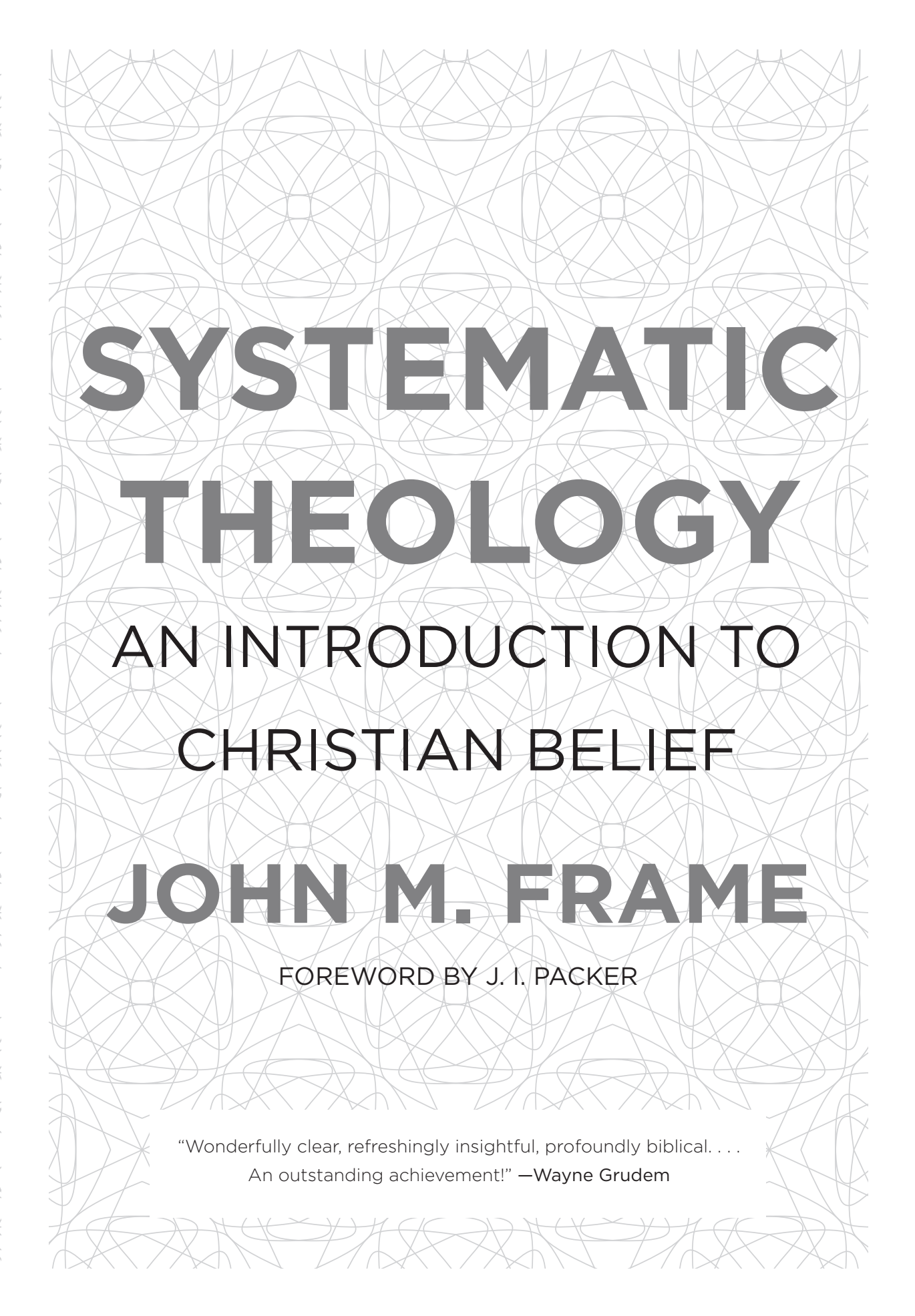




SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

**AN INTRODUCTION TO
CHRISTIAN BELIEF**

JOHN M. FRAME

FOREWORD BY J. I. PACKER

“Wonderfully clear, refreshingly insightful, profoundly biblical. . .
An outstanding achievement!” —Wayne Grudem

SEMINARY LEADERS

“All good theology is practical. Proper theology is for the church, not just for academics. Biblical systematic theology impacts the way we think, the way we live, and the way we feel about God, ourselves, the world, and others. John Frame always does ‘good’ theology. It will change your life.”

—**Robert C. (Ric) Cannada Jr.**, Chancellor Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Many times in the past I have grown in my understanding of Scripture and benefited in my practice of ministry as a consequence of John Frame’s written reflections on God’s Word. Now the opportunity to draw upon that thought from a work that expands and systematizes his reflections from a lifetime of study and devotion is a great treasure for the church and a great gift to all in ministry.”

—**Bryan Chapell**, President Emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary

“Theology reflects our study of God’s general and special revelation and our attempt to express that theology in the language of those to whom we seek to communicate our conclusions. Theology must be faithful to the authority of the Word of God, and must be written in an understandable style. For those reasons, John Frame has once again used his gifts to give us a systematic theology that is consistently biblical and written within the framework of Reformed theology. Familiarity with the author’s writings makes the reader aware of his ability to express himself clearly and to the point. He does not waste words or the reader’s time. You will find an immediate appreciation of and benefit from his definitions and expressions of our Reformed doctrine. While a number of outstanding systematics reside within the family of biblically Reformed theology, Frame’s will complement and deepen one’s understanding and appreciation of the ‘faith once delivered to the saints,’ yesterday and today. Without question this work will be taught and studied in a way that will enable the reader, teacher, and student to see and understand the sovereignty of God, the kingdom of God, the lordship of Christ, and salvation with fresh minds and day-to-day application. You will find Frame, as usual, demonstrating his well-known mantra, ‘theology is life and life is theology.’ Each page is a constant reminder that the truth will make us free.”

—**Charles Dunahoo**, Chairman of the Board, Westminster Theological Seminary; Coordinator for Christian Education and Publications, Presbyterian Church in America; pastor and teacher

“John Frame is an esteemed colleague and one of the most important contemporary Reformed systematic theologians in the English-speaking world. His *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* reflects a half-century of distinguished teaching, prolific writing, and serious study. For that reason alone, especially in a day and age in which many evangelicals question the legitimacy of systematic theology,

this volume commends itself to our attention. Frame (thankfully) encourages a Bible-centered approach to doing theology and (rightly) asserts that even ‘practical theology’ is a department of systematic theology. Here you will find the Professor Frame you have come to expect: clear, readable, restrained, and conversational in his presentation, and thoughtful, biblical, consistent, and careful in his views. Many years ago, Carl F. H. Henry suggested that we need a ‘recovery of Christian belief.’ May your engagement with this book serve to introduce you to and ground you in genuinely Christian belief.”

—**Ligon Duncan**, Chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary

“John Frame is one of my favorite theologians, and his *Systematic Theology* is filled with the deep learning and warranted wisdom of a lifetime. I commend it warmly to the Lord’s people everywhere.”

—**Timothy George**, Founding Dean, Beeson Divinity School of Samford University; General Editor, Reformation Commentary on Scripture

“It is always a joyous occasion when one of God’s faithful servants of his Word produces the fruit of his many years of labor into a full-fledged systematic theology. This is no small undertaking, but in the grace of God, we in our generation are the happy recipients of just such a work from Professor John Frame. He is, by all odds, one of the best known and most respected Reformed theologians in our day. It is a special joy to see this, the quintessence of a lifetime of his study of God’s Word, and now to commend it to all the body of Christ with thanksgiving to God for his gift of Dr. John Frame to the church.”

—**Walter C. Kaiser Jr.**, President Emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“When one thinks of modern Reformed theologians, John Frame is at the top of the list. He has the rare ability to explain complex theological truths in a manner that is simple enough for the layman and deep enough for the scholar. Moreover, his theological guidance is always wise, steady, and, more than anything else, biblical. And now we finally have the book that so many have waited for him to write—a systematic theology. This volume is a wonderful gift for the church. I cannot recommend it highly enough.”

—**Michael J. Kruger**, President, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“John M. Frame’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* is a remarkable achievement. It is simultaneously scholarly yet accessible, sweeping in scope but penetrating in insight, steeped in historic orthodoxy yet fresh in reflection. Frame herein develops and advances his Westminster perspective on theology and ethics, culminating in what is simply Reformed theology at its best.”

—**Peter A. Lillback**, President, Westminster Theological Seminary

“It may be said that there are levels of theologians. Most of us teach what others have written. A few will actually add creatively to others’ material. And then there are the theologians of the first class. They think at a deeper level and produce the living, vital ‘starter’ or leavening agent that the other theological artisans will ‘bake’ with. Few have been starter theologians. Certainly Karl Barth was one from the last century. But the leavening was incomplete in the opinion of the most charitable confessional Christians and tainted with deadly error in the opinion of others. John Frame is a theologian of the first class in our day. His *Systematic Theology* is not a reworking of others’ leavening, but is indeed a starter that, unlike Barth, produces a biblically faithful, untainted, deeply satisfying, and expectant Christian theology. This theology is capable of being dispatched for use as the central ingredient in a robust course of study to produce pastors—and believers of all vocations—who are tethered to the inerrant and infallible Word of God, who have a personal love for Christ Jesus our Lord, and who lead the flock of Christ to sunlit uplands where the triune God’s promises appear to reveal not only an abundant life and the assurance of life with God after death and salvation from hell, but also the golden beams of a new heaven and a new earth. John Frame’s *Systematic Theology* is thus the release of an untainted and thoroughly faithful leavening agent that will produce a starter to strengthen other theologians, train future shepherds of the church, and nourish the body of Christ for years to come. It is my honor to commend *Systematic Theology* to the church. I thank God that in this rather young new century, the first-class, original, starter theologian of our time, John Frame, is not a mere theologian of the Word, but a theologian of the propositional Word as well as the Word made flesh. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Frame and to P&R Publishing for the production and release of this magisterial work.”

—**Michael A. Milton**, Fourth President/Chancellor, Reformed Theological Seminary; Presbyterian (PCA) minister; author; columnist; theologian; Army Reserve chaplain; composer

“This new systematic theology comes from one of the great theological minds of our age. John Frame’s contributions to theology are already massive and many, but now he has given the church a systematic theology. This is a very important book, and it represents a lifetime of consecrated theological reflection. This new volume promises to be an enduring contribution to evangelical theology.”

—**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“As one who has long admired—and learned so much from—John Frame’s contributions to Reformed life and thought, I am so pleased that we now have this fine volume that gathers together the insights of a half-century of serious theological scholarship. The biblical and practical nature of his perspective makes this a refreshing and much-needed resource for all of us who care about a vital Reformed theology.”

—**Richard J. Mouw**, President, Professor of Christian Philosophy, Fuller Theological Seminary

“Biblical, clear, and cogent, John Frame moves through the loci of theology with ease and without ‘looking to the right or to the left.’ This new book is not just a cut-and-paste job from past publications. While his volume is less historical than some systematic theologies, Frame avoids bogging down in episodic intellectual controversies, without denying the importance of every ‘jot and tittle.’”

—**Andrew J. Peterson**, President, Global Education, Reformed Theological Seminary

“Few in our day champion such a vision of God as massive, magnificent, and biblical as does John Frame. For decades, he has given himself to the church, to his students, and to meticulous thinking and the rigorous study of the Bible. He has winsomely, patiently, and persuasively contended for the gospel in the secular philosophical arena, as well as in the thick of the church worship wars and wrestlings with feminism and open theism. He brings together a rare blend of big-picture thinking, levelheaded reflection, biblical fidelity, a love for the gospel and the church, and the ability to write with care and clarity.”

—**John Piper**, Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary; Founder and Teacher, www.desiringGod.org

“Clear, thorough, intelligent, and fair to opposing views, John Frame’s work will now be the standard within traditional Reformed theology.”

—**Cornelius Plantinga Jr.**, President, Calvin Theological Seminary

“We can count on John Frame to speak of the profound complexities of biblical theology with a precision, perspicuity, and humility that represent the best tendencies of the Reformed tradition. In this work, Professor Frame gives expression to a system of belief that will serve and satisfy a variety of audiences, including the curious layperson, the young seminarian, and the experienced pastor. Never one to shy away from the difficult, thorny issues of his discipline, he explains and upholds the teaching of Scripture, even when that teaching offends modern sensibilities. I would recommend this systematic treatment to all my students.”

—**John Scott Redd Jr.**, President, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

“For decades, Professor Frame has purposefully driven scholars and students, colleagues and critics, leaders and laity to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Scriptures. That laudable objective will be magnified for generations yet to come with the release of this, the author’s most provocative and mature theological expression. ‘Everyone else serves his best first . . . but you have reserved your best for now.’”

—**John T. Sowell**, President, Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

“Any theologian who says that ‘the Bible is the most important thing’ is worth listening to. But one whose life commends his theology, as John’s does, is doubly worth listen-

ing to. This book is a gift to the church written by one who has a brilliant, discerning mind and a servant's heart. I was blessed by reading it."

—**Don Sweeting**, President, James Woodrow Hassell Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

"*Systematic Theology* is the culmination of John Frame's life's work in teaching young men who are preparing for the ministry. It is a masterful study that expresses the dogmatic method and thought of a modern Reformer. Frame's approach to systematics articulates a refined synthesis of the theological and philosophical thought of early Westminster Theological Seminary with an emphasis on contemporary religious issues. No student of theology can ignore Frame's magnum opus, which represents a modern commentary on the Reformed perspective for the third millennium. Scholars, pastors, students, and laymen who want to be well informed in modern Reformation thought must drink from the wellspring of wisdom and insight offered by this humble theologian, whose one great desire is the glory and honor of his God and teaching theology that is adaptable to the church pew."

—**Kenneth Gary Talbot**, President, Whitefield Theological Seminary

"With a half-century of teaching experience, Dr. Frame writes with an irenic lucidity that speaks clearly to students while engaging questions that animate theologians and divide denominations. Presenting theology as the application of Scripture to every area of life, Dr. Frame intends the reader to live the truth that he confesses in love. While Dr. Frame's creativity will provoke discussion among readers seeking settled conclusions, the charity of his conversation models a Christlike confession. I commend Dr. Frame's *Systematic Theology* for offering insight with humility to readers and for bringing ongoing reformation to the Reformed tradition."

—**Steven T. Vanderhill**, President, Redeemer Theological Seminary

"John Frame has added significant value to the long line of systematic theologies in print. That value emanates from his profound understanding of the Bible, steeped in personal piety. He is a theologian of the heart. The personal, transparent nature of this magnum opus distinguishes it from other systematic theologies, enabling the reader to understand and apply Scripture. A quick scan of the contents dispels any doubt about Frame's broad acquaintance with the literature of the field, but his single-minded pursuit of explaining the great message of the Bible is equally clear. Seldom does a contemporary theologian engage as he does, enriching intellectually, theologically, and spiritually."

—**Luder G. Whitlock Jr.**, Interim President, Knox Theological Seminary, Fort Lauderdale, Florida; President, Excelsis, Orlando

"Even those not as rigorously Reformed in their theology as John Frame will find great benefit in these pages. With a clear commitment to the primacy of Scripture,

lucid argumentation, cogent articulation, a love for God's people, and a passion for God's glory throughout all the earth, Frame has produced what should become required reading in seminary classrooms and pastors' studies for years to come."

—**Mark Young**, President, Denver Seminary, Littleton, Colorado

PASTORS

"Trends in contemporary theology are generally split between essential and constructive approaches. The older essentialists were committed to doing theology only according to what the Bible says, most of which has been carefully summarized in numerous historic creeds and confessions. Their contemporary standard-bearers have done their best to protect the positions of the forefathers. That cultural trends helped to provide a reactionary climate for much of what essentialists codified and continue to protect as orthodox theology is clear. But no essentialist need admit that cultural trends supplied the *raison d'être* for his theological positions. That valued role is reserved for Scripture. Against this, constructive theology presents a case for doing original theology according to the present need of each generation and of the church. But it does so by drawing heavily from the norms and values of the contiguous culture. Consequently, constructive theology will always remain open-ended. Frame's *Systematic Theology* is unique in that it brings together both essential and constructive emphases in contemporary theology. Specifically, it represents vastly original work in theology, while at the same time it remains true to the finished Word of God and to the historic and orthodox confessional documents of Christianity. Frame is not the least bit interested in reconstructing theology. His is an effort to reconceptualize the *task* of theology along practical and pastoral lines. *Sola Scriptura* maintains the logic and coherence of his new exposition of theology, while 'perspectivalism' gives it its remarkable ability to explain and to apply God's Word afresh."

—**John Barber**, Pastor, Cornerstone PCA, Jupiter, Florida

"John Frame is one of the most seminal Reformed theologians of our age, and this is his most significant work."

—**Mark Driscoll**, Founder, Mars Hill Church and Resurgence; Cofounder, Acts 29

"John Frame is noted for his ability to articulate clearly and with an economy of words the contours of our Christian faith. He does that in this work with particular skill. Here is a systematic theology that clearly flows from biblical exegesis, follows the biblical story line, and is faithful to the confessional convictions of the author. It is a significant work that will bless the individual believer and serve the church well."

—**Liam Goligher**, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia

"John Frame says that he is 'immensely thankful to God' for the opportunity to produce this systematic theology. He is not alone: I am immensely thankful that God gave him this opportunity as well. Frame is a deep thinker and a clear communicator—a

rare combination among theologians of his stature. Here is a man who knows his church history, his philosophy, his theological systems; but he does not allow these to sidetrack him from pointing—again and again—back to the majesty of Christ in Scripture. Frame shows that theology is not an end in itself. Loving God is the goal. And Frame’s volume hits this mark.”

—**J. D. Greear**, Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina

“This book is as brilliant as it is personable. Dr. Frame’s panoramic comprehension of the Bible and of various theologians’ understandings of its content is matched only by the practical, applicable style of his writing.”

—**Joel C. Hunter**, Senior Pastor, Northland—A Church Distributed, Orlando

“John Frame the author has in *Systematic Theology* captured comprehensively and with clarity what many of us have benefited from in the classroom through John Frame the professor and teacher. His biblical precision and personal passion are spread on every page, which you will quickly desire to turn in order to get to the next page as he allows and propels us to see the singular glory of the triune God revealed in his Word as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.”

—**Harry L. Reeder**, Pastor/Teacher, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham

“Dr. Frame does it again! He’s gifted the church with another wonderful tome of applied theology. This systematic theology—an elaborate exposition of the teaching of Scripture as he understands it—brings together a lifetime of study. It reflects the emphases of his teaching and writing, revealing interaction with theologians old and new, biblically orthodox and otherwise.

“Connoisseurs of systems of theology will note the distinctive features of Dr. Frame’s method: the umbrella theme of God’s lordship, both a high view and a high use of Scripture, with application to the reader’s heart and life. Wedded to the supremacy of Scripture and recognizing both its divineness and its humanness, Dr. Frame sets his doctrinal discussion in redemptive-historical context, returns to his triperspectivalism, and models for us the much-needed counterbalancing of historic orthodoxy and biblical creativity. The result is a fresh, stimulating, courageous, yet winsome study. While disarmingly accessible, the volume succeeds both in teaching the theology of Scripture and in furthering discussion of how that theology is to be systematized. While the methodological discussion unfolds, we may fully expect Dr. Frame’s *Systematic Theology* to draw in earnest students of Scripture at all stages of learning. It is a rich treasure trove of biblical analysis, useful for personal or group study. It will prove to be a legacy that keeps on giving. I plan to return to it time and again.”

—**Tim J. R. Trumper**, Senior Minister, Seventh Reformed Church, Grand Rapids

“John Frame writes theology for those who want to use, and be used by, the Word of God. He has done his professional theologizing for many years in the context of

the preparation of young men for ministry in seminary. But more to the point, his theology's practicality springs from his understanding of the nature of theological reflection itself. When I was his student over forty years ago, he told us, 'Theology is application.' His discussions of the various loci of systematic theology always have an eye on the Holy Scriptures' power and purpose to transform the lives of the people who study them—intellectually and ethically. Anyone who reads this volume will be blessed with a more comprehensive and systematic appreciation for the teachings of the Word of God and at the same time will grow in renewing the mind and life by the Holy Spirit's speaking through the Word."

—**Roger Wagner**, Pastor, Bayview Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chula Vista, California

MINISTRIES

"Hurray for John Frame! At a time when systematics has been shoved into a corner by biblical theology in many seminaries, John has published what I can only hope will be an alternative to that imbalance. Not since A. A. Hodge's *Outlines*, Buswell, Reymond, and Grudem has a truly substantive systematic theology appeared. I expect *Systematic Theology* to become a classic, and I look forward to its publication with the greatest anticipation."

—**Jay E. Adams**, Founder, Institute for Nouthetic Studies (INS), National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC), and Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF); Author, *Competent to Counsel*

"Systematic theology is notoriously challenging to read but even more challenging to write. I tell students that too many modern theologians have given us 'cookbooks' that feed neither the mind nor the soul. John Frame is a great evangelical exception. He has mastered the historical method, and more importantly, his readers have come to expect that biblical theology will guide his systematic theology. As he says, 'The Bible is the most important thing.' I welcome this important volume and encourage all readers of theology, especially students, to have Frame's valuable work at their side."

—**John H. Armstrong**, President, ACT3 Network; Adjunct Professor, Wheaton College Graduate School

"John Frame has written a very big book—another one. Frame's strengths are once again on display: vast scope, unshakable confidence in Scripture, carefulness and generosity, a deceptively casual style. What most stands out, though, is the open-mindedness of his project. Big as it is, Frame's work raises questions even as it answers them, and as a result it opens ever-new threads in the ongoing conversation that is the Reformed tradition."

—**Peter J. Leithart**, President, Trinity House, Birmingham, Alabama

“John Frame has given the church a superb new resource in this volume. Taking as his theme the lordship of God, Frame seeks to do what he says the good theologian always does: he states the truth not for its own sake but to build up people in the Christian faith. He incorporates much of the best of modern Reformed theologians (Van Til, Murray, etc.) and addresses the hottest topics of the day, such as the length and nature of the days of Genesis 1 and whether Scripture is inerrant. Many will take issue with one or more of Frame’s points, but all will be edified by a careful reading of this work.”

—**Samuel T. Logan Jr.**, International Director, The World Reformed Fellowship;
Special Counsel to the President, Biblical Seminary

“On my bookshelf sit numerous systematics by Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof, Robert Reymond, and Wayne Grudem. I enjoy them all. They inform, educate, and bring clarity to different issues within Scripture. While systematics are full of precious knowledge to assist any student to better understand God and his holy Word, the reader will find none so well written, with a meekness and tenderness of heart, as Frame’s. The breadth and length and height and depth of God’s amazing love graces this volume of theology. If Edwards’s ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’ can be said to have drawn sinners to Christ, Frame’s work will be said to draw Christians even closer to understanding their Creator, God, and Lord more fully. This work is a necessity for every layman, pastor, and scholar alike.

“This systematic theology is written from and faithful to a Reformed perspective—glorifying God and his Word. As expected, Frame makes extensive reference to Scripture and the Westminster Confession of Faith, but he makes good use of other confessions, too. While Frame is careful to address numerous contemporary issues, his work directs the reader to Christ—to his salvation alone. This personalizes the text. Though it draws on ‘yesterday,’ it makes it applicable to the reader ‘today and forever’ (Heb. 13:8).”

—**Joseph R. Nally**, Theological Editor, Third Millennium Ministries

“No theologian in modern times combines (1) a simple, childlike faith in the Bible, (2) a razor-sharp analytical intellect, (3) a gift for conceptual and linguistic clarity, and (4) a love for Christ’s church and everyday Christian people more successfully than John M. Frame. All factors considered, no theologian in recent memory—not Barth, not Brunner, not Pannenberg, not Tillich, nor even the conservatives: Millard Erickson, Carl Henry, the Hodges, Francis Pieper, Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict)—measures up to Frame. He is God’s unparalleled gift to the church, and his *Systematic Theology* is a wellspring of truth in a theologically parched age.”

—**P. Andrew Sandlin**, President, Center for Cultural Leadership; Senior Pastor,
Cornerstone Bible Church, Santa Cruz

“Does the world need one more systematic theology? That depends. It doesn’t necessarily, if what you mean is another doorstop describing the contentious history of doctrines.

But it does if what you mean is systematic theology that has finally come full circle through centuries of drift from the Bible itself and from practical application, back to the early evangelists' heart for teaching God's Word for edification. When the apostle Paul was wrapping up his ministry in Ephesians, he summarized what he had done among them this way: 'You yourselves know . . . how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable' (Acts 20:18, 20). What was good enough for Paul is evidently good enough for John Frame."

—**Andrée Seu Peterson**, Senior Writer, *WORLD* magazine

"When it comes to the field of systematic theology, anything that John M. Frame writes is certainly worth reading. This is so because Frame understands the difference between the primary standard and secondary standards. The primary source and standard for systematic theology is the written Word of God in Holy Scripture, and the secondary standards are the creeds and confessions formulated by the church across the centuries. Frame does not manipulate the text of Scripture to make it supportive of received doctrinal formulations, but subscribes to the Reformed creeds and confessions because they embody the truth that the Lord has given us in his Word. The creeds and confessions do not stand on a level with the only infallible rule of faith and practice, but are planted deep under Scripture and are subject to revision as the Holy Spirit leads the church of Christ on its way to ultimate victory when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

"Here, at last, is John Frame's magnum opus—the fruit of fifty years of teaching theology and training ministers of the gospel. Few other contemporary theologians have influenced me as much as Dr. Frame, and I am eager to see this culmination of his theological labors under the lordship of the triune God make its way into the heads, hands, and hearts of Christians around the world."

—**Justin Taylor**, Blogger, "Between Two Worlds"

"This fresh, lucid, and doxological work illustrates the very core of John Frame's project: theology as application. Frame understands the role and place of theology in general and of systematic theology in particular—showcasing one perspective of Christ's dynamic lordship. He avoids the ditches that frequently crisscross today's paths of theological undertaking—either pining for some prior supposed golden utopian theological era (merely quoting select Reformers), on the one hand, or, on the other hand, limiting the theological exercise to a mere propositional alchemy of privatized preparatory salve for heaven alone (life here in this yucky world consists only of a transitory pilgrimage for which the triune God lacks any true concern or effect other than 'soul-winning'). No, and decidedly no. Frame understands that we have been redeemed by the One who is Lord. We have been saved body and soul *from* something *for* something. Therefore, the 'stuff in the middle'—that is, life under the Lord between the cross and the consummation—matters to the Lord here and now and thus should matter to us in all its facets, not just the spiritual ones. Theology in this sense is earthy, and marvelously so.

This work is robust, yet accessible; timely, yet evergreen; and innovative, yet orthodox (notice the triad)! Accordingly, theological endeavors hereafter will never be the same because Frame has in this work passionately demonstrated truth—all to Christ’s glory and the church’s edification. Don’t just read this book; apply it!”

—**Jeffery J. Ventrella**, Senior Counsel, Senior Vice-President, Alliance Defending Freedom

PROFESSORS

“John Frame is one of the most important evangelical theologians of our time, a deeply biblical thinker whose work has epitomized the Reformation principles of *sola Scriptura* and *solī Deo gloria*. His writings have proved that Christian scholars don’t have to choose between orthodoxy and originality or between profundity and perspicuity. I’ve long hoped that the Lord would grant Dr. Frame the opportunity and motivation to write a full-length systematic theology, and I’m delighted to see that hope now realized. This exposition of Christian doctrine is the culmination of a lifetime of careful and submissive reflection on the whole counsel of God revealed in Scripture. It will nourish both mind and heart.”

—**James N. Anderson**, Associate Professor of Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“Few scholars of our generation have done as much as John Frame to combine philosophical, biblical, and confessional concerns in an overarching theological synthesis. Here at last he offers us the fruit of his lifetime’s labor as a service to the church of our day and to future generations. This is a work that will edify those who read it, and they in turn will use its message to build up the church of Christ. The wealth of teaching and insight that it contains will be a blessing to many, and we can be sure that it will be mightily used of God in the days ahead.”

—**Gerald L. Bray**, Research Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

“Sometimes there is a book that is so complete, so true, so instructive, and so clear that it assumes a prominent place in one’s library and stays there for years. John Frame’s *Systematic Theology* is that kind of book. It is a gift to the church . . . and a gift to me. This book will be an anchor to my soul and a source for my theology and faith for the rest of my life. Get it, give it, and rejoice that John Frame wrote it!”

—**Stephen W. Brown**, Professor of Practical Theology Emeritus, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“How do we grow in Christ? By listening intently to God’s plan and promises for us in the Bible—that’s the answer. But the Bible has so many different things in it, almost all of them problematic. What do they mean, all together? For you?

Even better, for us? Many helpful books out there will assist you with pieces of the puzzle, but Frame assembles everything together for you. Really, try his systematic theology and see; you will come to know your God so well, in all his love and mercy and kindness.”

—**D. Clair Davis**, Professor of Church History Emeritus, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Near the end of his long and fruitful career, John Frame has given us his *chef d’oeuvre*. His *Systematic Theology* is the distillation of a life’s work in reflecting on how God’s Word relates to the Christian life of the simple believer. As his readers have come to expect, his chief emphasis is on the glory of God, the God who saves, the God who loves us. It would be nearly impossible to read this volume without being drawn into fellowship and conversation with the God who is at its center. Full of quotes from poetry, traditional theology, and even hymns, this is perhaps one of the most practical systematic theologies ever penned. It belongs alongside Turretin, Hodge, Bayinck, and the other hall-of-famers in the discipline. All we can say is: thank you, John Frame!”

—**William Edgar**, Professor of Apologetics, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Our world has become one of theological confusion. Dr. Frame’s *Systematic Theology* has emerged as a refreshing and practical tool for the serious student of God’s Word. Frame brings systematic theology to life, and allows for easy integration with apologetics and other expressions of theology. By clarifying the biblical worldview, *Systematic Theology* equips us to communicate God’s Word and engage the culture with biblical truth.

“Dr. Frame’s triperspectival approach to theology is one of the greatest contributions in empowering students to understand the Bible. It allows for theological inclusiveness without compromising a high view of Scripture, and opens exciting possibilities for doing solid theology in both Western and non-Western contexts. No theological library would be complete without *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*.”

—**Carl F. Ellis Jr.**, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology, Redeemer Seminary

“John Frame has faced classrooms of bright and talented students for decades. He has shared with them a biblically based theology that faithfully addresses difficult questions and problems. This text is the sweet fruit of that classroom labor. Reading it makes those who never had the opportunity to attend see a little of what we missed and those who were his students glad that they were. *Systematic Theology* reads extremely well and always points the reader to the glorious Lord who is the text’s subject. Frame is to be congratulated for a job well done!”

—**Richard C. Gamble**, Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

“Professor Frame’s *Systematic Theology* is a long-anticipated and richly rewarding treasure. The very best of what we have valued in his decades of faithful labor are represented here in this culminating and crowning achievement. It is neither exhaustive nor thin, and readers will likely wish it accounted more for this or that question or development. But as a survey of theology that seeks to be relentlessly biblical—a most refreshing conviction!—it is a clear and fine example of the judicious, humble, and joyful spirit of theological inquiry of which Professor Frame has long been a superb example. As the author has undoubtedly hoped we would, I submit that we cannot help but come away from a patient reading of this tome with greater confidence in the truth of Holy Scripture, with zeal to submit to the wise and loving lordship of Jesus Christ, and with a longing to make him known.”

—**Mark A. Garcia**, Adjunct Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary; Adjunct Professor of Church History, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary; Pastor, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh

“Not content merely to give us Berkhof in a different wrapper, John Frame has produced a new *Systematic Theology* that maintains continuity with the best of the Reformed tradition while breaking important new ground. Employing the same multiperspectival approach worked out in his Theology of Lordship series, Dr. Frame addresses the various loci of theology in a fresh way. He grounds his theological work in exegesis and engages widely with theologians across the theological spectrum—and across the centuries. He faithfully teaches as a Reformed theologian, always remembering that the confessional standards of the church are subordinate to Scripture. His approach is balanced and his irenic spirit commendable, though certain to displease some of a more dogmatic stripe. I believe, however, that in our fragmented and needlessly argumentative Reformed circles, we need this theology—‘for such a time as this.’ Years ago in a personal conversation, Dr. Frame described his approach as being ‘Reformed but not angry about it.’ His *Systematic Theology* is ‘Reformed but not angry about it,’ and the church will be greatly blessed by this contribution from our foremost theologian.”

—**R. J. Gore Jr.**, Professor of Systematic Theology, Erskine Theological Seminary

“Though it is more compact on each subject, *Systematic Theology* is not an abridgment of John Frame’s earlier books. His already-clear thoughts have continued to develop and crystallize. The section on covenant history that precedes the material on the doctrine of God is especially helpful. I look forward to teaching theology with this book.”

—**Howard Griffith**, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.

“This is a remarkable volume—a wonderfully clear, refreshingly insightful, profoundly biblical treatment of systematic theology. While reading this book, I felt as though I once again had the privilege of being a student in John Frame’s theology classes, the

classes that so deeply influenced my thinking as a Westminster Seminary student forty years ago. But now the material has been enriched by a lifetime of further research and teaching. An outstanding achievement!"

—**Wayne Grudem**, Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies, Phoenix Seminary, Phoenix, Arizona

"Vintage Frame—the old, old story, but with new slants and new emphases to make the reader sit up and think. John 'Rabbi' Duncan remarked of Jonathan Edwards that his doctrine is all application, and his application doctrine. Frame aspires to be of Edwards's school, but he's also a teacher who sets homework for his readers. Also like Edwards, sometimes his words are spiced with a polemical hot sauce. A systematic theology to ponder and to profit from."

—**Paul Helm**, Teaching Fellow, Philosophical Theology, John Calvin, Regent College

"When Charles Hodge emerged as Presbyterianism's premier theologian in the nineteenth century, students and pastors alike awaited the completion of his three-volume *Systematic Theology*. When the final volume appeared, all found what they had hoped for—a magisterial work. It was not merely a rehash of Hodge's classroom lectures but a careful reworking of material that he had successfully taught at Princeton for many decades. The fact that Hodge's volumes are still reprinted today testifies to their staying power. With the appearance of John Frame's *Systematic Theology*, one now finds a work that will likewise serve Reformed Christians for a similar length of time. Frame is well known for his perspectival theological method, his clarity and comprehensiveness in exposition of the many-sidedness of the biblical text, his apt illustrations that capture profound theological and biblical truth, and his ability to pose stimulating questions that enable students to probe even beyond his reflections. Perhaps the highest praise that can be given to theologians, besides the affirmation that their theology leads to doxology, is that their treatment sustains and further stimulates their readers' interest. I have never opened the pages of John's many works to ascertain his treatment of a given theological point or biblical text without being enlightened. More than that, however, after finding what I originally sought, I realized that I was still reading an hour later. Students of Reformed theology will find themselves similarly enthralled."

—**W. Andrew Hoffer**, Emeritus Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

"If you want a philosophy and theology drenched in the Bible with literally thousands of biblical references, this book is for you—and for me! Dr. Frame deals with so many topics with the skills of both a generalist and a specialist that reading him on virtually any subject is greatly beneficial. May this magnum opus of biblical theology be widely read in the church for years to come."

—**Peter R. Jones**, Scholar in Residence, Adjunct Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California

“Reading John Frame’s *Systematic Theology* often encourages, occasionally puzzles, but almost always stimulates. Growing out of a lifetime of reflection and wrestling with biblical texts, these pages contain much that we can learn from as we all try to understand better how God glorifies his lordship in our salvation. I, for one, am thankful that we now have this one-volume synthesis of Frame’s thinking.”

—**Kelly M. Kopic**, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

“This *Systematic Theology* is by any measure a crowning achievement in a fruitful theological career of teaching, preaching, and writing by Professor John Frame. It is the outpouring of many jars of fragrant and well-aged ‘wine on the lees’: the rich vintage that has been matured in a bright Christian mind that has been immersed in meditation on (and obedience to) the Word of God in the fellowship of the Reformed church for more than threescore years and ten.

“Like Frame’s other works that I have read, this book is written with enthusiastic faith in God and in the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit inspired, and in fellowship with the risen Christ. It is written clearly; Frame is never ashamed of his position (traditional Calvinism), and is humble enough to say about some difficulties, ‘I do not know.’ His writing exhibits humility and unwavering submission before both the clear truths and the mysteries of God. He is always charitable toward those whose position he thinks is wrong and presents it fairly, and yet he does take a stand, which he knows will not suit everyone. You might not agree with all that he says, but at least you will grasp precisely what he is saying.

“Someone described C. S. Lewis as ‘A Mind Awake,’ and that is how I see John Frame. This volume shows how alert he is to moral, philosophical, and societal issues raised by Christian truth claims over the last three centuries in a secular culture.

“One of the great contributions of Frame’s theology is that it shows the inescapable necessity of starting with—and remaining with—the presupposition of the truth of Holy Scripture, for theology and for everything else that we wish to make sense of. Along this line, not only in this book but in others that he has written, I have found very helpful his explanation of why a certain circularity of reasoning is always necessary when arguing for any ultimate authority (e.g., whether Holy Scripture, human reason, empiricism, or, perhaps, evolutionism). Rationalists have long accused Christians of circular reasoning (as concerns the Bible), but what they do not tell you is that they, too, must use the assumption of a final authority themselves, in order to prove their point.

“Frame’s section on the providence of God is one of the most beautiful that I have ever read. At times I was less than comfortable with his account of the rather direct relationship of God to evil, yet I am not sure that I could treat the subject any better, if as well. But I must keep thinking about it. His discussion of how God brings about free decisions of humans—which both avoids short-circuiting our responsibility and avoids the false theory of libertarian free will (i.e., that our will is free from the control of our fallen personality, and is ultimately free from the control of the Sovereign God)—is one of the best I have seen.

“In sum, Frame’s *Systematic Theology* cogently and succinctly presents the most crucial thought and practice of the long Christian tradition (especially in its Reformed branch, which has been concerned above all to be faithful to the entirety of Holy Scripture), in terms that can be understood in this twenty-first century, where we are called to live. Frame’s English is lucid; his learning is great, but he does not overwhelm you with it. His doctrine is in accordance with the Westminster tradition of the seventeenth century (and behind that, Calvin of the sixteenth century, and Augustine of the fifth), always looking at these Augustinian traditions in light of God’s written Word (and under it), and he helps the reader to deal with the problems of speaking and living out that tradition in an aggressively secular age. This volume is eminently suitable for a seminary or college textbook. It will also give inspiration to many a preacher (as it has to this one!). I perceive that it was written in an atmosphere of quiet joy, and I will be surprised if it does not convey something of that joy to those who read it.”

—**Douglas F. Kelly**, Richard Jordan Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“This book by John Frame on systematic theology provides students of God’s Word with a tool designed to clearly understand and effectively explain the Scriptures. It is indeed a sterling treasure that is sure to stand the test of time.”

—**Simon J. Kistemaker**, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Those who have appreciated Frame’s contributions to theology in previous works, such as his *Doctrine of God*, will not be disappointed with his *Systematic Theology*. Adopting a strongly biblical perspective, Frame succeeds in presenting a comprehensive treatment of the various theological loci that also is highly accessible. This book will be of value for the specialist, student, and general reader alike. It marks a major milestone in Frame’s distinguished career.”

—**Robert Letham**, Senior Tutor, Systematic and Historical Theology, Wales Evangelical School of Theology

“John Frame sets out to be biblical, clear, and cogent, and succeeds splendidly. Steeped in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos and John Murray, he offers a work that is firmly rooted in exegesis, comprehensive in scope, and rigorous in methodology, yet easily accessible to all serious lovers of Scripture.”

—**Donald Macleod**, Professor of Systematic Theology (Retired), Free Church College, Edinburgh

“As someone who taught systematic theology and Christian doctrine in seminary for nine years, I find John Frame’s *Systematic Theology* a significant contribution to historic, orthodox, biblical theological thinking. I especially appreciate Frame’s conversational

style of writing—as if he were talking on a personal level with his reader. If theology is the making of distinctions, Frame does an exceptional job of bringing fresh and illuminating meaning to traditional theological terms; for example, in chapter 3, ‘God’s Lordship as a Unique Worldview,’ he says of God’s immanence that it is ‘*the deepest sense in which God is present in Jesus.*’ A telling description, that. I also think Frame’s pedagogical focus on the question ‘Why does this matter?’ is pointedly necessary in today’s evangelical climate, and illustrates his view that ‘meaning is application.’ He is definitely a ‘so what’ theologian, yet skillfully combines both the fully worked-out objective content and the subjective dimension needed in a proper theological education. Frame’s *Systematic Theology* is admirably accessible without compromising the depth and complexity of biblical theological thought.

“One of the most important elements of Frame’s *Systematic Theology* is what I can best describe as its devotional dimension. Even in the discussion of complex metaphysical attributes of God, Frame presents God as an intimately personal being and not simply a philosophical abstraction. His discussion of God’s lordship has deepened my own spiritual experience. (Indeed, I found myself reading chapters of *Systematic Theology* as parts of my daily devotions.)

“Were I still teaching systematic theology, Frame’s thorough, illuminating, comprehensive, and spiritually powerful treatment of the classical topics of systematic theology would definitely be my primary course text.”

—**Reginald F. McLelland**, Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Covenant College

“John M. Frame, occupant of the J. D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, is a household name not only in Reformed circles but across a broad swath of ecclesiastical and denominational traditions. His published works in the fields of his expertise are widely respected for their adherence to biblical fidelity and the tightness of their argumentation. This major work on systematic theology maintains Frame’s reputation for impeccable scholarship on the one hand and eminent practicality on the other. It is a theology that not only educates but works in everyday life.”

—**Eugene H. Merrill**, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

“‘Count your blessings, name them one by one,’ and I count the writings of John Frame to be *one* of my greatest blessings. He’s a guide for many of us in the twenty-first century, especially in this volume—*Systematic Theology*. His treatment of all the standard theological topics is the gold standard. And as a theologically informed philosopher, I was especially interested in Frame’s discussion of epistemology. Amen and Amen!”

—**David K. Naugle**, Distinguished University Professor, Dallas Baptist University

“Readers of this comprehensive work will rejoice to see a biblically saturated exposition of the great truths of the Christian faith. John Frame has now given his unique

and fascinating insights to the church in one volume. This work will be invaluable for anyone who wants to see the biblical roots of Christian doctrine, and is a clear testimony against any who think that systematic theology can arise from any source other than Scripture.”

—**K. Scott Oliphint**, Professor of Apologetics and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“*Systematic Theology* brings together, slims down, sums up, and augments all the wisdom contained in Frame’s four-volume Lordship series. It is a worthy climax to the life’s work of one who has only ever sought to be a faithful servant of Christ, teaching in his church. It is a privilege to celebrate its appearing and to commend it for serious study. I guarantee that the dividends of such study will be uniformly high. Thank you, John Frame, for this superb gift.”

—**J. I. Packer**, Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia

“I highly recommend this book as a solid, profound, and readable summary of theology, and at the same time a suitable introduction to John Frame’s more specialized writings. It is valuable also for those who are already familiar with Frame’s works. He sometimes approaches old subjects in new ways, and he includes thoughts and arguments that have not appeared elsewhere or that have appeared in print but have up till now not been integrated into his major works. The result is brilliant, practical, and edifying.”

—**Vern S. Poythress**, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Editor of the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Many years ago, John Frame signaled his desire to show in some measure the richness of the theological resources available to Reformed orthodoxy and thereby to make that position more attractive. Today, Frame’s many volumes are themselves vital resources that simultaneously fortify and adorn the Reformed theological tradition that he has expounded over many decades. In this his newest volume—Bible-centered, multiperspectival systematic theology, nurtured in the soil of Warfield, Bavinck, Murray, and Van Til—Frame demonstrates once again why he has become a teacher to this generation of Reformed pastors and theologians. Students familiar with Frame’s work know what to expect and will enjoy his application of multiperspectivalism to several new loci. Those new to Frame will find his system accessible, his reflections on doctrine judicious, and his modeling of theology as essentially a study of Scripture a refreshing tonic that can be shared with all of God’s people. Thank you, Professor Frame!”

—**Mark P. Ryan**, Adjunct Professor of Religion and Cultures, Covenant Theological Seminary; Director, Francis A. Schaeffer Institute

“In this systematic theology, Frame has not overwhelmed us with the scholarly apparatus characteristic of so much theological literature, and as he certainly is capable

of doing. Instead, he has chosen to enter into conversation with his reader, showing how he has come to understand the teaching of God's Word. He takes us with himself into a deeper and fuller exploration of God's creative and redemptive purpose in the world. Frame's work will well serve the needs and interests of the informed layman and theological student as well as the more advanced scholar."

—**Norman Shepherd**, Former Pastor; Former Professor of Systematic Theology, Holland

"For those already introduced to Frame, here is the same sober emphasis on a scripturally rooted theology combined with rigorous thinking that you can recall from live lectures or addresses. For those unfamiliar with Frame, here is a wonderful entry to his engaging and nuanced thought, which breathes a commendable evangelical catholicity."

—**Kenneth J. Stewart**, Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

"In his *Systematic Theology*, once again John Frame has wonderfully served the church and glorified God through his writing. Frame writes with unusual clarity, humility, and joy, which fosters a deeper love for Christ. His theological method is profoundly biblical, so the reader learns how to do evangelical theology, along with learning evangelical doctrine. Among Frame's other stellar works, his *Systematic Theology* may prove to be his most significant contribution. The beginning chapters on the story line of the Bible and the closing ones on the Christian life set this work apart from others like it. They ensure that the systematic study of doctrine is considered within the overarching story of the Bible and that God's truth informs our lives. I'm deeply grateful that this wise, seasoned, godly saint has given us this treasure trove of distilled biblical truth, and hope it has the wide, edifying influence it should."

—**Erik Thoennes**, Professor of Theology, Chair, Undergraduate Theology, Biola University/Talbot School of Theology; Pastor, Grace Evangelical Free Church, La Mirada

"John Frame's *Systematic Theology* is an important landmark in one-volume treatments of the major loci of doctrine. Frame's signature is readily apparent on every page: commitment to Scripture for everything he writes, accessible philosophical analysis of difficult questions, and, yes, triperspectivalism. This volume ranks as the most recommendable single-volume systematic theology of our time."

—**Derek W. H. Thomas**, John E. Richards Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson; Minister of Teaching, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson

"What a gift the gracious Lord of all has given us in the person and work of John Frame. Of the many qualities that commend John Frame's *Systematic Theology*, three stand out: (1) It is eminently biblical. As Frame indicates at the outset, his

main concern (rightly) is to reflect, as best he can, the wisdom and wonder of the Word of God, which shows forth the glory of God in all he is and does. (2) It is richly orthodox. John Frame knows the gospel and what doctrines and positions are necessary to sustain, support, and spread that gospel. He holds the line at every point where this is needed, in a day when many have yielded slack to, or have thrown down, that doctrinal lifeline. (3) It is deeply insightful. Frame demonstrates where theological innovation is best applied—in endeavoring to rethink and restate age-old truths with an eye both to biblical fidelity and to contemporary expression. May God be pleased to magnify his name through the broad reading and study of this great work.”

—**Bruce A. Ware**, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

**AN INTRODUCTION TO
CHRISTIAN BELIEF**

JOHN M. FRAME


P U B L I S H I N G
P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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To the Next Generation

Adam
Amanda
Gavin
Kristina
Malena
Olivia
Rebecca
And those yet unborn

And to Carol
NKwagala nnyo!

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- (3) John 20:28
- (4) Acts 20:28
- (5) Romans 9:5
- (6) 2 Thessalonians 1:12; Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1
- (7) 1 Timothy 3:15–16
- (8) Hebrews 1:8
- (9) 1 John 5:20
- (10) Philippians 2:6
- (11) Colossians 2:9
- (12) Epilogue

F. Other Titles of Christ

G. Other Evidence for Jesus' Deity

H. The Deity of the Holy Spirit

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A. The Distinctness of the Persons

B. The Distinct Personality of the Spirit

C. *Circumincessio*

D. Mutual Glorification

- E. Substance and Persons
- F. Ontological and Economic
- G. Eternal Generation
- H. Eternal Procession
- I. *Filioque*
- J. Subordination
- K. Trinitarian Models
- L. Trinitarian Analogies
- M. Philosophical Analogies
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- B. God's Truth
- C. God's Word to Us
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 - (2) Meaningful Authority
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24. God Speaks to Us in Events and Words

- A. Revelation through Events
 - (1) Nature and General History
 - (2) Redemptive History
- B. Revelation through Words: The Divine Voice
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- D. The Canon of Scripture

26. The Nature of Scripture

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B. Inerrancy, Infallibility

(1) Definitions

(2) Biblical Basis

(3) Inerrancy and Precision

(4) "Qualifications" of Inerrancy

C. Phenomena and Purpose

D. Clarity

(1) Clarity and God's Control

(2) Clarity and God's Authority

(3) Clarity and God's Presence

E. Necessity

F. Comprehensiveness

G. Sufficiency

(1) Confessional Formulation

(2) Biblical Basis

(3) General and Particular Sufficiency

(4) Challenges to the Sufficiency of Scripture

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A. Copying and Textual Criticism

(1) What Is an Autograph?

(2) Is This Limitation Scriptural?

(3) But Don't Biblical Writers Quote Copies as God's Word?

(4) Is This Limitation an Apologetic Dodge?

(5) Does This Limitation Make Inerrancy a Dead Letter?

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(8) Isn't Any Loss a Serious Loss?

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B. Person-Revelation: The Divine Witness

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- (2) Christ, the Mediator of All Revelation
- (3) The Work of the Holy Spirit
- (4) Epistemology and the Spirit's Witness
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 - B. Our Knowledge of God
 - C. God's Knowability and Incomprehensibility
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 - (2) Men and Women Are Equally in the Image of God
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FOREWORD

REFORMED THEOLOGY PRESENTS itself (as Roman Catholic theology also does) as a comprehensive, thoroughgoing embodiment of universal Christian truth. The taproot for all versions of it has been John Calvin's catechetical treatise for preachers and adult believers, the fifth and final edition of his *Institutes*, where the wealth of truth uncovered by Martin Luther's biblical minings is consolidated for all time. Since then, three parts of the world have made major contributions to the Reformed heritage, each engendering its own conflicts and loyalties. England saw the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan development, from William Perkins to John Owen, exploring life in Christ in and through the Holy Spirit; nineteenth-century Holland produced the Kuyperian theology of human and Christian culture within a Reformed frame; and the twentieth century witnessed, within the conservative Presbyterian world, the ongoing quest for Reformed methodological authenticity, in which B. B. Warfield, Geerhardus Vos, J. Gresham Machen, and Cornelius Van Til are, by common consent, the leading names. I'd like to think that tomorrow's Reformed leaders will add John Frame's name to that list; I believe they should.

The church must ever seek in its theological life to verbalize biblically affirmed realities and biblically approved attitudes—to make clear to itself what is and will be involved in holding fast to these things and living in their light and power, and to detect and reject inauthentic alternatives. That, of course, involves interacting both with the words and ways of the surrounding world and with the heritage of the Christian past. In the nature of the case, theology is a cumulative enterprise in which each generation of thinkers stands on the shoulders of those who went before, and reflects on its intellectual legacy in the spirit of a grateful, though critical, trustee. This requires discernment and may call for challenges to what is customary, for the church's heritage contains, along with truth and wisdom, limitations and mistakes and anachronisms, so that it can not only inspire but also mislead our minds and put damaging blinders on them. That is why wise men say that the Reformed church must always be reforming (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*; actually, the Latin is passive: "needs always to be reformed" is the precise translation). To the church's head, our living Lord Jesus Christ, the church's well-being is a matter of abiding concern, so those who theologize in his name should always see active service in and to the church as part of their vocation.

Concern for a clear theological method and concern for the church's well-being are evident as two driving forces in John Frame's theological work, all of which anchors itself within the territory mapped out by the Westminster Standards. In the world of separatist American Presbyterianism, he has sometimes come under fire as a left-wing reformist; in the wider world of mainstream conservative Protestantism, which has the Reformed heritage at its center, he is not as well known as he should be; but where his work is noticed, he is recognized as one of the most clearheaded and best disciplined biblical systematists of our time. His status here will become apparent to anyone who takes time to study this, his magnum opus, and it is a matter for thanksgiving that he has been able to crown his career as teacher and writer by composing it. He seems to have feared lest it be unwittingly uneven, because he had not taught in the seminary classroom all the topics he covers here—but he need not have worried. At every point his probing, lucid, patient, thoroughly resourced reflections display mastery, and the easy friendliness of his style becomes the spoonful of sugar that makes the mixture go down into mind and heart in the pleasantest way possible, every time.

Clearly, the ideal reader whom Frame has in mind is the seminary or Bible college student who will one day be teaching in the church, and his aim throughout is to render that person a humble, faithful, Bible-soaked, Christ-loving, reverent communicator of the revealed truth of God. The thoroughness with which he searches the Scriptures, the firmness of his insistence that on all matters canonical Scripture must be allowed to speak the last word, and his quickness to discern where this is not being done, or not done well enough, give his discussions hermeneutical significance that his academic peers will appreciate. Also, his presentations reveal something yet more precious in a teacher of theology, namely, an awareness that it is natural for the children of God to want to know all they can learn about their heavenly Father. Over and above his primary audience, Frame writes for all who have this instinct and are willing to think about divine things at some length.

The goal of theology, as Frame understands it (and there is nothing out of the ordinary here), is the organized knowledge of God and ourselves together, in the context of our past, present, and future lives. This knowledge, which is both cognitive and relational, must be drawn, first to last, as we have already observed, from the written Word of God—the Bible. Frame sees, and stresses, that since God is infinite and we are finite, our knowledge of him and of our relationship to him cannot be other than, and so at best will be, perspectival, that is, made up of a set of distinct but correlated perspectives, each providing a thematic focus complementary to what other perspectives yield. Anyone who has driven, or can imagine driving, the sixty miles or so around the foot of Washington State's mighty Mount Rainier, stopping every few miles to view the mountain from a new angle, will appreciate what this means. Within this carefully constructed commitment to perspectivalism as the scaffolding, Frame opts for a regular procedure of what may be called heuristic triadic analysis, which opens up each point of theological substance by subdividing it into three. The procedure seems to grow out of the demonstrable advance in understanding that Frame first achieved

by his archetypal analysis of God's lordship (that is, his sovereignty) in terms of control, authority, and presence. While not categorically claiming a connection between triperspectivalism and the truth of the Trinity, Frame habitually practices it as an unfailing didactic technique (in his own words, "a good pedagogical device, a set of hooks on which to hang the doctrines of the faith"). He is a master at it, and presents us with no fewer than 110 cogent triadic analyses in the course of this work, all neatly listed at the back as Appendix A. The proof of the pudding, they say, is in the eating, and there is no doubt that Frame's triads, all achieved by separating out situational/normative/existential factors in the reality, or phenomenon, under analysis, do again and again bring into his discourse a degree of clarity that is quite stunning. Familiar, faded doctrines become fresh; fuzzy doctrines become precise; dull doctrines become stimulating and exciting. History will perhaps see this technique as John Frame's major contribution to the conceptual toolkit with which systematic theology works.

Briefly, now: *Systematic Theology* brings together, slims down, sums up, and augments all the wisdom contained in Frame's four-volume Lordship series. It is a worthy climax to the life's work of one who has only ever sought to be a faithful servant of Christ, teaching in his church. It is a privilege to celebrate its appearing and to commend it for serious study. I guarantee that the dividends of such study will be uniformly high. Thank you, John Frame, for this superb gift.

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PREFACE

SOME VERY GREAT systematic theologians never wrote systematic theologies, among them B. B. Warfield. Warfield never desired to write one. He thought the *Systematic Theology* of his predecessor Charles Hodge was quite adequate, and for himself he preferred to write scholarly and popular works on specific doctrinal subjects. His stature as a theologian is no less for this decision. Nevertheless, I would not be surprised to hear that most teachers in the field would dearly love to have the opportunity to summarize their thoughts in a full-scale systematics. I belong to the latter group, so I am immensely thankful to God for the opportunity to write this book, an elaborate exposition of the teaching of Scripture as I understand it.

When my friend and editor John J. Hughes suggested this project, I did not resist, but he sought to motivate me nonetheless. He pointed out that in my case the task might be easier than for others, because I have already written big systematic theology books in some areas,¹ and I have written an introductory summary of theology, including topics not covered in the larger books.² Certainly these earlier books have been a great help to me in writing this one, and readers of those books will see here a basic continuity of thought and approach. They might even suspect (rightly) that in many places some text has been cut and pasted from those past books. But I have tried to do more than to summarize the big books and to expand chapters of the smaller one. Rather, I have tried to rethink everything to make it more biblical, clear, and cogent.

For me, *biblical* is always the operative word. Systematic theologies, to be sure, are often full of historical lore about the theological battles of the past and present, and that is needed up to a point. Readers will misunderstand the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, if they don't see how the technical terms *substance* and *person* emerged from controversy over Sabellianism and Arianism. And I want also to include enough historical discussion to express proper gratefulness to those teachers whom God has raised up in past generations. Neither my theology nor anyone else's gets its content exclusively from an individual encounter with the Bible. And I don't want my readers to think I am claiming anything like that for my own work.

Yet the Bible is the most important thing. Only the Bible is the written Word of God made available to us. It must have the final word in all historical and contemporary

1. DKG; DG; DCL; DWG.

2. SBL.

controversies. So the most important aspect of theological work is to present to readers what the Bible says. And if some choice is to be made (as it must) of what to include and exclude, that choice must be on the basis of what is best suited to express the Bible's teaching to contemporary readers.

My use of this criterion has led to a systematic theology that is somewhat less historical in focus than other volumes. I have also written less than they about controversies among contemporary academic theologians, because frankly I do not think many of these controversies are helpful in bringing the Bible's teaching to Christian believers. I will have more to say on these subjects in chapter 1 of this book.

I am thankful to all who have helped to make this work possible. First among these is my dear wife, Mary, and our children, Debbie, Doreen, Skip, Justin, and Johnny. Thanks also go to the administration, faculty, and student body of Reformed Theological Seminary, who have given me constant and gracious support. P&R Publishing, which has given me many opportunities over the years to expound biblical doctrine, has now allowed me the privilege of publishing this volume. I am especially thankful to John J. Hughes, my longtime friend, who shepherded this volume through the publishing process and who has helped me much on my past writing projects. In this book he has worked together with Karen Magnuson, an outstanding copyeditor who has also done excellent work on my past projects. Thanks also to my RTS colleague John Muether, who has produced the Index of Scripture and the Index of Subjects and Names.

I have prayed that this book will also show that the hand of God, in the Spirit of Jesus, has been in it. Apart from him I can do nothing. For his work in and through me I am uniquely grateful.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGG	John M. Frame, <i>Apologetics to the Glory of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994)
ASV	American Standard Version
BRD	Herman Bavinck, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> , 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–8)
CD	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i> , 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936–62)
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CVT	John M. Frame, <i>Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995)
CWM	John M. Frame, <i>Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997)
DCL	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Christian Life</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008)
DG	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002)
DKG	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1987)
DWG	John M. Frame, <i>The Doctrine of the Word of God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010)
ER	John M. Frame, <i>Evangelical Reunion: Denominations and the One Body of Christ</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); available at http://www.frame-poythress.org ; http://www.evangelicalreunion.org
ESV	English Standard Version
GST	Wayne Grudem, <i>Systematic Theology</i> (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)
HC	Heidelberg Catechism
<i>Institutes</i>	John Calvin, <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>

IRF	John M. Frame, "Introduction to the Reformed Faith," available at http://www.frame-poythress.org
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	The Septuagint, early Greek translation of the OT, sometimes quoted in the NT
MCW	<i>Collected Writings of John Murray</i> , 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977)
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NOG	John M. Frame, <i>No Other God</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PP	John M. Frame, "A Primer on Perspectivalism," available at http://www.frame-poythress.org
PWG	John M. Frame, <i>Perspectives on the Word of God</i> (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000)
RD	Heinrich Heppe, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950, 1978)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBL	John M. Frame, <i>Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006)
SCG	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>
ST	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, Presbyterian Church in America, 1986); published together with the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), and proof texts
WST	John M. Frame, <i>Worship in Spirit and Truth</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996)
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

PART 9

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE HOLY SPIRIT

THIS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY follows more or less the traditional Trinitarian plan of organization, though I have interspersed other subjects between the main discussions of the Trinitarian persons. The main Trinitarian pattern can be traced through part 3, “The Doctrine of God,” part 8, “The Doctrine of Christ,” and now part 9, “The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”

As I have indicated, the general distinction between the three persons in the works of creation and redemption is that the Father plans, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies. So orthodox theologians typically place the *ordo salutis*, or the application of redemption, under the discussion of the Holy Spirit. At points this decision leads to inaccuracies. Effectual calling, as we will see, though it is an element of the traditional *ordo salutis*, is better described as a work of the Father than of the Spirit. The same is true of justification. These are reasons to rethink the traditional *ordo salutis* and the order of topics that normally accompanies it. But I will not attempt to come up with a better organizational structure in this volume.

In this chapter, however, I will discuss the Holy Spirit in a more direct way, before passing on to the events associated with him in the application of redemption. As we considered the person and work of Christ, we will, in this chapter, consider in general terms the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Who Is the Spirit?

First, as I indicated in chapter 21, the Spirit is God, like the Father and the Son. He stands alongside them as an object of worship. We baptize people in the threefold divine name, which includes the Spirit (Matt. 28:19). And the apostolic blessing, too, places the threefold name of God on the people: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

We also saw that biblical writers coordinate the Spirit with the Father and Son when they write about the source of spiritual blessing. See how Paul in Ephesians 2:21–22 coordinates the three persons. He speaks of Christ, “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being

built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Cf. also Rom. 15:19; Eph. 4:4–6; Phil. 3:3; Rev. 1:4–5; 2:7.

We noted also how NT writers often quote OT texts that contain the name of God and replace that name with the name of Jesus. The same is true of the Holy Spirit. In Jeremiah 31:33–34, the Lord is the speaker. But when the author of Hebrews quotes this text in Hebrews 10:15–17, the speaker is the Holy Spirit. Note also Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9:8.

The Spirit is called “God” in Acts 5:4. He bears divine attributes of eternity (Heb. 9:14), omniscience (Isa. 40:13; 1 Cor. 2:10–11), wisdom (Isa. 11:2), omnipresence (Ps. 139:7–10; Acts 1:8), and incomprehensibility (Isa. 40:13). He is called *holy* nearly a hundred times. Clearly, his holiness is not a merely creaturely holiness. He is perfectly holy by his very nature, the very definition of holiness for us. His holiness is a divine holiness, a divine attribute.

And just as Jesus performs all the acts of God, all the things that God alone can do, so does the Spirit: creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30), judgment (John 16:8–11), giving of life (both physical and spiritual) (Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30; John 3:5–8; 6:63; Rom. 8:11). Like the Father and the Son, he participates in our salvation. Through him we are washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:11). And he is the Teacher of the church (Num. 11:25; Matt. 10:20; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 2:27).

So the Spirit is God. He is equal to the Father and the Son, worthy of honor equal to theirs.

The next thing to keep in mind is that the Spirit is a divine *person*, not an impersonal force. This is obvious to most of us as we read the Bible, but some cultists have actually wanted to deny that the Spirit is personal. They believe that the Spirit is an *it*, not a *he*: a kind of force or power from God, but not a person.

But in my judgment, the Bible is very clear on this. It’s true that the Greek word for “Spirit,” *pneuma*, is neuter (the OT *ruach* is feminine), but the NT writers regularly use masculine pronouns to refer to the Spirit. He is “he,” which emphasizes his personality (John 14:17, 26; 16:14; 1 Cor. 12:11).

He is, to be sure, the power of God (Acts 1:8), which might suggest an impersonal force. But he is also God’s *wisdom* (Isa. 11:2; Acts 6:10; 1 Cor. 2:4), and wisdom cannot be impersonal. The Spirit also has a mind (Rom. 8:27), and he speaks. He speaks in the first person (Acts 10:19–20; 13:2) and performs personal actions such as creating, judging, and so on.

The fact that the Spirit is coordinate with the Father and Son in passages such as Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2:21–22; and elsewhere, the divine attributes ascribed to him, and the divine acts he performs make it plain that the Spirit is a person, together with the Father and the Son.

What Does the Spirit Do?

For the rest of the chapter, then, let’s think about what the Spirit does, his work. I’ve already mentioned that he is involved in all the works of God, for he is God. As

we've seen, Scripture often presents him as the *power* of God exerted in the world. This power is the *control* of God, the first of the lordship attributes. He is the Creator and the Provider, as we have seen. He also empowers and strengthens angels (Ezek. 1:12, 20) and human beings. Remember how the Spirit fell upon Samson, and he tore a lion in pieces (Judg. 13:25; 14:6)? Remember how later the Spirit came upon him and he killed thirty Philistines all by himself (Judg. 14:19; cf. 15:14)? Well, then you have a way of understanding how the Spirit in the NT empowers preaching. In 1 Corinthians 2:4, Paul says that "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Cf. Luke 4:14; Acts 2:1–4; Rom. 15:19; 1 Thess. 1:5. When you present the gospel to others, think of Samson tearing that lion in pieces. The same Spirit is present in you.

As the Spirit speaks the word powerfully, he also speaks it *authoritatively*: Prophets speak their word by the authority of the Spirit (Gen. 41:38; Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:6; Isa. 61:1; Luke 1:17; 1 Peter 1:11). So do Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 10:20; Luke 4:14; John 3:34; 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 2:4; 1 Cor. 2:4; 12:3). So the Spirit gives wisdom: both in the sense of practical skills, such as Bezalel and Oholiab had to build the tabernacle (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; Deut. 34:9), and in the sense of ethical understanding (James 3:13–18). As we will see, the Spirit's authority also comes with the gifts that he gives to the church (1 Cor. 12:1–11).

Power, authority, and now the third lordship attribute: presence. The Spirit is God's presence on earth. David asks, "Where shall I go from your Spirit?" (Ps. 139:7). It is the Spirit who dwells in Christians as his temple (1 Cor. 3:16; Gal. 4:6; 5:16–26; 1 Peter 1:2), so that we worship God "in spirit" (John 4:24).

In chapter 18, I discussed God's *spirituality*. Scripture associates this attribute of God with the Holy Spirit. Particularly when God makes himself visible to human beings, he often takes on a form that Meredith Kline calls the "glory-cloud," which is identified in turn with the Spirit.

The Spirit is God's control, authority, and presence in the world. That is to say, he is the Lord. As Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King, the Spirit is God's authoritative word, his abiding and mediating presence, and his powerful control over all things.

The Spirit in the Lives of Believers

Now let's focus in on ourselves more narrowly and ask what the Spirit does in the lives of believers. Well, there are a great many things that the Spirit does for us and in us. We will here look through a long list of things, and every item on that list could be treated at much greater length. To make a long story short, the Spirit does everything for us that we need in our life with God.

The atoning work of Jesus occurred in the past, objectively, definitively. And the Spirit continues to work today, often in our own subjectivity. Now, this is not to separate the work of the Spirit from the work of Christ. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Christ is in him and he in Christ. As we said earlier, everything that any person of the Trinity does, he does along with the other two. But the main emphasis of the Bible

in the Spirit's work is that he gives us what we need for our present, continuing walk with God.

Indeed, he did the same for Jesus, during Jesus' earthly ministry. Remember how the Spirit descended on him like a dove at his baptism (Matt. 3:16). The Spirit filled him with power for preaching and for working miracles. Cf. Isa. 11:2–3; 42:1; 61:1; Luke 4:1, 14, 18; John 1:32; 3:34. Well, if Jesus needed the Spirit's ministry to him, we certainly need the Spirit as well. He is the One who equips us to serve God (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9; Judg. 3:10), to preach (Acts 1:8; Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4), to pray effectively (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 2:18). He regenerates us (John 3:5), gives us the new birth. He sanctifies us (Rom. 8:4, 15–16; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:2), makes us holy in thought and deed, putting to death the sins of the body (Rom. 7:6; 8:13; Phil. 1:19). He is grieved when we sin (Eph. 4:30).

The Bible puts a special emphasis on the work of the Spirit to create unity and peace in the body (2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 5:18–20; Eph. 2:18; 4:3; Phil. 2:1–2; Col. 3:14). He is the One, after all, who enables us to cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6), and thereby establishes the church as God's sons and daughters together in a family.

And of course, the Spirit is the great Teacher of the church. The writers of Scripture, both Testaments, were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write God's truth (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). The prophets and apostles spoke God's truth because the Spirit came upon them and enabled them to do it (Matt. 22:43; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 1:16). And the Spirit comes not only upon speakers and authors, but also upon hearers and readers. The Spirit illumines us, enabling us to understand the Scriptures (Ps. 119:18; 1 Cor. 2:12–15; Eph. 1:17–19) and persuading us that the Word is true (1 Thess. 1:5).

Baptism in the Spirit

How do people receive the Spirit? First, the Spirit regenerates, gives us a new birth, which we'll talk more about in chapter 41. In the new birth, the Spirit is like the wind, which goes anywhere it wants (John 3:8). So in the first instance, it is not we who receive the Spirit, but it is the Spirit who receives us.

This initial regeneration is sometimes called in Scripture the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Paul describes it this way in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Cf. Matt. 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16. You see that the baptism of the Spirit includes *all* believers. In fact, the baptism of the Spirit is what makes us one body. Without that baptism, we are not part of the body of Christ. So everyone in the body has been baptized in the Spirit.

Some people think that the baptism of the Spirit is an experience that comes after conversion. But 1 Corinthians 12:13 and other texts show that that is not so. Everybody who is converted, everyone who is a Christian, is baptized in the Spirit. There are not two groups in the church, one baptized in the Spirit and the other not. If that were true, it would be a basis for *disunity*, rather than, as Paul says, a basis for unity.

Nor is this a repeated experience. It happens at regeneration, at the new birth. And as we will see, the new birth happens only once.

In the baptism of the Spirit, the Spirit comes on us with power to serve Jesus as his covenant people. He unites us to all the other people in his body, so that together with them we may do God's work in the world.

Filling of the Spirit

Now, although the baptism of the Spirit occurs only once, there are other experiences of the Spirit that occur repeatedly. Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." Paul addresses this command to Christians, and so to people who are already baptized in the Spirit. The filling is something more. We see it also in passages such as Acts 4:31, where the disciples are filled with the Spirit and go on to "speak the word of God with boldness." The filling of the Spirit gives fresh power for ministry.

Here, too, the Spirit is sovereign. But interestingly, Ephesians 5:18 is a command addressed to us: we are to "be filled with the Spirit." There is both divine sovereignty and human responsibility here. It is hard to imagine what we can do to fill ourselves with the Spirit. It would be easier to think that since the Spirit is sovereign, we can only wait passively for him to decide whether to fill us. But according to this verse, our decisions have something to do with his filling. Evidently our behavior has some bearing on the degree and frequency with which we are filled with the Spirit. In the context of Ephesians 5:18: if you are a drunkard, don't expect the Spirit to fill you. You have filled yourself with drink, abusing a good creation of God, and in doing so you have said that you don't want the Spirit to fill you. Conversely, I would think, those who fill their hearts with Scripture and prayer open themselves to a greater fullness of the Spirit.

Fruit of the Spirit

I should also mention the *fruit* of the Spirit, described in Galatians 5:22–23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." The picture of a "filling" of the Spirit is the picture of a discrete event, repeated on a number of occasions. The picture of the "fruit" of the Spirit is the picture of a slow process that is always going on. The Spirit not only grabs us at various moments, but also works inside us moment by moment, changing us to conform to the image of Christ. This is the doctrine of sanctification, which we will discuss in chapter 43.

Gifts of the Spirit

Now, besides the baptism of the Spirit, the filling of the Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit, there are also *gifts* of the Spirit, according to Scripture (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 7:7; 12:4–11, 27–31; Eph. 4:7–16; 1 Peter 4:11). Wayne Grudem defines a spiritual gift as "any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church."¹ He points out that some of these are related to our natural abilities, such as teaching,

1. GST, 1016.

showing mercy, and administration. Others are more “supernatural,” such as tongues, prophecy, healing, distinguishing spirits.

The biblical lists of gifts are not exhaustive. Notice that they differ from passage to passage. Any divinely given ability that edifies the church should be considered a spiritual gift. I wouldn’t hesitate to say that the ability to sing in worship is a spiritual gift. Or the ability to cook meals for church gatherings or mercy ministry. Or the ability to manage finances for the church body.

Now, if you are a believer in Christ, God has given you one or more gifts that the church needs for its ministry. If you are a pastor or other church leader, one of your chief responsibilities is to help your people to identify their spiritual gifts, and then to stir up those gifts so that they can flourish in the body.

How do you discover your spiritual gifts? Pray that God will make them evident to you. Then test out your abilities in different areas until you find out in what ways you can make the best contribution. Ask other believers to help you. Their perspective will add much to your own.

Miracles

Now, there have been many controversies about spiritual gifts, and we must look at them here. In our own time, the main controversies have to do with the more “miraculous” gifts, such as prophecy, tongues, and healing. I say “more miraculous,” because I don’t believe we can draw a sharp line between miraculous and nonmiraculous events. Recall our discussion on that subject in chapter 7.

Does God give miraculous gifts to the church today? We should recall that miracles are actually fairly rare in biblical history. Hundreds of years pass by in the history of the Bible without any reference to miracles. Evidently God did not intend to make miracles a regular part of his people’s lives.

Miracles do appear at *special* times, when God is doing some great deed of mercy and/or judgment. We read of many miracles in the time of Moses, in the time of Elisha and Elijah, and in the earthly ministries of Jesus and the apostles. In the time of the apostles, the miracles had a special connection with the apostles’ witness to Jesus. They are called “signs of a true apostle” in 2 Corinthians 12:12. In that text, Paul appeals to his miracles to show that he was a true apostle. His argument wouldn’t be very strong if *everyone* worked miracles. Rather, he implies that miracles are a special gift given to the apostles, to identify them as God’s messengers all around the world where they preached Christ. Hebrews 2:4 also shows God using signs and wonders (miracles) to bear witness to the message of the apostles.

So it looks as though the more miraculous kinds of gifts were given mainly to apostles in the NT period, and to prophets such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha in the OT. But the point is probably not that they were the only ones in the world who could work miracles. Rather, the Lord enabled the prophets and apostles to work many, many miracles, to show everyone that God had appointed them.

For us, at any rate, the point is that we should not *expect* God to work miracles for us. They are not a regular part of the Christian life. They may happen, certainly, at

God's pleasure, and we should be thankful when they do. Indeed, as I indicated in chapters 7–9, there is a sense in which even God's general providence is miraculous. But we must not demand miracles, or be angry at God when he chooses not to work them for us. Even Paul could not work miracles all the time, for the Lord refused Paul's prayer for his own healing (2 Cor. 12:7–9).

Prophecy

But what about that special kind of miracle called *prophecy*? In prophecy, as we saw in chapter 24, God enables a human being to speak God's very word (Deut. 18:18–22). Does God still inspire prophets today?

Wayne Grudem believes that the people called prophets in the NT were rather different from those called prophets in the OT.² In the OT, the prophets spoke God's very word, and so what they said was absolutely true, reliable, infallible, and inerrant. But in the NT, according to Grudem, the gift of prophecy was a lesser gift. It was simply the ability to put a message from God into human but fallible words. In other words, in the NT, God revealed his thoughts to the prophets, but their actual words were not identical with his.

Grudem believes that there are today no prophets in the OT sense, but there are prophets in the NT sense. He recognizes that if there were prophets in the OT sense in the church today, then they would be adding to Scripture. Scripture would not then be sufficient, since there would be other words of God of the same authority. But Grudem does believe that there are prophets in the NT sense in the church today. Since their words are fallible, those words don't challenge the sufficiency of Scripture.

I am not convinced of Grudem's thesis. If it is true, then there may well be in the church today prophets in the NT sense. But I think it is not, and therefore there are no prophets, defined biblically, in the church today. There is nobody in the church today who can give us a message of the same authority as Scripture. So as I indicated in chapter 26, *only* Scripture serves as our ultimate authority. We live by Scripture *alone*, *sola Scriptura*.

Of course, the word *prophecy* can be used more loosely. People sometimes speak of preaching as prophecy, since it conveys the teaching of Scripture, and since it often receives special power from the Holy Spirit. People sometimes refer to the church as having the offices of prophet, as well as priest and king. Nothing I've said in this chapter should keep us from using the term *prophet* in that general way. All I want to emphasize is that there are in the church today no prophets who have the authority described in Deuteronomy 18.

Nor do I want to say that God cannot reveal himself in unusual, surprising ways. I've heard of believers dreaming of some great disaster coming, in time to warn others to avoid a real disaster. Could that be of God? Certainly. He is sovereign over our dreams and subconscious, just as he is sovereign over the workings of our eyes, ears, and noses.

2. Ibid., 1050–55. Important texts in this discussion are Acts 21:4, 10–11; 1 Corinthians 14:29–38; 1 Thesalonians 5:19–21.

Every event in some way reveals him, as we saw in chapter 8. All I am saying is that the only place we can go to find supremely authoritative *words* of God is the Bible.

Tongues

Now, what about tongues? Grudem says that “speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.”³ In Acts 2, Jews from many nations, who spoke many languages, were gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and they heard Peter’s sermon in their own languages. Certainly this was a great miracle, given by God. Elsewhere, the NT speaks of the gift of tongues as a gift used in worship, both public and private. Apparently, people were praying or teaching in languages that they themselves did not know, and that other people listening did not know. It is hard for us to imagine the purpose of this, but apparently it had some devotional value (1 Cor. 14:14). Evidently, in many cases at least, God himself spoke to the people through the unknown language.

When someone used a tongue in public worship, there would often be an interpreter present, who would tell the congregation what the first speaker meant. Since God was speaking through the tongue-speaker, the interpretation of that tongue was also God’s speech. So the interpretation of the tongue was equivalent to prophecy. Indeed, since it was a God-given interpretation of a God-given message, it was equivalent to prophecy in the OT sense. Both in the unknown tongue and in the interpreted tongue, the message was the very word of God.

Now, in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is very concerned that the worship of the church not only honor God, but also edify the people. It’s not enough in worship to speak to God; we must also teach one another, encourage one another (Heb. 10:25), edify one another, lead one another toward spiritual growth. Someone who speaks in tongues, Paul says, communes with God, but he does not edify the congregation, unless there is an interpretation. So, Paul says, Christians should not speak in tongues in worship unless someone present has the gift of interpretation, unless someone is able to translate the tongue-speech into a known language.

By the way, it is obvious from 1 Corinthians 14 (and from 12:30) that not every Christian spoke in tongues. Some people think that every genuine Christian speaks in tongues, or at least everyone who is baptized in the Spirit. But as we have seen, every Christian is baptized in the Spirit, and not every Christian speaks in tongues.

Does God give the gift of tongues today, or are tongues, like prophecy, a temporary gift that God gave to the church, not needed now that we have a completed Bible? Well, since interpreted tongues are the same as prophecy, our previous argument implies that there are no interpreted tongues today. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 14 would tell us that we should not practice the use of tongues in public worship services.

Paul does not, however, condemn the use of tongues in private devotions. Indeed, he says, in 1 Corinthians 14:2, “For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.” Does God

3. Ibid., 1070.

still give this ability to some Christians, to speak to him privately in an unknown language? It is hard to imagine why God would give such a remarkable gift to be used only privately. The general teaching of Scripture about the gifts of the Spirit is that they are not for our private use, but are to be used for the whole body. Still, there may be something about the private use of tongues that might enable a person to minister to others more effectively. It's also hard to imagine why God would withdraw from the church the gifts of prophecy and interpretation, leaving intact the gift of the private use of tongues. Nevertheless, I think it is best to leave that question open for now.

Healings

In the NT, God gave miraculous healings as a witness to Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 9:18; Mark 6:13; Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8). Jesus could heal at his mere word, or by using materials such as mud and saliva. He was Lord over all the forces of nature, and he could reverse the curse on the ground at will.

The apostles also healed the sick frequently, but with them the healing was not automatic. In Mark 9:28, the disciples are not able to cast a demon out of a boy, and Jesus teaches that this kind of exorcism requires prayer. Paul, too, was unable to heal at one point, namely, to heal himself from what he calls a "thorn" (2 Cor. 12:7). He pleaded with God three times about this (v. 8), but God replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9; cf. 2 Tim. 4:20). We note also that all the apostles died, in God's time. They were not able, through the gift of healing, to prevent death forever. The death rate continued as something less than one per person.⁴

We also read in the Psalms (as 119:67, 71) and elsewhere that God uses affliction, certainly including sickness and injury, for his good purposes.

Does the gift of miraculous healing exist today? I would say that God gave special ability to heal to the apostles and to some others during the apostolic age (1 Cor. 12:9). Though that ability was limited, it was sufficient to bear witness to the watching world that the new Christian sect had the blessing of God. Like other miraculous gifts, this ability was not given to all Christians, nor was it given throughout the period of biblical history. Rather, it was given for a special purpose in a special time. So we should not expect to find people with this gift of healing in the church today. But this is not to say that God will never, ever, give that gift to anybody. We just don't know the purposes of God well enough to make such a generalization.

It is certain, however, that the church does have *some* access to divine healing. There may be no people today with the NT gift of healing. But we certainly do continue to have access to God's throne by prayer. And the NT encourages us to pray for healing. James 5:14–15 says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." Here we read not only about prayer

4. Evidently, Enoch and Elijah did not experience death.

for healing, but about such prayer as a special ministry of the church. The passage is difficult in some ways, for there is a connection here between healing and forgiveness that is hard to understand. I take it that the passage promises that when a person is sick because of some sin, he may confess that sin to the elders of the church and that their prayer of faith, with the anointing of oil, will raise him up.

Certainly, though, even when there is no clear connection between sickness and sin, we have the privilege of bringing that up before our heavenly Father. As with the apostles, such prayer is limited; there is nothing automatic about it. God may say no for any number of reasons, among them the reason he gave to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9. But the power of prayer has not been lessened since the time of the apostles. We are to come boldly before the throne of grace, confident that in God's way and in his time, we will receive his mercy (Heb. 4:16).

Key Terms

Baptism in the Spirit
 Filling of the Spirit
 Fruit of the Spirit
 Gifts of the Spirit
 Miraculous gifts
 Signs of an apostle
 Prophecy
 Tongues
 Healings

Study Questions

1. Summarize the biblical evidence for the deity of the Holy Spirit.
2. Is the Holy Spirit in Scripture a person, or an impersonal force? Defend your answer.
3. Show how the Spirit embodies God's lordship attributes.
4. "And of course, the Spirit is the great Teacher of the church." Explain; elaborate.
5. When are believers baptized in the Spirit? At conversion or after? Present biblical considerations.
6. Paul commands believers to be filled with the Spirit. How is that possible? What can we do to bring about the Spirit's filling?
7. How is the fruit of the Spirit different from the filling of the Spirit?
8. What are some of the gifts of the Spirit? How are they related to our natural abilities? How can we determine what gifts we have?
9. Does God give miraculous gifts to the church today?
10. Does prophecy continue today? Discuss Wayne Grudem's thesis in this connection.
11. Do tongues continue today? If so, are there any differences between their use in the NT period and the uses they should have today?

12. Does the gift of miraculous healing continue in the church today? Discuss any differences between the use of this gift now and its use in the NT period.

Memory Verses

Rom. 12:6–8: Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Cor. 12:12–13: For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

2 Cor. 12:7–9: So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Cor. 12:12: The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Heb. 2:3–4: How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

James 5:14–15: Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Resources for Further Study

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CALLING

IN THIS AND FOLLOWING CHAPTERS, we will explore a series of divine blessings flowing to us from the atoning work of Christ, dealing with sin in our lives, and preparing us for eternal fellowship with God. The Spirit is the most prominent source of these blessings, so it is appropriate that these chapters fall under the general description of the “Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.” But we will see that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in these transformations of our lives.

The list of these blessings is fairly traditional among theologians: calling, regeneration, conversion (faith, repentance), justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. As we have seen, these blessings are sometimes described as the *application of redemption*. In the application of redemption, the work of Jesus brings the blessings of salvation to individuals. John Murray titled one of his books *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*,¹ a phrase that well expresses the distinction in view. Redemption was accomplished at the cross, once for all. But the blessings of redemption must then be applied to each individual believer. So Jesus died for the sins of each of his people, but God calls each of us to Christ, regenerates us, converts us, and so on. Although the atoning work of Christ is complete, God has much to do in and for each one of us.

To emphasize the individual at this point is not to deny the importance of the church as the body of Christ. God intends that the blessings of the atonement will come to us together with other Christians, each believer enriching the whole body with the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. But salvation is irreducibly individual in one sense: the salvation of another believer will not save me. Each of us is accountable to God for his own works, and for his own relationship to Christ (Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 14:12). Salvation is both individual and corporate, not merely one or the other. I will focus on individual salvation in this and following chapters. Later (in chapters 46–49), we will look more closely at the church.

This distinction between accomplishment and application suggests a way of summarizing the course of our salvation in Christ in accord with our triperspectival understanding. Salvation begins in God’s eternal decree, the *pactum salutis* (normative perspective), is

1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

accomplished through Jesus' atonement in history (situational perspective), and is applied by the Spirit to each of us (existential perspective). Note that this distinction is based on the different roles played in redemption by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You can also see these three stages in a passage such as Ephesians 1. There, Paul speaks of election in verse 4:

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Then in verse 7 he speaks of the atonement:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

And in verse 13 he speaks of the events of our experience that brought us to trust in Christ:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

These three verses provide three complementary answers to the question "when were you saved?" We may answer: (1) before the foundation of the world, (2) on the cross of Calvary, and (3) when we came to believe in Christ.² In terms of our triperspectival approach, this analysis yields the picture shown in fig. 40.1.

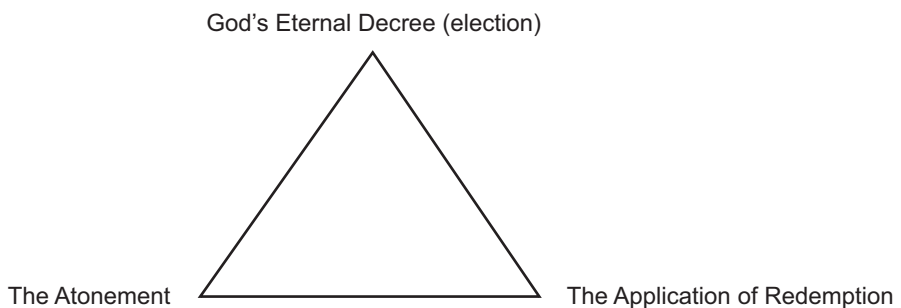


Fig. 40.1. Aspects of Salvation

The *Ordo Salutis*

As we have seen, theologians have a propensity to summarize biblical teaching in ordered lists. In chapter 11, we discussed the order of the decrees, supposedly a summary

2. And of course, there is also the important sense in which we "are being saved" through our earthly life (1 Cor. 1:18) and "will be saved" (Matt. 24:13) when Jesus returns.

of the order of God's thoughts in his eternal plan for creation. In the supralapsarian version of the list, the first item was God's *pactum salutis*, the covenant between Father and Son to secure blessing for an elect, creatable people. Then followed the decrees to create, to permit the fall, to send Christ to atone for sin, and so on. Infralapsarians proposed a rival order, and there were still others. Rather than taking for granted the legitimacy of this project and criticizing individual proposals, I called into question whether Scripture authorizes us to chart the contents of God's mind in this sort of way.

Many theologians have also gathered the blessings of the application of redemption into an ordered list, called the *ordo salutis*, or "order of salvation." But there are problems with this order similar to the problems in the order of the decrees. One is that neither order is mentioned in Scripture. Another is that Scripture itself does not show any interest in arranging these events in an ordered list.

The idea of an *ordo salutis* is sometimes based on Romans 8:29–30:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

We are tempted here to put all these divine acts into an ordered list: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification. Paul's placing of calling, justification, and glorification agrees with the order of these in the traditional theological list. But Paul's list does not include some items on the traditional *ordo* (regeneration, conversion, adoption, sanctification, perseverance), and it adds the events of foreknowledge and predestination, which are not usually included in the *ordo* by the theological systems.

More important, the actual text of this passage does not emphasize whatever aspects of order there may be in the list. All the passage says is that God has given these five blessings to the same people. These are the people who are "called" (Rom. 8:28), for whom "all things work together for good." Paul assures them that if they are called by God, they will certainly experience all the other blessings mentioned in the passage. Paul does not encourage the called ones to meditate on the order in which these blessings come.

Further, if the believer were to meditate on the order in which God's blessings come to him, what kind of order would he have in mind? As I indicated in the discussion of the order of the decrees (chapter 11), there are different kinds of order, such as temporal, causal, and conditional, pedagogical.³ And as with the order of the decrees, no one kind of order determines the traditional list. Note:

3. People sometimes talk about *logical order* in this connection, but it is not clear what they mean by the term. Logical order occurs in syllogisms, where a major premise precedes a minor premise, the premises precede a conclusion, and one conclusion must be proved before another one. But nobody construes the *ordo salutis* as a collection of syllogisms, and it is not clear what else *logical order* might mean in this context, unless it is a synonym for *pedagogical order*.

1. Calling comes before regeneration both temporally and causally.
2. Regeneration comes before faith causally, but many theologians regard them as simultaneous.
3. Faith is prior to justification, but neither causally nor temporally. Most theologians describe the relation as “instrumental.” But instrumental priority is relevant only to these two items of the list.
4. Justification precedes adoption and sanctification, but neither causally nor temporally. Perhaps it is best to say that justification provides the legal-forensic basis for adoption and sanctification; but the *legal-forensic* category is useful only here on the list.
5. There is no obvious reason why adoption should precede sanctification, or vice versa.

So in my view, the “order” of the *ordo salutis* does not reflect an objective arrangement in God’s redemptive provisions. There are various kinds of order throughout the list, as I indicated above, but no general kind of order that runs through the list as a whole.

Nevertheless, I do think the *ordo* has value as a *pedagogical* device. It is edifying for a teacher to lead students through the traditional list, explaining the meanings of the terms and the various relationships linking the items in the series. Theologians need to give more, not less, attention to pedagogy, and the *ordo* is a pedagogical device that is effective and that emerges from the theological tradition itself.

Perspectives on the Application of Redemption

My discussion of the application will follow the traditional *ordo* in a general way. But I think there is another way of looking at these blessings that is more helpful to us in seeing their relation. No reader of this book should be surprised to hear that this approach is triperspectival.

In chapter 36, I described triperspectivally the major effects of the fall; see fig. 40.2.

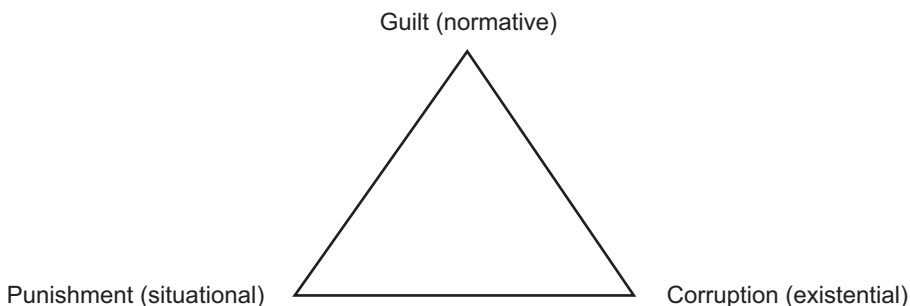


Fig. 40.2. Effects of the Fall

Guilt is our legal status, implying that we have violated God's law, so I characterize it as the normative perspective. Punishment is the consequence of guilt in which God has set the course of nature and history against sinful man. It is a change in our natural environment that brings pain, suffering, and frustration, the situational aspect of our fallen condition. Corruption is the continuing sin in ourselves, and its effects within us, the existential perspective.

Now, the application of redemption deals with these three aspects of sin; see fig. 40.3.

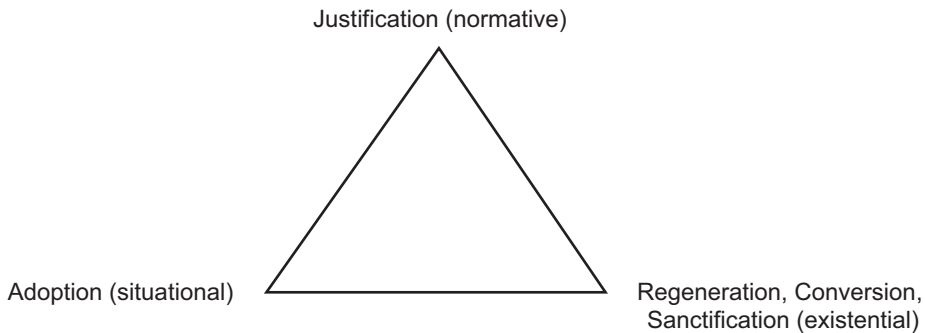


Fig. 40.3. Three Aspects of Redemption

In justification, God deals with our guilt and accounts us righteous for the sake of Christ. In adoption, God provides us with a new environment, a new family. He makes us heirs of Christ and with him lords of creation. In regeneration, conversion, and sanctification, God deals with us inwardly, giving us new hearts. As we grow in grace, we gain more and more the ability to say no to sin.

An important clarification: By placing these blessings on a triperspectival diagram, I am not claiming that they are ultimately identical. Protestant theology has always insisted with good reason, for example, that justification should never be confused with sanctification, nor vice versa. This is, indeed, an important aspect of the conflict between Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrines of justification, which I will discuss when we come to consider that subject. Nevertheless, I do want to insist that none of these blessings functions properly without the others. It is impossible to imagine someone who is regenerate and sanctified in the biblical sense, but not justified. Or one who is an adopted son of God, but who is neither justified nor regenerate. And it is impossible to imagine that anyone can be justified who is not converted. That is to say, since we are justified by faith alone, we cannot be justified unless the Spirit has wrought faith in our hearts, and faith comes by regeneration.

So just as sin is a derangement of our legal standing, our relation to our environment, and our inner life, so redemption deals thoroughly with all these aspects of life to bring us toward a comprehensively righteous life.

I have not placed *effectual calling* on the diagram. It does not belong to one perspective or another. Rather, it serves as our entrance to all the blessings from all the perspectives.

Effectual Calling

The term *call* in Scripture has several meanings that I will explore later in this chapter. But the most predominant meaning in Scripture and the most important for the application of redemption is what theologians call *effectual calling*. John Murray defines it thus:

Calling is the efficacious summons on the part of God the Father, in accordance with and in pursuance of his eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, addressed to sinners dead in trespasses and sins, a call that ushers them into fellowship with Christ and into the possession of the salvation of which he is the embodiment; a call immutable in its character by reason of the purpose from which it proceeds and the bond it effects.⁴

Romans 8:28–30, quoted earlier, is one of the most important passages on the subject. It indicates that “those who are called” have a very special status in God’s eyes, and that call confers on them all the blessings of Jesus’ work. See also Rom. 1:6–7; 11:29; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24, 26; 7:18; Gal. 1:15; 2 Thess. 2:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1–2; 1 Peter 2:9; 5:10; 2 Peter 1:10. Calling in this sense is a sovereign act of God and “does not derive its definition from any activity on our part, such as faith or repentance or conversion.”⁵ We cannot resist it.

Effectual calling helps us to deal with a paradox: Many people in the world are elect but nevertheless “dead in the trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Although they are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, they live as unbelievers, without any faith in Christ. This paradox is due to the historical character of redemption. God has sovereignly determined that election is the first step, not the final step, in the story of each believer’s life with Jesus. Subsequent to election, God leads each of his people through a process by which they become more intimately attached to Christ. Effectual calling is the first step in that historical process.

Effectual calling summons us into all the blessings of salvation: the kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12), holiness (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 4:7; 5:23–24), peace (1 Cor. 7:15), freedom (Gal. 5:13), hope (Eph. 1:18; 4:4), light (1 Peter 2:9), patient endurance (1 Peter 2:20–21), God’s kingdom of glory (1 Thess. 2:12), eternal life (2 Thess. 2:14; 1 Tim. 6:12; Heb. 9:15; 1 Peter 5:10; Rev. 19:9). So this calling is “high” (Phil. 3:14 *kjv*), “holy” (2 Tim. 1:9), and “heavenly” (Heb. 3:1). Ultimately it calls us into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), for it is in Christ that we have all the blessings of salvation. So in the life of the believer, God acts first, before we offer him any response, but his act calls forth from us a godly response.

4. *MCW*, 2:165.

5. *Ibid.*, 2:162.

So not only does God call us into blessing; he also calls us into obligation. Peter exhorts:

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. (2 Peter 1:10)

The “qualities” are listed in verses 3–9: faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, love. Calling is a gracious act of God, but it inevitably produces good works in the believer, works that demonstrate that one is in fact called.

Note that in the application of redemption, each step intensifies our union with Christ (see chapter 38). We are “in Christ” by virtue of our eternal election (Eph. 1:3), but by effectual calling we enter the “fellowship” of Christ (1 Cor. 1:9). The application of redemption draws us more and more deeply into Christ, who is the source of all its blessings. The difference between one who is uncalled and one who is called is a difference between night and day, death and life. But from another perspective it is a difference between one union with Christ and another deeper union.

The author of effectual calling is God the Father⁶ (Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:17–18). Murray says:

To use the terms used by our Lord, [the Father] donates men to his own Son in the effectual operations of his grace (John 6:37).⁷

Though the Spirit is dominant in biblical descriptions of the application of redemption, it is worth reminding ourselves that in all the works of salvation, the persons of the Trinity are all active. We will see that the Father is also the One who justifies, adopts, and sanctifies us. It is good to know that the Father who devised the eternal covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) remains involved in the outworkings of this covenant. As we are drawn into fellowship with Christ through the Spirit, we become sons of his Father.

Applications of God’s Call

As I mentioned earlier, the term *call* in Scripture does not always refer to effectual calling as such. Biblical writers also use the term for more specific calls of God. For as God calls us into fellowship with Christ, he also calls us to play particular roles in that fellowship. It is helpful to think of these as John Murray does,⁸ as “applications” of the call of God, rather than as separate callings. For in these additional callings, God is

6. WSC 31, to the contrary, describes it as “the work of God’s Spirit.” The Westminster Standards, however, appear to conflate *effectual calling* with what we now call *regeneration*. (They do not discuss regeneration as a distinct topic.) Of course it is the Spirit (John 3) who is the principal Author of regeneration. I believe that it is best to distinguish calling and regeneration as, for example, John Murray does in *MCW*, 2:161–201.

7. *Ibid.*, 2:163.

8. *Ibid.*, 2:161.

setting forth what roles we are to play in the fellowship of Christ. He specifies where we are to be located in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Scripture speaks of calling to church office:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, [is] called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. (Rom. 1:1; cf. 1 Cor. 1:1)

The term is also used for the *gospel call*, the invitation to all people to put their faith in Christ. In this sense, God (usually through preaching) calls some people who are not finally saved, as well as some who are. Effectual calling, we recall, cannot be resisted, but the gospel call can be and often is. Thus, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). We recall the tone of pleading in the voice of wisdom in Proverbs 8:4–5:

To you, O men, I call,
and my cry is to the children of man.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
O fools, learn sense.

Theologians have also used the biblical terminology of calling to refer to *vocation*, the specific relationships and responsibilities in which God has placed us, such as marriage, singleness, or a profession. They have sometimes invoked 1 Corinthians 7:20–24 as referring to vocation in this sense:

Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

On this reading, slavery and freedom (and in context marriage and singleness) would be callings of God. Yet I am inclined to take “called” in this passage to refer to effectual calling. So Paul is saying to these people who face unique hardship to remain in the walk of life where they were when God called them into fellowship with Christ.⁹

Of course, the difference in the two readings is not great. Our current walk of life (singleness, marriage, farming, carpentry) is given to us in God’s providence, and in some cases, like the situation of 1 Corinthians 7, it is normative; it is the walk of life in which we should stay. And if we should not equate *calling* with *vocation*, certainly it’s not wrong to find reference to vocation in Paul’s references to one’s walk of life.

9. The point is not that we should never change jobs. It appears that the Corinthians were going through a particularly difficult period that Paul calls “the present distress” (1 Cor. 7:26). Given the difficulties of making big changes in one’s life during such a trial, Paul urges the single people not to marry, married people not to seek divorce, and other people not to change jobs.

So it is not surprising that Martin Luther and others have interpreted one's profession as a calling of God. Certainly there is an analogy between God's effectual calling and God's providential work of bringing someone into a particular profession.¹⁰

Key Terms

Accomplishment of redemption
 Application of redemption
Ordo salutis
 Temporal order
 Causal order
 Logical order
 Pedagogical order
 Effectual calling
 Gospel call
 Vocation

Study Questions

1. Describe and evaluate Frame's triperspectival understanding of the blessings that Paul enumerates in Ephesians 1:4, 7, and 13.
2. When were you saved? Discuss.
3. What does Romans 8:29–30 teach about the existence of an *ordo salutis*? Do you believe that *ordo salutis* is a useful concept? Explain.
4. Describe Frame's comparison between the perspectives on the fall's effects and the perspectives on redemption's effects. Evaluate.
5. "Calling in this sense is a sovereign act of God and does not derive its definition from any activity on our part, such as faith or repentance or conversion." Explain; evaluate.
6. How is it possible to be elect in Christ and at the same time to be dead in trespasses and sins? What does that paradox reveal about God's plan for realizing the *pactum salutis*?
7. List some of the blessings into which effectual calling brings us. List some of the obligations.
8. "The difference between one who is uncalled and one who is called is a difference between night and day, death and life. But from another perspective it is a difference between one union with Christ and another deeper union." Explain; evaluate.
9. Which person of the Trinity is particularly the Author of effectual calling? Is that important? In what way? Can you reconcile your view with the WSC?
10. What is the relation of other divine "calls" to effectual calling? Is there any value in calling these "applications" of effectual calling? Discuss.

10. Compare my discussion of the vocational will of God in chapter 16.

11. “Effectual calling, we recall, cannot be resisted, but the gospel call can be and often is.” Explain; evaluate.
12. Are marriage and work-professions callings of God? Discuss.

Memory Verses

Rom. 8:28–30: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1 Cor. 15:1–4: Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

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

Eph. 1:7: In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Eph. 1:13: In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:10: Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Resources for Further Study

Murray, John. *MCW*, 2:161–66.

———. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

REGENERATION AND CONVERSION— SUBJECTIVE SALVATION

THE TERMS *OBJECTIVE* AND *SUBJECTIVE* are frequently used in discussions of the *ordo salutis*, the application of redemption. In one sense all these blessings are subjective, because they are given to each individual believer and they have major implications for our individual spiritual lives. But it is confusing to describe, particularly, justification and adoption as *subjective*. An important aspect of justification and adoption is that they convey to us a new status: as righteous (justification) and as sons and daughters (adoption). These are not matters of degree; they do not describe our inner feelings or dispositions. So theologians generally describe them as objective, not subjective.

Other blessings in the *ordo salutis* are inward, subjective, including regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. In one sense, however, these blessings are also objective. Those who are regenerate really are regenerate, objectively so; and those who are unregenerate really are unregenerate. Same for conversion and sanctification, although the latter admits of degrees.

So all the blessings of the application of redemption are objective in the sense that they are real blessings, not dependent on our interpretations or feelings. All are subjective in the sense that they all bring about major changes in our individual lives. And some (regeneration, conversion, sanctification) are subjective in a further sense: they change us within. They change the heart of the believer. These are the blessings that, in the previous chapter, I aligned with the existential perspective.

Some writers have claimed that the gospel is entirely objective and not at all subjective in this second sense. It is true that in some biblical passages the term *gospel* refers to objective events in the sense of things that happen outside us rather than inside us. In 1 Corinthians 15, for example, Paul expounds his “gospel” (v. 1) by referring to Jesus’ death for us according to the Scriptures (v. 3), his burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances (vv. 4–9). But it is clear in this passage as in many

others that these objective events have huge subjective consequences. In verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Objectively, Christ appeared to Paul; but when he appeared, he wrought great changes in Paul's mind and heart, creating within him a new disposition to work hard in the preaching of the gospel that he had once opposed. Indeed, throughout the NT, the gospel brings about profound subjective change. Not only did Christ die and rise again, but when he died, his people died to sin, and when he rose, we rose with him to new life (Rom. 6:4; cf. Col. 3:12–14). It is "Christ in you" who is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27; cf. Rom. 8:10). The doctrine of union with Christ (chapter 38) is not only about ourselves in Christ, but also about Christ in us (2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19).

So the gospel not only narrates the objective events of the history of redemption. It says that these events happened *for us* ("for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures," 1 Cor. 15:3) and promises that those who believe will experience the inward blessings of those events. Indeed, *gospel* is even broader than that. The gospel announces the coming of the kingdom of God, God's victory over sin and all its effects in the creation (Matt. 3:1–2; 4:17; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:31).

Regeneration

In the previous chapter, we considered effectual calling, the first event of the application of redemption, or *ordo salutis*. Now we come to the second event, namely, regeneration, or the new birth. When God calls us into fellowship with Christ, he gives us a new life, a new heart. Regeneration is the first effect of effectual calling. And regeneration is the first item on the list that occurs inside of us. It is a subjective blessing, in the second sense of *subjective* noted above.

The presupposition of Scripture is that apart from God's grace, we are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1–3), as we saw in chapter 36. This means that in and of ourselves, we can do nothing to please God. So just as conception and birth bring new physical life, so the work of regeneration brings new spiritual life. Through the new birth, we gain new desire and new ability to serve God. So my definition of regeneration is this: a sovereign act of God, beginning a new spiritual life in us.

Regeneration in the Old Testament

The most familiar references to regeneration are in the NT, but we can expect that since man's need is the same in both Testaments, the OT teaches the same thing, from its own perspective. When Jesus teaches Nicodemus about the new birth in John 3, he expresses amazement that Nicodemus, "the teacher of Israel," does not understand his teaching (v. 10). And indeed the OT does speak of the new birth in a number of ways.

As I indicated in chapter 4, God's covenants commanded his people to write the law on their hearts (Deut. 6:6; 11:18; 32:46). It is the heart, the core of man himself, that is "deceitful" and "desperately sick" (Jer. 17:9), so in redemption God must change the heart. In another figure, God calls the people to "circumcise" their hearts (Deut. 10:16; 30:6). The people cannot, of course, accomplish this change through their own strength. God, rather, promises grace to them (Jer. 24:7; 31:33; 32:39; Ezek. 11:19; 36:25–27). Note also the prophecies of abundant, sufficient grace for God's people when the Messiah comes (Isa. 32:15; 34:16; 44:3; 59:21; etc.). God seeks regeneration among the people as a whole, and to secure that result he deals graciously with individuals:

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 "I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,
 and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isa. 57:15)

So Paul rightly describes the nature of OT Judaism when he says:

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. (Rom. 2:28–29; cf. 9:6–8)

God's intention for the Israelites was that they should be a regenerate people, inwardly righteous, circumcised of heart, the law written on their hearts. As I indicated in chapter 4, the new covenant in Christ (Jer. 31:31–34) applied to elect Israelites retroactively. In terms of that covenant, God himself indeed wrote his law on their hearts, circumcised their hearts, and created in them new spiritual life.

The teaching of Jesus, similarly, flows from the understanding that man's righteousness does not suffice to please God:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:20)

Unless God himself does a work of grace in a man, he can do only evil (Matt. 12:33–35; cf. 19:16–26; John 6:63–65).

The Johannine Teaching

The familiar NT language of new birth comes from the writings of John. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless a man is born again,¹ he cannot see the

1. Or "born from above." The Greek *anōthen* can be taken either way, and exegetes have made huge efforts to establish each conclusion. See, for example, *MCW*, 2:174–79. I don't think much of theological importance hinges

kingdom of God (v. 3) or enter the kingdom of God (v. 5). John Murray distinguishes these:

“To see” may express the idea of intelligent understanding, cognition, appreciation, not mere observation in the sense of being spectator; and “entering into” means actual entrance into the kingdom as members in the realm of life and privilege.²

This passage, then, reinforces the frequent emphasis of this book (especially chapters 28–32) that our knowledge of God is part of redemption. The intellect, with the rest of our faculties, must be redeemed from the distortions of sin. In Paul’s language, our new self is “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10). The new birth turns back the repression of the truth that Paul describes in Romans 1:18. And of course, the new birth is also a qualification for entering the kingdom (see chapter 5), enlisting on God’s side in the cosmic battle.

In John 3:4, Nicodemus literalizes Jesus’ saying, exposing his failure to understand.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)

Much has been written about the phrase “water and the Spirit.” Since “Spirit” obviously refers to the Holy Spirit, the discussion has focused on “water.” Many have thought that this term is an allusion to Christian baptism, and it is possible that Jesus provides an advance reference to that here, as he may provide an advance reference to the Lord’s Supper in John 6:25–65. But the Christian sacraments did not exist as such in the setting of these passages. So we must ask the likely meaning of “water” to Nicodemus himself in his context. We do not have to look far to answer this question, since the OT was replete with the use of water as a redemptive symbol. Note the symbolism of water as purification from sin and defilement in the following: Ex. 30:18–21; Ps. 51:2f.; Isa. 1:16; Jer. 33:8; Ezek. 36:25; Zech. 13:1. Jewish proselyte baptism cannot be excluded from this reference, nor the early baptizing of John and Jesus. Pharisees like Nicodemus resisted the notion that they needed to be purified of sin (cf. Luke 7:30), but God frequently used water to teach his people their need for cleansing, and the new birth is a definitive cleansing from sin.³

With the reference to the Spirit, we may distinguish in the new birth a negative and a positive aspect: negatively purification from sin, and positively creation of new life through the Spirit. Compare the coordination of these aspects in Ezekiel 36:25–26:

on the controversy. The remarkable thing about the passage is the reference to *birth*. The one interpretation indicates its temporal relation to ordinary birth, the other the figurative location of its source.

2. Ibid., 2:179. Much of the following discussion is indebted to John Murray’s treatment, though I take full responsibility for the formulation here.

3. Compare the pride of Naaman, the Syrian commander, who resisted (but eventually accepted) Elisha’s command to wash in the Jordan to be cured of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:11–14).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

Cf. Ps. 51:2, 7, 10; Titus 3:5.

John 3:6 expands the imagery of birth: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” “Flesh” here has a negative moral connotation, as elsewhere in the NT. So the old birth, from sinful parents, gives rise to a sinful child. Ordinary birth does not deal with sin. But birth by the Spirit creates children with the qualities of the Spirit, children with a new life.

John 3:7–8 emphasizes the mysteriousness of the event:

Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.

How do you know whether someone is born again? It’s not a visible event. Jesus says that the regenerating work of the Spirit is like the blowing of the wind: you don’t see it; you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes. But as with the wind, you can see the results, though you cannot be *infallibly* sure that regeneration has taken place. Faith and good works are the effects of regeneration, and these show that we have been born of God. In his first letter, John speaks about being born of God and its results:

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. (1 John 2:29)

That new birth is like a seed that God plants in believers that grows into a holy life that resists temptation:

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

Love is evidence that a person is born of God:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 John 4:7)

Faith in Christ is also evidence of the new birth (1 John 5:1).

Similarly with all the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

When people's lives are changed from disobedience to obedience to God, we can know, though not infallibly, that the Spirit has been at work, giving new birth.

Those who are born of God will surely overcome the world (1 John 5:4). The new birth protects the believer against sin and the devil (5:18).

Paul on Regeneration

Paul's writings also teach that God acts to bring new spiritual life in his people. As we have seen, Paul also recognizes that sin makes us totally unable to please God through our works (Rom. 3:10–18; 6:23; 8:8). Only God's grace in Christ is able to produce good works in us (Eph. 2:8–10).

Paul uses the language of "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10; cf. James 1:18) or the theme of giving life (Gal. 3:21), as well as the term "regeneration" itself (Titus 3:5), to describe God's way of bringing new spiritual life. We also find the idea of resurrection in passages such as Romans 6, which speak of us as dying and rising with Christ: we die with him unto sin, and we are raised with him unto righteousness. As effectual calling calls us into union with Christ, so regeneration is our union with him in his resurrection life. So new birth, new creation, life from the dead are alternative ways of speaking of the ways in which God gives us new life.

All these expressions emphasize God's sovereignty. New birth is obviously an act of God (note Ezek. 36:26–27; John 3:8). You didn't give birth to yourself; you didn't have anything to do with your own birth. Others gave birth to you. Your birth was a gift of grace. So your new birth was a gift of God, in this case God the Holy Spirit. (As effectual calling is an act of the Father, so regeneration is an act of the Holy Spirit, as Scripture usually represents it.)

Similarly with *new creation*. Creation is "out of nothing," as we saw in chapter 10. Before creation, there was nothing. Nothing can't produce anything. Reality all comes by the creative act of God. Same with *resurrection*. Before resurrection, there is death. Death can't produce life. Only God can. So in the new birth we are passive.

Since regeneration enables us to see the kingdom of God and to stop repressing the truth that he has revealed, it comes before our faith, bringing it about. People sometimes say, "Believe in Jesus, and you will be born again." This expression is biblically inaccurate. It's true that believing in Jesus is the path to blessing. But the new birth is the cause of faith, rather than the other way around. Again, you can't give birth to yourself, even by faith. Rather, God gives new birth to you and enables you to have faith. It's always God's sovereignty, isn't it?

A Second Meaning of Regeneration

Like effectual calling, regeneration usually occurs when we hear the gospel. First Peter 1:23 reads, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable,

through the living and abiding word of God” (cf. v. 25). The Spirit’s great power to give us new birth typically comes through the power of the Word of God. James 1:18 says, “Of his own will he brought us forth [that’s the idea of regeneration] by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

There is, however, a distinction between regeneration as it appears in these two passages and the more common descriptions of regeneration that we have considered in the NT. In 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18, it would naturally seem that our new birth comes through a faithful appropriation of the Word of God, while in John 3 and other passages, regeneration clearly precedes and causes any such faithful hearing of God’s Word. We should remember (what Nicodemus did not originally understand) that regeneration is a metaphor of spiritual renewal. As a metaphor, it can be applied to several phases of the redeemed life. In the main Johannine and Pauline passages, regeneration is the absolute beginning of new life, coming before anything we do to grow in Christ. But in these verses of Peter and James, regeneration is a broader concept indicating the process of spiritual growth through the Word of God.

This ambiguity of two senses of regeneration shows a weakness in the concept of an *ordo salutis*. Regeneration is “prior to faith” in John 3, but in 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18 it is subsequent to faith, or possibly a way of describing the activity of faith as it appropriates God’s revelation.

Regenerate Infants

Regeneration in the Johannine and Pauline senses, then, is “prior to faith” and does not presuppose any intellectual deliberation on the part of the person. In that respect, it is different from regeneration in 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18. It is a divine act, causally and temporally prior to any human thought or act. So there is no reason to suppose that this blessing is given only to adults or to people of a certain level of intellectual maturity.

It is in this context that we should understand the leaping “for joy” of the unborn John the Baptist when his mother met Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:41, 44). This passage does not describe a typical random movement of an unborn baby. Rather, it imputes to that baby a significant motive in making that movement: he leaped for joy. And one who rejoices in the coming of the Messiah, *because of* the coming of the Messiah, is certainly regenerate.

Nothing can stop God from bringing an infant to newness of life. Scripture doesn’t tell us how regeneration affects such a child’s experience, feelings, and understanding. Certainly we should not assume that regeneration immediately gives the child the intellectual ability to confess creedal doctrine. For him, then, regeneration is prior to any kind of profession of faith. But if that child has the new life of Christ within him, then he has what John Murray used to call a new “dispositional complex.” That child will have the inclination (despite remaining sin) to love righteousness and hate wickedness. And he will tend to appropriate God’s revelation in nature and Scripture

without wickedly resisting it and working against it. And when he comes of age, he will have an inner disposition to receive with joy the teaching of the Word and to profess his faith in it.

Thus, we can understand more clearly this statement of WCF 10.3:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

The confession does not specify who these “other elect persons” might be. I assume the divines had in mind people lacking in intellectual competence or with defective sense organs. But it is interesting to consider how wide this provision may in fact extend, and I will return to this subject later in the chapter.

Faith

Regeneration confers on the elect person a desire to live a holy and righteous life. We saw that this new disposition embraces all the fruit of the Holy Spirit, such as it is described in Galatians 5:22–23, and it includes all the Christian virtues. Among those virtues, three of the most prominent in the NT are faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:1–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; cf. Rom. 5:2; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 1:15; 3:17; 6:23; Col. 1:4, 23; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:14; 6:11–12; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 3:15; Philem. 5; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:21). But even though “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13), Paul gives to faith a special distinction within the *ordo salutis*: faith is the means by which we receive the grace of God. As we will see, Paul teaches that we are justified by faith, and by faith alone.

Faith and repentance together are often called *conversion*. Faith and repentance are gifts of God, but they are nevertheless also something we do. We choose to believe, or not to believe, to repent or not to repent. In this respect, faith and repentance differ from those elements of the *ordo salutis* that we have already considered: effectual calling and regeneration.

Let’s look first at faith. As you study the Bible, notice that *faith* and *belief* are closely related. Usually the English translations use “faith” for the Greek noun *pistis*, and “believe” for the Greek verb *pisteuo*. So *believe* is the verb form of *faith*, and *faith* is the noun form of *believe*.

In this chapter, we will focus on saving faith, faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. There are, of course, other kinds of faith—faith in our friends, faith in the regularity of nature, and so on—which are similar to and different from saving faith in different ways. It is useful to know that all our actions in the world, and all our knowledge of the world, involve some kind of faith. When you get out of bed in the morning, you believe, you have faith, that the floor will be beneath your feet and will stay there. This is sometimes called *general faith*. But we will instead be talking in this chapter about a specifically biblical, theological concept: *special faith* or *saving faith*.

Definition of Saving Faith

Theologians have traditionally analyzed faith according to three elements: knowledge, belief, and trust. *Knowledge* in this context is simply a knowledge of God's revelation, either special or general (Rom. 1:32; 10:14). It is a knowledge *about* God, not a personal knowledge, or friendship, with God. Nor is it a knowledge that the revelation is true. Rather, it's simply a knowledge of what the revelation says.

Now, it is good to emphasize that faith is based on knowledge. Some people think faith is a leap in the dark, or believing something without any evidence. But it is a knowledge of the Word, and the Word provides evidence of its truth. Faith does sometimes call us to go against the evidence of our senses, as Abraham did, according to Romans 4:19–21:

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Cf. 2 Cor. 5:5. So far as Abraham's senses were concerned, God's promise seemed to go against the evidence. God had promised a son, but both Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children. But remember that the best evidence is the word of God itself. Abraham knew that if God *told* him that he would have a child, he could rely on that. So in the most important sense, Abraham's faith was based on evidence, the highest evidence. Or as we are saying at this point, it is based on knowledge. Compare my argument in chapters 23–28.

The second element of faith in the traditional analysis is *belief* (John 3:2; Acts 26:27). That is, faith is not only knowing what God's revelation says. It is also believing that that revelation is true. This is sometimes called *assent*. Theologians have been known to say that assent is not important; in other words, it doesn't matter what you believe in your head, as long as you love God in your heart. That idea is not biblical. Scripturally, assent is necessary for true faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

But is assent *sufficient* for true faith? James 2:19 says that the devils believe that God is one, and they tremble. It is possible to assent to some of the truths of the Bible and not be saved. But is it possible to assent to *all* the truths of the Bible and to be lost? Hard question to answer. I suspect that Satan believes in all the truths of the Bible in some sense, yet he is not saved.

I think it depends somewhat on the strength of assent. That is, if you assent to the truths of Scripture, not feebly or forgetfully, but in a way that determines your behavior, thoughts, and feelings, then it seems to me that you have all that is needed for true faith. But then your faith is better described not merely as assent, but according to the

third component of faith, *trust*. Trust *includes* knowledge and assent. But it is a richer concept. Satan believes quite a lot of God’s revelation, maybe all of it. But he doesn’t allow his knowledge of God’s Word to govern his thoughts, actions, and behavior. If he did, he would plead for God’s mercy and ask forgiveness. But he doesn’t do that. In other words, he doesn’t *trust* in God.

Trust (the Latin word is *fiducia*) is trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. We trust him as Savior to save us from sin and to give us eternal life (John 3:16). Many Scripture verses present this trust in other terms, such as receiving Christ (John 1:12), coming to him (Matt. 11:28–30; John 6:37; 7:37), drawing near to God through him (Heb. 7:25). Notice that the primary meaning of this is not believing that I am saved, but believing in Jesus, trusting him for salvation. Not only believing *that*, but believing *in*. This is what the devils can never do. They can believe abstractly that Jesus is the Savior of his people, but they cannot trust him for salvation.

The second element of trust is subjection to Christ as Lord, a willingness to obey. As James 2:14–26 says, faith must be living faith, obedient faith, faith that works, or else it is dead. “Jesus is Lord” (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; cf. John 20:28) is, as we’ve seen, the most fundamental confession of the NT people of God. And it is to be not only a confession of the mouth, but a commitment that directs all of life.

So true saving faith involves knowledge, belief, and trust in Christ. I should warn you, however, that Scripture sometimes speaks about believing, about faith, in lesser senses. For example, in John 8:31, Jesus begins a dialogue with some Jews who, says John, “believed in him.” But their responses to him indicate anything but true faith. By verse 44 he tells them, “You are of your father the devil.” These Jews are like the devils who give assent to certain Christian teachings, but in the end set themselves against the kingdom of God.

The triad *knowledge*, *belief*, and *trust* can be illustrated as a perspectival triangle; see fig. 41.1.

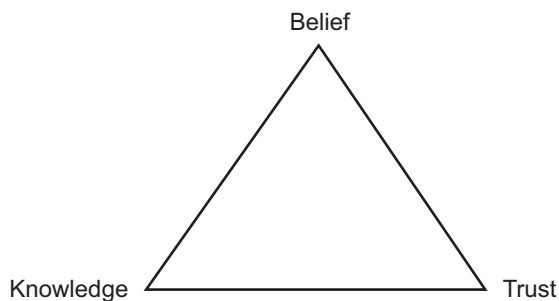


Fig. 41.1. Aspects of Saving Faith

Here I put *knowledge* as the situational perspective because in the traditional understanding, knowledge is simply the data that we are acquainted with. *Belief* is normative

because it involves commitment to a right understanding of that data. And of course, *trust* is existential, since it grasps the heart.

Saving Faith Is a Gift of God

So much for the definition of saving faith. Now let's look at some more biblical teachings *about* faith. First, saving faith is a gift of God. Ephesians 2:8–9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (cf. Phil. 1:29). In John 6:44, Jesus says that nobody can believe in him unless the Father draws him. No one, indeed, has any spiritual understanding without God's grace (Matt. 11:25–27; John 3:3; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 5:20). Apart from grace, we repress the truth of God (Rom. 1:18, 21, 23, 25). So in Scripture, when people believe in Christ, they do it because God appointed them to eternal life (Acts 13:48) or because he opens their hearts, as with Lydia in Acts 16:14. We have seen that the gospel is a word of God that has power to save. That power works to make people believe, and it comes from God himself (1 Cor. 2:4–5, 12–16; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:14).

Faith and Good Works

Next, saving faith and good works are closely related. Paul does emphasize that we are saved by faith and not by the works of the law (Gal. 2:16). Salvation, in other words, comes through trusting Jesus, not by trying to earn your salvation through good works. But since saving faith is living, not dead (James 2:14–26), some works will be present. They don't earn you anything, but they always accompany true faith. Paul, who contrasts faith and works, understood that faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). And those who love Jesus keep his commandments (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; Titus 3:8). So works are an evidence of faith.⁴

The Role of Faith in Salvation

Now, we say that we are “saved by faith” or “justified by faith.” What does that mean? Faith, after all, is something we do. We are the ones who believe, not God. But isn't salvation entirely of God? Isn't it entirely by God's grace? Or is faith the one thing we do, in order to merit God's forgiveness?

Certainly not. It's important to be precise about this, to see what faith does and what it doesn't do for us. First, it is not the *ground* of our salvation. The ground is what entitles us to eternal life. The sacrifice of Christ is the only ground of our salvation. His righteousness, not ours, entitles us to fellowship with God. Nothing we do is good enough to gain God's forgiveness and fellowship. Not even our faith is worthy of him.

Nor is our faith the *cause* of our salvation, for the same reason.⁵ The *cause* is the power that brings us into relation with Christ. But as we've seen, this power does not

4. In chapter 4, I argued that God's covenants often include gracious blessings, but they always call on man to respond with a living and active faith.

5. Aristotle spoke of four senses of *cause*. Here we consider the *efficient cause*, the cause that makes the effect take place.

come from ourselves; it comes from the power of the Spirit, making us believe the Word and trust in Christ. We cannot do anything to save ourselves, to bring about our own salvation.

So what is the role of faith? Theologians struggle for words here, but Reformed theology has settled on the word *instrument*. By this we mean to say that faith, even though imperfect and unworthy, is the means (instrument = means) by which we reach out and receive God's grace. Some have compared it to an empty hand, reaching out to be filled. As the hymn "Rock of Ages" puts it, "nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling."

But rather than tying yourself in knots trying to understand these technical expressions, it's better to just remember that faith is trust. Jesus has died for you; that's your only hope, the only means by which you can be saved. Your faith is simply trust in him. Your trust is not going to earn you anything, but it connects you with Christ, who has earned everything for you.

Faith in the Christian Life

We've been speaking so far mainly of faith at the beginning of the Christian life. That's quite important: faith as that first moment of trust in Christ that brings us into eternal fellowship with God. But faith doesn't stop after that first moment. It persists throughout the Christian life and is important in our day-to-day relationship with God. Paul says that faith, hope, and love "abide"; they remain throughout life (1 Cor. 13:13).

We see in Hebrews 11 how the great saints of the OT acted again and again "by faith." In this passage and elsewhere, there is a contrast between faith and sight (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). Don't take this the wrong way. Walking by faith is not walking in the dark. The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 had a good understanding of where they were going. God's word had promised them the blessings of the covenant, and they knew they could trust those promises. As we have seen, faith is based on knowledge. But it's the knowledge of God's word, not the knowledge of the eyes. God told Abraham that he would have a son, but that didn't *appear* possible, since Abraham and Sarah were far too old. Yet he believed anyway (Rom. 4:19–21). His faith was based on knowledge of God's promise. But until Isaac was born, he didn't see the fulfillment of the promise. Similarly the saints of Hebrews 11: they didn't see the city that God had promised his people. They didn't see the fulfillment. But they continued believing, because they knew that God's promise was sure—more sure, even, than the evidence of their eyes.

So the Lord calls all believers to walk by faith. As Paul says, "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Faith, Hope, and Love

As we have seen, NT writers frequently combine *faith* with two other virtues, *hope* and *love* (1 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:1–5; 1 Thess. 1:3; cf. Rom. 5:2; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 1:15; 3:17; 6:23; Col. 1:4, 23; 1 Thess. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:14; 6:11–12; 2 Tim. 1:13; Titus 3:15; Philem. 5; James

2:5; 1 Peter 1:21). Hope is not something radically different from faith, but it is a kind of faith: faith directed toward the future fulfillment of the promises of God. Since it is based on God's promises, it is not something tentative, uncertain, the way in which we usually use the word *hope* in modern life. Rather, it is firm and certain. The words *faith* and *hope* differ only in that *hope* has more of a futuristic emphasis. Or we can think of it in terms of the lordship attributes: faith is directed toward God's authority, because it focuses on the Word. Hope focuses on God's control, which will bring his words to pass in the future. But of course, you can't have faith without hope, or hope without faith.

The third and highest of the three central virtues is love. Love focuses on the third lordship attribute, God's personal presence. We can think of love as faith and hope dwelling in the heart to produce the deepest personal commitment. Love is a commitment of the whole person. God calls us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. See fig. 41.2.

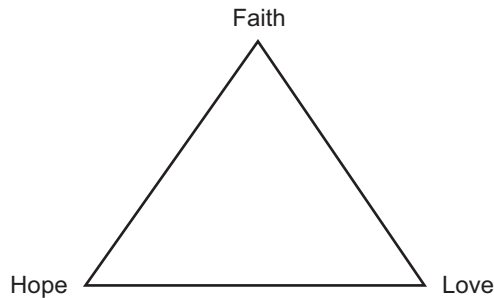


Fig. 41.2. The Three Chief Christian Virtues

So love is commitment, loyalty, or allegiance. In marriage, when we pledge our love, we at the same time pledge an exclusive loyalty to that person over against all others. Covenant love to God is the same. It is exclusive. We are to worship God alone, not in competition with other gods, or with our money, ambition, pride, or anything else.

But love is also *action*. It is doing something to show your loyalty. In marriage, if you love your wife, you will take out the trash and such like. With Jesus, if you love him, you will keep his commandments. And third, love is *affection*. When you love someone, you have *feelings* of love. You rejoice in your wife's presence, her beauty, all that she is. That's true in marriage, and it's also true with God. As John Piper has often told us,⁶ God wants us to delight in him, to desire him, to find him sweet and lovely.

So love is allegiance, action, and affection. I line these up as normative, situational, and existential, respectively. See fig. 41.3.

6. John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1986, 2003).

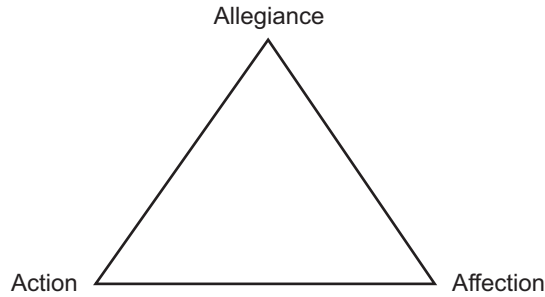


Fig. 41.3. Three Aspects of Love

The Necessity of Faith

Now, many today don't think that we must have faith in Jesus in order to be saved. Some of these are *pluralists*, who think that one can be saved through any number of religions. Others are *universalists*, who believe that everybody will be saved, whether or not he believes in Jesus. Others believe that some people who never hear of Jesus will be saved because they *would have* believed if they had had a chance. We might say that these believe in the salvation of all *potential believers*.

But Scripture is clear that nobody is saved apart from Jesus Christ. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life," so that he can say, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter said, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12; cf. John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36). On the last day, everyone in heaven will confess that he was saved by Jesus Christ and him alone. He is the *exclusive* Lord and the *exclusive* Savior.

Does this mean that no one can be saved unless he makes a verbal confession of Christ in this life? Well, that is a different question, and it is more difficult. Reformed Christians believe, for example, that children who die in the womb, or before being able to talk, may nevertheless be saved by God's grace. As we saw earlier in this chapter, WCF 10.3 says this:

Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.

Is this statement biblical? I believe so. Luke 1:15 says that John the Baptist would be "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb," and in verse 41, John, then in his mother's womb, leaped for joy in the presence of Mary the mother of Jesus. I believe also that in Luke 18:15, when Jesus laid his hands on the infants, he meant to place God's name on them and identify them with the kingdom of God.

If God saves children who are too young to make a public profession of faith, says the confession, he may save others, too, who are unable for some other reason to make a confession. We can't be dogmatic about what classes of people fall into that category. We naturally think about people who are handicapped so as to be unable to think or speak normally.

But it is certain that however wide the divine net might be, it never reaches outside the grace of Christ. When the Spirit regenerates a person, that person will eventually come to faith in Christ. And if and when he is able to profess faith in Christ, he will do so. The confession's statement should not encourage anybody to think that he can be saved without trusting in Christ. "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," said Peter in Acts 4:12.

So Christ alone is the name by which we may be saved. It is vitally important to proclaim the name of Christ throughout the world, so that people of all nations may believe in him.

Repentance

In the theological tradition, both repentance and faith are part of conversion. Salvation comes through faith, but also through repentance. That may sound strange, since we are accustomed to thinking of faith *alone* as the instrument of salvation. Where does repentance fit in?

Wayne Grudem defines repentance as "a heartfelt sorrow for sin, a renouncing of it, and a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ."⁷ As with faith, this definition has three elements. First, as faith is based on knowledge, so repentance is based on an understanding that we have sinned and our sins are hateful to God. So the first element of repentance is *sorrow*. In Scripture, there is a difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:9–10; Heb. 12:17). Worldly sorrow is like the sorrow of Judas, who had no hope. Godly sorrow recognizes how terrible I must look to God and confesses that honestly. But it is hopeful. It recognizes sin in its true light, because it knows that God is able and ready to forgive.

Then, just as faith involves assent, belief, so repentance involves *renunciation*. In assent, I say that I believe, I agree with what God says. So renunciation goes beyond sorrow. It is agreeing with God's evaluation of my sin.

And finally, repentance is actually *turning* away from sin, just as faith is turning to Christ. As faith makes a personal commitment to Christ, repentance makes a personal commitment against sin. See fig. 41.4.

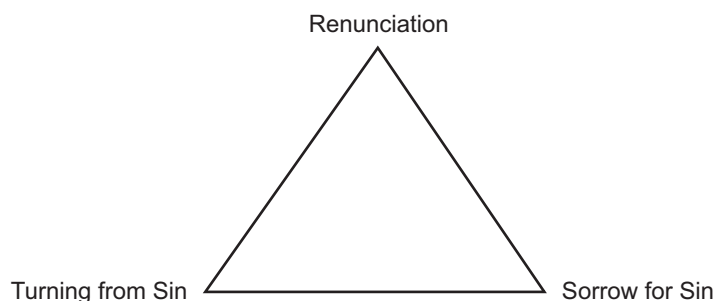


Fig. 41.4. Three Aspects of Repentance

7. GST, 713.

You can see, then, that repentance and faith are inseparable. They are two sides of a coin. You cannot turn from sin without turning to Christ, or vice versa. Turning from sin points you in the direction of Christ. You don't need to turn twice, only once. So faith and repentance are the same thing, viewed positively and negatively. Neither exists before the other, and neither exists without the other. The two are simultaneous and perspectival.

This means, in turn, that you cannot accept Christ as Savior without accepting him as Lord. Jesus says that if we love him, we must keep his commandments (John 14:15; many other texts cited earlier). To receive Jesus as Lord is to make a commitment to keeping his commandments. This is to say that to trust Jesus for forgiveness is to repent of sin. So it is unbiblical to say as some people do that you can accept Christ as Savior without accepting him as Lord. The Bible teaches what is called *lordship salvation*. To be saved, we call upon the Lord (Rom. 10:13); Paul has said in verse 9, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." So our salvation begins with the confession "Jesus is Lord."

Some have said that lordship salvation means that you must be sinlessly perfect, obedient to the Lord, from the first moment of your Christian life. That is not the case. It does mean that from the beginning of our life with God, we must be *committed* to Jesus' lordship (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11).

Repentance and Salvation

Does this mean that repentance, as well as faith, is necessary for salvation? In a word, yes. But it's not as though there were two different things that are necessary. *Faith* and *repentance* are two names for the same heart-attitude. The gospel of the NT includes a demand for repentance, as many texts indicate. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15; Luke 24:46–47; Acts 2:37–38; 3:19; 5:31; 17:30; 20:21; 2 Cor. 7:10; Heb. 6:1). To believe the gospel is to repent. WCF 15.3 also teaches that repentance is necessary for salvation:

Although repentance is not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof, which is the act of God's free grace in Christ; yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it.

This is the same thing the confession says about faith. Repentance is not the ground or cause of salvation. It does not make satisfaction for our sins; only Jesus does. It does not cause us to receive pardon; only God's grace does. But it is necessary for us, so much so that we will not receive pardon without it. Scripture cannot imagine anyone believing in Christ who wants at the same time to cling to his sin.

Repentance and the Christian Life

I said earlier that the Christian life does not just begin with faith, but continues by faith. It is a life of faith. Similarly, the Christian life is a life of repentance. When Jesus

saves us, we do not instantly become sinlessly perfect, and indeed we will not become perfect until the consummation. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12; cf. 2 Cor. 7:10). Jesus tells those he loves to “be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, Peter resisted at first, but then asked Jesus to wash everything: his head, his whole body. Jesus replied that “the one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean” (John 13:10). By his death for us, Jesus has cleansed us completely from sin. But as one’s feet accumulate dust on the paths of Palestine, so we accumulate sin in the Christian life, and we need to ask God’s forgiveness on a regular basis. This sin does not affect our eternal salvation. You needn’t worry that if you die with sin you haven’t repented of, you will go to hell. But if you love Jesus, your daily sin will grieve you, as it grieves him, and you will run to him, saying that you are sorry, you renounce it, and you intend to act differently. And of course, Scripture also says that when you sin against another human being, you should also go to him, express your sorrow, renounce your sin, and promise to do better (Matt. 5:23–26; 18:15–20). You may also need to make restitution, to make up for the wrong that you did to the other person.

The other person might or might not forgive you. But God will. We have his promise that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). He is faithful, and also just. He is just to forgive our daily sins, because Jesus has borne the penalty for *all* our sin, past, present, and future.

We need more Christians who will lead lives of repentance. For repentance always challenges pride. If you’re coming to God daily to confess to him how much you have sinned, you will find it hard to pretend that you are holier than everybody else. You’ll find it hard to put on airs, to pose as the perfect Christian. When others accuse you of sin, you won’t immediately jump to defend yourself, as if of course you could never do wrong and any accusation must spring from a misunderstanding. Rather, when someone accuses you of sin, you’ll respond by thinking there is a high probability that the accusation is true, and you won’t be embarrassed to say, “Oh, yes, I did do that, and I am terribly sorry. Will you forgive me?” If we are able to humble ourselves before God, we will be humble before men as well. And the church will be far better off if there are more of us like that.

Key Terms

- Objective salvation
- Subjective salvation
- Regeneration
- New creation
- Dispositional complex
- Faith

Conversion
Belief
Saving faith
Knowledge (in faith)
Belief (in faith)
Trust (in faith)
Ground (of salvation)
Cause (of salvation)
Instrument (of salvation)
Hope
Love
Allegiance
Action
Affection
Pluralism
Universalism
Repentance
Sorrow
Renunciation
Turning

Study Questions

1. Distinguish various meanings of *objective* and *subjective* in understanding the blessings of the application of redemption.
2. Summarize the teaching of the OT that bears on regeneration.
3. Explain from John 3 in what ways the new birth deals with sin in our lives.
4. What is meant by “born of water” in John 3:5?
5. Frame says that the phrase “born of water and the Spirit” in John 3:5 distinguishes “in the new birth a negative and a positive aspect.” What are these? Are these aspects distinguished elsewhere in Scripture? Evaluate.
6. How do you know when someone is born again? Or can you know? Discuss.
7. How does Paul describe the new birth? Why are these terms appropriate?
8. “Believe in Jesus, and you will be born again.” Is this exhortation biblically legitimate? Why or why not?
9. What is meant by the regeneration language in 1 Peter 1:23 and James 1:18? How does this concept differ from that in John 3?
10. Is it possible for infants to be regenerate? Present biblical evidence.
11. Expound the traditional definition of faith in terms of knowledge, belief, and trust. Explain Frame’s triperspectival interpretation of it.
12. “Saving faith is a gift of God.” Show biblical evidence.

13. What is the relation between faith and good works? Support your answer from Scripture.
14. Describe the relation of saving faith to salvation, defining the terminology used.
15. What does it mean to lead a life of faith?
16. Why are faith, hope, and love linked to one another in the NT? Expound the meaning of love.
17. Can someone be saved without faith in Christ? Give biblical grounds for your answer.
18. Can one have faith without repentance? Can one be saved without repentance? Discuss.
19. Describe a life of repentance.

Memory Verses

Isa. 57:15: For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
 "I dwell in the high and holy place,
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,
 and to revive the heart of the contrite."

John 3:1–8: Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Acts 4:12: And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Rom. 2:28–29: For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

1 Cor. 15:10: But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Col. 1:27: To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Resources for Further Study

Miller, C. John. *Repentance: A Daring Call to Real Surrender*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 2009.

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JUSTIFICATION AND ADOPTION

IN OUR STUDY OF THE APPLICATION of redemption (*ordo salutis*), we have so far discussed effectual calling, regeneration, faith, and repentance. In this chapter we will look at justification and adoption, and in subsequent chapters sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.

In chapter 36, I pointed out three effects of sin, effects that reflect our oft-cited triperspectival analysis; see fig. 42.1.

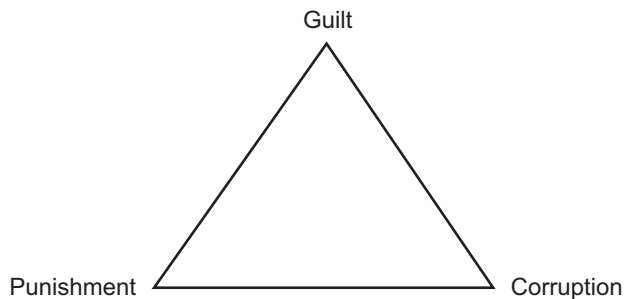


Fig. 42.1. Three Effects of Sin

Our redemption in Christ deals with all these effects of sin, and Scripture distinguishes the blessings of salvation in each of these areas: justification deals with our guilt, adoption with our punishment, and subjective salvation (regeneration, conversion, sanctification) with our corruption; see fig. 42.2.

Later in this chapter, I will address some aspects of this diagram that might occasion confusion. (1) It might appear that in this diagram justification and subjective salvation are ultimately identical, a Roman Catholic position. This is not my view, and I will indicate why. (2) It is not obvious why *adoption* should replace *punishment* in the previous diagram. I will try to clarify how adoption and punishment are related.

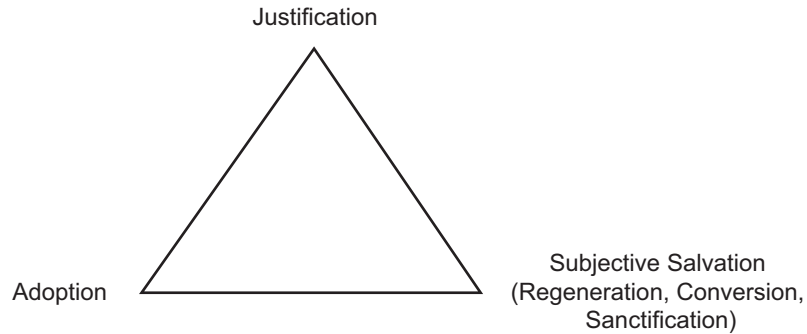


Fig. 42.2. Blessings of Salvation

Righteousness

There are three chief forms of moral predication: goodness, righteousness, and holiness. We discussed these as divine attributes in chapters 12 and 13. In the application of redemption, God restores to sinners these moral qualities, though he does not separate us entirely from sin until death or the final judgment. These qualities can be diagrammed perspectively; see fig. 42.3.

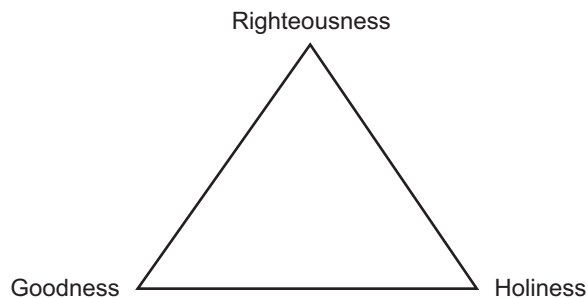


Fig. 42.3. Three Forms of Moral Predication

Good is the most general term of commendation. Applied to God, as we saw, it refers mostly to benevolence—providing benefits to others. *Righteous* comes from the legal vocabulary. To say that God is righteous is to say that his works accord with his standards of truth. (But we should not forget the redemptive use of the term, in which God saves his people by his righteous deeds; here *good* and *righteous* overlap.) *Holy* deals with God's transcendent otherness, but also with his drawing people into fellowship with him.

So *goodness* corresponds to adoption: bringing sinners into an inheritance instead of the punishment due to them. *Righteous* pertains to justification, and *holiness*, obviously, to subjective salvation, particularly sanctification.

Here I will focus first on righteousness and justification. In line with the definition of righteousness above, God's righteousness is connected with his judgment. Only God is perfectly suited to judge our lives, because only he is perfectly righteous. But of course, we are fallen and sinful, and so we can expect from God's righteousness only condemnation.

But as we saw, Scripture presents God's righteousness not only as a standard of judgment, but also as a means of salvation. God's "righteous deeds" are his acts to redeem his people from oppressors. What this means is that when God makes a gracious commitment to a covenant people, he is right to take their side. It is hard to understand in the OT context why God's righteousness sometimes condemns Israel and sometimes supports and rescues Israel. God repeatedly tells his people that he will surely condemn their sins, yet he also holds out hope that he will fulfill the promises of salvation made to Adam, Abraham, and David. Only in Christ does the mystery find resolution. He endures God's righteous condemnation, so that his people may be righteous for his sake. That is the essence of justification.

The Nature of Justification

Now let us focus on the doctrine of justification. Note the definition from WLC 70:

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

A Legal Declaration

The language here is *forensic*, that is, the language of a law court. In that court God is the Judge, and we are on trial for our sins—both the sin of Adam and the sins that we have committed in this life. The wages of sin is death, so clearly we deserve to die. But Jesus has taken that death penalty in our place. So the divine Judge turns to us and pronounces us not guilty. Indeed, he even goes beyond that, as a secular judge would never do, and says that we are positively righteous because of Christ. That is our justification.

It is important to distinguish between justification and sanctification, though Roman Catholic theology makes them overlap. In justification, God *declares* us righteous; in sanctification, he *makes* us righteous. Justification is forensic. It is about our legal status, not our inner character. For the important thing is that in justification God justifies the *ungodly*, those who by their inner character are wicked. Contrary to Roman Catholicism, God does not justify us because he likes our inner character, even because he likes what he himself has done within us (our "infused" righteousness). He justifies us only because of Christ.

In Scripture, many passages indicate the forensic nature of justification. In Deuteronomy 25:1, judges in Israel are to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked.

Clearly, this means that judges are to *declare* the innocence of the righteous and the wickedness of the wicked. It cannot mean that the judges are to *make* people righteous or wicked. In Luke 7:29, we read that some people “declared God just,” literally, “justified God” (as in the KJV), because of Jesus’ words. Clearly, that cannot mean that the people *made* God just. “Declared God just” is the correct translation.

In Romans 4:5, God “justifies the ungodly” apart from works. Since it is apart from works, *justify* cannot mean “to make righteous,” only “to declare righteous.” In Romans 8:33–34 and other passages, the word *justify* is the opposite of *condemn*. But *condemn* means “to declare someone guilty,” not “to make the person guilty.” Thus, it makes sense to take *justify* to mean “declare righteous.”

This is the consistent meaning of *justify* throughout Paul’s writings, when he is talking about the justification of sinners unto salvation (see Rom. 3:20, 26, 28; 5:1; 8:30; 10:4, 10; Gal. 2:15; 3:24).

A Constitutive Declaration

Someone might object that a *mere* declaration is not enough. Obviously, if a judge were to declare a defendant not guilty, when he was really guilty, that would not be just. We saw earlier the admonition to judges in Deuteronomy 25:1: a judge is to justify those who are really righteous and condemn those who are really wicked. Some have objected that the Protestant doctrine of justification violates this principle: God looks at wicked people and falsely declares them to be righteous.

But this is to forget the work of Christ. Because Christ died in our place, God’s declaration is true. It is not a legal fiction or a false judgment. Jesus really did pay the complete penalty for sin. So in him we really are innocent and righteous, because he is innocent and righteous. So John Murray¹ argued that justification is not a *mere* declaration, but a declaration that “constitutes” a new legal status, a “constitutive declaration,” as he put it. He took the phrase “made righteous” in Romans 5:19 to mean “constituted righteous.”

That is fine, but the word *constitute* might confuse some people; it’s very close to the word *make*. But we’re not talking about making righteous here in the sense of sanctification. Even when we talk about God’s *constituting* us righteous, we’re still in the legal, or forensic, sphere. To “constitute righteous” means that God is constituting a new *legal* status for us. So remember that this constitutive declaration is still forensic, still in the legal, courtroom sphere. It is not the same thing as sanctification. It does not renew us from within. It rather provides us a new legal position: righteous in Christ.

The elements of this declaration, of justification, are the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us. Because of Christ, God takes our sins away from us, so that they may never again rise to condemn us (Pss. 103:3; 130:4; Rom. 4:6–8; 8:1, 33–34; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; 1 John 1:9). God removes our transgressions “as far as the east is from the west,” as Psalm 103:12 puts it.

1. MCW, 2:213–15.

He also imputes Christ's righteousness (Isa. 61:10; Rom. 3:21–22; 4:3; 5:19; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21). This means not only that he removes our sins, but that he positively adds to us the perfect righteousness of Christ. So our legal status is not just not-guilty, not neutral, but righteous. If you think of your legal status numerically, sin had plunged you deep into negative numbers. God's forgiveness brought you back up to zero. But the righteousness of Christ took you far above zero in the eyes of God.

Here is what is often called a *double imputation*.² God imputes our sins to Christ and imputes his righteousness to us. This follows from the doctrine we discussed in chapter 38, that the atonement is a substitutionary sacrifice. Christ receives the punishment for our sins, and we receive the blessings of his righteousness. This is also an implication of our union with Christ (also discussed in chapter 38): we become the righteousness of God "in him."

Writers³ have often objected to the idea of imputation, arguing that guilt and righteousness are not the sorts of things that can be transferred from one person to another, even by God. How this can happen is certainly a mystery. It could never happen in any human court, that the guilt or innocence of one defendant could be transferred to another. But marvelously, this is precisely what happens in God's economy. It is clearly the teaching of Scripture, and in Scripture it is an aspect of our union with Christ. Romans 5:12–21⁴ makes it clear that God imputed Adam's sin to all his descendants, parallel to his grace in imputing the righteousness of Christ to his people. Verse 19 reads:

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.⁵

To reject the idea of divine imputation is to confuse the whole biblical account of sin and salvation. Illustrations and parallels in other areas of human life can help us better to understand and appreciate this doctrine. See chapter 36 for some considerations that clarify God's imputation of Adam's sin. But none of the illustrations or parallels is perfect. In the end, our justification is mysterious, even miraculous. We must be ready to see God as Lord of the moral universe as well as the physical.

The Ground of Justification

The *ground* of justification is the basis on which we are justified. It answers the question: why should God declare me to be just? The answer is, simply: Christ. In his work on the cross, his people are united to him, and God sees us as righteous in him. Although we often say that justification is "by faith," faith is not the ground of

2. In the overall biblical doctrine there are, of course, three imputations: of Adam's sin to us (Rom. 5:1–12; cf. chapter 36), of our sins to Christ, and of Christ's righteousness to us.

3. Such as N. T. Wright, whose general position I will consider later in this chapter.

4. Review the exposition of this passage in chapter 36.

5. The two instances of "made" represent the Greek *kathistemi*, which Murray understands to mean "constitute." It is not the term generally translated "impute," but in context it clearly amounts to what we have called a constitutive declaration, God's imputation of a new legal standing.

justification. It has another role that I will mention below. God does not declare us righteous because of our faith. Our faith is always impure, imperfect. Only Christ is perfect, and perfectly righteous.

Theologians have often distinguished between Christ's active and passive obedience (cf. chapter 38). His passive obedience is his suffering and death for us. His active obedience is his perfect life. So often when theologians talk about justification, they say that Christ's passive obedience brings us the forgiveness of sins; his active obedience is the basis for God's declaring us positively righteous. For God imputes Christ's righteousness to us, making us righteous in him.

There is some controversy in Protestant circles now about the imputation to us of Christ's active obedience, even among writers who accept the imputation of his passive obedience, his death. We do not have space to enter this controversy in detail. But it seems obvious to me that (1) God declares us righteous "in him," that is, by union with Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus expresses his righteous character in all that he does, both in his perfect life and in his atoning death. It is that righteous character, that sinlessness, that is ours by our union with him, not merely its passive expression. (2) Jesus' perfect life is a necessary aspect of his atonement. In the OT, sacrificial animals had to be "without blemish" (Ex. 12:5). The NT often speaks of Jesus as a lamb. As a sacrifice he, too, had to be without blemish, and in a man that implies sinlessness. First Peter 1:19 speaks of Jesus as "a lamb without blemish or spot." Cf. Heb. 9:14. Since Jesus' atonement is substitutionary, God imputes to us the sinlessness of Jesus' life as a whole. (3) Our union with Christ is a union both in his death and in his resurrection. When Jesus died for us, we died to sin; when he rose from the dead, we rose with him to new life (Rom. 6:1–14). The resurrection life of Christ is (among many other things) a continuation and fulfillment of the sinless life that he lived on earth.

The Instrument of Justification

I have said that although justification is "by faith alone," faith is not the ground of justification; only Christ is that. What role, then, is played by faith? Faith is what *receives* the grace of God in Christ. So theologians have described its role as *instrumental*. Faith claims no merit for itself; it makes no claim to deserve the gift of God's righteousness. It confesses that only Christ can save, and only his righteousness can justify.

This is the main difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic views of justification. For Roman Catholicism, justification is primarily God's making us righteous, not declaring us righteous. It is not a consistently forensic concept, but overlaps sanctification. So on the Roman view, God makes us righteous within and declares us to be righteous on the basis of this "infused righteousness." That infused righteousness, which includes both faith and works, merits eternal life. This means, then, that salvation is based partly on our works. The consequence, then, is that we cannot be assured of our salvation in this life, because we are never sure whether our works have been sufficient.

This kind of anxiety over salvation led to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther, first of the Protestant Reformers, while he was a priest in the Roman Catholic Church, was in agony over whether he had enough good works to stand before God's throne on the judgment day. When he read Romans 1:16–17, he wondered how the righteousness of God could be *gospel*, “good news.” Paul says there that the gospel, the good news, reveals the righteousness of God. But how, Luther asked, can that be good news, since God's righteousness is precisely what condemns us?

But as he thought some more about this passage, it occurred to him that the “righteousness” here is not the righteousness that condemns, but the righteousness that God offers to us in Christ as a free gift. Understood that way, the righteousness of God really is good news. For by counting us righteous in Christ, God forgives our sins and brings us irrevocably into fellowship with him.

One more important point: Justification is by faith apart from works. We touched on this in chapter 41 when we discussed saving faith, but the point cannot be left out of the discussion of justification here. Even though saving faith is a faith that works, Paul regularly contrasts faith with works in justification. Justification is by faith apart from works, apart from works of the law, without works (Rom. 3:27–28; 4:5–6; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5; Eph. 2:8–9).

How can Paul draw such a contrast, when faith and works elsewhere appear inseparable? We saw in James 2 that faith without works is dead. Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:6, where he speaks of faith working through love. Indeed, justification is by a living faith, not a dead faith, a faith that works, rather than a mere profession. But faith does not justify because of its connection with works. It justifies because its nature is to trust, in this case to trust the grace of God in Christ. That trust motivates us to please God and therefore to do good works. Since God has saved from sin, this is the only appropriate response. Yet salvation is not through the works, but through the trust that motivates them. The point is that salvation is a free gift (Eph. 2:8). We cannot work for it, but only *trust* the One who gives it. Faith is central because faith is *trust*. But of course, after we receive that gift, it is important for us to show our gratefulness by our actions, and that is what we want to do.

James 2:24, which even speaks of justification by works, tells us that a faith without works is not saving faith, not true faith. So works are evidence of a true, saving faith.

Justification and Sanctification

Since justification is by faith apart from works, it is distinct from sanctification, which, as we will see in the following chapter, is the development of good works in the believer. That fact raises a problem with my triangular diagram of justification, adoption, and sanctification,⁶ and I must address that problem to prevent misunderstandings.

In some of my triangular diagrams, each corner embraces the others. For example, in fig. 42.4 (expounded in chapter 2)—

6. In what follows, I will abbreviate *subjective salvation* by the term *sanctification*.

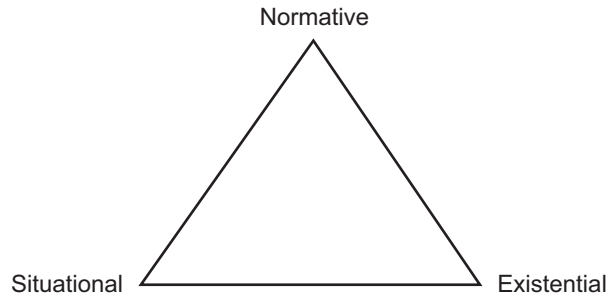


Fig. 42.4. Three Perspectives on Knowledge

—the normative includes the situational and existential, and they include it. So ultimately the three perspectives are identical. But in the triad *justification, adoption, sanctification*, it seems not to be the case that each corner includes the other two. Indeed, it would seem that to take it that way would be to invite doctrinal errors. In Protestant theology (which I affirm), for example, sanctification is not identical with justification, nor is adoption. Indeed, there are grave dangers in confusing justification with sanctification, dangers that I will describe later in this chapter.

Why, then, does this triad differ from some of the others I have presented? The key point is that in dealing with these triangles, it is important to note what the whole triangle represents. In the triad *normative, situational, existential*, the whole triangle represents all of reality. So each corner of it also deals with all of reality, and each is ultimately identical with the others. But in the triad *justification, adoption, sanctification*, the whole triangle does not deal with all of reality. Rather, just as the triad *guilt, punishment, corruption* dealt with the effects of sin, so the present triad *justification, adoption, sanctification* deals with the effects of redemption. Guilt, punishment, and corruption are parts, aspects, of the devastation wrought by sin. Similarly, justification, adoption, and sanctification are aspects of the renewal accomplished by our redemption in union with Christ.

Now, this triad indicates a very close union among its three aspects. Everyone united to Christ by faith is justified, adopted, and sanctified. So there is nobody who is justified but not adopted, or adopted but not sanctified. Justification is not the same thing as sanctification. But justification without sanctification is unthinkable. A justified person will certainly be sanctified in some ways and in some degree. In that sense, sanctification is the inevitable context of justification.

The best language, perhaps, is that justification, adoption, and subjective salvation are “inseparable.” They are not synonymous, nor is one the ground of the other. But they are never found apart, and each proves the presence of the others. The point is this: that the redeemed man is justified, adopted, and sanctified. Together, these three qualities describe the blessedness of the believer.

We often say in theology that you cannot understand a concept unless you understand its context. Adoption and sanctification serve as a context for justification, just as

the tune of a hymn serves as a context for its words. Although the words are distinct from the tune, even to the extent that the tune could appear with different words and the words with a different tune, you cannot sing a particular hymn unless you express the two together. So it is not meaningful to say that someone is justified in a biblical sense if he is not in other respects a believer (justification is by faith), that is, if he is not adopted and sanctified.

The triangular diagram means, therefore, in this case that justification, adoption, and sanctification form a total context for one another. And in that sense, to use a metaphor that I have used in other cases, each “embraces” the other two. True justification is a justification *with* adoption and sanctification, not without them. And the whole triangle represents the blessings of the saved person.

This is the main point of James 2:14–26:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Although James says that Abraham was “justified by works” (v. 21) when he offered his son on the altar, he is not contradicting Paul, who says that we are justified apart from works (Rom. 3:28). James says that a faith that justifies is a living, working faith, not a dead faith (vv. 17, 26). Works are what *show* (v. 18) that faith is genuine.

Recent Controversy over Justification

The New Perspective on Paul

Several NT scholars, including Krister Stendahl, E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright, have developed what has become known as the *New Perspective on Paul*. Although this viewpoint has more complications than I can discuss here, it is important that we consider its bearing on justification. The main contention of the

New Perspective is that when he speaks of justification Paul is not primarily interested in how a sinner can get right with God, but rather in the conditions for belonging to God's covenant community. On this view, Paul is primarily a champion of Gentile membership in the kingdom of God through Christ. Paul is not criticizing his fellow Jews because of their attempts to save themselves by their works, as Luther thought. Rather, he is criticizing them for being exclusive, for rejecting religious fellowship with Gentiles. These Jews expected the Gentiles to become Jews, through circumcision and the Jewish law, before they could be accepted as followers of Christ. On this basis, to be "justified" is to be a member of the covenant community in good standing. As covenant membership, justification is not by works of the law (i.e., circumcision and the Jewish boundary markers) but by faith. So justification is not primarily "soteriological," but "ecclesiastical."

I disagree with this view.⁷ (1) The Greek lexicons do not define *dikaiosune*, *righteousness*, as "membership in a group," even as "membership in a covenant community." On the contrary, righteousness has to do with one's standing before God as Judge. (2) Romans 1–5, the main context of Paul's chief discussion of justification, is precisely an account of how human beings (both Gentiles and Jews) have sinned against God and the means of their forgiveness. Only through Christ does God declare sinners to be righteous, and that declaration is their justification. In Romans 1:18–32, Paul shows how deeply the Gentiles have fallen into sin. In 2:1–3:8, he indicates that the same is true of the Jews, regardless of their boasts of moral superiority. His conclusion is in 3:10–20: "None is righteous, no, not one." But God's grace astonishes:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21–26)

The New Perspective scholars are right to emphasize Paul's concern with the unity between Jews and Gentiles in the church of Jesus Christ. But not everything in Paul's writing can be assimilated to that theme. I believe that the New Perspective fails to deal adequately with a number of Pauline passages, such as Romans 4:4–5; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8–10; Philippians 3:9, which make it plain that Paul rejects not only legal barriers between Jew and Gentile, but also all attempts of people to save themselves by

7. The following discussion draws heavily on Charles E. Hill's excellent article "N. T. Wright on Justification," *Third Millennium Magazine Online* 3, 22 (May 28–June 2, 2001), available at <http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/nt/NT.h.Hill.Wright.html>. I take full responsibility for the formulation here.

their works. For Paul, justification is not a person's covenant membership. It is God's declaration that the person is righteous for the sake of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is God's imputation to us of Christ's righteousness.⁸

Norman Shepherd

Norman Shepherd⁹ taught systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) from 1963 to 1981, and after that served two pastorates in the Christian Reformed Church. After his retirement in 1998, he wrote two books¹⁰ and several articles that touch on the doctrine of justification. Both his earlier and later writings on this subject have aroused considerable controversy in Presbyterian and Reformed circles. This controversy concerns the following emphases in his work:

1. He believes, on the basis of James 2:14–26, that saving faith, that is, justifying faith, is a faith that works. In this connection, he sometimes said that works are “necessary” to justification. This choice of words, I think, was not wise. Some thought Shepherd was saying that works are the efficient (or meritorious) cause of justification. This is not what he meant to say, and the word *necessary* does not need to be taken that way. Indeed, as we will see, Shepherd denies that merit has anything to do with our salvation. His assertion, rather, was based on simple logic: (a) Without faith, no justification, since justification is by faith. (b) Without works, no faith. (c) Therefore, without works, no justification. The term *necessary* here refers simply to this logical relation, not to efficient or meritorious causality. Shepherd is saying that a living faith is a *necessary condition* of justification, not its ground, efficient cause, or meritorious wage. Shepherd's choice of words may not have been the best, but his idea is quite commonplace in Reformed theology: it's faith alone that saves, but the faith that saves is never alone.

2. He denies that merit (either that of Jesus or of the believer) plays any role in salvation. This belief is controversial, because we are familiar with the formula “salvation is by Jesus' merit, not ours.” *Merit*, as Shepherd understands it, is a means of earning reward. Jesus earned salvation for his people by the merits of his life, and therefore we need not try to earn our way, to seek merit of our own. But Shepherd questions this formula. He does not believe that God assigned human beings the task of earning anything. Rather, God forbade Adam from eating a particular fruit. Abstaining from the fruit was not a job by which Adam could earn a reward; rather, it was simple obedience. Similarly, when Jesus became man, his charge from the Father was not to do a certain number of good works to earn favor, but simply to obey. I agree with Shepherd that salvation in the Bible is not a matter of earning anything, not a quasi-commercial transaction.¹¹ But if we define *merit* simply as “just deserts,” it may play a

8. Wright is critical of the very idea of imputed righteousness, as I indicated earlier in the chapter.

9. Full disclosure: Shepherd was my senior colleague when I taught at Westminster/Philadelphia from 1968–80. He has been a good friend to me ever since. But as the reader will see, I do not agree with all of his views.

10. Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000); *The Way of Righteousness* (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2009).

11. I've discussed that issue in chapter 4 of this book.

role. Certainly Jesus *deserved* the honor he gained through his cross and resurrection. That honor was rightly his. And the honor that believers receive “in” Christ is rightly theirs,¹² because it is rightly his.

3. Shepherd also came to deny that Jesus’ “active” obedience is imputed to the believer in justification.¹³ In his view, we are justified only by his death and resurrection, not by his righteous incarnate life. Shepherd regards the imputation of Christ’s active obedience as an addition to Scripture and as an incentive to merit-based soteriology (point 2 above). On this matter I disagree. As I explained in chapter 38, I believe that we are saved “in” Christ, and therefore by union with his righteous character, displayed in all his works. That character is constituted by everything in his nature and all his works, including his *active righteousness*. Compare my treatment of this question earlier in this chapter in the section “The Ground of Justification.”

Shepherd’s critics, in my view, responded more to the *sound* of what he said than to the actual content of his assertions. In points 1 and 2, Shepherd questioned certain standard ways in which Protestants have traditionally presented the doctrine of justification. But I think these two assertions of Shepherd reflected remarkable insight into the teaching of Scripture. In point 3 I think he was simply wrong, but not wrong to such an extent as to question any fundamentals of the Reformed system of doctrine. The Reformed confessions have not been unanimous on this issue. Shepherd appeals to the earlier confessions, those of the sixteenth century. So neither position should be made a test of Reformed orthodoxy.

Adoption

Now let us consider the doctrine of adoption. WLC 74 defines it thus:

Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of his children, have his name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow heirs with Christ in glory.

In adoption, God places us in his family. So this doctrine fulfills the theme of the family of God that pervades Scripture. I summarized this theme in chapter 6, noting the biblical emphasis on the redeemed as God’s royal family under his fatherhood.

It may be asked why in my triangular diagrams at the beginning of the chapter *adoption* serves as the remedy for *punishment*. Recall that in our discussion of sin in chapter 36, *punishment* refers initially to woman’s pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16) and

12. This statement is implicit in the biblical teaching we considered earlier, that justification “constitutes” our legal standing before God as righteous.

13. See Norman Shepherd, “The Imputation of Active Obedience,” in *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, ed. P. Andrew Sandlin (La Grange, CA: Kerygma Press, 2007), 249–78. He argues his view both from Scripture and from the earlier generation of Reformed theologians and confessions.

man's toil in securing food (Gen. 3:17–19). But of course, these curses represent all the pain and suffering of human life, culminating in physical death (v. 19; cf. 2:17). What this entails is that the creation, man's "situation," resists his efforts to fulfill the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28.

Now, the blessing of adoption, our inheritance, places the believer into a new situation.¹⁴ What this means ultimately is a new family. Believers become sons and daughters of God, not of Satan. And that new family relation to God implies a new relation to the entire creation. The creation, says Paul, looks forward to being "set free from its bondage to corruption" and thus obtaining "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). The creation's "groaning" for this fulfillment (v. 22) parallels our inward groaning as "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons" (v. 23).

Of course, the believer's adoption exists from the beginning of his regenerate life. But as with many of God's other blessings, there is in adoption an *already* and a *not yet*. Although we are already sons and daughters of God, we await a higher fulfillment of our adoption. And that fulfillment is what the creation also awaits. So adoption should be understood in the context of the transformation of man's environment and thus the reversal of his punishment as the work of Christ overcomes all the forces of death on the earth.

So adoption meets our need for a new family. The Bible teaches that because of sin we are children of the devil (John 8:41–44; cf. Eph. 2:2–3; 5:6). By faith, Jesus gives us authority to become sons (and daughters) of God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 3:23–26; 4:28, 31; 1 Peter 3:6; 1 John 3:1–2). In Christ, God loves us so much that we become his people, his nation, his family (1 John 3:1). So Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9). And he also taught them to speak intimately with God, using the Aramaic term *Abba*, a child's name for his father, like our word *Daddy* (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4–7). We would not dare speak to God with such familiarity, except that Jesus has given us permission.

Jesus himself is *the* Son of God, as we saw in chapter 21. He has a unique sonship, a relation to God that we cannot attain. To say that he is the Son is to designate his position in the Holy Trinity. So his sonship is higher than ours, and it is the source of ours, for only those who receive Christ (John 1:12) gain the authority to be sons of God. In John 20:17, Jesus distinguishes his sonship from ours when he says to Mary, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Jesus never describes God as "our" Father in a way that equalizes the relationship between Jesus' sonship and ours. Nevertheless, we are sons of God because God

14. Alert readers might note that in chapters 4–6 I put *family of God* as the existential perspective, contrasted with *God's covenants* (normative) and *kingdom of God* (situational). So why should family be existential in chapter 6, but situational here? Well, the beauty of perspectives is that each perspective is integrated with the others, and that each plays different roles in different contexts. *Family*, like *covenant* and *kingdom*, has normative and situational aspects as well as existential. Family is our situation, and it is also our subjective comfort. In chapter 6 I made use of its existential aspects, and here I focus on its situational aspects.

sees us in Christ, in his beloved Son. So we share the blessings that the Father gives to his unique Son, Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is also important to our adoption. He witnesses in our hearts that we are the sons of God (Rom. 8:15–16).

Our sonship is both present and future. We are God's sons here and now (1 John 3:2), but the creation awaits the full manifestation of that sonship (Rom. 8:23). We have grasped only the beginning of what it means to be a son or daughter of God.

Like saving faith and justification, adoption is demonstrated by good works. It is through our good works that we glorify our Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16; cf. Phil. 2:15; 1 John 3:10).

Adoption relates us not only to God, but also to one another. We are sons and daughters of God, and therefore brothers and sisters of one another. Even Jesus is our brother, according to Hebrews 2:17. We are to love our brothers and sisters as Jesus loved us.

Relation of Adoption to Other Doctrines

Regeneration

We may have questions about the relation of adoption to regeneration, for they both refer to family. Regeneration is about birth, and in the Bible birth happens in a family. Adoption, too, tells how we enter God's family. But the two doctrines are not the same. Regeneration describes natural descent, while adoption describes admission to a family that we were *not* born into. So we have two different metaphors here, each making a somewhat different point. Regeneration tells us that our spiritual life comes from God. Adoption emphasizes that God admits us into a family that we did not originally belong to. Both metaphors are biblical, though at first glance they might seem to point in opposite directions.

The two doctrines also differ in this way: in regeneration, God grants new life; in adoption, God grants new privileges, a new inheritance.

Faith

Adoption, like justification, is through faith (John 1:12; Gal. 3:23–26). We are not entitled to the privileges of sonship by our efforts, but we receive them as a gift, reaching out with the empty hands of faith.

Justification

Justification gives us a new legal standing. Adoption gives us the additional privileges of inheritance. So adoption carries us beyond justification. Justification is amazing and wonderful, but adoption is the apex, the high point, in our relationship with God. So the doctrine of adoption deserves far more emphasis in our preaching and theological work than it has usually received.

Privileges of Adoption

Let us, then, consider the privileges of adoption. These can be summed up in the word *inheritance*. First, there is sonship itself, as distinguished from slavery (Gal. 4:7).

We are not merely slaves in God's household, though we are slaves, servants, from one point of view. We are bound to serve the Lord. But we are not *mere* slaves. We are sons of God.

Sonship also describes a kind of maturity in our relation to God. Even a son, when he is a child, is very much like a slave, for he knows very little and must be taught, often through harsh discipline. Paul describes in that way the old covenant of the Jewish people under Moses. It was a time when they were sons, but children. Jesus' coming brings us to maturity and freedom.

Mature sonship gives us new freedom and confidence in prayer (Matt. 6:9). The Jews of the old covenant also prayed to God, but they feared coming into the most intimate sphere of God's presence, and indeed they were barred from it by temple curtains and many regulations. But when Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn in two. Now there is no barrier between ourselves and the greatest intimacy with God that a human being can enjoy. Now we enter boldly into the Most Holy Place, praising our Father and asking him for what we need. We can count on his compassion and care. Just as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps. 103:13; Matt. 6:32).

There is still discipline in our family. The writer to the Hebrews says that any father chastens his children (Heb. 12:5–10). He adds that our father's discipline is one proof that we are real sons and daughters, not illegitimate children.

And just as adoption gives us a new vertical relationship to God, it also gives us new horizontal relationships to one another, to the brothers and sisters in the family (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

Among other things, our brothers and sisters are God's gifts to us, and we receive God's gifts to build them up. That includes the great gift of the Holy Spirit himself, and the gifts that the Spirit gives to each of us (Matt. 7:11; Luke 11:13; Rom. 8:14).

Adoption also gives us a forward-looking vision. In this world, we look forward to the privilege of suffering with Jesus, which according to Paul is part of our sonship (Rom. 8:17). But then, of course, comes the fullness of privilege, the final inheritance (Gal. 4:7; 1 Peter 1:4), the privilege of reigning with Christ over the entire world (Rev. 2:26–27; 3:21). All things are ours, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:21. We will judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3). That fullness of inheritance is so great that Paul in Romans 8:17 refers to it as another adoption, one that we await in the future. That shouldn't surprise you. The NT teaches often that salvation is complete in Christ, yet the full unfolding of it is yet to come. That is sometimes called the "paradox of the *already* and the *not yet*." Jesus' atonement has taken away the guilt of our sin, but it is now taking away the power of sin, and one day it will take away the very presence of sin. So our salvation is *already*, but *not yet*. Justification is ours already, but one day we will be pronounced righteous before the Father's throne. So there is a past justification and a future justification. Similarly for adoption. When we believe in Christ, we become members of his family. But the fullness of our privileges as sons and daughters remains for the future. Adoption, too, is past and future.

Christian believers are usually not highly regarded in this world. But our ultimate destiny is a life of such great dignity and authority that we can hardly imagine it now. So even the creation groans, awaiting the manifestation of the sons of God: that's you and me. In Romans 8, Paul says this about our adoption past and future, with some references also to justification:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:19–39)

That's the way our God treats his sons and daughters.

Adoption is really a wonderful teaching of God's Word. Again, I think it gets neglected in our preaching and teaching. We tend to focus on justification because of the importance of that doctrine in the Reformation, and on sanctification because it describes the progress of salvation in our hearts in a practical way, day by day. But adoption, belonging to God's family, is the height of our privilege as God's people, and the beginning of our heavenly reward. It is the foundation of all our relationships with God and one another. God's name is our family name, the name by which we will be known through all eternity.

Key Terms

Righteousness
 Justification
 Forensic
 Constitutive declaration
 Imputation
 Double imputation
 Ground
 Instrument
 Active obedience
 Passive obedience
 Infused righteousness
 New Perspective on Paul
 Norman Shepherd
 Adoption
 Inheritance

Study Questions

1. Review the nature of God's righteousness. Why does Frame find the relationship between its two aspects mysterious? How does Christ's work address that mystery?
2. Explain Frame's triangular diagram of justification, adoption, and subjective salvation. Show how it corresponds to the triangle representing the effects of sin.
3. Why is it important to distinguish between justification and sanctification?
4. Does *justify* in Scripture mean "declare righteous" or "make righteous"? Cite references.
5. Is justification a *mere* declaration? What problems might arise in such a view? What more is needed?
6. "So our legal status is not just not-guilty, not neutral, but righteous." Why is this important?
7. Does God impute to us Christ's active obedience, or only his passive obedience? Explain the question and answer it from Scripture.

8. Describe Martin Luther's anxiety over Romans 1:17 and his solution to it.
9. How can Paul draw a sharp contrast between faith and works in salvation, though elsewhere he presents them as inseparable?
10. Do Paul and James disagree over the relation of faith and works? Explain.
11. Does Frame's triangular diagram imply that justification and sanctification are ultimately identical? Why or why not?
12. Describe and evaluate the view of justification among the advocates of the New Perspective on Paul.
13. Describe and evaluate Norman Shepherd's view of justification.
14. Frame's diagrams suggest that adoption is a remedy for the punishment of sin. Explain; evaluate.
15. Compare Jesus' sonship to ours.
16. "Our sonship is both present and future." Explain both aspects.
17. Compare and contrast adoption and regeneration.
18. "Adoption carries us beyond justification." How? Explain.
19. Enumerate the privileges of sonship and describe them.

Memory Verses

Ps. 103:11–12: For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Rom. 3:21–22: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Rom. 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Rom. 8:14–17: For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Rom. 8:19: For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

2 Cor. 5:21: For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Eph. 2:8–9: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

James 2:26: For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

1 John 3:1: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Resources for Further Study

Milton, Michael. *What Is the Doctrine of Adoption?* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012.

Murray, John. *MCW*, 2:202–74.

Oliphint, K. Scott, ed. *Justified in Christ*. Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2007.

Essays on the recent controversy about justification. It also includes as an appendix John Murray's important exegesis of Romans 5:12–21, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*.

SANCTIFICATION

AS WE HAVE SEEN, GOD *DECLARES* believers to be righteous in Christ (justification) and welcomes them into his own family (adoption). But he also works within believers to *make* them holy. We spent some time insisting that justification is not God's *making* us righteous, but *declaring* us righteous as a legal status. But we should never forget that God also *makes* his people righteous and holy, and that this work of God forms a necessary context for justification and adoption. Faith without works is dead.

God's work to make us holy is called *sanctification*. This discussion brings us back to the sphere of subjective salvation, which we discussed in chapter 41 under the topics of regeneration and conversion. We then employed the following diagram, which will be useful to review at this point; see fig. 43.1.

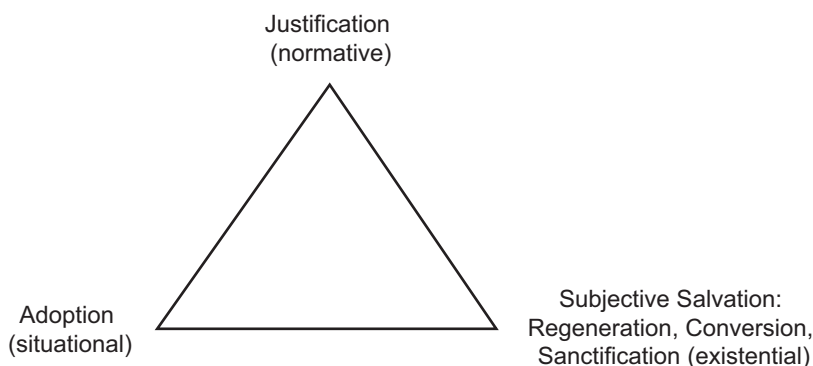


Fig. 43.1. Aspects of Salvation

We should never fall into the temptation of disparaging the subjective work of God. Although the ground of our salvation is objective, outside us, what theologians have sometimes called an *alien righteousness*, this objective work of Christ has profound

effects within us. And as we have seen, justification and adoption do not exist apart from regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. Justification is “by” faith, and faith is part of subjective salvation. So the justification of the individual, although its ground is external to the believer, depends on the work of the Spirit within the believer, enabling him to embrace the salvation of Christ.

Holiness

To sanctify is to make holy. Holiness, of course, includes righteousness. But the concept of sanctification focuses on the concept of holiness, which we explored in chapter 13 as a divine attribute.

God’s holiness is his capacity and right to arouse our reverent awe and wonder. Think of what it would be like to meet God directly. When Moses met God in Exodus 3:5–6, God told him to remove his shoes, for the place of this meeting was holy ground. Cf. Ex. 19:12–13, 23. When God came to be there, the very space around him became sacred, holy. When Isaiah met God, the seraphim (angels) flew around, crying, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” (Isa. 6:3). God’s holiness is his radical difference—literally, separation—from human beings, which arouses our amazement. It puts us in contact with a being vastly different from anyone or anything in the universe.

God is different and separate from us because he is our Creator, because of his lordship, his attributes of control, authority, presence. After the fall, he is also separate from us in another way: he is perfectly righteous and good, but we are wicked and sinful. So when God met with Isaiah, the result was not only Isaiah’s amazement at God’s greatness, but also Isaiah’s profound conviction of sin. “Woe is me!” he cried, “for I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). Isaiah knew that God was pure and would judge all wickedness. He knew he had no right to stand in the presence of such intense purity. He may well have expected to be destroyed then and there.

But God showed kindness to Isaiah. One of the angels took a live coal from the temple altar and placed it on Isaiah’s lips, symbolically taking away Isaiah’s sin, in anticipation of the work of Christ (Isa. 6:6–7). God deals with all believers after that pattern. Amazingly, God promises that we will be holy, even as he is holy (Lev. 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

Remarkably, then, God’s attribute of holiness, which creates such a distance between God and human beings, also joins us to him in the most intimate fellowship. God makes us holy, which means that he associates us with his holiness. He brings us into his holy ground. So we become his holy people, his saints. As we compare justification and sanctification, it is instructive to recall the similar duality in God’s righteousness that we noted in the previous chapter. Both righteousness and holiness as attributes of God are frightening. Both separate us from God. But both of these are also ways in which God draws near to his people and redeems them.

As we have seen, God comes to us in his covenant presence, and he takes us to be his people, saying, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Jer. 7:23). In the case of Israel, that meant that the people were a *holy* people, a people separate from all the other nations of the world (Ex. 19:6). For the children of Israel, holiness was both a fact and a norm, both a reality and a command. They were in fact the holy people of God, distinct from all the nations. But God also commanded them to *be* holy (Lev. 20:7). God made them holy, but they were to make themselves holy. Here divine sovereignty and human responsibility come together.¹ This is not true in justification. God does not command us to be justified, for justification is entirely his work, not ours. But he does command us to be sanctified, to be holy, for sanctification is both a work of God and a work of the believer.

The same language can be found in the NT. God has made us his holy people (1 Peter 2:9), his saints (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2). But he also commands us to be holy as he is holy (1 Peter 1:15–16; cf. Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:7).

Definition of Sanctification

As we begin our discussion of sanctification, consider the definition in the WLC:

Q. 75. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is a work of God’s grace, whereby they whom God hath, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life.

Note one difference at the outset between this definition and the catechism definitions of justification and adoption that I have quoted in previous chapters. The catechism describes justification and adoption each as an “act” of God’s free grace. It describes sanctification, however, as a “work” of God’s grace. I think the distinction is this: an act is instantaneous, a single divine intervention that is never repeated. A work, however, is an ongoing activity of God, a process. The suggestion is that God does not continually justify us or adopt us, but he does continually work within us to sanctify us.

This distinction describes well the biblical emphasis. We should remember, however, that all three of these divine activities play continuing roles in the history of redemption. Abraham, for example, was justified by faith apart from works, according to Romans 4:1–8. Paul here refers to Genesis 15:6. But James tells us that Abraham was also justified at a later time, when he obeyed God’s commandment to sacrifice his son (James

1. Compare my discussion of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in chapter 35.

2:21–23). God justifies us upon initial faith, but he continues to declare righteous our acts of obedience through life.

Similarly, our adoption is once and once for all. But Paul mentions a future adoption for which we wait, along with all creation (Rom. 8:23). There is an *already* and a *not yet* to our adoption. We belong to God's family, but our experience in that family continues to grow, and at one future point it will seem that we are adopted all over again.

So although the catechism presents sanctification as a continuing process, we find in Scripture that it, too, has an instantaneous beginning as well as a continuous development.

Definitive Sanctification

The instantaneous beginning of sanctification is called *definitive sanctification*, contrasted with the ongoing process of *progressive sanctification*.² The first is a single act of God that happens at a single point in time. The second is a continuing work of God with which he calls us to cooperate. This distinction reflects the fact we have noted, that for the believer holiness is both a fact and a command. Let us first look at definitive sanctification.

Definitive sanctification is a once-for-all event, simultaneous with effectual calling and regeneration, that transfers us from the sphere of sin to the sphere of God's holiness, from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God (Heb. 9:13–14; 10:10; 13:12). It is at this point that each of us joins the people of God. This is analogous to God's bringing Israel out of all the surrounding nations to be his holy people. It is at this point that we enter his very presence and find his welcoming smile, rather than his condemnation. So the NT says that all Christians are saints, that is, holy (Acts 20:32; Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). Sainthood does not belong to just a few special Christians, as on the Roman Catholic view. It belongs to all believers.

Definitive sanctification is based on the fact that we belong to Christ. We have also said that about justification and adoption. These are all aspects of our union with Christ. Remember from our discussion of effectual calling that God calls us into union with Christ. Paul expresses this often by the phrase "in Christ." We are justified in Christ, adopted in Christ, sanctified in Christ. We are set apart from all other people, holy, because we are in Christ. So in him we have been sanctified, past tense.

So Paul is able to say that when Christ died, we died with him. When he died for sin, we died to sin. So definitive sanctification involves a clean break with sin (Rom. 6:11; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:3). And as we have died to sin in Christ, we are raised to new life in his resurrection. This does not mean that believers are sinlessly perfect. John tells us plainly that if we say that we do not sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8, 10). But in Christ, God breaks our bondage, our slavery to sin (Rom. 6:14–23), so that it has no more dominion over us (Rom. 8:13). So now we can say no to Satan's temptations. Definitive sanctification (overlapping regeneration, of course) has given

2. In recent years, this distinction has been developed especially by John Murray. See his *MCW*, 2:277–317.

us a new basic reorientation of the mind, will, and affections, so that we have a new desire to do God's will.

Progressive Sanctification

But sanctification is not only that initial reorientation. It is also our gradual growth in holiness and righteousness, our progress in God's way, the way of good works. This is what we usually think of when we hear the word *sanctification*.

Definitive sanctification is a break with our sinful past. But as we've seen, it does not make us sinlessly perfect. We are not perfectly free from sin until our death or the last judgment (Phil. 3:12; 1 John 1:8, 10). As with other aspects of salvation, sanctification displays the tension of the *already* and the *not yet*. We are already saved through the finished work of Christ, but we must wait for the fulfillment of our salvation at the return of Jesus on the last day.

Some have thought that 1 John 3:6 teaches sinless perfection, but it does not. That belief might arise from the kJV translation, which reads, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." But this verse teaches only that believers will not sin *continually*, that is, they will not carry on a sinful lifestyle. The ESV translation reads, "No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him," and that is a better rendering of the Greek original.³ John knows that we sin daily, as he writes in 1 John 1:8 and 10, and Jesus tells us in the Lord's Prayer to ask forgiveness for our sins (Matt. 6:12; cf. 1 Kings 8:46; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20).

But we should not be complacent about the presence of sin in our lives. Rather, there is a battle to be fought, with God's help (1 Cor. 9:24–27).

So sanctification is not only a past event, but also an ongoing process. It begins in regeneration, and we can think of sanctification as the outworking of the new life given in regeneration. In that ongoing process, God works in us (1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20–21), but he also calls us to work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12–13). It is all of God, for all things are of God. Sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16–18, 22–23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2) on the basis of Christ, who is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). Notice again how the elements of the *ordo salutis* are aspects of our union with Christ.

The good works and attitudes that arise through sanctification are called "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22–23. So as we see ourselves growing in grace, we should thank and praise God. It is by his grace that we are able to grow at all.

Nevertheless, we should not wait passively for God to sanctify us. Some have taught that the way to holiness is to "let go and let God."⁴ But that idea is not biblical. In the first place, we don't need to "let God," for God is sovereign and does not need to wait for us to let go before he can work. And we should not let go, for God

3. John Murray, however, understands 1 John 3:6 differently, in *ibid.*, 282–83. He believes that John is speaking of a particular sin, the sin of disbelieving that Christ is come in the flesh (1 John 4:2).

4. This was the slogan of the Keswick Victorious Life teaching. See Andrew D. Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey & Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), for analysis and critique.

commands us to fight in the spiritual battle. So the paradox: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b–13). God does it all, but he does it (as he often does, as I emphasized in chapters 1, 7, and 35) by the use of human effort. Cf. 2 Peter 1:5–11.

Just as God told the children of Israel in Exodus 19 that they were already his holy people, but also commanded them to be holy as he is holy in Leviticus 19, so in definitive sanctification he tells us that we *are* his holy people, and then he commands us in progressive sanctification to *become* holy as he is holy.

So, as in many other contexts, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not opposed. The former works through the latter (as well as sometimes working above and beyond it). The latter always depends on the former. But our role in sanctification is never passive. Our work is to fight, to run the race, to pursue holiness.

We should beware of slogans that disparage one side or the other of this tension. “Sanctification by grace alone” minimizes our responsibility, while “synergistic sanctification” misses the sense in which *all* our progress in holiness is by God’s grace.

I have noted a tendency among some Christians to find some inconsistency between moral effort and justification by grace through faith. Some seem to think that “trying” to obey God, pursuing holiness, and so on are incompatible with trust in the finished work of Christ. One hears testimony such as “keeping this command [e.g., to love my neighbor] was something I could never do, so I took the biblical command as an occasion for repentance and for turning to the cross for forgiveness.” It is certainly true that we need God’s grace to love one another or to keep any divine command. But God does not give his commands in Scripture merely as occasions for repentance, or even as occasions to turn to the cross. He gives his commands for us to obey.⁵

So Scripture commands us to yield our lives to God (Rom. 6:19; Phil. 3:13–14; Col. 3:10; Heb. 12:1), to strive for holiness (Rom. 8:13; 2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15; 2 Peter 1:5; 1 John 3:3), to don the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10–20) in order to fight against Satan and his angels, to put to death our sinful dispositions (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5). We can win this battle, not by the sword, but by truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation. Our only offensive weapons are the Word of God and prayer. This may seem a puny arsenal to the rulers of this world, but God tells us that it has more power than any of those rulers. People sometimes say mockingly, “Well, we can always try prayer.” But God’s weapons are more powerful than anything in the mockers’ arsenal. A gun will subdue a man, but only the sword of God’s Word, wielded in prayer, will subdue Satan.

5. Compare my discussion of these issues in my article “Simple Obedience,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of John Frame* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013).

Means of Sanctification

Scripture describes the spiritual battle, the walk of faith, in many ways. To summarize, I will (of course) suggest three general categories of resources that God has provided to us; see fig. 43.2.

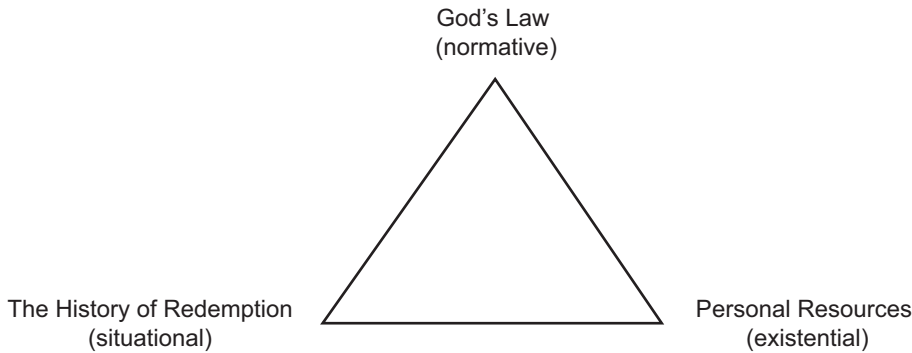


Fig. 43.2. Resources for the Walk of Faith

God's Law

First, God has provided us with a norm or standard to tell us what is right and what is wrong. His moral revelation is part of natural or general revelation (Rom. 1:18–32), but as we saw in chapter 24, fallen human beings suppress the truth in creation until they receive God's grace in Christ. When they come to believe, they are able to look at natural revelation through the “spectacles” of Scripture, and Scripture becomes their sufficient norm. Scripture is sufficient (chapter 26) in that it contains all the divine words that we need to do anything to the glory of God.

So when Scripture motivates us to pursue holiness, it often calls us to be obedient to God's commands—commands that for us are located in Scripture itself. As Joshua prepared to take possession of the Land of Promise, God said to him:

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:7–9)

Jesus, too, urged his disciples and all people to obey the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12; 19:18–19). Paul reminds us that God has redeemed us so that the law might be fulfilled in us:

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3–4)

In these passages, the law of God serves as the standard of what we should do in order to glorify God. And therefore it also provides a motivation for us to do what is right. When we learn that God has commanded something, that fact should move us to act on it (as in Josh. 1:7–9). Further, although we are not entirely free from sin, we know that through Christ God has given us the ability to obey the law (Rom. 8:4). God’s law, therefore, comes to us with the promise of a better way to live.

I am here advocating what has been called, especially in Reformed and Lutheran circles, the *third use of the law*. The first use is the use of the law to order civil society. The second is the use of the law to drive people to Christ. (In some accounts, the first and second are reversed.) The third use is the use of the law as a guide to believers. Some Lutherans rejected the third use because they thought that in Scripture the law serves only as “terror” and “threat.”⁶ But the prevailing view among Lutherans is that the third use is legitimate if it guides us by terrorizing us: making our sins vivid to drive us back to Christ again and again. The Reformed generally deny the premise that the law can serve only as terror and threat, though the Lutheran view is gaining some advocates in Reformed circles.

But there are some in both Lutheran and Reformed circles who hesitate to refer to the law in their quest for holiness, suspecting that considering the law will compromise their dependence on God’s grace. This suspicion is wrong. Paul tells us, “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). And it is a good thing for believers to meditate on the law:

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked
nor stands in the way of sinners
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps. 1:1–2)

The History of Redemption

The second way in which Scripture helps us in the quest for sanctification is by reminding us of what God has done for our salvation. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 begin by reminding Israel:

6. Lutherans distinguish sharply between law and gospel. The former instills terror of judgment without any indication of grace. It is all bad news and no good news. The gospel is opposite: a free promise of salvation through grace, without any threat. I do not agree with this construction, as I have argued in *DCL*, 182–92.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Ex. 20:1)

The passage then continues by setting forth God's commands. But the motivation for keeping the commands is God's great deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. So throughout Scripture God motivates his people to holiness by reminding us of what he has done to save us.

Most dramatic in this connection is Romans 6. Here, Paul has expounded the doctrine that we are saved entirely by grace apart from works. But that raises the question: "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). Paul replies:

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:2–4)

He goes on to emphasize that before we came to know Christ, we were slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6). When we died to sin in Christ, that bondage was broken. Our deepest desire is no longer to sin; rather, we are "obedient from the heart" (v. 17) and therefore "slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification" (v. 19).

So if we continue to sin, we are violating our very heart; we are doing what we most hate. It is not impossible for us to do precisely that, of course, as Paul indicates in Romans 7. But a sinful existence will create an intolerable tension between the believer's actions and his deepest desire. So we should consciously adopt the stance of those who are dead to sin and free from it:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Rom. 6:11–14)

Paul makes the same point more concisely in Colossians 3:1–4:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

In these passages, Paul applies our union with Christ to our sanctification. Again, the blessing of salvation is our relationship to Christ himself.

Our Personal Resources

But Scripture doesn't call us to restrict our meditation to events in the past. God has redeemed us in the past, but the repercussions of those past events continue to have great effects today, as I have already noted. We have died to sin and been raised to new life, but those events have changed our hearts, so that today our dispositions are entirely different. We have already experienced the first stages of what I have called *subjective soteriology*: regeneration, conversion, and now sanctification.

So it is not wrong to consider sanctification from a subjective, inward perspective. I have already mentioned the change of heart brought about by Christ (Rom. 6:17). That inner change is correlative to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The Spirit dominates the redeemed life. Believers walk "not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

The Spirit is sovereign, and as we have seen, he works mysteriously. He is not under our control. Yet the believer is able to make a conscious decision to follow the Spirit's leading. So Paul commands, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Again we note the subtle interaction between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

The Spirit bears "fruit": new traits of character that replace the "works of the flesh":

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22–25)

Although the Spirit's work is invisible and mysterious, therefore, we know in what direction he is moving, and we know how to follow him. Cultivating such fruit is what it means to walk in the Spirit. Cf. Rom. 8:1–17.

And it is important to recognize that our personal resources are not only individual. As I will emphasize in chapters 46–49, God brings individuals into a body of believers, the church. They, too, are resources for our sanctification. Not only the officers of the church, the elders and deacons, but all believers have the power and the responsibility to build one another up in the grace of Christ (Heb. 10:24–25). God gives to each member gifts for the edification of the church as a whole (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Col. 3:16). And it is in the church primarily that we encounter the means of grace: the Word, sacraments, and prayer.

We serve as resources to one another, not only by teaching and preaching, but also by living as examples. Scripture puts much emphasis on the example of Christ (as John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21) and the examples of characters in the biblical narrative (positive: Heb. 11; James 5:10; negative: Heb. 4:11).⁷ Leaders of the church are to be examples of sanctification to one another (1 Tim. 3; 4:12).

7. Hence I resist the too-prevalent notion that sermons should never use biblical characters as moral or spiritual examples.

Spiritual Exercises and Simple Obedience

Much of the current evangelical discussion of sanctification concerns proposed methods and techniques designed to help believers fight the spiritual warfare. That warfare is often difficult, and just as we are tempted by schemes for quick weight loss, so we are often led to enroll in methods that promise rapid progress in sanctification.

I have already referred to the “let go and let God” slogan of the Keswick Victorious Life teaching and have criticized it as unbiblical. This doctrine is a form of what theologians have called *quietism*, the view that in sanctification our proper role is entirely passive. A similar approach may be found in the Formula of Concord, the Lutheran confessional standard, wherein truly good works are never motivated by any command, threat, or reward, but are produced spontaneously by the Spirit within.⁸ This is perhaps the root of Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde’s view that “sanctification is thus simply *the art of getting used to justification*.”⁹ A number of Reformed writers have taken similar positions, thinking that an active pursuit of holiness is somehow inconsistent with justification by faith alone.

But as we have seen, Scripture opposes the notion that sanctification is passive, or even that it is simply an outworking of justification. As I indicated in the previous chapter, Protestant theology warns us against confusing justification and sanctification. Certainly God’s free justification is a significant motivation for ethical obedience, for it means that we do not need to earn God’s love in Christ. But the biblical writers never tell their readers simply to count on their justification as a way of evading the spiritual warfare.

I think part of the confusion is this: God has certainly accepted believers once and for all in Christ. They belong to him as his sons and daughters and can never be cast out. But there is another level of divine approval, arising from his fatherly discipline. The book of Hebrews emphasizes it:

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a

8. Epitome of the Formula of Concord 6.5. See my *DKG*, 189–91, for further discussion.

9. Gerhard Forde, “The Lutheran View,” in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 13 (emphasis his).

short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5–11)

We do not need to fear God's final judgment, but we should fear his fatherly displeasure.¹⁰ Hebrews and other books of the NT speak against our complacency and passivity, urging us to spiritual exertions:

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:12–14)

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:24–27)

Although God is fully pleased with the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf, still the NT calls us to "please God" (Rom. 8:8; Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 11:6). Since we have been saved by God's grace alone, we cannot be indifferent to his pleasure.¹¹

Certainly it is a good spiritual exercise to remind ourselves of our justification, or of the cross; certainly it is good to "preach the gospel to ourselves" and to repent of our idolatries (to mention some other approaches). But none of these exercises replaces the act of obedience itself. In the end, God expects us to obey his commands.

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Eccl. 12:13)¹²

10. It is also important (especially for the writer to the Hebrews) to keep in mind that some who are formally members of the church may not have true faith. It is possible that people who at one time are members of the church in good standing will at a later point apostatize. The warning passages of Hebrews and other NT books serve to urge us both to seek our Father's pleasure and to examine ourselves as to whether we are in fact believers. Self-examination, of course, should not become a morbid introspection, wallowing in our memories of past sins. Rather, it should be a simple inquiry whether we are on the Lord's side. For more discussion of this, see the following chapter on the assurance of salvation.

11. I have actually heard Christians say that it is wrong to try to please God because trying to do that is self-righteousness. Their argument is that God is already pleased with us for the sake of Christ, and we cannot please him further. But Scripture often urges us to please God, to seek his approval: Ps. 69:31; Prov. 16:7; Isa. 56:4; 1 Cor. 7:32; Gal. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:15; 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 11:6.

12. In a number of places, Scripture summarizes the law, as here: Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 13; Col. 3:14. Love, particularly, fulfills the law, and Jesus defines that as keeping his commandments (John 13:34–35; 14:15; etc.). Our whole duty toward God is obedience, motivated by love.

In the end, it's a matter of simple obedience.

Key Terms

Holiness
 Sanctification
 Definitive sanctification
 Progressive sanctification
 Three uses of the law
 Indwelling of the Spirit
 Fruit of the Spirit
 Keswick Victorious Life
 Fatherly discipline

Study Questions

1. Frame says that our justification depends in some way on our inner subjective change. Explain; evaluate.
2. How are holiness and righteousness different? In what very significant way are they alike?
3. Why does the catechism say that justification and adoption are “acts” of God’s grace, while sanctification is a “work” of God’s grace? Explain; evaluate.
4. Distinguish definitive and progressive sanctification, citing Scripture.
5. Given that we are not sinlessly perfect, what is the nature of the change wrought by sanctification?
6. Define and evaluate: “sanctification by grace alone”; “synergistic sanctification.”
7. Outline and discuss the relation of God’s sovereignty to human responsibility in sanctification.
8. Why do some Christians hesitate to refer to the law in their pursuit of holiness? Evaluate their view. What role should the law play in the believer’s sanctification?
9. How does the teaching of Romans 6 bear on our sanctification?
10. How can Paul command us to walk in the Spirit, given that the Spirit is sovereign and invisible?
11. Describe our individual and corporate resources for living godly lives.
12. Is sanctification a matter of “getting used to justification”? Argue pro or con.
13. Is it wrong to try to please God? Why might someone say this? Evaluate.

Memory Verses

Josh. 1:7–9: Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book

of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

Ps. 1:1–2: Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Eccl. 12:13: The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

John 14:15: If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Rom. 6:1–4: Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Rom. 8:3–4: For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

1 Cor. 9:24–27: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

Gal. 5:22–25: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Phil. 2:12–13: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Col. 3:1–4: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

1 Peter 1:15–16: But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Resources for Further Study

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PERSEVERANCE AND ASSURANCE

IN OUR CONSIDERATION of the application of redemption (*ordo salutis*), we have considered effectual calling and regeneration, the beginning of our experience of salvation in space and time. Effectual calling is God's act to bring us into fellowship with Christ, and regeneration describes the change that God works in us to become like Christ. Faith and repentance, sometimes together called *conversion*, describe our regenerate response to God's calling, as we turn to Christ as Lord and Savior (faith) and turn away from sin (repentance). Then comes the triad *justification*, *adoption*, and *sanctification*. In justification, God gives us a new legal standing before him. In adoption, he brings us into the family of God as his sons and daughters. In sanctification, he makes us saints, holy people, working out our regenerate nature to renew us in the image of Jesus.

In this chapter, we will consider *perseverance*, the doctrine that this new life continues to the end, indeed to eternity, and in the next *glorification*, which refers to the consummation of human nature in God's image. That consummation begins with effectual calling and continues through eternity. In this chapter, we will also discuss the problem of *assurance*: how do we know that we belong to Christ? Scripture says that those who belong to Christ persevere to the end, but how can we be sure of belonging to that number?

Perseverance

Let us first consider the doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints*, sometimes called the doctrine of *eternal security*. I use these two phrases as synonyms, though as we will see, they do carry somewhat different nuances with different people. Perseverance simply means that those who are truly regenerate, in saving union with Christ, can't lose their salvation. As WCF 17.1 puts it:

They, whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

In Matthew 10:21–22, Jesus describes a period of persecution for the church. He says:

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

As we will see, people do fall away under temptation, trial, and persecution. Salvation is for those who endure, who persevere. But Scripture teaches that everyone who is effectually called, regenerated, converted, justified, adopted, and sanctified by God will surely persevere to the end.

We can see that this is true from a number of statements in Scripture. In John 6:39–40, Jesus says:

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

So everyone who believes in Jesus—not hypocritically, but who sincerely believes—will have eternal life. Jesus will raise him up on the last day. So if you have believed in Jesus now, you cannot lose your salvation. Be confident that Jesus will raise you up on the last day.

Notice also John 10:27–29:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Nobody can snatch a believer out of God's hand.

These verses speak of eternal life in the future for those who believe today. But other passages put the point even more strongly: we have eternal life here and now, not only in the future: “Whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36); “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24); “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

So Paul is able to say that there is *now* no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). When we believe in Jesus, our sins are immediately forgiven, past, present, and future. At that point, every barrier is removed to eternal fellowship with God. So we will certainly persevere.

But remember that our salvation goes back even before the beginning of our faith, into eternity past. Salvation begins in election. This is an even more ultimate reason why we will persevere. In chapter 11, I quoted Romans 8 at some length. Note there how the apostle Paul connects election and perseverance.

Paul sees a golden chain: from God's foreknowledge and predestination in eternity past, to calling and justification, to glorification. Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ cannot fail to be glorified. So we hear the language of perseverance. No one can accuse us; no one can separate us from the love of Christ. When Paul writes about death, life, angels, rulers, the present and future, powers, height, depth, he knows what he is talking about. Many times he was beaten, left for dead, shipwrecked, persecuted. But he knows that nothing can separate him from Christ, because he has been predestined, called, and justified. You see how the doctrine of perseverance adds something important to the doctrine of assurance?

We should also note what Paul calls the "seal" of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13–14:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We receive the Holy Spirit at the beginning of our regenerate lives, and anyone who has the Holy Spirit has a guarantee of final perseverance.

All of this is to say, simply, that God completes the work he begins (Phil. 1:6). He guards every believer to the end. "By God's power [we] are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

Now, with all this biblical evidence before us, how can anybody doubt the doctrine of perseverance? Well, there is one major problem in this. That is that people sometimes do turn away from Christ after professing him. You probably know people who have fallen away, after seeming like faithful Christians for years. And such defections, called *apostasy*, occurred during the NT period as well. There were false professions, people who said "Lord, Lord" to Christ, but were "workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21–23). There were false brothers (2 Cor. 11:15, 26; Gal. 2:4), false branches on the Vine of Christ (John 15:1–2, 6), wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). There was, as in Jesus' parable, seed sown on rocky soil, which sprang up and looked healthy for a time, but eventually withered away (Mark 4:5–6, 16–17).

It can be difficult to tell whether a professing believer is true or false. Listen to Hebrews 6:4–8:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose

sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

This writer is speaking about false believers. But he describes them much as one might describe a true believer: repentant, enlightened, tasting the heavenly gift (possibly some supernatural gift—tongues, prophecy, healing), sharing the Spirit, tasting the goodness of the Word and the powers of the age to come (again, probably referring to miraculous events). So there are some Christians who believe that this passage describes true believers, and that these true believers do not persevere, but fall away. That position, in my view, however, contradicts that great number of Bible texts we discussed earlier.

Can we regard the people in this passage as false believers? I think we can. Think of Judas Iscariot, chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve disciples. By joining Jesus' band of followers, he turned away from the sinful world, a kind of repentance. Doubtless he received the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, either from Jesus or from John. He was enlightened by hearing Jesus' teaching. He tasted the heavenly gift as he watched Jesus heal and prophesy.¹ He shared the Spirit, at least as much as King Saul did when he prophesied, and people asked, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:11). Judas also tasted the good word of Christ and Jesus' miraculous powers, the powers of the age to come, the powers of the coming kingdom. Judas himself preached Christ and worked miracles in his name (Matt. 10:1–42). But he proved to be reprobate, unbelieving. He betrayed Jesus, who said of him that it would have been better if he had not been born. Externally, he seemed to be a believer, and indeed, he had many advantages that believers have, hearing Jesus' words and watching his miracles.

Perhaps even more to the focus of the letter to the Hebrews: OT Israel was much like this—enlightened in comparison with the other nations, experiencing all sorts of heavenly gifts, powers, and words. But many of the Israelites were wicked and turned against God.

Hebrews 10:26–31 also speaks of apostasy. Here, the writer says that the apostate "has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace." The most difficult point here is the clause that says the apostates were once sanctified by the blood of Christ. How can that be said of someone who falls short of final salvation?

Well, the language of sanctification means a setting apart. It can refer to moral cleansing, as we saw in the doctrine of sanctification in the previous chapter. But it can also refer to other kinds of setting apart. God said that Israel was his holy people because he had set it apart from all the nations of the world; yet Israel was not always sanctified in the sense of being obedient to God. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul says that children of believers are holy, even though they may not be old enough to perform good works. I believe that those in Hebrews 10 are people who became part of God's

1. God does temporarily give gifts of the Spirit to people who are not finally saved. Review here our discussion of common grace in chapter 12.

holy people, separated from all others. As Israel was set apart by sacrifices, those in Hebrews 10 were set apart by the blood of Christ, which separates the visible church from everyone else in the world. But God did not change their hearts, and they came to despise the blood of Christ, as Judas Iscariot certainly did.²

So people can have all these blessings without being saved, and so without the ability to persevere. The apostates of Hebrews 6 did not have regenerate hearts or true faith. So in Hebrews 6:9, the writer says, “Yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.” The writer believes that his readers have regenerate hearts and true faith, and so they are saved and will be saved in the end. He knows that the apostates he has spoken of do not have gifts of God sufficient for salvation.

In our own time, this passage applies to many who make a minimal commitment to Christ. How many nominal church members there are in our time! How many have “come forward” at an evangelistic meeting, or even receive baptism and join a church, only to lose interest shortly afterward. And there are some today like Judas, or like the Pharisees, who even get very active in the Lord’s work, who may become pillars of the church over a period of years, whose hearts are not right with God, who have never experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

Some people have taught that anyone who makes a minimal commitment to Christianity—for example, by coming forward, professing faith, being baptized—will certainly be saved in the end, even if the person then renounces Christ and lives a sinful life. That, of course, is not biblical teaching. In Scripture, those who persevere are those who are regenerate by God’s Spirit and who grow in grace. We cannot read the hearts of people, so we sometimes fail to discern that growth, or the lack of it. But God sees, and in the end it’s God who will judge.

The view that those who make a minimal commitment will certainly be saved is sometimes called *eternal security*, though not everyone who uses this phrase teaches this error. Perseverance is not guaranteed to everyone who professes faith, only to those who really trust Christ. Indeed, some who make initial professions of faith get involved in such serious sins that they should be cast out of the church, excommunicated (1 Cor. 5). Excommunication means that someone whom the church originally considered to be a believer will no longer be considered as such.

But this teaching is not intended to frighten believers into morbid self-examination. Christians sometimes experience periods of doubt over whether they have “truly believed.” But Hebrews 6 and 10 are not about immature believers who are trying to serve Christ but who struggle with sins in their lives. The apostates of Hebrews 6 and 10 were wolves in sheep’s clothing. Their profession was playacting. You remember how the disciples trusted Judas with the treasury, and he used it for his personal wants. He put on a show of caring for the poor, when all he cared about was himself. The Hebrews 6 apostates never confessed their sins and trusted Jesus for forgiveness.

2. In terms of our discussion in chapter 11, these were historically elect, but not eternally elect.

To those who are not playacting, but have faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, God promises to preserve them to the very end, and into all eternity. If you are concerned about your faithfulness and devotion to Christ, your concern is a mark of true faith. Wolves in sheep's clothing are not concerned about such things.

Assurance of Salvation

We have seen that those who are truly elect, called, regenerate, and believing are saved from sin through the work of Christ and can never lose their salvation. This doctrine is intended to be a great comfort to Christians. But for many, this is where the trouble begins, for they question whether indeed they are truly elect, called, regenerate, and believing. How can somebody know, beyond tentative guessing, that he himself belongs to Christ?

Assurance naturally follows the discussion of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and our perseverance in these blessings. For our assurance is based on the reality of these three divine blessings in our lives.

WCF 18.1–2 tells us this about assurance:

Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love him in sincerity, endeavoring to walk in all good conscience before him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.

First, let us note that God intends for us to have assurance. He calls us to draw near to him “in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22). Scripture says that we *know* God, not merely that we hope or suppose that he exists. God’s promises are absolutely sure, for they are based on his own oath, which cannot lie (Heb. 6:13, 18). This is “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (v. 19). Similarly, Paul (2 Tim. 3:16–17) and Peter (2 Peter 1:19–21) speak of Scripture as God’s own words, which provide sure guidance in a world where false teaching abounds. God’s special revelation is certain, and we ought to be certain about it. The apostle John writes to believers “that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13).

On the other hand, the Bible presents doubt largely negatively. It is a spiritual impediment, an obstacle to doing God’s work (Matt. 14:31; 21:21; 28:17; Acts 10:20 *kjv*; 11:12 *kjv*; Rom. 14:23; 1 Tim. 2:8 *kjv*; James 1:6). In Matthew 14:31 and Romans 14:23, it is the

opposite of faith and therefore a sin. Of course, this sin, like other sins, might remain with us through our earthly life. But we should not be complacent about it. Just as the ideal for the Christian life is perfect holiness, the ideal for the Christian mind is absolute certainty about God's revelation.³

We should not conclude, however, that doubt is *always* sinful. Matthew 14:31 and Romans 14:23 (and indeed the others I have listed) speak of doubt in the face of clear special revelation. To doubt what God has clearly spoken to us is wrong. But in other situations, it is not wrong to doubt. In many cases, in fact, it is wrong for us to claim knowledge, much less certainty. Indeed, often the best course is to admit our ignorance (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33–36). Paul is not wrong to express uncertainty about the number of people he baptized (1 Cor. 1:16). Indeed, James tells us, we are always ignorant of the future to some extent, and we should not pretend that we know more about it than we do (James 4:13–16). Job's friends were wrong to think they knew the reasons for his torment, and Job himself had to be humbled as God reminded him of his ignorance (Job 38–42).

But as to our salvation, God wants us to *know* that we know him (1 John 5:13). In the Roman Catholic view, you cannot be fully assured of your salvation because salvation is partly based on works, and your works can always pull you down. But in Protestant theology, as in Scripture, salvation is the work of God. Nobody can destroy it, not even the believer's sins. Those who are justified by faith in Christ have the right to believe that they belong to God forever.

Grounds of Assurance

But *how* can we be assured that we are saved? We generally hold that only the Bible teaches absolutely certain truths. But your name is not in the Bible, nor is mine. So on what basis can we have what the confession calls the "infallible" assurance that our faith is true and that we belong to God?

The confession lists three realities that our infallible assurance is founded on. These correspond to justification, sanctification, and adoption, respectively—putting these in a different order from the order in which we studied them. First, the confession speaks of "the divine truth of the promises of salvation." Clearly, God promises eternal life to all who receive Christ (John 1:12; 3:15–18, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40, 47; etc.). His promises are absolutely infallible. How can we doubt them? To be sure, the promises don't explicitly contain my name or yours. But they contain our names *implicitly*; that is, they *apply* to us.

Let me give you a similar example: When the eighth commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal," it doesn't mention my name. It doesn't say that *John Frame* should not steal. Does that mean that I am free to take your wallet? Well, of course not. Because "Thou shalt not steal" means "*Everybody* should not steal," or "*Nobody* should steal." That includes John Frame. So although my name is not in the text explicitly, the text

3. Compare the discussion of our assurance of the truth of Scripture in chapter 28 and of the certainty of knowledge in chapters 29–32.

applies to me, which is to say that my name is there *implicitly*. Same with the promises of salvation. God promises salvation to *everybody* who believes. If you believe, then, that promise is yours. God promises to save *you*. And that promise is infallible, certain. You dare not doubt it.

Justification comes from faith, from trusting God's promise, just as Abraham did, when he believed what God said, even when God's promise seemed impossible. If you believe God's promise, you are justified, and you also have a right to assurance. Believing God's promise is the instrument of justification, as I put it in chapter 42, the essence of justifying faith (Rom. 4:3, 20–21; Gal. 3:7–9). And continuing in faith brings assurance (Col. 1:23; Heb. 3:14; 6:12). This does not mean, of course, that anyone who raises his hand at an evangelistic meeting is saved. People sometimes do that hypocritically. Faith is an inward reality. But if it is there, you have a right to be assured. If you can honestly say, "I am trusting Jesus for my salvation, not my own works, not my family, not my church, but Jesus," then you can say without doubt that you are saved. And as we saw earlier in this chapter, you cannot lose that salvation.

The second basis of assurance that the confession mentions is "the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made." This ground corresponds to the doctrine of sanctification. When we introspect in this way, we are asking whether the Lord is indeed sanctifying us.

Now, under the first basis of assurance, I mentioned God's promises. God's promises include a promise of new life, of regeneration and sanctification. God has promised to make his people holy (1 Peter 1:15–16; 2 Peter 1:4). So as we observe what God is doing within us, as we observe our own progress in sanctification, we "make [our] calling and election sure," as Peter says (2 Peter 1:10–11).

Now, I know that self-examination can be a discouraging business. When we look at ourselves, we see continuing sin, as well as the effects of grace. So we wonder how we can ever gain assurance by self-examination. Many say that we should not look at ourselves, but that we should look beyond ourselves, outward, at the work of Christ, at his word of promise. It is important to remember that the object of our faith is Christ, not faith itself.

That was what we advised under the first ground of assurance, and certainly we should not look inward without looking outward at the same time. But it is important not only to look at God's promises, but to see how God is fulfilling those promises within us. The continuing presence of sin should not discourage us, because God does not promise to make us sinlessly perfect in this life. But he does promise growth in grace, growth in holiness. When we see that, it increases our confidence that God's promises apply to us. And if we don't see that, it is a danger signal. In that case, we should seriously ask ourselves whether we have understood the promises of God. If we see ourselves dominated by sinful patterns, we should ask whether we have really trusted Christ as *Lord* and Savior.

The third ground of assurance, corresponding to the doctrine of adoption, is "the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the

children of God.” This confessional statement comes right out of Romans 8:16–17. This is to say that in the end, our assurance is supernatural. Note in Romans 8 that it is not only the witness of our own spirit, but something over and above that, a witness of God’s Spirit *with* our spirit, that we are the children of God. Our scrutiny of God’s promises and our own sanctification, in the end, is fallible. We make mistakes in our judgments. But the Spirit never makes a mistake. So he persuades us that what we observe in God’s Word and in our own lives is really true, really evidence of grace.

In chapter 28, I spoke of the Spirit’s work in illuminating God’s Word to us. I called that work *existential revelation*. His work in giving us assurance is no different from that. He is not whispering in our ears some new truths that are not found in the Bible. Rather, he is helping us to understand the promises of God in the Bible, to believe those promises, and to see that they apply to us.

Note the triadic structure of these three aspects of assurance, corresponding to justification, sanctification, and adoption, and therefore to God’s authority, presence, and control. This suggests that these three grounds of assurance are not independent of one another, but that they work together, that each requires the others. And that is indeed the way we should look at it. The Spirit’s witness enables us to be sure of the promises of God and the fruits of our sanctification. The promises of the Word are the promises of the Spirit, who inspired the Word, and he continues to speak through the Word. Our sanctification helps us better to appreciate and apply the promises of God to ourselves. See fig. 44.1.

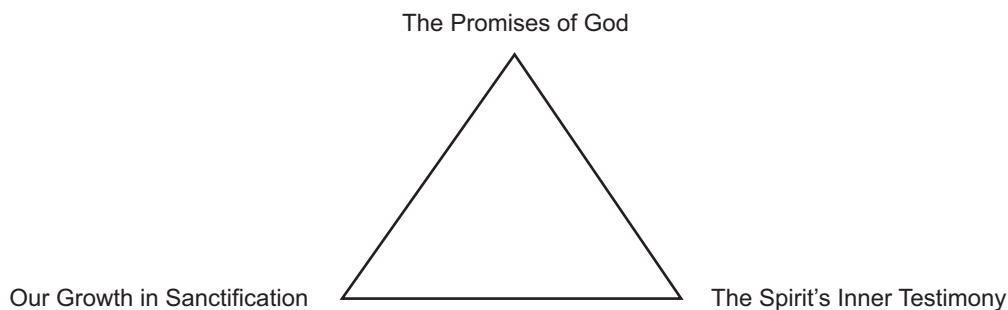


Fig. 44.1. Means of Assurance

Given these powerful resources, how can a Christian ever lack assurance? Yet we sometimes do seem to fluctuate between assurance and doubt. The Reformed confessions look at this problem from two perspectives. HC 21 says that assurance is of the essence of faith: you can’t really have faith without having assurance. And that is true in a way. If you believe in Jesus, as I said earlier, you cannot doubt that his promises are true. And if you believe in him, you cannot doubt that those promises apply to you, because they apply to everyone who believes.

But the WCF differs somewhat from the HC. It says (18.3–4), “This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it,” and then:

True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken, diminished, and intermitted; as, by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and grieveth the Spirit; by some sudden or vehement temptation, by God’s withdrawing the light of his countenance, and suffering even such as fear him to walk in darkness and to have no light: yet are they never so utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the meantime, they are supported from utter despair.

Note the difference from the HC: the Westminster statement says that assurance does not *so* belong to the essence of faith as to preclude periods of doubt. The bigger picture is that if we believe in Christ, we have assurance in our heart; but that assurance can be weakened by sin of various kinds, so that our psychological feeling of assurance has its ups and downs. Assurance is logically implied in faith, but notoriously we miss logical implications. Sin sometimes weakens our confidence that our faith is genuine. But God has given us adequate resources to return to a state of full assurance. He has given us his promises, his sanctifying work, and the Spirit’s testimony. We have a right to assurance if we believe God’s promises. When we are in doubt, we should keep coming back to those resources, and to the means of grace, which we will discuss in chapter 48: the Word, Christian fellowship, and prayer.

Key Terms

Perseverance
 Eternal security
 Apostasy
 Assurance of salvation
 Promises of salvation
 Fruits of sanctification
 Inner testimony of the Spirit

Study Questions

1. Do those who believe in Christ necessarily persevere to the end? Cite biblical texts to defend your answer.
2. What is the major problem with the doctrine of assurance? Cite biblical references.
3. Can Hebrews 6:4–8 refer to false believers? Analyze clause by clause. Can you relate this passage to any historical examples?
4. Same for Hebrews 10:26–31.

5. Frame says about the apostasy texts, “But this teaching is not intended to frighten believers into morbid self-examination.” Why not?
6. “God wants us to *know* that we know him.” How do we know that?
7. Enumerate the grounds of assurance mentioned in the WCF. Does Scripture warrant these? How?
8. Show how the three grounds of salvation can be diagrammed as a Frame-triangle.
9. Since we continue to sin in many ways, how can self-examination contribute to assurance?
10. Why is the Spirit’s witness to our sonship so important?
11. Describe the difference between the HC and the WCF as to the nature of assurance. Are these reconcilable? How? Or why not?

Memory Verses

John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

John 6:39–40: And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 10:27–29: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

Eph. 1:13–14: In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

1 John 5:13: I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

Resources for Further Study

Frame, John M. *DKG*.

———. *DWG*, 297–327, 615–40.

GLORIFICATION

SINCE BELIEVERS PERSEVERE to the end, their inevitable final blessing is glory. So we discuss glorification, appropriately, at the end of the *ordo salutis*. But there is also a sense in which glorification occurs here and now, as we will see.

First, let's review what we know about the glory of God. Glory is God's visible presence among people. Glory is an adornment: a woman's hair is her crowning glory (1 Cor. 11:15). Woman is the glory of man (11:7). God always has the adornment of a great light, light that people often see when they meet God. God's glory was in the cloud that led Israel through the wilderness (Ex. 16:6–10). It shone on Mount Sinai (24:16), and then it came and dwelled in the midst of Israel, in the tabernacle, and later in the temple (29:43; 40:34). This indwelling presence of God was called the *shekinah*, the Hebrew word meaning "settle down, abide, dwell." So in the glory, God dwelled as Lord among his people. You remember God's lordship attribute of covenantal presence. His glory is a form of that presence. In the NT, Jesus is God tabernacling with his people (John 1:14). He is our *shekinah*.

Now, God wants human beings to glorify him. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do," says Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "do all to the glory of God." Cf. Matt. 5:16. That sounds as though we are to increase God's glory by what we do. But is that possible? Isn't God's glory infinite? How can we add anything to the glory of God?

Well, that is mysterious. Cornelius Van Til called it the "full-bucket problem." We can put it this way: given the vast importance of God, how can human actions have any importance at all? But as we have seen, God's greatness doesn't exclude a subordinate greatness for human beings. God's sovereignty doesn't exclude human responsibility.

It is hard to understand literally what it means for us to glorify God, but on the level of the metaphor, we can think of it this way: We are God's image, and so he wants us to reflect back the glory shining out of him. When that reflected glory shines from us, back to him, we become more like God: both God and we have glory shining out of us. And God receives more light because we reflect it back to him. So we can be said to glorify God.

Returning to a more literal description of this process: remember that *glory* refers to all of God's perfections, such as his love, grace, goodness. For us to glorify God is to be holy as he is holy, good as he is good, loving as he is loving. To glorify God is to image him. Remember that the image of God is both a fact and a norm. It is a fact, what we are, how God made us. But it is also a norm, a duty, a responsibility. God wants us to be like him, for he says, "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44–45).

And glory is also one of the blessings of salvation, the *ordo salutis*. For God not only asks us to glorify him, but ordains that we will. Hard as it is to imagine that we will reflect God's glory and thereby glorify him, Scripture says that it will happen to everyone who is joined to Christ by faith.

Present Glorification

As with many other doctrines in the *ordo salutis*, this one has a present and a future aspect. Let's look first at our present glorification. Psalm 8 speaks of God's creation of human beings in glorious terms. The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 8 in Hebrews 2:7–8 as follows: "You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." In one sense, that is true of all human beings. God has made us in his image and to have dominion over the whole earth. So we are like God, and we play a divine role. As God has dominion over the whole creation, so Adam was to take dominion of all the earth in God's name.

But as we know, Adam failed to take dominion as God commanded. He sought to glorify himself rather than his Creator. So redemption must restore to us the glory that we forfeited by sin. Jesus glorified his disciples. In John 17:22, he prayed to his Father, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one." In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." In John 17:22, glorification is in the past. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, it is in the present. Cf. 1 Peter 1:8; 2 Peter 1:3.

This is one way in which the Bible talks about the benefits of salvation, as a great light reflected from God, more and more reflected back to him. Scripture also uses this image of glory in regard to the ministry of the gospel. Paul's ministry glorifies the church (Eph. 3:10), and the church glorifies him in return (1 Thess. 2:20). So the ministry of the new covenant exceeds the glory of the old (2 Cor. 3:9).

Through that ministry of the gospel, we even now partake of that glory that will be revealed: "So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed" (1 Peter 5:1).

Future Glorification

But most biblical references to glorification place it in the future. Like most of God's other blessings, there is a beginning in this life and a consummation at the end, an *already* and a *not yet*, as the theologians say. Present glorification is usually presented as

a moral conformity to God's will. Future glorification is often the glorification of the *body*. Note the large number of passages on this subject (Rom. 8:11, 18–19, 22–23; 1 Cor. 15:42–44; 2 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 3:21). Scripture is not ashamed of the human body, as some philosophers and religions have been. It recognizes that the human body is weak, weary, and sick because of the fall. But it also recognizes that because of Christ, our bodies, not just our souls, will be raised in glory—never again to experience suffering, sickness, or death. The resurrection body will be imperishable, without corruption, powerful. It will be spiritual—not in the sense of being immaterial, for it will be quite material. It will be spiritual, rather, in being fully dominated by the Spirit of God, like Jesus (1 John 3:2).

More generally, our glorification will be a consummation of human nature in God's image, humanity as God intended for it to be (Rom. 2:10; 5:2; 9:23; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:27; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 2:10; 1 Peter 1:7; 5:10). We cannot now imagine how wonderful it will be, how wonderful we will be, and, indeed, how wonderful even those we consider lowliest will be in their glorified bodies.

He rewards us with a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). That image might be cause for pride as we look forward to it. But look at how Peter deals with this promise (1 Peter 5:1–4):

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

For Peter, the coming glory should motivate elders to be examples to the people in their churches. They should not seek their own gain, or to dominate their brothers and sisters, but to serve them, as Jesus taught in Matthew 20. We can humbly serve one another in this life, knowing that our crown will come with Jesus. This is the time for us to be willing to suffer, knowing that the glory is coming later (Rom. 8:18–39; 1 Peter 1:11).

But there is a glory even now, as we've seen: the glory of serving Jesus and one another, the glory of being willing to suffer for his sake.

Partaking in the Divine Nature

The biblical doctrine of glorification, I think, has been the main motivation for some theologians (especially the tradition from Irenaeus and Eastern Orthodoxy today) to speak of our sanctification in terms of *theosis*, or “deification.” One text of Scripture especially has led many to this formulation:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped

from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3–11)

Note especially verse 4, “that . . . you may become partakers of the divine nature.” That sounds to some as if it compromises the Creator-creature distinction on which I have placed much weight in this book (see especially chapter 3). Most people who speak in terms of deification say that they are not at all violating this distinction. But they do want to draw metaphysical conclusions from the passage, saying, for example, that we cannot become God, but we can possess divine “energies.” This terminology is quite obscure and, in my mind, somewhat dangerous.

The passage itself is not at all metaphysical, but ethical. Recall my argument in chapter 36 that, contrary to Roman Catholic doctrine, sin is not a metaphysical derangement of human faculties but personal rebellion—ethical disobedience against God. Similarly, in 2 Peter 1:3–11 the writer’s interest is not man’s metaphysical nature, but the ethical qualities fulfilling God’s promises to us, by which we can “make [our] calling and election sure” (v. 10).

The reference to the divine nature in verse 4 should therefore be seen as God’s ethical attributes, reflected in us as we are renewed in the image of Christ. It is in that way that we can “partake” of the divine nature. We share it as we reflect God’s glory and do the things he does.

Glory with God and with Christ

The WSC famously says in its first question and answer that “man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” So although our glorification comes at the end of the *ordo salutis*, we must not think of the goal of our life as merely to glorify ourselves, even if that glory comes from the reflection of God’s glory. As John Murray says:

When we think of the glory of God as the chief end in the goal of sanctification, we must appreciate the extent to which God will be glorified in the glorification of his people. . . . This great truth, that the glorification of the saints has not only as its chief end the glory of God, but is really constituted by the exhibition and vindication of the glory of God, is illustrated by the word of the apostle when he says that “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). There is good

reason for believing that “the glory of God” refers to God’s own glory (possessive genitive; cf. John 11:4; Rom. 1:23; 15:7 . . .), and not to the glory that comes from God and is bestowed upon us (cf. Rom. 2:7, 10; 8:18, 21; 9:23b . . .). So when Paul says, “We rejoice in hope of the glory of God,” he represents the eschatological finale of the believer’s hope as hope of the manifestation of God’s own glory (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10). This is simply to say that the theocentric interest of the believer is paramount in the hope which constitutes the completion of the redemptive process.¹

Murray continues by saying that our glorification in the NT is specifically a glorification with Christ himself (Rom. 8:17, 29–30). Christ is glorified as the “firstborn among many brothers” (8:29), and Murray adds:

We thus see how, in the final realization of the goal of sanctification, there is exemplified and vindicated to the fullest extent, an extent that staggers our thought by reason of its stupendous reality, the truth inscribed upon the whole process of redemption, from its inception in the electing grace of the Father (cf. Eph. 1:4; Rom. 8:29) to its consummation in the adoption (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:5), that Christ in all his offices as Redeemer is never to be conceived of apart from the church, and the church is not to be conceived of apart from Christ. There is correlativity in election, there is correlativity in redemption once for all accomplished, there is correlativity in the mediatorial ministry which Christ continues to exercise at the right hand of the Father, and there is correlativity in the consummation, when Christ will come the second time without sin for those who look for him unto salvation. This is the goal of sanctification; this is the hope it enshrines, and thereby its demands upon us are invested with sanctions of surpassing glory.²

There is, then, more to be said about glorification in our later discussions of heaven (chapter 50) and of the return of Christ (chapter 51).

Key Terms

Glory of God

Shekinah

Full-bucket problem

Already and not yet

Crown of glory

Theosis

Deification

Energies

Study Questions

1. MCW, 2:314–15.

2. Ibid., 2:316–17.

1. “Jesus is our *shekinah*.” Explain; evaluate.
2. If God is all-glorious, what can it mean for us to glorify him?
3. Relate *glory* and *image*.
4. Is glorification only a future hope, or is it a blessing for our lives today? Explain.
5. Does glorification pertain to the *body*? Explain how, or why not.
6. Is it possible for human beings to “partake in the divine nature”? How? Or why not? Explain how 2 Peter 1:3–11 bears on this question.
7. Discuss the relationship between our glorification and the glorification of God himself, and specifically of Jesus Christ.

Memory Verses

Rom. 5:2: Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

1 Cor. 10:31: Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

2 Cor. 3:18: And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

1 Peter 5:1–4: So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

2 Peter 1:3–4: His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Resources for Further Study

Frame, John M. *DCL*, 298–313 (on man’s “chief end”).

Murray, John. *MCW*, 2:305–17.