinners, backsliders, and apostates do not go this far. Some may have said things under peer pressure of atheist people, but not meant it fully, or necessarily known what they were saying. Willful public rejection of Jesus Christ must be sincere and from the heart for the unpardonable sin to have taken place. This results in a man-made fall, a man-made resistance to the Holy Spirit, and a man-made acceptance of temptation.

Some do fall into this hopeless apostate condition, and become the “enemies of God” (Heb. 10:27). These are atheists and Satanists;³⁸ and all other kinds of anti-Christian people who once believed in the gospel, but instead chose to harden their own hearts against God in stiff-necked rebellion. These kinds of backsliders are rare, and they are beyond the hope of salvation (reprobates). It is evidenced by their

38. I don't deny that an atheist or a Satanist can be saved and become a genuine Christian. But I am talking about *ex-Christians* who once truly loved the Lord and obeyed God's Word. If they become atheists or Satanists, it is not likely their heart will ever again be soft enough to repent and believe in the cross.

stubborn attitudes and behavior. They never even come close to feeling or thinking to repent from sin, or to believe again in the gospel. Continually, on and on, they “suppress the truth by their wickedness” (Rom. 1:18).

Reprobates (or hopelessly hardened backsliders) are rare. Most backsliders have it well within their power to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s influence, and yet again “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15, NASB). Most people can come back to God. If you are reading this, and you are not cursing and swearing, and resisting everything on this page, then you can definitely come back to God. Do it now! Life is short! “You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (Jas. 4:14). Get right with God now. Please! God wants to heal your backslidings; God wants to forgive your sins—but “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5, NKJV). Turn away from your sins; then pray for forgiveness, because God only “hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29). If you have an inner worry about going to hell after you die, and you feel some guilt for your sin, then that means you have not fully seared your conscience, and the Holy Spirit is still near you (John 16:8). You are not in a hopeless condition. Throw gasoline on your spark of faith and read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; then read the book of Romans (especially chapters 3–8), and the rest of the New Testament. Jesus died on the cross for your sins. “Repent, and believe in the gospel!” (Mark 1:15, NASB).

CHAPTER 6

Heaven

“I Want to Know One Thing—The Way to Heaven”

The basic question in the heart of every spiritually awakened soul is, “How do I get to heaven? I don’t care what I have to do, what I have to give up; I don’t care... whatever the Bible says, I’ll do it; if I’m going to live for God, and he tells me to lay down my life as a martyr, I’ll do it if I can get into heaven. Whatever it takes; I’ll do it!” This feeling was also held by John Wesley:

I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me.¹

Continuing in True Repentance and Faith in the Cross

The Bible, namely Paul’s epistle to the Romans, chapters 3–8, contains enough knowledge and revelation for any man to know the way to heaven. God’s plan for man’s salvation from an eternal hell and all earthly sin is through repentance and faith in the cross of Jesus. To recap on what I have been saying in previous chapters, repentance is a heartfelt u-turn or turning away from all known sin in your life; all things that offend God and conscience; all transgressions of his divine law in the Scriptures. Repentance seeks to maintain a clear conscience, a clean slate always before

1. Steve Harper, *The Way to Heaven: The Gospel According to John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), p. 6.

God. But repentance alone is not enough; if we believed that repentance alone were sufficient for salvation, then we would be coming near the heresy of medieval Catholicism. We could go farther than that and say that a religion that seeks repentance only from the sins against God's law is more closely akin to Judaism, which if we only have that kind of repentance, then we are "fallen from grace"! (Gal. 5:4). In addition, the repentance I'm talking about is not the simplistic repentance of the "cheap grace" dispensationalists, who think that a one-time initial repentance from all the sins of the past (when you are seven years old) is all that is needed when accompanied by a belief that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the grave. The repentance I'm speaking about is the biblical repentance of the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ.

Biblical repentance is costly. It does not require martyrdom, but it comes close. It requires mortification—death to selfishness, sinful pleasures, and all the idols of our hearts which we hold so dear, but which God hates. No mortification can reach a perfect sinless state in this life. Anyone who professes to have attained this is a liar and the truth is not in him. But as Christians try to live a holy life, stretching over thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years or more, resisting temptations inwardly and outwardly, stretching their willpower to its utmost limits, seeking to obey God's moral commandments in the Bible, and praying for the Holy Spirit and grace to come to their aid, the holy, godly Christian finds that holiness becomes easier over time. Practice does not make perfect, but it can come close for those Christian soldiers who try to obey God and pray their hardest. The Christian soldier who practices biblical repentance continually, every day of his life, yearns for heaven. He is no longer at home on earth, which is full of sin, vexation, corruption, and temptation. The godly Christian is very awake to the reality of hell and the devil; they are not empty doctrines to him, but revelations, awarenesses, levels of consciousness—and he yearns for heaven, to "depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

The token of his yearning, however, is not his level of repentance. Because the repentant Christian, the more he practices repentance (although he knows it is necessary for his salvation from hell), understands all too well how imperfect his repentance is, and at times, how half-hearted and weak-willed. Within the context of living a repentant Christian life, the exhausted Christian man finds solace and peace of mind through faith in the cross of Jesus. However, this is not to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction—as if salvation from hell only requires a belief that Jesus died on the cross for your sins; as if salvation from hell did not require repentance leading to a holy life. The repentance continues vigorously, but the Christian understands his repentance to be overshadowed by the grace of God offered to us by the cross of Jesus. The Christian kneels at the foot of the cross, hundreds of thousands of times before death arrives, and his angel finally escorts him to heaven. Jesus said, “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). And so we shall; this is the one thing we need to know—the way to heaven.

And that thing is this—the gospel: God will forgive the sins of the repentant, holy Christian, every time he comes to the cross by faith, believing what Isaiah 53 says about the subject: that Christ was crucified for our sins, that he took the blame for them, was punished for us by God himself, and that being the sinless Son of God, made perfect mediation and reconciliation between sinful man and the holy God. All sinful men, who then repent and believe in this way, will be saved from eternal damnation in hell, and receive the gift of eternal life. But all who do not repent and believe, and do not CONTINUE to repent and believe, will not receive the gift of eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of regeneration, the Holy Spirit dwelling within the believer’s heart, and it is the token, the guarantee (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13–14), or assurance, the witness of the Spirit, that he is a child of God, and will inherit the kingdom of God, provided that he does not lose the gift his Father gave him, through hardness of heart or impenitence or unbelief, and that he endures to the end, and is saved by God’s grace alone (Matt. 10:22), through a repentant faith in the cross of Christ alone.

After Death: What Happens to True Christians?

While any serious Bible reader and common sense Christian knows that “the hope of the hypocrite” will perish (Job 27:8); and that all those who do not truly “know God” will be everlastingly destroyed by him in hell (2 Thess. 1:8–9); and that all those who practice lawlessness, Christ will command to depart from him (Matt. 7:21–23); for those who are true Christians—those who are genuinely saved and truly converted, what the Bible promises to them after death is beyond what is normally imagined by the human mind in this dark, corrupt world: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:9–10). Focusing on what Scripture says about the subjective experience of the saints after death, there are at least four things we can observe:

1. **A Heavenly Body.** We know that there is an *earthly body* (marred by sin and sickness, capable of healing, but temporary, and destroyed by death and decay); a *hellish body* (a “vessel of wrath fit for eternal destruction”—Rom. 9:22, that God may eternally “destroy both body and soul in hell”—Matt. 10:28); and finally there is a *heavenly body* (which is also called a “spiritual body” by the apostle Paul—1 Cor. 15:40–44). After a true Christian dies, his soul will come out of his earthly body, and he will immediately be transported into his heavenly body. “The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). This body will physically look similar to our earthly body, but it will have none of its imperfections, nor sicknesses, nor pains; and it will be in this body that the saints will live in heaven for eternity; and also on the new earth after all things are restored. Christ “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).
2. **The Beatific Vision of God.** What is classically called “the beatific vision” is the ability to see God’s face in its full

glory. Some mystics have only peered into the face of God by visions or dreams, prophesying in part and knowing in part (1 Cor. 13:9)—but in heaven, “the pure in heart shall see God” (Matt. 5:8)—and “we shall see face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). The inhabitants of heaven will see God and worship him on the throne in an assembly on a regular basis (Rev. 4:10–11), and be filled with joy in his holy presence and love, and be filled with all the divine perfections, and fruits of the Holy Spirit, the more they gaze on his light and glory! John said, “I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9). “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God’” (Rev. 21:3). “They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4). “There before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby.² A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne... From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder” (Rev. 4:2–3, 5). John saw the glorified Christ “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters... his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance” (Rev. 1:13–16).

3. **Perfection in Holiness.** What exactly this will be like is

2. Jasper—“an opaque red, yellow, or brown quartz”; ruby—“a deep red, translucent corundum, highly valued as a precious stone; a deep purplish red” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). In John’s vision of God the Father sitting on the throne in Revelation 4:3, God looked like a man made of a ruby (a transparent red jewel, which can look like blood in its raw, unpolished form).

hard to imagine, but we can infer it will be similar to the experience of saints on earth while they are on their greatest spiritual highs, without any temptation, or accusation, without any irritation of the Devil, of the world, or of the flesh; perfect love for God and man, overflowing impulses from the Holy Spirit within, the perfection of “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23); no temptation; no difficulty to obey God’s law. With the removal of the presence of demons, of sins, and temptations from the view of the saints; and with the strongest manifestation of God’s holy presence, permeating all of heaven; and with both saints and angels carrying around with them and in them, this sanctifying grace, the saints of heaven will be solidified in righteousness; and their hearts will be hardened in holiness. *“The spirits of the righteous” will be “made perfect”* by God’s power (Heb. 12:23).

4. **Indefectibility; or Eternal Security in Heaven.** Whatever debates that Calvinists and Arminians may have about the eternal security of Christians on earth, there will be no such debate in heaven. It will be impossible for the saints in heaven, who have been saved, perfected, and glorified, to ever want to rebel against God. Their hearts will have been perfected in righteousness; there will be no more need to repent from sin, because the presence of sin will be removed from them; and the cross of Christ and the bloodshed of the atonement will last as an everlasting righteousness for all those who were faithful to the death (Dan. 9:24; Rev. 12:11). The willpower will be so hardened in the love of God and man that the sin of Lucifer will not be possible, who although he was once in heaven, said to himself, “I will raise my throne above the stars of God... I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13–14). No sin will be allowed into heaven; no thoughts like that will be permitted; it will be a completely different environment. *Freedom to choose sin will not be possible in heaven*, because all those who are there

chose against sin consistently by choice on earth, and God has rewarded them by removing even the presence of the thought of sin, so that all those in heaven enjoy a state in which sin is a completely alien concept to them. The saints in heaven don't even understand what sin is anymore, because they have become so accustomed to holiness. Therefore, all those who have entered heaven will not be capable of rebelling against God; it will be impossible for them to fall from heaven and go to hell. "*We will be with the Lord forever*" (1 Thess. 4:17). They will live with God for eternity in bliss and righteousness; and God's Spirit will preserve them and protect them from temptation, sin, the devil, and hell. Once you get to heaven, you cannot lose your salvation; you will be permanently saved for certain.

These four subjective aspects will remain with the saints for eternity, and they will grow in their depth and dynamics as their understanding and holiness grows. But there are also objective aspects about heaven as a geographical place in God's universe, that is, what it looks like as a place of residence for God, angels, and saints. Immediately, for all those who "die in the Lord" in the present (Rev. 14:13), knowing that "to be absent from the body" is "to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8), what we commonly call "heaven" is really New Jerusalem in the third heaven. And after the world is destroyed by fire, and completely renovated by God, he will re-create a new heaven and a new earth, and New Jerusalem will descend from the third heaven where it currently is, and come down to a new paradise earth, where after the final judgment, God will dwell with the angels and saints for eternity, and no longer in the third heaven.

New Jerusalem in the Third Heaven: The Present Heaven

There is a city in heaven, and we are to understand from Scripture that it has the name New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2). If we are to rely on Scripture alone, and not on any extra-biblical visions or

revelations, we don't know if there are any other cities in heaven than this one. But if there are other heavenly cities or towns, we should understand that New Jerusalem is the capital city, or the centerpiece of the upper world. It is this city which John Bunyan allegorizes as the "Celestial City" in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It is in this city that God the Father and Christ have their manifested dwelling place (Rev. 21:3); and it is there that they sit on their thrones (21:5). If a true Christian were to die right now, it is probably to New Jerusalem that the angels will escort him (2 Cor. 5:8; 12:1–4; Luke 16:22); it is in New Jerusalem that their heavenly homes are prepared by Christ; it is there that all God's saints will dwell for eternity (John 14:2).

It may be possible that heaven has a very broad geographical boundary, with countrysides that expand outside of the heavenly city, and it may be possible to speculate that saints have houses outside of New Jerusalem in other parts of heaven, as in Rebecca Springer's *Within Heaven's Gates*. But biblically speaking, if we are to speak of a saint "dying and going to heaven," what we mean is New Jerusalem. Shocking to think of, but the Bible even says that New Jerusalem, as a city, is in its measurement about 1,400 square miles! (Rev. 21:15–16). Odd for the human mind to contemplate; this is a city that is so wide, it would stretch from North Carolina to Texas! And because the city is shaped like a golden box, it is equally tall! "Whose architect and builder is God!" (Heb. 11:10). Only God could construct such a city! There is also a temple in the city where God and Christ are worshipped in all their manifested glory (Rev. 7:15).

New Heavens and a New Earth: The Future Heaven

After the Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:13), and after God renovates or purifies the earth by fire (because it was defiled by the presence of sin, 2 Pet. 3:10—this is called "the Day of the Lord"), New Jerusalem will descend from the third heaven down to this earth! (Rev. 21:2). Imagine that! A golden, box-shaped city, large

enough to extend from North Carolina to Texas, descending from the sky! What an overwhelming epic scene! Hundreds of thousands of saints and angels, and what's more Christ, and God himself, coming down with it! A city that levitates, and floats down to the new earth; this same planet, but with all things made new, and with all the former things of sin, sickness, and suffering, having passed away! (Rev. 21:4–5). There will be no temple in New Jerusalem at this stage; God will still be worshipped, but not in a heavenly temple (Rev. 21:22).

All the kinds of animals that God ever created, and we may reasonably speculate dinosaurs as well as all other pre-flood beasts, will dwell with man peacefully, and harmoniously, and they will not be wild and violent, but will “eat straw like the ox” (Isa. 65:25). As Wesley rightly interprets the Scripture, it will be an “unmixed state of holiness and happiness,” with men being able to maneuver like the angels in glorified bodies; with only the clearest, cleanest unpolluted water and air; no hurricanes, tornadoes, or thunderstorms—only the most serene and pleasant weather; only the best temperatures; no comets or meteorites; no volcanoes or earthquakes; no Antarctica, no glaciers; no Sahara Desert; no thorns or poisonous plants; no mosquitoes or gnats or annoying bugs; only beautiful rolling hills and mountains,³ and scenery so completely full of eye candy, that you can scarce take it all in, until the Holy Spirit in nature floods your soul with praise and worship to God! Those who enter this state will be indefectible; it will be impossible to rebel in this “home of righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). Dr. Shedd says, “Eden was uncertain; heaven is certain.”⁴ We will be with the Lord forever, because we will be like him! (2 Thess. 4:17; 1 John 3:2).

3. John Wesley, “The New Creation,” 1.8–16.

4. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), p. 665.

Appendix

A Response to Non-Judgmentalism

David Kinnaman's *Unchristian* (2007), chapter 8: "Judgmental" makes the case that pastors, youth pastors, and all Christians should be completely non-judgmental towards sin and morals, and only be tolerant of sin and loving of sinners in their sins. It is seeker-sensitive theology for Generation Y, my generation. Some heresies are die-hard; this antinomian, non-judgmental stuff is very old; but it was (sort of) refreshing to see the heresy articulated again in its most up-to-date form, at least so I can try to rebuke it utterly with all of my heart. On page 255, note 2 for chapter 8, Kinnaman provides a list of Scriptures that he believes teach non-judgmentalism (the idea that Christians should not tell other people what they're doing is wrong). I felt sick as I read him taking these Scriptures out of their context and reinterpreting them in a liberal, antinomian, morally lax, carnal manner. So, to make up for this, I consulted Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke, and the *NIV Study Bible* to compile a traditional orthodox interpretation of these biblical passages, and respond to Kinnaman's gross misinterpretation and immoral misapplication of the inspired Word of God. David Kinnaman and his crowd seem to fit well into these Scriptures: "Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived... For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Timothy 3:13; 4:3-4).

1. **Matthew 7:1-2.** This only forbids hypocrites from judging others (v. 5). Particularly, rash and unfriendly judging based on the personal like or dislike of a person.

2. **Luke 6:37.** Again, this only forbids hypocrites from judging others; and it does not forbid genuine spiritual discernment (vv. 43–45). This forbids harsh, demeaning, and unmerciful condemning of others.
3. **Luke 7:36–47.** Jesus does not rebuke the Pharisee for judging at all—he is not going to the extent of teaching non-judgmentalism. Instead, he teaches the Pharisee how to make a righteous judgment of a person who has repented and been forgiven by God (vv. 40–43). The Pharisee was being hypocritical and lukewarm in his judgment of the woman; because, although she had been a prostitute and pagan, her great weeping and visible worship of Jesus shows that her repentance from sin and love for God were now very deep, unlike the Pharisee, who doubted that Jesus should even be called a prophet (v. 39). Henry concludes, “The reason why some people blame the pains and expense of zealous Christians, in religion, is because they are not willing themselves to come up to it, but resolve to rest in a cheap and easy religion.”
4. **Romans 2:1–4.** Paul teaches, just like Jesus (Matthew 7:1–2; Luke 6:37), that it is wrong for hypocrites to judge others. He is not teaching non-judgmentalism, but was rebuking some unrepentant carnal Christians in Rome who were criticizing others (v. 5). This means that in this Scripture, Paul was judging someone!
5. **Romans 14:4, 10–13.** Paul is not teaching a full scale non-judgmentalism in these verses! If you read the whole chapter in its proper context, it becomes clear that the subjects he was addressing were “disputable matters” of the conscience (v. 1), such as keeping a Sabbath day (v. 5), or being a vegetarian (v. 2). Paul makes himself clear that all foods are clean (v. 20), but he directs Christians who already know this to not be judgmental toward those Christians who aren’t so sure (v. 15). Vegetarian Christians don’t yet realize that God has cleansed all foods (Acts 10)—but they are still saved if they maintain a clear

conscience toward God. God will judge their lives as well as ours (v. 12)—“therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another” (v. 13) about such petty issues. Paul teaches flexibility and tolerance about such issues of the ceremonial law; but he does not teach an antinomian, full blown non-judgmentalism about all morality and sins (the moral law). Paul was teaching non-judgmentalism to be directed at those Christians who were not mature enough in their faith to completely abandon the ceremonial law; again, he was not teaching non-judgmentalism about the moral law. David Kinnaman, however, teaches non-judgmentalism about major issues of sexuality and morality such as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, prostitution, and adultery (pp. 182, 184, 196, 201). Neither Jesus nor Paul taught Christians to be non-judgmental about the moral law, especially sexual sins.

6. **1 Corinthians 4:5.** This verse was directed to a particular group of people in the church of Corinth who were unjustly and arrogantly judging Paul as a false prophet and false apostle (v. 3, 18–20). Henry and the Puritans called it “ensoriousness” (nitpicking; faultfinding; being severely critical). They didn’t really know him or his heart, but were passing judgment on his motives anyway (v. 5), and saying that he was evil. He reminds them that he will have to face God on the day of judgment for everything he is doing and every motive in his heart (vv. 4–5)—God, who is all-knowing, and judges perfectly, righteously, and without favoritism. Paul is telling a particular group of people at Corinth who were calling him a false apostle—“Wait until judgment day, then we’ll all see what God says about me and my motives.” This verse does NOT teach non-judgmentalism. What a total removal of the verse from its original context! Kinnaman would have us believe that all Christians at all times should suspend their judgment toward the gross and obvious immorality in other people’s lives (and implicitly, not warn them that they are in danger

of hell), because God will judge us himself on the day of judgment. Recently I saw a thug wearing a shirt that said, “Only God can judge me” (probably from the cuss-filled 2Pac rap song). That’s not true! Men are created in the image of God, and have the capacity to think critically and discern right from wrong and warn against all wrongdoing and teach all righteousness! What Paul is saying is, “You people don’t really know me; also, you are arrogant and are saying things that are not accurate at all... but God, who knows all things, will judge me one day.” Paul is not telling all Christians to be non-judgmental to all sin in the world! He is NOT teaching “only God can judge me; don’t judge me; you don’t know me!”—as if this applied to all moral issues and all relationships. He was applying a principle of righteous judgment, which was also the teaching of Jesus, to be modeled in the church of Corinth. In other words, if you’re going to judge someone, make sure you have sufficient evidence and are trying to make an accurate, honest evaluation of the facts, and are being humble about the matter, making a judgment that is based on clear, indisputable reasons and evidences. Otherwise, you are arrogant, illogical, and would serve as a poor judge in any court of law (unless it was a kangaroo court that totally perverted justice).

7. **1 Corinthians 5:12.** God judges non-Christians who don’t go to church and are not part of the church community. But Christians within the church community are to judge each other. “The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). As a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4), so it is not possible for Christians to accurately judge the personal lives of non-Christians since they don’t (or shouldn’t) know them that intimately. What a rebuke to friendship evangelism! Kinnaman assumes that Christians should be friends with non-Christians and in a non-judgmental manner about their sin throughout his whole chapter! Clarke rightly said,

“Christians who wish to retain the spirituality of their religion should be very careful how they mingle with the world. He who is pleased with the company of ungodly men, no matter howsoever witty or learned, is either himself one with them, or is drinking into their spirit. It is impossible to associate with such by choice without receiving a portion of their contagion. A man may be amused or delighted with such people, but he will return even from the festival of wit with a lean soul.” Paul says, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). However, Christians should obviously preach against the sins of the world when they practice evangelism in public, whether by means of open air preaching, one-to-one witnessing, etc. Without the preaching of God’s law there can be no preaching of God’s grace (the gospel).

Further Reading on Salvation

John Wesley on Salvation (Wesleyan Arminian)

Personally, in my preparatory studies while writing this book, my strongest influences were Kenneth J. Collins, Thomas C. Oden, Harald Lindström, Steve Harper, John Wesley's sermons, and Joseph Alleine's *Sure Guide*.

Cell, G. C. *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935.

Collins, Kenneth J. *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997. Wesley's order of salvation based on all his works. Level 3.

———. *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Francis Asbury Press, 1989. Wesley's order of salvation based on his sermons. Level 2.

Harper, Steve. *Four Views on Eternal Security*. Edited by J. Matthew Pinson. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. Chapter 4: "A Wesleyan Arminian View." Maintains the possibility of apostasy with clear reasoning. Chapter 3: "A Reformed Arminian View" has more biblical references; and also maintains conditional security.

———. *The Way to Heaven: The Gospel According to John Wesley*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003. Wesley's order of salvation based on his sermons. Level 1.

Lindström, Harald. *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Francis Asbury Press, 1980. Reprint of 1946 edition; strong influence on Kenneth J. Collins; Wesley's order of salvation based on his sermons. Level 3.

Oden, Thomas. *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. Presents Wesley's views of theology. Level 2.

Outler, Albert, ed. *John Wesley*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Wesley, John. *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. Edited by Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991.

Works That Influenced John Wesley's View of Salvation

Alleine, Joseph. *A Sure Guide to Heaven*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989. A modern version of *An Alarm to the Unconverted*.

Arminius, James. *The Works of James Arminius*. 3 vols. Translated by James Nichols and William Nichols. Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2007.

Arndt, Johann. *True Christianity*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979.

Barnes, Robert. *Two Treatises, The First on Justification by Faith Only, The Second on the Sinfulness of Man's Natural Will*. Gale ECCO, 2010.

Baxter, Richard. *An Extract of Richard Baxter's Aphorisms of Justification*. Edited by John Wesley. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010. 40 pages.

———. *A Call to the Unconverted*. Welwyn, UK: Evangelical Press, 1976.

———. *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter: Selected Treatises*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010.

Church of England (Thomas Cranmer). *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to Be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library, 2005. Especially: "Of the Salvation of all Mankind."

Goodwin, John. *A Treatise on Justification*. Gale ECCO, 2010. Edited by John Wesley; had a strong gospel influence on him. Goodwin was an Arminian Puritan preacher; and died in 1665. Also includes Wesley's refutation of the antinomian James Hervey.

Luther, Martin. *Commentary on Romans*. Translated by J. Theodore Mueller. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1976.

———, et al. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2000. Influenced by Luther, Melancthon, and other early Lutheran theologians.

Wesleyan Methodists on Salvation

- Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Christian Theology*. Nicholasville, KY: Schmull Publishing, 1990.
- Merrill, Stephen Mason. *Doctrinal Aspects of Christian Experience*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2008.
- Oden, Thomas. *The Transforming Power of Grace*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993. An Arminian masterpiece.
- Ralston, Thomas. *Elements of Divinity*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2009.
- Tillett, Wilbur. *Personal Salvation*. Nabu Press, 2012.

Charles Finney on Salvation

Although Finney erred in the areas of Pelagianism (denial of original sin) and perfectionism, he did not always err in this manner. Much of what he says has a synergistic nature, or shows how the influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to Christians living a holy life (by the grace of God). In addition to Wesley, Charles Finney was another profound Arminian theologian, evangelist, and forerunner to Pentecostalism. He was the main evangelist during the Second Great Awakening. Most of his writings have to do with sanctification, obedience to God's moral law, or living a holy life.

- Finney, Charles. *Lectures on Systematic Theology*. 2 vols. Edited by Richard Friedrich. Alethea in Heart, 2003.
- . *Finney's Systematic Theology*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994. A modernized unabridged version.
- . *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. Edited by Richard Friedrich. Alethea in Heart, 2005.
- . *Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures*. Edited by Richard Friedrich. Alethea in Heart, 2005.
- . *Sermons on Gospel Themes*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007.
- . *Sermons on the Way of Salvation*. Nabu Press, 2011.

Puritan and Reformed Books on Lordship Salvation

In 1988, John MacArthur (*The Gospel According to Jesus*) and Calvinists like him began preaching a “lordship salvation” gospel like the Puritans—that a truly saved Christian has to demonstrate righteousness, and evidence of repentance, in order to know if he has truly saving faith. Jesus is not only Savior, but also the Lord of your life, in order for there to be any salvation from sin and hell. The majority of the conservative evangelical (dispensationalist) community rejected what MacArthur was preaching as “legalism” and “works-salvation,” but actually he was preaching the same gospel that George Whitefield preached during the Great Awakening, and the Puritans before him. And there are others just like him today, such as Ray Comfort (*Hell’s Best Kept Secret*, 1989) and Paul Washer (*The Gospel’s Power and Message*, 2012).

If you are an Arminian preacher and tend only to think of Calvinists as coming from a “cheap grace” viewpoint, then please consider these books. It does Christians well to be balanced, and to promote understanding throughout the body of Christ, whether you are Calvinist or Arminian. But here are some good Puritan soteriologies that are also against “cheap grace,” and preach that sanctification is necessary in a Christian’s life if he is to hope for salvation from hell.

Alleine, Joseph. *A Sure Guide to Heaven*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989. A modern version of *An Alarm to the Unconverted*. Influenced Whitefield, Wesley, and Spurgeon.

Bolton, Samuel, Nathaniel Vincent, and Thomas Watson. *The Puritans on Conversion*. Soli Deo Gloria, 2003.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Book Third. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008.

Comfort, Ray. *Hell’s Best Kept Secret*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1989. Shows that preaching God’s law is necessary for evangelism.

Gerstner, John. *Steps to Salvation: The Evangelistic Message of Jonathan Edwards*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960. Gerstner is

- a great modern Reformed scholar on Jonathan Edwards—just as Kenneth J. Collins is to John Wesley.
- . *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1987. Presents the gospel of Jesus Christ as an order of salvation: original sin, atonement, regeneration, justification, sanctification, hell, and heaven.
- Graham, Billy. *How to Be Born Again*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977. Lightly “Reformed” (evangelical); still good.
- Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989. This is a more systematic and theological work of soteriology. It presents a Reformed Calvinist approach to the “order of salvation,” but argues that most of the steps happen simultaneously—that is, drawings of the Father, regeneration, conversion, repentance, faith, and justification. Sanctification and perseverance are life-long. Extensive Reformed Calvinist bibliography on salvation.
- Leiter, Charles. *Justification and Regeneration*. Hannibal, MO: Granted Ministries Press, 2009.
- Lescelius, Robert. *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers: Including a Reply to “So Great A Salvation” by Charles C. Ryrie and “Absolutely Free!” by Zane C. Hodges*. Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992.
- MacArthur, John. *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.
- Packer, J. I. *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990.
- . *Concise Theology*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1993.
- Shedd, William G. T. *Dogmatic Theology*. Vol. 2. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888. Not only does it contain the incomparable Reformed treatment on eternal punishment (hell), but also other subjects of soteriology such as: original sin, atonement, regeneration, conversion, justification, sanctification, the means of grace, heaven, and the final judgment. Full of references to Puritan books and classic historical-theological treatments on each subject.
- Marshall, Walter. *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005. A classic Puritan work on the Christian life or growing in sanctification.
- Washer, Paul. *The Gospel’s Power and Message*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012.

Hell: The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment

It may come as a surprise to some evangelicals that most of what we may call “sound doctrine” on the subject of hell comes down to us from the Puritans and from other Reformed theologians following in their footsteps (for example, Christopher Love, Thomas Vincent, John Bunyan, and Jonathan Edwards). As a Wesleyan Arminian, at first this was difficult for me to accept; but then I had to humble myself towards my Calvinistic brothers and admit the fact that I must either rely on their theologians for my understanding of eternal punishment, or maintain a very weak view of hell.

I am not entirely sure why Arminianism does not have an equally developed tradition of hell-fire preaching as does Puritanism and Reformed Christianity. It is true that universalism is often associated with people who are defective Arminians (for example, James Relly); but the true Arminians, like John Wesley and the 18th century Methodists (Adam Clarke, Francis Asbury, and other Wesleyan theologians) maintained somewhat of an understanding of the Puritan view of hell. Perhaps the Methodists’ theology of hell was not as developed as the Puritans’ because Methodist evangelists were preoccupied with the subjects of holiness and righteousness, practical theology, morals, or ethics in the Christian life (which concerns this present life, and not eternity). Also, the Methodists clung to the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, which says little about hell. The Puritans had the Westminster Confession, which has a developed biblical theology of hell. The gospel preacher must be eternity-conscious if he intends on effectively communicating the message of salvation; hence, I point the reader to the Puritans and their heritage for most of what needs to be preached on the biblical subject of hell.

Augustine, St. *City of God*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. Book XXI or 21.

Bunyan, John. *Sighs from Hell*. Edited by Don Kistler. Orlando, FL: The Northampton Press, 2011.

- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008. Book Third, Chapter 25, Section 12.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Wrath of Almighty God: Jonathan Edwards on God's Judgment against Sinners*. Edited by Don Kistler. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996. The standard sermons of Puritan hellfire preaching from the Great Awakening. Hands down, the greatest hellfire preacher ever.
- . *The Torments of Hell: Jonathan Edwards on Eternal Damnation*. Edited by William Nichols. Ames, IA: International Outreach, 2006. Previously unpublished sermons on hell.
- Gerstner, John. *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980.
- Love, Christopher. *Heaven's Glory, Hell's Terror*. EEBO, 2010.
- Morgan, Christopher, and Robert Peterson, eds. *Hell Under Fire*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. A contemporary work of biblical scholarship, which establishes the traditional doctrine of hell as a place of eternal punishment; thoroughly refutes the heresies of universalism and annihilationism. Essential reading for “what the Bible says” about hell; indispensable (cannot do without), but extremely technical (difficult to read through).
- , Eds. *Is Hell for Real or Does Everyone Go to Heaven?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. A simplified booklet based on *Hell Under Fire*. To-the-point what the Bible says about hell.
- Shedd, W. G. T. *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- Vincent, Thomas. *Fire and Brimstone*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1999.
- Wesley, John. “Of Hell” (Sermon 73).
- Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapter 33: “Of the Last Judgment.” Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, n.d.
- Whitefield, George. “The Eternity of Hell Torments” (Sermon 26).

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The Gospel of Jesus Christ

In the past decade, there has been a rise of a new breed of street preachers—a move, especially among Generations X and Y, through YouTube, and on college campuses, to preach the Bible with striking clarity, much more so than is currently heard in most churches today and in the recent past. But with the renewed focus on open air preaching, there needs to be a return to sound doctrine as found in the soteriology of the Great Awakening. The author takes his lead from John Wesley, as *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* is intended to be a practical manual for street preachers, evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and all Christians to preach a clear gospel presentation. Hell has enlarged her mouth and time is short! The task is urgent! Let our mouths be filled with the words of Christ's salvation as we go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature! (Mark 16:15).

In a day of superficial gospels and seeker-sensitive churches, John Boruff digs deep into church history, giving us many choice excerpts of what godly men in the past preached and believed. He sets the plumb line from Scripture, and shows how this current generation is needing a correction in its gospel. I recommend this volume for saints to read and share with others. —GREG GORDON, Founder of SermonIndex.net

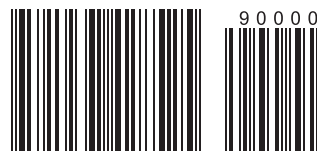
JOHN BORUFF (B.A., Philosophy and Religion, UNC Pembroke) is the founder of WesleyGospel.com, which is committed to spreading classic Christian spirituality in the Wesleyan tradition. He feels called to preach the gospel wherever the opportunity may be found, and has a hunger to grow in and teach on the spiritual gifts. He is also a husband and father.

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