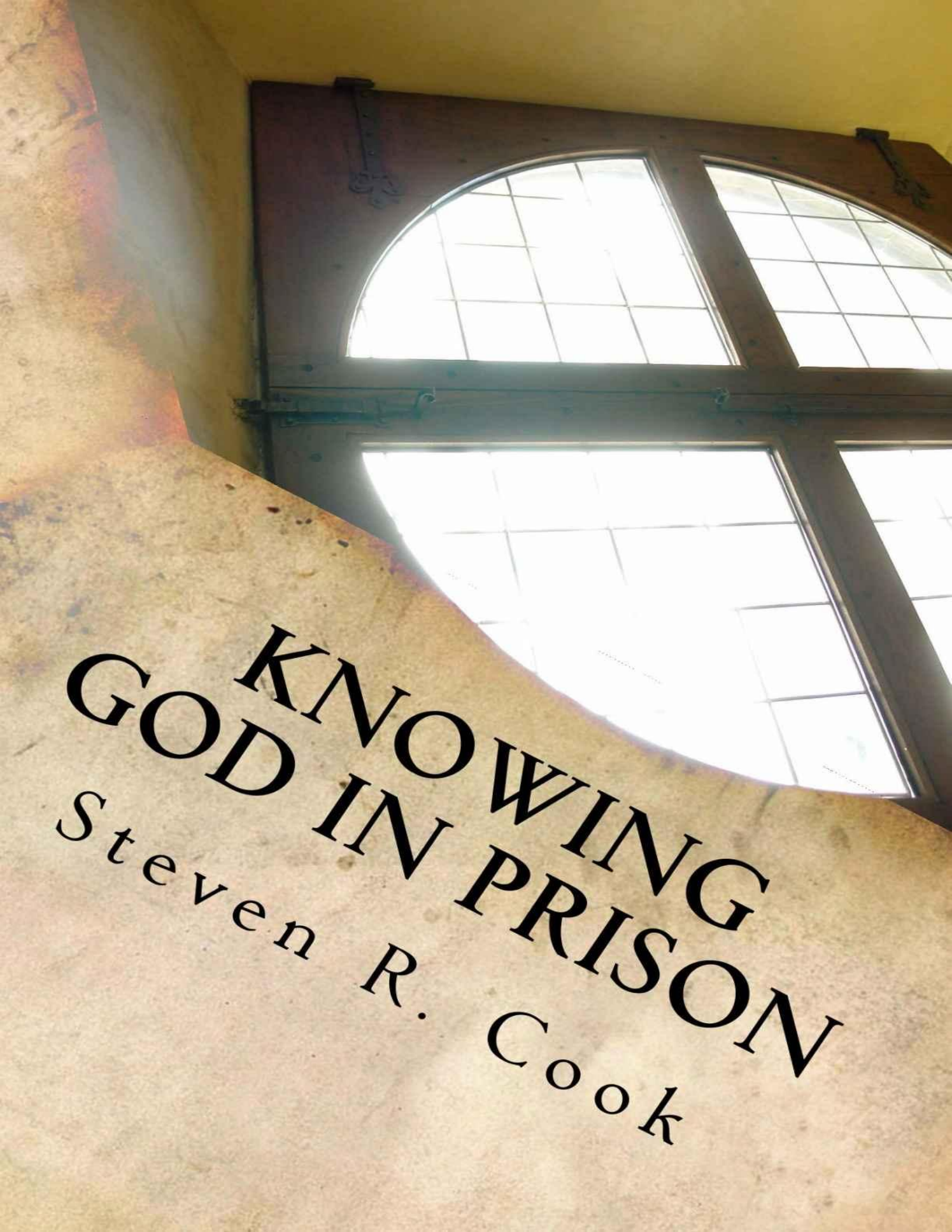


KNOWING GOD IN PRISON

Steven R. Cook

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-*Overcoming Evil in Prison: How to Be a Light in a Dark Place*

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PREFACE

It was through a simple presentation of the gospel message that I came to believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior when I was eight, with the result that I received eternal life (John 3:16; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). However, I learned that being saved does not guarantee a godly life. As a young teenager I was completely surrounded by worldly minded people with no godly influence, and I was free to chase after the world and the lusts of my flesh. For years I was unopposed in my pursuit of a life of drugs and crime. From the beginning of my rebellion, I used the hardest drugs I could find (PCP, cocaine, LSD, etc.). This life was all I knew and it nearly destroyed me.

One Sunday morning back in the summer of 1988, I was sleeping on some grass and woke to the sound of children walking past a fence near the alley where I'd slept the night before. Years of bad choices and heavy drug use had caught up with me and the few weeks I'd spent living on the streets of Las Vegas, Nevada, and at the Salvation Army, were enough to awaken me to the despair of my situation. Worldly living had produced such a darkness within me, there were times I had considered suicide as a solution to end the misery that was my pathetic life. From the time I was saved until that morning on the grass, I had not been living as a righteous man, but rather as the wicked that "are like chaff which the wind drives away" (Ps. 1:4). My life at that time epitomized worldliness, as I had rejected God from life altogether. By excluding Him, I had become my own worst enemy. I had excluded God from my life, but He had not excluded me from His.

The Lord loved me and humbled me by divine discipline (Heb. 12:5-11). He caused me to suffer for my own good. Like David, I came to say, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Ps. 119:71). The Lord brought me to a place where I was helpless and ready to

listen to Him. When my heart was broken, and I had no place to look but to Him, then Scripture my grandmother had helped me memorize when I was a little boy came to mind, and I found hope (Ps. 1:1-6; 23:1-6). I was homeless, hurt, hungry, wearing only rags, and more thankful than I'd been in many years. The Lord, who allowed me to destroy my life, forgave me and called me back to fellowship with Him. I welcomed His love and grace.

The joy of my salvation was refreshed within me. A fire was ignited in my soul and I was ready to walk with the Lord. I knew I had to be responsible and face my prison sentence and serve time for the crimes I'd committed, and I knew the Lord was with me all the way. My two year prison term was a time of spiritual development as I faced many tests and grew in my knowledge and application of Scripture. As a Christian, my spiritual growth began the day I turned my life over to God. Many worldly people had previously influenced me in an ungodly way, and I was stupid enough to let them. No more. No more hanging around foolish people, or reading worldly books, or watching movies that promote worldly values, or listening to music that glorifies degenerate values. No more. God had blessed me with everything I needed to grow and mature and I decided to lay hold of that life. Oh, I made bad choices along the way and fell into sin, but God continually showed me grace. I confessed my sin and got back to living the spiritual life and "walking in the light as He Himself is in the light" (1 John 1:7). As I grew in my love for Him I learned that "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Four months after my release from prison, in 1990, I actively started serving in jail ministry and continued for over twelve years. I loved teaching Bible classes several times a week and sharing the gospel with others. I started college in 1992 and completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services from Wayland Baptist University in 1998. Afterward, I studied Classical Literature for several years at Texas Tech University, and then began graduate school in 2002 at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and completed a Master of Divinity degree in 2006.

The year before my graduation, on February 10, 2005, the Governor of Nevada, Kenny Guinn, along with the Nevada Supreme Court, awarded me a full pardon for the crime that sent me to prison. In 2006 I had my criminal records permanently sealed. This is the grace of God. The Lord has opened doors of opportunity for ministry and education and undone much of the damage I had inflicted on myself many years before. The fifteen years between the time of my release from prison in 1990 until the time of my pardon in 2005 was very difficult. Convicted felons are generally viewed with great suspicion in society and are automatically denied jobs, places to live and other opportunities in life. I've learned that life is not fair and not to expect any justice from the world. I accepted my hardship during that time and lived where I could. I worked menial jobs while I was in school, and above all kept my focus on the Lord who gave me joy and hope from day to day. Now I choose to live a simple life and work in quiet. I enjoy writing articles and books to a small audience, and teaching small groups when I have opportunity.

Though I was saved at a young age, it was only through many years of study that I came to understand and appreciate in a greater way what God did in bringing me to Himself through the substitutionary atoning work of His Son on the cross. My study of the subject of salvation began while I was in prison, and this writing is partly a reflection of that time of learning. **This book is intended to present the Gospel message to those who have never trusted Christ as their Savior, as well as deepen the Christian's understanding of the atoning work that was accomplished by Jesus Christ at the cross**.

I pray you find this book a help and a blessing. I hope you will take the time to look up every Scripture reference to see for yourself that the things written here are true and not merely the opinion of a man. I pray this book will bring light to your soul and rest to your mind as you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation.

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INTRODUCTION

All four Gospels record the prisoner exchange between a notorious criminal named Barabbas and the Lord Jesus (Matt. 27:16-26; Mark. 15:7-15; Luke 23:18; John 18:40). Barabbas was in jail for insurrection, murder, and robbery, and was surely going to face death for his crimes (Luke 23:18-19; John 18:40). Jesus, on the other hand, was innocent of all the charges brought against Him. Pilate, the Roman Governor who presided as judge over the two men, knew it was "because of envy" that Jesus had been handed over to him to be scourged and crucified (Matt. 27:18; cf. Mark 15:10). Pilate knew Jesus was not guilty of the charges leveled against Him and sought to have Him released (Luke 23:20); however, Pilate eventually proved a weak leader who surrendered to the insane demands of the mob who kept shouting "crucify, crucify him!" (Luke 23:21). All of this occurred according to God's predetermined plan (Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28).

Barabbas was sitting in his jail cell when a Roman guard came, unlocked his door and informed him he was free to leave. I suppose Barabbas was puzzled because freedom was not what he expected. Barabbas was in a dark place with no ability to save himself. Outside the prison walls, Jesus was being led away to die in his place, the innocent for the guilty, the just for the unjust. I am Barabbas. You are Barabbas. Spiritually, we are all in a dark place without hope, facing eternal death, and with no ability to save ourselves. But there's good news! Outside our prison is a free and innocent Man who has died in our place, who bore the punishment that rightfully belongs to us.

> For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God

> demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:6-8)

We are “helpless…ungodly… [and] sinners”, much like Barabbas, yet, “Christ died for us.” That’s good news! Today, our prison cell is open, and salvation is available to us because another man bore our penalty for us.

GOD IS HOLY

The Bible reveals that God has many attributes. One of the attributes that people often mention is God's attribute of *love* (Jer. 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16). However, a more thorough search through Scripture reveals numerous divine attributes which inform us that God is:

1. ***omniscient*** (Ps. 139:1-6; Matt. 6:31-33)
2. ***omnipresent*** (Ps. 139:7-12; Heb. 13:5)
3. ***omnipotent*** (Job 42:2; Isa. 40:28-29)
4. ***sovereign*** (1 Chron. 29:11; Dan. 4:35; Acts 17:24-25)
5. ***righteous*** (Ps. 11:7; 119:137)
6. ***just*** (Ps. 9:7-8; 19:9; 50:6; 58:11)
7. ***immutable*** (Ps. 102:26, 27; Mal. 3:6)
8. ***truthful*** (2 Sam. 7:28; John 17:17; 1 John 5:20)
9. ***loving*** (Jer. 31:3; 1 John 4:7-12, 16)
10. ***faithful*** (Deut. 7:9; Lam. 3:23; 1 John 1:9)
11. ***merciful*** (Ps. 86:15; Luke 6:36; Tit. 3:5)
12. ***gracious*** (Ps. 111:4; 116:5; 1 Pet. 5:10)
13. ***eternal*** (Deut. 33:27; 1 Tim. 1:17)
14. ***holy*** (Ps. 99:9; 1 Pet. 1:14-16)

It is the last characteristic of ***God's holiness*** mentioned in the above list that is very important as we start our study into the Gospel. It's also essential that we understand the Gospel starts with God. The Gospel starts with the truth that God is holy and that He is positively pure and separate from sin.

> Exalt the LORD our God And worship at His holy hill, For holy [Heb. *qadosh*][i] is the LORD our God. (Ps. 99:9)

> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, but like the Holy [Grk. *hagios*] One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Pet. 1:14-16)

Both the Old and New Testament Scriptures teach that God is holy. The word "holy" comes from Hebrew *qadosh* used in the Old Testament and the Greek *hagios* used in the New Testament. The word "holy" means sacred, consecrated, or set apart from all that is sinful or unclean (Lev. 11:44-45; Josh. 24:19; Ps. 99:9; Isa. 6:3; John 17:11; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; Rev. 15:4). God is completely set apart from sin, as the Scripture tells us, "*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness *with favor*" (Hab. 1:13), and "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Because God is holy, His commands are "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12), and He tells His people to "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15).

> In respect to God, holiness means not only that He is separate from all that is unclean and evil but also that He is positively pure and thus distinct from all others.[ii]

Too often people come to God as though He were a big fluffy teddy bear waiting to be squeezed, or a kindly old man who poses no threat to anyone. God never portrays Himself this way in Scripture, as though He were soft and easy. Men who see God's holiness stand in awe of Him and have respect for His greatness. More so, because God is holy He must stay separate from sinners, and those who encounter God's holiness are afraid for their lives. Moses was not allowed to approach the Lord when he met Him at the burning bush; rather, the Lord said "do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). Later, when God revealed Himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, "the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking"

(Ex. 20:18a). Rather than run to God as One to be embraced as a cuddly teddy bear, “they trembled and stood at a distance” (Ex. 20:18b).

> God’s holiness means His complete “apartness” from anything that is sinful. He is *different* from that which is common; He is *separate* from that which is defiling. But God’s holiness isn’t a static thing, like a block of pure ice. His holiness is active and alive, a “sea of glass mingled with fire” (Rev. 15:2). Everything about God is holy: His wisdom, His power, His judgments, and even His love. If His love were not a holy love, He would never have sent His only Son to die for the sins of the world and meet the just demands of His own nature and His own holy law.[iii]

God is love and wants to have a loving relationship with us, but He cannot and will not compromise His holiness to make that happen. In Scripture, many experienced God’s holiness before they came to know His forgiveness and love. “In the year of King Uzziah’s death” the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God in which he “saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted” (Isa. 6:1), with angels standing above Him who were crying out “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:3). An acute awareness of personal sin suddenly enveloped the prophet when he encountered God’s holiness and he declared, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Similarly, after meeting the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time, Peter became conscious of his sinfulness and said, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8). The apostle John, upon seeing the Lord Jesus in His resurrection glory, responded by falling “at His feet like a dead man” (Rev. 1:17). These are healthy responses to a holy God, for “who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy” (Rev. 15:4). To know God is to know that He is holy, and to know His holiness is to be aware of the fact that we are sinful.

When a person understands God’s holiness, he naturally feels uncomfortable in his conscience because he knows he stands guilty before

the righteous Judge of the universe. The matter gets worse when he realizes he's *helpless*, *ungodly*, an *enemy of God*, *dead in sin*, and *completely unable to save himself* (Rom. 5:6-10; Eph. 2:1-3). In order to be eternally saved, a man must first be brought to the place where he stands guilty before an infinitely holy God with the realization that he cannot save himself. There is hope for him in the Gospel message, but we must deal with other biblical subjects first.

MAN IS SINFUL

The subject of *sin* is specifically mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew *chata* and the Greek *hamartano* are the two most common words found in Scripture. Both words have the basic meaning *to miss the mark*. God's laws are a reflection of His holy character, and when a person sins, not only does he *miss the mark* of doing God's will, but he hits the wrong target altogether. "The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against God, even when the wrong we do is to others or ourselves (Gen. 39:9; Ps. 51:4)."[iv]

Sin entered the world because of the rebellion of Adam and Eve, and every descendant of Adam (except for Jesus Christ) is born into this world with a sinful nature that is bent on behaving sinfully. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he defied God and His will for him and incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death that God righteously and sovereignly promised would come if he ate fruit from the forbidden tree.

> The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17)

Scripture reveals both Adam and Eve "took from its fruit and ate" (Gen. 3:6); however, Adam alone was held responsible by God for the disobedience that occurred in the Garden of Eden. Because of Adam's rebellion against God, sin and death entered the human race and spread throughout the universe (Rom. 8:20-22).

> Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all

sinned [when Adam sinned]. (Rom. 5:12)

> For since by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all [who believe in Him] will be made alive. (1 Cor. 15:21-22)

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that "through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (Rom. 5:12), "that by the transgression of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one" (Rom. 5:17), "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men" (Rom. 5:18), "through the one man's disobedience [Adam's sin] the many [all mankind] were made sinners" (Rom. 5:19).

All of Adam's descendants are born into this world spiritually dead in "trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), and are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), "separate from Christ…having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12), alienated from God (Col. 1:21), and "devoid of the Spirit" (Jude 1:19; cf. Rom. 8:9). Biblically, men are sinners in three ways:

1. By imputation of Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12-21; Gal. 3:22).[v]
2. By nature (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 7:19-21; Eph. 2:3).
3. By choice (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:9-18).

The Bible teaches that man is completely marked by sin in every aspect of his being. Sin permeates his thoughts, feelings and volition (i.e. will). The sin nature resides in every person and negatively influences his relationships with other people, and most of all with God.

> Man's sin had a great effect on God. It still does. Surely sin made its mark on Adam and Eve and on the entire human race. Severe penalties were inflicted on our first parents, the serpent, and even the ground because of man's self-centered attitude and action. But what relationship did Adam's sin and our sin in him have on God? This

> question is seldom given much thought. The answer is not difficult if we remember that all sin is an offense against God. He is the norm, the standard, the criterion of judging right from wrong. Therefore sin is an offense against him, against his holy character.[vi]

All mankind is fallen in sin and "there is none righteous, not even one…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10, 23). Men are born sinners *in Adam* and inherit a sin nature which internally motivates them to commit personal sin. All men are completely corrupted in sin. This does not mean that all men are as sinful as they can be, but that all are equally in a state of sin, and their sinful condition has completely separated them from God and rendered them helpless to save themselves.

> The Bible is explicit about the condition of all who have not been born again. They are lost (Luke 19:10), condemned (John 3:18), under God's wrath (John 3:36), dead in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1), having no hope, and without God in the world (Eph. 2:12), and unrighteous (Rom. 1:19-32). These passages represent but a sampling of the Bible's teaching regarding God's view of those not in his heavenly family. Man's need of salvation is thus established. It must not be thought that this teaching applies only to pagans and the worst of sinners by human standards. All are under God's wrath and in need of salvation. The religious and nonreligious, the educated and uneducated, the rich and the poor—all are in need of God's saving grace and are hopelessly lost without it.[vii]

God is holy and men are sinners. This is a dark picture. Even worse, man, by his own efforts, cannot save himself. Human ability can never measure up to God's perfect standard of righteousness. Jesus declared, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

The words of Scripture should weigh like a ten ton stone tied around our necks as we are tossed into the ocean and feel ourselves desperately

sinking to the bottom. Before salvation, we should feel helpless and lost, unable to save ourselves. We should see ourselves as guilty sinners before a holy God who deserve only death as the just punishment for our sin.

GOOD WORKS DO NOT SAVE

The unbeliever can do nothing to save himself. His adherence to any system of good works or the Mosaic Law will never win the approval of God. In the sight of God, "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment" which have no saving value whatsoever (Isa. 64:6). The words translated "filthy garment" in Isaiah 64:6 literally mean a "menstruation garment"[viii] which conveys in strong and offensive language the "best deeds of guilty people."[ix] It's a slap in the face to human pride to label our best efforts as "filthy rags" in the sight of God. The trade-in value for our "righteous deeds"—should we bring them to God and demand payment—is eternal separation from Him in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:12-15). Human efforts at righteous living will never open the doors of heaven to anyone. The Scripture is clear that salvation is "the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8b-9), and that God saves us "not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Tit. 3:5). Salvation is never what men do for God, but rather what God has done for them through the Person of Jesus Christ who paid their sin debt on the cross. God now offers eternal life without charge to all who accept His free gift of salvation (John 3:16; 20:31; Rom. 6:23).

Many unbelievers fallaciously hold to the strange notion that if they follow the Mosaic Law they will win God's approval and be accepted into heaven. This is completely wrong. Scripture states:

> …a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Righteousness before God never comes through the Law, “for if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law” (Gal. 3:21). Obedience to the Mosaic Law never brings an unbeliever into righteous standing before God. The Law reveals God’s righteous character and the truth that we are sinners who do not measure up to His righteous standard.

> But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the [Mosaic] Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:22-26)

That we are “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” should forever settle the issue that human works do not save. If human works save, then credit belongs to the individual for the work he did on his own behalf in bringing himself to God. But human works never save, and the credit for our salvation belongs one hundred percent to the Lord Jesus Christ because of His substitutionary atoning work on the cross. The cross of Christ is an offense to the arrogant self-made man who must admit his helplessness and sinfulness before a holy God in order to be saved by grace. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told a parable “to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9). Jesus said:

> Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’

> "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10-14)

Self-righteous arrogance leads people to brag about themselves and their religious accomplishments before God, thinking the Lord will be impressed with such activities and throw open the doors of heaven to welcome them. The Lake of Fire will be full of people who tried to get to heaven by their own good works. In contrast, the sinner who is honest with God and appeals to His mercy will be "justified" before the Lord. Salvation is always a matter of mercy and grace rather than religion and works!

When we think of salvation, we must always ask ourselves, "Who is doing the saving?" In the Bible, it is always God who saves the sinner (John 3:16; Tit. 3:5). It is God who gives the sinner eternal life and imputes to him a righteousness he does not deserve and could never manufacture on his own (John 10:28; Rom. 4:1-6; Phil. 3:9). The sinner never saves himself. If the sinner could save himself, then Jesus's death on the cross would not have been necessary.

> THE word salvation is used in the Bible to indicate a work of God in behalf of man. In the present dispensation its use is limited to His work for individuals only, and is vouchsafed to them upon one definite condition. Too much emphasis cannot be placed on the fact that now, according to the Bible, salvation is the result of the work of God for the individual, rather than the work of the individual for God, or even the work of the individual for himself. Eventually the one who is saved by the power of God may, after that divine work is accomplished, do "good works" for God; for salvation is said to be "unto good works" (Eph. 2:10) and those who "believed" are to be "careful to maintain good works" (Tit. 3:8). Good works are evidently made possible by salvation; but these good works, which follow salvation, do not add anything to the all-sufficient and perfect saving work of God.[x]

Again, salvation is never what man does for God, but rather, what God has accomplished for him through the Person and work of Jesus Christ who died for his sins (John 3:16). Christ died for the sins of the entire world, but only those who trust Jesus as their Savior will know eternal life (John 3:18, 36; 20:31; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). If men could save themselves through good works or obedience to the Law, "then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). To enter heaven, men need regeneration of life, not reformation of character (John 3:3; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Good works should follow salvation, but they are never the condition of it (Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5-8).

God's laws are a reflection of His righteous character, and He will only approve of that which conforms to His righteousness. As stated earlier, God is completely set apart from sin, as the Scripture declares "*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness *with favor*" (Hab. 1:13), and "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). By sinning, men prove that "there are none righteous, not even one…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:10, 23). Because God is perfectly righteous, He can deal with sin in only one way, and that is to condemn it. God's laws expose our sin and reveal that we are powerless to save ourselves. Anyone who reads the Mosaic Law and fails to come to that conclusion has missed something very important. The Law does not save! It never has and it never will! The sooner we get this into our thinking, the sooner we can move onto the work of the cross and understand what Christ did for us.

> By nature the Law is not grace (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10; Heb. 10:28). It is holy, righteous, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14). In its ministry it declares and proves all men guilty (Rom. 3:19). Yet it justifies no one (Rom. 3:20). It cannot impart righteousness or life (Gal. 3:21). It causes offenses to abound (Rom. 5:20; 7:7-13; 1 Cor. 15:56). It served as an instructor until Christ appeared (Gal. 3:24). In relationship to the believer, the Law emphatically does not save anyone (Gal. 2:21). A believer does not live under the Law (Rom.

6:14; 8:4), but he stands and grows in grace (Rom. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). The nation, Israel, alone was the recipient of the Law (Exod. 20:2). [xi]

Obeying the Mosaic Law never makes one a child of God. One major purpose of the Mosaic Law was to reveal man's sinful condition before an infinitely holy God and to lead him to Christ that he might be saved by grace alone through faith alone (Rom. 3:20; 5:20; 8:3-4; Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:19-26).

CHRIST PAID OUR SIN DEBT

Adam was originally created free in the Garden of Eden and could serve God without the burden of sin. Freedom, in the true biblical sense, is the power to live God's will without the control of sin. When Satan tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, he was tempting him into spiritual death and slavery.

Remember that death, both spiritual and physical, was the consequence of Adam's sin. God had declared to Adam concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "in the day that you eat from it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Death means separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body (Eccl. 12:7). Spiritual death is the separation of a person from God (Isa. 59:2; Eph. 2:1). Unbelievers, who are physically alive, reside in a perpetual state of spiritual death until they believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and then they are given eternal life (John 10:28; Eph. 2:1, 5). When an unbeliever dies, his spiritual death extends into eternity when he is cast into the Lake of Fire. When the unbeliever is cast into the Lake of Fire he is forever separated from God. In Scripture, this is called the *second death* (Rev. 20:14-15).

> In the Bible, *death* basically means "separation," not only physically, as the spirit separated from the body (James 2:26), but also spiritually, as the spirit separated from God (Isa. 59:2). The unbeliever is not sick; he is dead! He does not need resuscitation; he needs resurrection. All lost sinners are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay. The lost derelict on skid row may be more decayed outwardly than the unsaved society leader, but both are dead in sin—and one corpse cannot be more dead than another! This means that our world is one vast graveyard, filled with people who are dead while they live (1 Tim. 5:6).[xii]

The current condition of the human race is the result of Adam's decision to disobey God in the Garden of Eden. Adam was free to disobey God, but there was a price to pay. Freedom from God meant slavery to Satan. This is always true. There is no middle ground. One is either a servant of God or a servant of Satan. On the day Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, he became a slave to sin. The result is that all his children are born spiritually enslaved, "sold into bondage to sin" (Rom. 7:14). Jesus declared that "everyone who commits sin [reveals he] is the slave of sin" (John 8:34).

Slavery was a common practice in the ancient world when the New Testament was written and is referred to many times in Scripture. Slaves served in every strata of society from doctors and accountants down to household bakers and shoemakers. Slaves were sometimes the defeated enemies from military campaigns, but many were born into slavery. Slaves could be purchased at the local market where there was a section dedicated specifically for them. Only free men who were wealthy could afford to purchase slaves, as the slave was not able purchase his own freedom, or the freedom of another.

The writers of Scripture capitalize on the language of their day and use one aspect of the institution of slavery to make a spiritual point. **Every human born into the family of Adam is born as a spiritual slave** (the only exception is Jesus Christ). No one likes to be called a slave, but the Bible uses the offensive term freely to refer to all of Adam's descendants. Unbelievers are slaves to sin, and believers are slaves to God. We are all born into spiritual slavery and the yoke of our slave chains is too great for us to throw off by our own ability. The Scripture declares we are helpless to free ourselves and if God does not free us, there is no hope (Rom. 5:6). A slave is not able to free another slave, for both are under the same unbreakable chains of bondage. One who is shackled cannot liberate another. Being born into the slave-market of sin is the biblical reality of our condition, and this reality must be accepted before salvation can be received.

It is good news that Christ was born into this world as Adam was created: free from sin. Nearly two thousand years ago God the Son came into this world and took upon Himself true humanity and "became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Scripture tells us Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the Law" (Gal. 4:4), and that He was "tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin" (Heb. 4:15; cf. Matt. 4:1-11). Jesus is the only Person in the history of the human race to be born and live completely free from sin. Jesus is truly free, since he was not born into the slave-market of sin. As a free man, He was able to purchase our freedom for us and liberate us from our spiritual bondage.

The Bible teaches that Jesus paid the ransom price for our freedom. The Greek words *lutron* and *antilutron*—translated *ransom*—are used in Scripture to communicate that Jesus paid our sin-debt to God the Father in order to liberate us from the slave-market of sin. Jesus declared "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom [*lutron*] for many" (Mark 10:45), and the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom [*antilutron*] for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). Jesus asked, "what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). The answer is nothing! If Jesus had not paid our sin-debt to God, there would be no hope of ever being liberated from spiritual slavery, for "no man can by any means redeem *his* brother or give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease *trying* forever" (Ps. 49:7-8).

When a person accepts the Bible's declaration about his spiritual helplessness, he can then turn to Christ as his redeemer. Redemption translates the Greek word *apolutrosis* which means to "release from a captive condition."[xiii] When we turn to Christ as our only Savior "we have redemption [*apolutrosis*] through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:13-14). Because Jesus died in our place, He is able to set us free from our spiritual bondage and give us eternal life, but it is only because of His shed blood on the cross that He can do this, for we "were not redeemed [*lutron*] with perishable things like silver or gold… but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood*

of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The blood of Christ is necessary, for "without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22).

> Redemption implies antecedent bondage. Thus the word refers primarily to man's subjection to the dominion and curse of sin (*see* Gal. 3:13; 1 Cor. 15:56). Also in a secondary sense to the bondage of Satan as the head of the kingdom of darkness, and to the bondage of death as the penalty of sin (*see* Acts 26:18; Heb. 2:14-15). Redemption from this bondage is represented in the Scriptures as both universal and limited. It is universal in the sense that its advantages are freely offered to all. It is limited in the sense that it is effectual only with respect to those who meet the conditions of salvation announced in the gospel. For such it is effectual in that they receive forgiveness of sins and the power to lead a new and holy life. Satan is no longer their captor, and death has lost its sting and terror. They look forward to the redemption of the body (see Heb. 2:9; Acts 3:19; Eph. 1:7; Acts 26:18; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; Rom. 8:15-23). [xiv]

All humanity is born into a slave-market of sin. Jesus came into this world and took upon Himself true humanity and died upon a cross to atone for our sins. Because Jesus died on the cross and tasted death for everyone (Heb. 2:9), He rendered inoperative "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Those who turn to Christ for salvation can be set free from the satanic slave-market of sin into which they were born, to which they were "subject to slavery all their lives" (Heb. 2:15).

Once we are saved, we can say with the apostle Paul, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14).

Jesus' death on the cross:

1. Was substitutionary (Mark 10:45; Rom. 5:8-10; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18).
2. Paid the redemption price for sin (Matt. 20:28; Gal. 3:13; 4:4-5; 1 Pet. 1:15).
3. Propitiated God the Father[xv] (Isa. 53:4-6, 10-12; Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).
4. Reconciles sinners to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:19-20).
5. Cancels our sin debt (Col. 2:14).

ATONEMENT FOR SINS

> For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement [*kaphar*] for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement [*kaphar*]. (Lev. 17:11)
>
> And according to the Law, *one may* almost *say*, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Heb. 9:22)

Atonement is a very important concept in the Old Testament. The word atonement translates the Hebrew verb *kaphar* which means to "cover over, pacify, propitiate, [or] atone for sin."[xvi] The animal sacrificial system—which was part of the Mosaic Law—taught that sin must be atoned for. The idea of substitution was clearly taught as the sinner laid his hands on the animal that died in his place (Lev. 4:15, 24; 16:21). The innocent animal paid the price of death on behalf of the guilty sinner. God established the Levitical animal sacrificial system as a way of teaching that human sin must be atoned for. The atoning animal sacrifices were performed daily by the Jewish temple priests on behalf of Israelites who committed sins in ignorance (Lev. 4:1-4, 20, 26, 31). More serious sins—those deliberately committed—were atoned for once a year on the Day of Atonement—Yom Kippur—by the High Priest who would enter the Holy of Holies in the temple and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed bull and goat on the mercy seat which was on the top of the Ark of the Covenant (Lev. 16:14-15). There were two sacrifices on the Day of Atonement: a bull was sacrificed for the sins of the High Priest (Lev. 16:6, 11), and two goats for the sins of the nation (Lev. 16:7-10). The sacrifice of the goats were "to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year" (Lev. 16:34). One goat shed its blood on the altar, and the other was sent away into the wilderness after the High Priest had laid his hands on it and

confessed over it “all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins” (Lev. 16:21). The innocent animals died in place of those who were guilty of sin.

> *Atonement* means making amends, blotting out the offense, and giving satisfaction for wrong done; thus reconciling to oneself the alienated other and restoring the disrupted relationship. Scripture depicts all human beings as needing to atone for their sins but lacking all power and resources for doing so. We have offended our holy Creator, whose nature it is to hate sin (Jer. 44:4; Hab. 1:13) and to punish it (Ps. 5:4-6; Rom. 1:18; 2:5-9). No acceptance by, or fellowship with, such a God can be expected unless atonement is made, and since there is sin in even our best actions, anything we do in hopes of making amends can only increase our guilt or worsen our situation. This makes it ruinous folly to seek to establish one’s own righteousness before God (Job 15:14-16; Rom. 10:2-3); it simply cannot be done.[xvii]

The animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law taught that God is holy, man is sinful, and that God was willing to judge an innocent creature as a substitute in place of the sinner. The animal that shed its blood gave up its life in place of the one who had offended God, and it was only through the shed blood that atonement was made. A life for a life. The whole animal sacrificial system under the Mosaic Law was highly symbolic, temporary, and pointed forward to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Levitical priests would regularly perform their temple sacrifices on behalf of the people to God, but being a symbolic system, the animal sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near” to Him, for the simple reason that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:1, 4). For nearly fourteen centuries the temple priests kept “offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins” (Heb. 10:11), until finally Christ “offered one sacrifice for sins for all time” and through that one offering “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” by it (Heb. 10:12, 14). What the Mosaic Law could never accomplish through the sacrifice of symbols, Christ did once and for all

time through His substitutionary death on the cross when he died in the place of sinners.

Jesus' death on the cross was a satisfactory sacrifice to God which completely paid the price for our sin. We owed a debt to God that we could never pay, and Jesus paid that debt in full when He died on the cross and bore the punishment that rightfully belonged to us. In Romans 3:25 Paul used the Greek word *hilasterion*—translated *propitiation*—to show that Jesus' shed blood completely satisfied God's righteous demands toward our sin, with the result that there is nothing more for the sinner to pay to God. Jesus paid our sin-debt in full. There's nothing for us to pay. The Apostle John tells us "He Himself is the propitiation [*hilasmos* – the satisfactory sacrifice] for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world" (1 John 2:2; cf. 4:10). Jesus' death on the cross forever satisfied God's righteous demands toward the sins of everyone for all time! God has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). Regarding Christ's death, J. Dwight Pentecost states:

> You can be adjusted to God's standard, because God made Christ to become sin for us. The One who knew no sin, the One in whose lips had never been found guile, took upon Himself our sin in order that He might bear our sins to the cross and offer Himself as an acceptable substitute to God for us—on our behalf, in our place. And when Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners and went to the cross on their behalf and in their place, He was making possible the doctrine of reconciliation. He was making it possible for God to conform the world to Himself, to adjust the world to His standard so that sinners in the world might find salvation because "Jesus paid it all." You can be adjusted to God, to God's standard, through Christ, by His death, by His cross, by His blood, and by His identification with sinners.[xviii]

Atonement for sins is the basis for reconciliation, because God has judged our sins in the Person of Christ who died on the cross in our place. The death of Christ has forever satisfied God's righteous demands for our

sin and it is on this basis that He can accept sinners before His throne of grace. The blood of Christ is the only coin in the heavenly realm that God accepts as payment for our sin-debt, and Christ paid our sin debt in full! That's good news!

> Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

Because Jesus' death satisfies God's righteousness demands for sin, the sinner can approach God who welcomes him in love. God has cleared the way for sinners to come to Him for a new relationship, and this is based completely on the substitutionary work of Christ. God has done everything to reconcile us to Himself. The sin debt that we owed to God has been paid in full by the blood of Christ.

GOD'S GREAT GRACE

> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

Grace (Grk. *charis*) is the underserved kindness or favor one person shows to another. It is "that which one grants to another, the action of one who volunteers to do something not otherwise obligatory."[xix] God was in no way forced to provide salvation for sinners, though He was motivated by His great love to do so (John 3:16). For God, "being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5).

> Speaking first of His mercy, it is defined as that compassion in God which moved Him to provide a Savior for the lost. If He had been able to save even one soul on the basis of His sovereign mercy alone, He could have saved every person on that basis and the death of Christ would have been rendered unnecessary. As for divine love, it is an emotion of infinite character, the motivating purpose back of all that God does in saving a soul. But since God is holy and righteous too and the sinner's sins are an offense to Him, He might perfectly desire to save a soul and still be utterly helpless to do so in the light of the claims which divine righteousness make against the sinner. Not until those claims are met can God's infinite love realize its desire. [xx]

God loves sinners, but He can only be gracious to them because His righteous demands against sin have forever been satisfied by the cross of

Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Theologically, it can be said that "grace is what God may be free to do and indeed what He does accordingly for the lost after Christ has died on behalf of them."[xxi] Because Christ has borne all sin and paid the penalty that was due to the sinner, God is now free to show infinite grace to the worst of sinners and offer them not only eternal salvation, but also bestow the greatest spiritual blessings of time and eternity (Eph. 1:3). The wondrous cross of Christ has made it possible for the worst of sinners to be "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

We must be careful that we do not see God acting graciously toward sinners independently of the cross, for that would be dishonoring to Him and all He did for us through the death of His Son. The perfect satisfaction of His righteous demands against sin had to occur before the display of His infinite grace toward sinners could be manifest. For "since God is holy and righteous, and sin is a complete offense to Him, His love or mercy cannot operate in grace until there is provided a sufficient satisfaction for sin."[xxii] Christ's death on the cross satisfied God's righteous demands toward sin; therefore, grace can be shown towards sinners who do not deserve it.

Having met the demands of God's perfect righteousness for sin, the cross of Christ has opened the floodgates of God's grace! Because Christ paid our sin debt, we can come to God and receive the free gift of salvation apart from any human works. Jesus Christ paid the price for my salvation in full. He paid it all at the cross. He bore every sin. He was judged in my place and bore the wrath of God that belonged to me, and now I can receive the free gift of salvation because God is satisfied with His death. There is nothing I can do to earn my salvation.

> Grace is the limitless, unrestrained love of God for the lost, acting in full compliance with the exact and unchangeable demands of His own righteousness through the sacrificial death of Christ.[xxiii]

Concerning our salvation, Scripture declares, “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is always a gift. If a person has to pay a price for something, it ceases to be a gift. A gift means that someone else paid the price, and we receive it freely without cost. Salvation is a free gift to us, from God, paid in full by Jesus Christ. What a wonderful gift!

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

Peter tells us, "Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). Christ willingly went to the cross to die for our sins, so that we may come to God through Him. Paul tells us that God the Father "made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). God took all our sin and imputed it to Christ and judged Him in our place. Because Jesus is sinless (Heb. 4:15), He was qualified to go to the cross as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus died a death He did not deserve, in order that we may have a righteousness that we could never earn. At the moment of faith in Christ, God imputes His righteousness to the believer and he is forever justified in His sight. Merrill F. Unger states:

> Justification is a divine act whereby an infinitely Holy God judicially declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable before Him because Christ has borne the sinner's sin on the cross and has become "to us…righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:24). Justification springs from the fountain of God's grace (Titus 3:4-5). It is operative as the result of the redemptive and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, who has settled all the claims of the law (Rom. 3:24-25; 5:9). Justification is on the basis of faith and not by human merit or works (3:28-30; 4:5; Gal. 2:16). In this marvelous operation of God the infinitely holy Judge judicially declares righteous the one who believes in Jesus (Rom. 8:31-34).[xxiv]

The doctrine of justification glorifies God and leaves no room for men to glorify themselves; this is because God has done everything to satisfy His own righteous demands against sin through the substitutionary

death of Christ. God gives "the gift of righteousness" to the sinner who trusts Christ for salvation (Rom. 5:17; see also 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). The "gift of righteousness" is God's own righteousness that He puts within the sinner as a free gift. The sinner is made acceptable to God because of the righteousness imputed to him as a free gift at the moment of salvation. The gift of righteousness! God does everything and man does nothing! That's grace!

This is not a righteousness that comes on the basis of works, but a gift that is given to the sinner on the basis of faith in Jesus alone. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes about Gentiles who, "attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith" (Rom. 9:30). Many unbelievers in Paul's day sought to make themselves righteous and acceptable to God through the Mosaic Law or good works. Paul says of them:

> For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own [by observing the Law], they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Rom. 10:3-4)

The Mosaic Law was never given as a way of salvation, yet many sought to live by it as a way to make themselves acceptable to God. Before his conversion, Paul himself had tried to be saved by keeping the Law. However, once he came to understand that righteousness is given by God as a free gift to those who trust in Christ for salvation, he abandoned trying to live by the Law altogether. Paul states:

> But whatever things were gain to me [when he tried to live under the Mosaic Law], those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish [Grk. *skubalon* – lit. fecal matter] so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, <u>the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith</u>. (Philip. 3:7-9)

The apostle Paul put all his hope in Jesus Christ. He rested completely in the finished work of the cross, trusting that Jesus' death satisfied every righteous demand of God the Father. Paul knew that when he trusted Jesus as his Savior, God the Father declared him justified because of the free gift of righteousness that was imputed to him at the moment of salvation. This teaching of Scripture removes all human works and all human pride and glorifies God alone.

> The gospel of justification by faith sets human beings by themselves as individuals before God. If it humbles them to the dust before God, it is that God may raise them up and set them on their feet. One who has had such personal dealings with God, and been made to stand erect in his presence by almighty power and grace, can never be enslaved in spirit to any other man or woman. Justification by faith is a bastion of true freedom. Luther was charged with 'inciting revolution by putting little people in mind of their prodigious dignity before God'. How could he deny the charge? The gospel, as he had learnt it from Paul, does precisely that.[xxv]

Once we trust Christ as our Savior, God gives us eternal life and imputes His righteousness to us, so that we are freely and legally "justified [declared righteous] as a gift by His grace through the redemption [payment for our sins] which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). It is an act of infinite greatness and grace that God freely gives His righteousness to sinful men and forever declares them justified in His sight based solely on the substitutionary work of Jesus.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, justification is "an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."[xxvi] God subtracted our sin and imputed it to Jesus while He was on the cross (2 Cor. 5:19), and then imputes His righteousness to us at the moment we trust Christ as our Savior (2 Cor.

5:21). It is the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at the moment of salvation that makes us acceptable to God, and this gift of righteousness comes by faith alone and never by any works we perform.

> What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works [and he was not], he has something to boast about [before men], but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works, his wage [payment for work] is not credited as a favor [a gracious gift], but as what is due [because he worked for it]. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom. 4:1-5)

When writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul used Abraham as an example of one who received God's gift of righteousness by faith alone. Paul makes clear that "the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). The word *credit*, as it appears several times in Romans 4:3-5, translates the Greek word *logizomai* which is an accounting term and means to charge or add something to someone's account. God credited—or imputed—His righteousness to Abraham at the moment he "believed" Him at His covenant promises. When the sinner hears and believes the content of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3-4), God imputes His righteousness to him at that very moment.

Biblically, justification means the sinner is declared righteous in the sight of God and is made acceptable to Him based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Such acceptance is based solely on the fact that the believer has come to God by faith alone in Christ alone. Just as God cannot and will not ever condemn Jesus Christ, neither can He, nor will He ever condemn the believer who is in union with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:7-9). J. Dwight Pentecost states:

> I would to God in your mind's eye you could see yourself being presented before the court over which God as a just Judge presides. In the outer room of that court, you as one who has received Christ as Saviour are being prepared to come into that court of justice. You are placed in Christ; you are made a new creation; you are robed with the righteousness of Christ; you are made mature in the Son. All the fullness of the Son has become your possession because you are in Christ. And then you march through that courtroom to take your place before the bar of justice upon whose bench a holy and a righteous God presides. God must pronounce a sentence in keeping with the facts in the case; God must justify the righteous and God must condemn the guilty. If you were to stand before that holy, righteous God outside of Christ and apart from the work of Christ, there is only one pronouncement which God could make: "Guilty, condemned, under wrath!" But when you stand in Christ Jesus before God's holy judgment, there is only one pronouncement which a righteous and just God can make "Acquitted!" There is no basis for condemnation in you. On the authority of the Word of God, I say to you that if you are in Christ Jesus, there is no basis whatsoever upon which a just and holy God can pronounce any sentence other than "acquitted."[xxvii]

When we turn to Christ as our Savior, we obtain "the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9b). There's simply no other way to be saved but by the substitutionary work of Christ who died in our place, on our behalf, the just for the unjust, the righteous for the unrighteous. It is only when we come with the empty hands of faith, trusting Christ as our savior that we receive the free gift of eternal life. More so, because Christ bore all our sin, it is possible for God to give us Christ's righteousness at the moment we come to Him for salvation so we can be declared forever acceptable in His sight as a result. Regarding propitiation, John F. Walvoord comments:

> The act of propitiation not only permits God to impute all sin to Christ, but also makes possible the imputation of the righteousness of

> Christ to the sinner. This is sometimes related to the sweet-savor aspect of Christ's offering as foreshadowed in the sweet-savor sacrifice in the Old Testament. The merit of Christ now has become the possession of the believer. In keeping with this freedom not only to forgive, but bestow righteousness, God can justify the sinner, and can proceed unhindered in all the program of salvation and sanctification. God on the basis of the death of Christ can take the foulest sinner and make him as pure in holiness as His own Son. This is the foundation of all effective gospel preaching which on the one hand fully sustains the concept that God is holy, and on the other that such a God is able to welcome sinners to Himself.[xxviii]

Jesus died in place of the sinner; the just for the unjust; the innocent for the guilty. When the sinner comes with the empty hands of faith and trusts Jesus for salvation, he receives eternal life and the gift of righteousness that forever makes him acceptable to God. May we all welcome this wonderful gift from God.

Living righteously

The Bible distinguishes between the *gift of righteousness* and the *walk of righteousness*. The *gift of righteousness* is what God gives to the sinner as a free gift at the moment he trusts Jesus as his Savior. The *gift of righteousness* makes the sinner forever acceptable to God. Once saved and declared righteous, the Christian is then called to *walk in righteousness*.

> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin [i.e. the power of the sin nature], but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God [i.e. righteous living]. (Rom. 6:11-13)

> Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness [i.e. righteous living], faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Tim. 2:22)
>
> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness [i.e. righteous living]. (2 Tim. 3:16)
>
> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age. (Tit. 2:11-12)

Receiving the *gift of righteousness* is simple because it is based entirely on the finished work of Jesus Christ and received completely by faith alone (Philip. 3:9). However, the *life of righteousness* that the new Christian is called to live after he is saved can be extremely difficult. Every Christian is born onto a battlefield and faces enemies all around him and spiritual challenges on every front. For the Christian to think that his life will only be one easy blessing after another is naïve at best and demonic at worst. A simple reading of a few passages of Scripture will quickly inform him that suffering is guaranteed to be a part of every Christian's walk (John 16:33; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:16-18; 2 Tim. 1:8; 3:12; Heb. 11:36-40; Jam. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6-7; 2:19-25; 3:14-17; 4:19). Of course there is joy in the midst of the trial (Philip. 4:11-13; 1 Thess. 1:6; Heb. 12:2), and the prepared Christian learns to expect suffering at any time (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

> These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)
>
> Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Tim. 3:12)
>
> For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is

> there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. (1 Pet. 2:19-20)

I remember when I first entered prison back in 1989. The medium security prison unit outside of Las Vegas, Nevada, had a practice of placing new inmates into solitary confinement the first twenty one days after their arrival. After I completed my twenty one days in solitary confinement, I was released onto the prison yard with the other inmates. I was tested within hours after being assigned my new sleeping quarters, as I was approached by an inmate who offered to sell me marijuana and I had to refuse his offer. I made it clear to him, albeit respectfully, that I wanted to live as a Christian and had no desire to do drugs. I was treated with hostility, even though I gave none. My initial reaction was to return hostility to him, but I knew that was wrong, as the Scripture directs me:

> Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God,* for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. (Rom. 12:17-19)

I could not control the situation or the other man's attitude, but at the same time, I could not allow myself to be controlled by it. As a Christian, I had to start living by God's Word and stop reacting to the sinful attitudes and actions of others as I was previously accustomed to doing. In prison, I was constantly challenged to live by God's Word and not my circumstances or the pressures of others. This prepared me for living in society after prison.

For those who do not know, there are different types of men in prison. I met some very evil men, but I met some good men too; Christian men who had turned from their past and were pursuing righteousness and goodness according to Scripture. A crime may put a man in prison; but a criminal act does not necessarily define who he is as a person. Neither does the place define who the person is, although it may influence his character.

On another occasion, I faced a challenge pertaining to racism when I was at a prison unit in northern Nevada. During meal time many of the inmates would sit separately with blacks on one side of the dinner hall and whites on the other side. This was the choice of the inmates. However, some of my Christian friends were black and some were white, and we would sit together at one table to talk about Scripture and pray. Biblically, we realized that there is only one race: the human race. Not wanting to be a slave to the prison culture, we chose to sit together and have Christian discussion. After a few weeks I was approached one morning by another inmate who told me to "stop sitting with the other men" because it was looking bad. I knew what he meant. I made it clear to this inmate, albeit respectfully, that I was going to sit with my Christian brothers so we could talk theology and pray together. To be honest, I thought there was going to be a fight that morning as this inmate got in my face and tried to bully me. Though I was somewhat intimidated, Christian courage demanded I stand my ground. To be clear, I was not trying to change the attitudes of the other inmates or reform the prison culture in any way. I think that's impossible; much like I think it's impossible to reform the devil's world. I was simply trying to enjoy Christian fellowship with my Christian brothers, even though I knew it meant standing against the corrupt values and practices of the prison culture.

To some degree, surviving in prison means conforming to the environment and getting along as best one is able. Where Scripture is silent this can mean compromise. However, living for Christ means walking in the light of God's Word, and that means standing against the values of the prison culture at times in order to obey God's Word. I wish I could say I walked according to Scripture all the time, but I did not. I was learning and applying Scripture during my time in prison, and was learning to pick my battles from one moment to the next. Picking battles is very important, for some battles are more important than others. As we learn God's Word, we'll gain wisdom for the moment.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

> Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel…that Christ died for [Grk. *huper* – as a substitute] our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1, 3-4)

The gospel is the good news regarding the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is good news to those who trust Jesus as their Savior, because it is only in Him that they receive eternal life (John 3:16, 18; 10:28; Acts 16:30-31; Col. 1:13-14; 1 John 2:2). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), and a man must see himself according to the biblical record as a sinner before he can come to Christ as his Savior. To reject Christ as Savior is to turn from God's only saving provision, and is therefore a personal choice that results in eternal separation from Him (John 3:18; Rev. 20:12-15).

Paul stated "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). The word "for" translates the Greek preposition *huper* which carries the idea of substitution. That is, Christ died *as a substitute* for our sins. The same Greek preposition is found in other passages that have the same meaning: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for [*huper* – as a substitute for] us" and "Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for [*huper* – as a substitute] *the* unjust" (Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:18). *Anti* is another Greek preposition that expresses the idea of substitution and was used by our Lord who said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for [*anti* – as a substitute for] many" (Mark 10:45). That Christ was buried in a grave reveals His body actually died, and His resurrection to life reveals His victory over sin and death. The gospel message that Paul communicated in writing to the Corinthians is "that Christ died for our sins according to the

Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Obtaining salvation is simple. A mute quadriplegic who will never speak or leave his bed to perform one kind deed can have eternal life if he hears the gospel and believes in Jesus as his Savior. Eternal life is based on the single act of trusting Christ as Savior, and eternity in heaven is a guaranteed reality even if the believer should die immediately afterward. Jesus used a present tense verb when He declared "I give [immediately, right now] eternal life to them, and they will never perish" (John 10:28). Eternal life is not what the believer waits for, but what he has at the very moment he trusts Christ as his Savior.

> More than 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be conditioned solely on the basis of faith – faith that has as its object the Lord Jesus who died as our substitute for sin (Jn 3:16; Ac 16:31). Salvation is a free gift; therefore, any statement of the terms must carefully avoid implying that we give God something. He gives it all; we receive that gift through faith (Jn 1:12).[xxix]

Once saved by faith in Christ, the believer is regenerated (John 3:3, 7; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23), indwelt with the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14), sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), baptized by the Spirit into union with Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28), and given a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-12). Further, the salvation provided by God saves from the penalty of sin (John 5:24; Rom. 6:23; 8:1), the power of sin (Rom. 6:11; 8:13; 2 Cor. 5:17), and ultimately the presence of sin as each believer will eventually be transformed into a new body like that of his sinless Savior when he enters heaven (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).

After regeneration, there is a sanctifying aspect to the Christian life that occurs over time as the believer grows to be more and more like Christ. Post-salvation sanctification is possible because we are born again (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23); however, regeneration does not guarantee sanctification. Sanctification requires our commitment to God (Rom. 12:1-

2), learning and applying Scripture by faith (Rom. 1:17; 10:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Heb. 4:1-2), the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18), daily dependence on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 21), and time to grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). Certainly the thief on the cross had eternal life, though he did not live long enough to experience the sanctifying aspect of his regeneration (Luke 23:39-43).

God's provision of salvation is not because of some beauty or worthiness in us, for the Scripture declares that we are all sinners and have fallen short of God's perfect standard of righteousness (Rom. 3:23; 5:8; 5:12, 17-19). God, by His grace, treats us better than we deserve. In grace God offers us His righteousness as a free gift, and we need only trust Jesus as our savior to receive it (Rom. 10:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:7-9). Salvation is completely the work of God and those saved are the recipients of His grace (Eph. 2:8-10; Tit. 3:5). J. Dwight Pentecost writes:

> The Author of our salvation is the all-wise God. Salvation was not an afterthought, as if after man sinned God found a way to patch up the rent in His plan; but salvation was ordained in Christ before the ages were ever formed. We were chosen in Christ, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:3, before the foundation of the world, in order that God might manifest His grace, His Love, His mercy, His wisdom, His justice, His righteousness, His holiness. God devised a plan whereby all that God is might be displayed in all its scintillating brilliance against the black background of sin. Salvation did not originate in blood; that is, it is not of human lineage. Salvation is not by the will of the flesh; that is, because a man sought God in his darkness. Nor is it of the will of man, as though man generated his own salvation. Man, dead in trespasses and sins, had no will toward God, no hunger nor appetite for God. He was self-satisfied and self-complacent in his spiritual death. Salvation's plan did not originate with men, but salvation originated with God.[xxx]

No one deserves salvation. Good works never please God (Isa. 64:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5). Only what Christ did on the cross satisfies God's

righteous demands toward our sin (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2). Too often people ask, “how can a loving God send someone to the Lake of Fire?” A more biblical question is “how can a righteous God permit a corrupt sinner into heaven?” The answer is simple: because God accepts as perfect and righteous the person who trusts in Jesus alone for salvation (Rom. 10:3-4; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:8-9).

Jesus is the Only Savior

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the only Savior. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus is exclusively the Savior, as there is no other way to heaven but through Him. God gave His Son to die for sinners so that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God “is not wishing that any should perish” (2 Pet. 3:9), but that “the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17); but this requires faith, for “he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Some depend on good works to get to heaven, but Jesus stated “this is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent” (John 6:29). When the Philippian jailer asked the apostle Paul, “what must I do to be saved?” The apostle answered, “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31a). Believing in Christ means you trust Him alone as your Savior, relying on His finished work on the cross as sufficient to save. Scripture declares, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation is one hundred percent from God, and given by grace alone to the person who comes to Jesus by faith alone, trusting Him as Savior.

> For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet

> sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath *of God* through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:6-10)

Reconciliation is provided to us while we are *helpless*, *ungodly*, *sinners*, and *enemies* of God. That's grace! We do nothing to deserve God's goodness towards us! It is pure love and grace that God would reach out to us, His enemies, and offer reconciliation through the sacrifice of His Son who died in our place. "Christ died for the ungodly" is what the Scripture declares and we should understand that it was Christ alone who paid the price for our sin.

The Christian's righteous standing before God is a result of Christ's righteousness that has been imputed to him, which cannot be added to even in the slightest. By grace the believer has been completely saved through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). Once justified by the single act of faith in Christ, the believer begins his journey of spiritual advancement to serve God in righteousness (Rom. 6:11-14), and to "fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). The objective of every believer after salvation is to advance to spiritual maturity. It is only through the consistent intake of Scripture that we "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Our spiritual growth glorifies God.

WHAT OF THOSE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL?

> The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. (Ps. 19:1-2)

Paintings and sculptures are never the product of chance, but the work of an artist, revealing an intelligent mind and the skill of a careful hand. Likewise, the "heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). To look at the creation is to know something about the Creator. At the most basic level, the creation reveals that God exists, though it may not reveal specifics about Him. General knowledge about God is known through His creation, but one must go to the Bible to get special revelation about Him and to know the particulars of His character. Scripture informs us that God's creation is sufficient to reveal His existence, and such general revelation, once obtained, is sufficient to condemn those who come to know that He exists and then reject Him.

> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made [God is "clearly seen" through His creation], so that they [all humanity born in Adam] are without excuse [before God]. For even though they knew God [through His creation], they did not honor Him as God or give thanks [which is the proper response], but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened [by negative volition]. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore

> [since they rejected what they learned about God through natural revelation] God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they [willfully] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 1:20-25)

God holds accountable each person who comes to know of Him through the creation. If the person who sees God through the creation wants to know Him personally, then God will make certain that person receives gospel revelation concerning Jesus Christ in order to be saved. If the person who comes to know of God through His creation goes negative and does not want to know Him, then God will let him go his own way, but will hold him accountable for his decision. Robert Lightner states:

> God has given to all a revelation of Himself in both nature and conscience (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:20); therefore, all adults are without excuse. Even where the gospel and the name of Jesus have not been heard, God's revelation in nature and in conscience has been given. Paul described those who rejected God's general revelation and God's response to this rejection: He gave them up (Rom. 1:24-32). God reveals truth to an open heart. When humans reject the lesser revelation of God in nature and conscience, they are demonstrating their rejection also of God's greater revelation in Christ…In places where the gospel has not reached, God holds people responsible for receiving the revelation He has given them. When they receive it, I believe He in sovereign grace sees to it that they hear the good news of salvation in Christ alone so they can believe and be saved. Response to God's message in nature and conscience does not bring salvation, but it does reveal a willingness to respond to God. It gives evidence of an open and receptive heart. When a person who lives in a land where the gospel is not heard reaches the point when he or she can respond to God's revelation in nature and in conscience, that person is no longer one who cannot believe. From that point on the

person becomes responsible for what is done with what is known. [xxxi]

God is revealed through His creation and this general revelation is sufficient to bring to the capable mind the knowledge of His existence. God is revealed through the Bible and this special revelation is sufficient to bring to the positive mind the knowledge of the gospel so those enslaved to sin can be saved and set free and given eternal life.

What about Children who die?

The command to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation presupposes intelligence and the ability to exercise one's volition. Children and those who are mentally disabled lack the intellectual and volitional capacity to make a decision for or against Christ; therefore, they are not made accountable for sin.

> In the Bible, infants, little children, and others who cannot believe are neither told to believe nor expected to do so. They are not classified as wicked evildoers and rejecters of God's grace. It is always adults who are addressed, either directly or indirectly, regarding these matters. Because the Bible has so much to say about those who cannot believe and yet says nothing about their being eternally separated from God because of their inability, we conclude that they have heaven as their home. They die safely in the arms of Jesus. [xxxii]

An often cited biblical precedent on this matter is found in the life of King David who lost a newborn son as a result of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. David was guilty of horrible sin, but he had a sensitive heart and was very concerned for his child. David said:

> While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.' "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me. (2 Sam. 12:22-23)

While the child was alive, David prayed to God to be gracious "that the child may live." However, after the child died, David expressed optimism by saying "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." David was thinking of heaven, where he knew his infant son had gone.

> Life after death was a certainty for David. That he would be with his son again in the future was his firm belief. He never doubted that fact for a moment. David was rightly related to the Lord, and he did not question that he would spend eternity with Him. Nor did he have any doubt that his infant son, taken in death before he could decide for or against his father's God, would be there also.[xxxiii]

WHAT DO WE DO AFTER SALVATION

> Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Pet. 2:2)

Scripture reveals three phases of Christian sanctification. The first is *positional sanctification* which refers to the place the Christian has in Christ at the moment he believes in Jesus for salvation (1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 10:10). The second is *progressive sanctification* which refers to the Christian's growth after he is born again, in which he yields himself to God (Rom. 12:1-2), learns Scripture on a regular basis (2 Tim. 2:15), and advances to spiritual maturity through the application of God's Word to everyday life (Eph. 4:11-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2). The third is *ultimate sanctification* which refers to the life the believer enjoys when he gets to heaven and spends eternity with God (1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:2). *Positional sanctification* and *ultimate sanctification* are completely the work of God and require nothing from the believer. However, *progressive sanctification* is a collaboration between God the Holy Spirit and the Christian who learns to live in daily dependence on Him. *Progressive sanctification* is all the Holy Spirit can accomplish in the life of the Christian who humbly depends on Him, relying on Scripture to guide every aspect of his life until he goes to heaven.

Once saved, God the Holy Spirit gives the Christian a new nature that enables him to live righteously as God commands (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). The Christian is called to "lay aside the old self…and put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:22, 24). Every person is born with a sin nature which he inherited from his parents all the way back to Adam. The sin nature completely controls the life of the unbeliever and directs his thinking and behavior to conform to the values and pleasures of the world

which are antithetical to God. At salvation, the Christian obtains a new nature that is able to obey God, and the sinful nature is crippled so that he does not have to obey its impulses (Rom. 6:11-14). From the day of salvation onward, the growing believer will know what it means to struggle within himself as a normal part of his spiritual development throughout his life.

> Torn inside with desires to do that which we know is evil and new desires to please God, we experience the rage of the battle. The internal conflict manifests itself in everyday life as the believer is tempted to sin. The source of this conflict is the old sin nature, which is the root cause of the deeds of sin. In the conflict the believer is not passive. He has a vital role in determining to whom he will give allegiance—the old nature or the new nature. From the moment a sinner trusts Christ, there is a conflict in his very being between the powers of darkness and those of light. The one who has become a member of the family of God now faces conflicts and problems that he did not have before.[xxxiv]

Only the growing Christian can know victory over the flesh as he grows to be more and more like Christ in his Christian character. As the believer grows in humility, he depends more and more on the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain him, and it is the work of the Spirit that helps the Christian overcome the flesh.

> The old nature (which has its origin in our physical birth) fights against the new nature which we receive when we are born again (Gal. 5:16–26). No amount of self-discipline, no set of man-made rules and regulations, can control this old nature. Only the Holy Spirit of God can enable us to “put to death” the old nature (Rom. 8:12–13) and produce the Spirit’s fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) in us through the new nature.[xxxv]

Apart from the internal temptations of the sin nature, the Christian must also be on guard against the attacks of the devil who is an enemy that is bent on our destruction and is described as one who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

> The desire of Satan was to move in and occupy the throne of God, exercise absolute independent authority over the angelic creation, bring the earth and all the universe under his authority, cover himself with the glory that belongs to God alone, and then be responsible to no one but himself.[xxxvi]

Satan has not always been a fallen angel, as there was a time when he was perfect, without sin, and served God in heaven (Ezek. 28:12-17). However, his wisdom turned to pride as he manufactured sin from the source of his own volition and in his madness sought to usurp the throne of God (Isa. 14:13-14). In his fall, Satan convinced many angels to rebel with him, and convinced the first humans to turn away from God (Gen. 3:1-7). Now, the world is filled with unbelievers who live in constant rebellion against God and help to perpetuate Satan’s world system.

> The devil is “the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.” This does not mean that Satan is personally at work in the life of each unbeliever, since Satan as a created being is limited in space. Unlike God, who is omnipresent, Satan cannot be in all places at one time. But because of his demonic associates (Eph. 6:11–12), and his power over the world system (John 12:31), Satan influences the lives of all unbelievers, and also seeks to influence believers. He wants to make people “children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2; 5:6). He himself was disobedient to God, so he wants others to disobey Him too.[xxxvii]

In addition to the sin nature and the attacks of Satan and demons, the Christian also faces the external temptations of Satan’s world system that seeks to mold him and conform him to its sinful beliefs, values, and

behaviors. When the New Testament mentions "the world" it rarely refers to the physical planet, but almost completely refers to "that which is hostile to God…lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved."[xxxviii]

> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)
>
> These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Satan's world system that seeks to upset and destroy the Christian did not come into place by accident, but is the product of the corrupted genius of Satan, who created and set it in motion, and who continues to perpetuate it in order to accomplish his agenda.

> The *cosmos* is a vast order or system that Satan has promoted which conforms to his ideals, aims, and methods. It is civilization now functioning apart from God-a civilization in which none of its promoters really expect God to share; who assign to God no consideration in respect to their projects, nor do they ascribe any causality to Him. This system embraces its godless governments, conflicts, armaments, jealousies; its education, culture, religions of morality, and pride. It is that sphere in which man lives. It is what he sees, what he employs. To the uncounted multitude it is all they ever know so long as they live on this earth. It is properly styled "*The Satanic System*" which phrase is in many instances a justified interpretation of the so-meaningful word, *cosmos*.[xxxix]

Jesus Christ, by His death, burial, and resurrection, has provided victory over the sin nature (Rom. 6:11-14; Gal. 2:20), the Devil (Eph. 6:11-

12), and the world (John 16:33). It is only in Christ that the believer can grow in the Spirit and overcome Satan and the pressures of the sin nature and fallen world.

> For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

As we learn God's Word and apply it to our lives by faith, we benefit from His promises and find an anchor for our souls. We live by faith, trusting God the Holy Spirit to help us understand Scripture and be obedient-to-the-word believers. This requires positive volition, for God will not give the victory to a traitor who has crossed over and is living with the enemy. The Christian must not "grieve the Holy Spirit" through personal sin, nor "quench the Spirit" by suppressing His ongoing transformative work of character development (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). Rather, the Christian must "be filled with the Spirit" and "walk by the Spirit" on a regular basis. The command to "be filled with the Spirit" implies a volitional response from the Christian to permit the Spirit to empower and guide him in everything (i.e. church life, family, business, social activities, military, etc.).

> To be filled with the Spirit is to have the Spirit fulfilling in us all that God intended Him to do when he placed Him there. To be filled is not the problem of getting *more* of the Spirit: it is rather the problem of the Spirit getting *more* of us. We shall never have *more* of the Spirit than the anointing which every true Christian has received. On the other hand, the Spirit may have all of the believer and thus be able to manifest in him the life and character of Christ. A spiritual person, then, is one who experiences the divine purpose and plan in his daily life through the power of the indwelling Spirit. The *character* of that life will be the out-lived Christ. The cause of that life will be the unhindered indwelling Spirit (Ephesians 3:16-21; II Corinthians 3:18).[xl]

Once “filled with the Spirit” the Christian must then learn to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). To walk by means of the Spirit is to live in continual dependence on the Spirit as He directs and sustains the believer. Walking in the Spirit is an ongoing action that requires a regular volitional response from the Christian.

> Constant dependence on the power of the indwelling Spirit of God is essential to spiritual growth and victory. By its very nature, walking is a succession of dependent acts. When one foot is lifted in order to place it front of the other one, it is done in faith—faith that the foot that remains on the ground will support the full weight of the body. You can only walk by the exercise of faith. You can live the Christian life only by dependence on the Holy Spirit. Such dependence will result in the Spirit’s control over the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:17-21) and the Spirit’s production of the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). Dependence on the power of God and effort on the part of the believer are not mutually exclusive. Self-discipline and Spirit-dependence can and must be practiced at the same time in a balanced spiritual life. Dependence itself is an attitude, but that attitude does not come automatically; it usually requires cultivation. How many genuine Christians there are who live day after day without even sensing their need of dependence on Him. Experience, routine, pride, self-confidence all tend to drag all of us away from that conscious dependence on God which we must have in order to live and act righteously.[xli]

The Christian is positionally perfect in the eyes of God because of the righteousness imputed to him at the moment of salvation; yet, he must strive for a righteous character throughout his lifetime, and this means learning to live in the knowledge of God’s Word and daily dependence of the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain until he goes home to heaven. The Christian life is marked by blessing and suffering. It is a life that has God as its source and truth as its basis. This provides hope and purpose to the Christian, both in this life and in the one to come.

As Christians we are waiting for the "blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Tit. 2:13). However, while we wait for His return, we are to live spiritually and offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Just as the Jewish priest under the Mosaic Law had a specific code to follow regarding his priestly service at the Jewish Temple, so the Christian has specific responsibilities placed on him by the Lord. The spiritual duties of every Christian include:

1. The giving of one's body for perpetual service to the Lord (Rom. 12:-1-2).
2. The sacrifice of praise for worship (Heb. 13:15).
3. The doing of good works and sharing with others (Heb. 13:16; cf. Phil. 4:18).
4. The sacrifice of one's life for the benefit of others (Phil. 2:17; cf. Phil. 1:21-26).
5. Walking in sacrificial love (Eph. 5:1-2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22).

The Christian will be spiritually effective in this world as he learns to live in dependence on the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word of God, giving sacrificially for the benefit of others.

Spiritual service and spiritual maturity are distinct. A new Christian may engage in spiritual service (as listed above), but only the mature Christian does so on a consistent basis. There are at least six things that lead to spiritual maturity which the born again believer must do on a regular basis throughout his life:

1. He must have an ongoing attitude of submission to God and be willing to seek His will above all else (Romans 12:1-2).
2. He must be in continual study of God's Word, applying it to every aspect of his life (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18).
3. He must rely on the Holy Spirit's power to strengthen him so that he can perform God's will (Eph. 5:17-18).

4. He must learn to walk in daily dependence on the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 21).
5. He must restore his broken fellowship with God through confession of personal sin (1 John 1:5-9). The confessed sin is directed only to God, the One who has been offended. Once confessed, sin is always forgiven (1 John 1:9).
6. He must take advantage of the time God gives him to learn and grow spiritually (Eph. 5:15-17; cf. Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 1:17; 4:1-2). The believer does not reach spiritual maturity overnight, and since he has only a measure of time allotted to Him by God (Ps. 139:16), he must make sure his days are not wasted on meaningless pursuits.

God has "blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ" (Eph. 1:3), and it is our responsibility to learn what those blessings are. Spiritual growth involves collaboration between God the Holy Spirit and our positive responses to His Scriptural guidance. The Holy Spirit will sustain us as we learn and obey Scripture, but we must say "yes" to His leading.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Salvation is of the Lord. From beginning to end God has done that is necessary to save us. It is very humbling when properly understood, as there is no place for human pride, since men contribute nothing to their salvation. This is the way it should be. God alone should be exalted, and men should respond in gracious thankfulness for all He has accomplished on their behalf.

Biblically, I know it was the Father's will that Christ go to the cross and die for sinners (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28), of which I am one among many; yet, in a very personal way, I see Christ bearing my sin, being judged in my place and bearing the Father's wrath that rightfully belonged to me. God's righteousness and love intersect at the cross, in that He displays His great wrath against my sin and at the same time His love for me, the sinner. At the cross, God punished my sin as His justice required and saved me, the sinner, as His love desired (Isa. 53; John 3:16). And all this happened while I was His enemy (Rom. 5:10)! Had I been alive in the days my Lord walked the earth, I surely would have led Him to the cross myself and driven the nails with my own hands. I would have lifted up His cross and made Him hang between heaven and earth to die. I am a sinner, but for the grace of God I would burn for all eternity. Yet God, in infinite grace and mercy came to me in my depravity and showed me love when I was not seeking Him, and by His grace gave me eternal life when I turned to Christ and trusted Him as my Savior. My name is Barabbas and today I am a free man.

CHRIST TO THE CROSS

I and the Father led Christ to the cross,
Together we placed Him there;
I pushed Him forward, no care for the cost,
His Father's wrath to bear.
Christ in the middle not wanting to die,
Knelt in the garden and prayed;
Great tears of blood the Savior did cry,
Yet His Father He humbly obeyed.

So He carried His cross down a dusty trail,
No words on His lips were found;
No cry was uttered as I drove the nails,
And His arms to the cross were bound.
I lifted my Savior with arms spread wide,
He hung between heaven and earth;
I raised my spear and pierced His side,
What flowed was of infinite worth.

Like a Lamb to the altar Christ did go,
A sacrifice without blemish or spot;
A knife was raised, and life did flow,
In a basin the blood was caught.
Past the incense table and the dark black veil,
To that holy of holy places,
The blood of Christ was made to avail,
And all my sins it erases.

This Lamb on a cross was a demonstration
Of the Father's love for me;
For the Savior's death brought satisfaction,
Redeemed, and set me free.
Now I come to the Savior by faith alone,
Not trusting in works at all;
Jesus my substitute for sin did atone,
Salvation in answer to His call.

Steven R. Cook
May, 2006

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[i] Bracketed words or comments found in Scripture quotations are mine and are added for explanation of the text.

[ii] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, Ill., Moody Publishers, 1999), 42.

[iii] Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Books, 2001), 306.

[iv] Merrill Frederick Unger, R. K. Harrison, Howard Frederic Vos et al., "Sin" *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Rev. and updated ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1198.

[v] Imputation means that God credits or charges Adam's original sin and its guilt to all his offspring.

[vi] Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 1995), 189.

[vii] Ibid., 188-189.

[viii] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 723.

[ix] Ibid., 723.

[x] Lewis S. Chafer, *Salvation* (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times Company, 1922), 1.

[xi] Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN., AMG Publishers, 2002), 125.

[xii] Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Colorado Springs, Col., Victor Books, 2001), 17-18.

[xiii] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 117.

[xiv] Merrill F. Unger, "Redemption," in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Ill., Moody Press, 1988), 1068-1069.

[xv] *Propitiation* means *satisfaction*, and this means Jesus' death *completely satisfied* God the Father's righteous demands toward sin.

[xvi] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers 1979), 497.

[xvii] J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995), 138.

[xviii] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mi., Kregel Publications, 1965), 89.

[xix] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1079.

[xx] Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Kregel Publications, 1993), 178.

[xxi] Ibid., 178.

[xxii] Merrill F. Unger, "Grace," in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Ill., Moody Press, 1988), 504.

[xxiii] Lewis S. Chafer, *Grace* (Philadelphia, PA: Sunday School Times Company, 1922), 22.

[xxiv] Merrill F. Unger, “Justification,” in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 729.

[xxv] F. F. Bruce, *Romans: Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, Mich., W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002), 38.

[xxvi] *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*; Question 33 (Richmond: Virginia, John Knox Press, 1910), 407-408.

[xxvii] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, 108.

[xxviii] John F. Walvoord, “The Person and Work of Christ—Part XI: Character and Results of Propitiation” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 119 (1962): 199-200.

[xxix] Charles Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago, Ill., Moody Press, 1972), 134.

[xxx] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, 32.

[xxxi] Robert P. Lightner, *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Kregel Publications, 2000), 60-61.

[xxxii] Ibid., 15-16.

[xxxiii] Ibid., 55.

[xxxiv] Robert P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, 206.

[xxxv] Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, 480.

[xxxvi] J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil* (Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan Publishing, 1969), 25-26.

[xxxvii] Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament*, Vol. 2, 18.

[xxxviii] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 562.

[xxxix] Lewis S. Chafer, “Angelology Part 4” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 99 (1942): 282-283.

[xl] Lewis S. Chafer, *He that is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan Publishing, 1967), 43-44.

[xli] Charles Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago. Ill., Moody Press, 1994), 198.

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