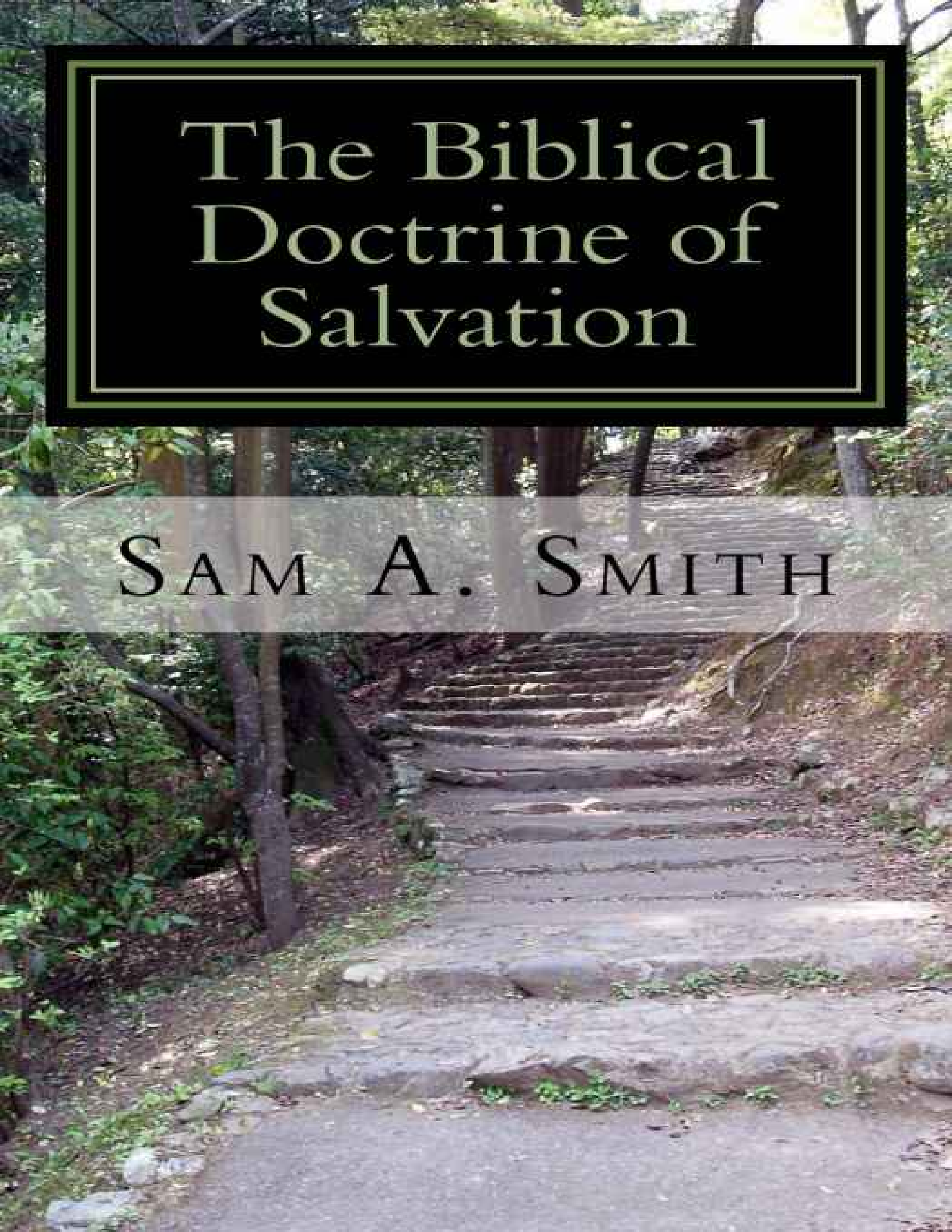

The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation

Sam A. Smith

The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation:
Why Man Needs to be Saved, and How God Accomplishes the Task

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Biblical Reader Communications

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Man

Man's nature

Students of the Bible have long debated the meaning of Genesis 1:26-27, where it says that God created man in his own image. What does this mean? The obvious place to look for an answer is to ask: In what ways does man's nature reflect God's nature? Of course, man is intelligent and self-aware, and while animals exhibit a level of intelligence, they don't build spaceships, computers, or nuclear reactors, and they don't write encyclopedias or novels; and so far as we know, they don't contemplate the nature of their own existence, or God's existence. Man is also "emotive," that is, capable of experiencing emotions. Some have suggested that ascriptions of emotions to God in the Bible are simply "anthropopathisms" (figures of speech in which a human emotion is ascribed to something incapable of emotion), but there is no biblical basis for saying that. Why would we think that God has no capacity for emotion? If God has no capacity for emotion, how do we explain that he created man with such a capacity? Psychologists tell us that people with little or no emotional capacity are seriously handicapped, unable to develop healthy relationships, and far more likely to engage in sociopathic behavior. Emotions are an important part of our nature. Of course, like everything else, man's emotions, and his ability to manage them, have been negatively impacted by the fall, and further impacted by personal experiences. Man is also volitional, or "willful," having the capacity to make choices, including good choices and evil choices. Adam and Eve originally had the capacity to originate righteousness by choosing to love God more than self. While the fall has rendered man in his present state unable to exercise that capacity, it was part of his original constitution. In the present state even redeemed sinners can only perform truly righteous acts by the enabling work of the Holy Spirit. While it may appear to fallen men that they possess a free will, their choices are limited to the range of choices consistent with a fallen nature. Thus, while fallen men do exercise choice, they cannot choose to be righteous. (This will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.)

A complex constitution

Historically, students of the Bible have been divided over how many components there are to man's constitution, and to a lesser degree over the function of those components. Some think that man is dichotomous, having two basic parts (soul {also referred to as "spirit"}, and body), while others think that man is trichotomous, having three distinct parts (spirit, soul, and body). The difference centers on whether man's immaterial nature can be subdivided.

a. Dichotomy

The arguments for dichotomy are as follows:

1) God breathed into man a living soul (Gen. 2:7), which seems to imply a simple (unitary) immaterial nature.

2) In some passages "soul" or "spirit" seems to be used to refer to the immaterial nature generally (Gen. 41:8 cf. Ps. 42:6; Mt. 10:28 cf. 27:50); thus these appear to be two names for the same thing.

3) In some passages body and soul are spoken of as constituting the entire man (Mt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 5:1-5, esp. v. 5).

4) Some contend that man is conscious of only two parts of his nature, the immaterial and the material. (Contrary to this, see: Romans 7:15-25.)

b. Trichotomy

The arguments for trichotomy are:

1) Some biblical statements make a clear distinction between spirit and soul (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12).

2) The arguments used in favor of dichotomy can be explained as figures of speech in which either soul or spirit is used figuratively to represent the entire immaterial nature, which is actually composed of two elements.

Interestingly, dichotomy and trichotomy can be two ways of looking at the same information. Since soul and spirit together comprise man's

immaterial nature, the question of whether man is tripartite or bipartite is a matter of how specific one wants to be. Some passages (mostly in the New Testament) distinguish between soul and spirit, others (mostly in the Old Testament) do not. This is not a contradiction; it's simply a matter of specificity. Some New Testament truths, such as sanctification, require a higher degree of specificity.

Man's original moral state

According to the biblical account, man was made sinless. That does not mean that he was righteous. Righteousness is a positive quality obtained by obedience to the will of God. Had Adam and Eve passed the moral test afforded them in the Garden, they would have become righteous, but that did not happen. Nevertheless, they were sinless. A sinless creature can move in either direction; he or she can choose to yield in obedience to God's will and become righteous, in which case they become inclined toward righteousness (*i.e.,* righteousness becomes their nature), or they can choose to sin, in which case their nature becomes inclined toward sin. Only our first parents had this option. As we will see, all of their offspring were conceived after the fall and were born with corrupt, sinful natures.

The proof of man's original sinlessness can be seen from the following: 1) Man, being a direct creation of God, could not have been sinful originally unless God made him that way. For God to make man sinful would be inconsistent with his holy nature. 2) The biblical record of creation indicates that everything God made, including man, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). 3) It is apparent from the account of man's fall in Genesis 3:1-24 that man's sin originated in his moral choice made in the Garden. It is important to recognize that the fall of the human race was the result of Adam's sin, not Eve's (Rom. 5:12-21), though Eve's choice resulted in her own fall.

The fall of man

The Genesis account

An understanding of the fall of man and its consequences is essential in understanding many other important truths, especially truths concerning salvation. The fall of man (sometimes referred to as "original sin") is derived from a literal understanding of the Genesis record. Those who hold to an evolutionary view of man's origin almost invariably deny the fall. Apart from an understanding and acceptance of original sin, it is impossible to understand man's dilemma (spiritual, intellectual, and physical). Also, apart from an understanding and acceptance of the fall we have no basis for understanding and appreciating the atoning work of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). Our entire concept of the message of the Bible, and hence, Christianity, stands or falls on our view of the fall of man, and that view rests on the validity of the Genesis record.

The particulars of the fall

Although Satan tempted Eve, his real target was Adam and Adam's race (we will see why this is true later). Satan struck at Eve because he knew he could leverage Adam's love for Eve against his love for God. Satan deceived Eve by casting doubt on God's goodness, suggesting that God was withholding something desirable from her (Gen. 3:4-5). Satan's deception also involved a direct contradiction of God's word to Adam and Eve (v. 4). Satan attributed evil motives to God, suggesting that God told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree because he didn't want them to discover that they could be like him (v. 5). Satan also made deceptive promises to Eve, telling her that if she ate of the fruit, she would be like God (v. 5). Satan's tactic as seen in this temptation has been repeated countless times throughout history. He attacks where we are weakest. His method is simple, but effective: he pits one affection against another, entices us to disbelieve God's goodness, incites us to actions that contradict God's clear commands, and holds out deceptive promises about the outcome.

The consequences of the fall

In surveying the consequences of the fall, we need to distinguish between types of consequences. Immediate consequences begin instantly, remote consequences happen in time; some consequences are natural (cause and effect), and others are the result of divine judgment. Adam and Eve's sin involved all of these.

a. Immediate consequences

Adam and Eve immediately sensed that something had changed. Whereas previously they had no self-consciousness, they now felt vulnerable, exposed, naked, corrupt, and ashamed (Gen. 3:7). Of course there was nothing wrong with their nakedness; they were naked before. The problem now was that in their fallen state they experienced alienation, both from God and from one another (vv. 8-10). For the first time they experienced a fear and dread of God and repulsion to his holiness. They didn't want to be in his presence. This was evidence of their spiritual death, for at the very moment of their sin, the indwelling presence of God was withdrawn. Their fellowship (the life giving union that existed) was instantly terminated. There arose within Adam and Eve a self-serving and self-preserving instinct (which undoubtedly contributed to their own sense of insecurity), and they began to pass the blame for their actions (vv. 12-13). Before their sin, Adam and Eve had experienced a deep unity at every level of spirit, soul, and body, now they were left with only a psychophysical unity. The flame of their relationship withered to merely a smoldering ember of what it had been. The relationship between the man and woman would now be strained and burdensome as a result of the fall (v.16). Any worldview that minimizes the distinct and complementary nature of men and women denies the truths taught in the account of man's creation and fall. (Note the connection between modern feminism and homosexuality: If woman is not a distinct, uniquely designed complementary mate to man, then male/male, or female/female relationships differ little from male/female relationships.) Not only did Adam and Eve personally experience the result of their fall, the environment was cursed and became hostile to man's survival; the serpent was cursed, perhaps as a symbolic remembrance of the fall. Finally, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden forever (vv. 23-24).

The fall rendered Adam and Eve completely unable to redeem themselves, or even to assist God in their redemption; this condition is called "total depravity." Total depravity doesn't mean that a fallen person is as bad as he could be; it means that sin has affected every part of his being (spirit, soul, and body). A depraved person will naturally recoil from God, just as Adam and Eve did after their sin. Consequently, fallen men in their natural state do not seek God; God must seek them (Rom. 3:9-18).

b. Remote consequences

Adam and Eve began the long process of physical degeneration and death. While it took many years for Adam and Eve to die, we may assume that the effects of physical degeneration were soon noticeable. There were additional complications for Eve and women after her; reproduction would be burdensome (v. 16). Since in Adam the entire human race fell, every descendant by natural conception would be born in sin, already spiritually separated from God (*i.e.,* spiritually dead). While the fall of the human race was immediate, its full effect would only be seen in the course of time.

Questions concerning the fall of man

Question: How could the impulse to sin arise within a sinless being?

Answer: In the post-fall world, we sin because we have a sin nature that is inclined toward sin (and thus we choose to sin). To put it another way, we have a tendency, or propensity to sin, just like a ball under the influence of gravity has a tendency to roll downhill. Of course, originally Adam had no sin nature, and thus no propensity to sin; so, how can we explain his action. If he had no inclination to sin, what moved him in that direction? The answer is in the nature of choice, or what we call "free will." All sin is first committed in the heart before it is acted out. Since Adam was created with a free will, he had within him the God-given ability to move in either moral direction. Today, man no longer exercises a completely free will. Man does have a will, and he does exercise a degree of free choice, but because of his fallen nature his choices are limited to those things that are consistent with his sin nature. For example, prior to the fall Adam could have chosen to do a truly righteous act, but the natural (unregenerated) person is incapable of producing righteousness (Rom. 8:5-8). A righteous

deed is motivated from a heart that sincerely desires to please God above all else. Even redeemed people can perform righteous deeds only with the enabling of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9-10).

Question: How could a good God permit man to be tempted?

Answer: It's because God is good that he made man with the ability to choose. Remember, God didn't tempt Adam and Eve to sin (Jam. 1:13); he created them with the ability to make moral choices. Why then did God deliberately place a tree in the Garden and command them not to eat from it? Was God placing a stumbling block in their path? Of course, in order for Adam and Eve to be truly free to obey God and become righteous, they had to be free to reject him and become sinful. If God had created Adam and Eve with the ability to choose, but had provided no choice for them to make, they still would not have had a free will. In such a case, their actions would have simply been determined by the lack of an alternative. God provided a choice for Adam and Eve, and warned them of the consequences of disobedience. God knew before he created them that they would fall, but their choice was nonetheless free, since foreknowledge of an event is not determinative. [If foreknowledge were determinative, then all things would be predetermined, since God knows all things. In that case God could not justly punish sinners, since he would have predetermined their actions.]

Question: How could so great a penalty be attached to so small a sin?

Answer: The problem here is in the assumption made in the question, that is, that sin is finite. If we consider that every sin is committed against an infinitely holy God, then every sin is an infinite offense and merits eternal damnation. In understanding the nature of sin, we must always seek to understand it against the backdrop of God's holiness. We cannot minimize sin without also minimizing God's holiness, sovereignty, and justice.

The human condition after the fall

How did Adam's sin affect the human family? Historically, three positions have been advanced to answer that question; they are: total depravity, Pelagianism, and semi-Pelagianism. The view one takes with regard to how Adam's sin affects his posterity has radical consequences with respect to salvation. This is really where the dividing line is drawn between liberal and conservative theology; and with respect to conservative theology, it is the dividing line between Calvinism, in its varying forms, and Arminianism.

Total depravity (Rom. 5:12-21; 8:5-8; Col. 1:21)

The Bible teaches that the fall resulted in man's total depravity. Total depravity means that Adam's sin resulted in the fall of his entire person—body, soul, and spirit. When Adam sinned his nature became such that he no longer possessed the capacity for righteousness, and thus he lost the capacity even to exercise faith (which involves obedience to God). This poses quite a dilemma; for if faith is required for salvation, and if man has lost his capacity to exercise such faith, how is he to be saved? The answer is that God imparts faith as a gift (Eph. 2:8-9).

Total depravity doesn't mean that unregenerated people are as bad as they could possibly be, and it doesn't mean that unregenerated men cannot do relatively good works; it simply means that the natural man is incapable of saving faith and righteousness. An unsaved soldier might sacrifice his life for his country, or for a friend; nevertheless, such deeds while noble from the human point of view, are not righteous because righteousness is motivated by intentional obedience to the will of God. As Paul said, the natural man is in a state of hostility against God and cannot yield himself to God (Rom 8:7; Col. 1:21). Actually, total depravity explains a great deal of human history. Man may become more prosperous and more educated, but the basic tendency toward sin is unchanged. Even regenerated men and women find that holiness involves a constant struggle against the tendency of that part of our nature that is not yet sanctified (*i.e.,* the mind and body—referred to in the New Testament as "the flesh"). As we will see further along, the doctrine of total depravity is pivotal in understanding how men and women come to be saved.

Pelagianism (5th Century A.D.)

Pelagianism is the belief that man is not fallen, and that Adam's sin merely set a bad example for his descendants, whereas Jesus' life set a good example. Modern liberal Christianity is largely based on this view. Pelagianists deny the fall of the race and the transmission of sin and a sin nature from Adam to his descendants; and as such, this view stands in clear contradiction of the teaching of the Bible (cf. Rom. 5:10-21, esp. vv. 18-19).

According to Pelagianism, all men have a free will and are free to choose righteousness or sin. However, Christians are assisted in performing righteousness by divine grace. A man's free choices thus determine his standing before God. Pelagianists see no need for sacrifice, and they reject substitutionary atonement. In practice, Pelagianism is often expressed as a system of works in which good works should outweigh sin. Salvation, if it can be called such, comes by works of righteousness. Early forms of Pelagianism tended to be strictly moralistic, and were often associated with an ascetic lifestyle. Modern forms of Pelagianism tend to dismiss most sins as psychological or social dysfunction rather than moral acts incurring divine judgment. Pelagianism was condemned by the early church at the Councils of Carthage (A.D. 412, 416, and 418), and that position was ratified at the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431).

Pelagianism denies total depravity (Rom. 5:10-21; 8:5-8 cf. Psa. 51:5; Eph. 1-3), as well as the Old and New Testament doctrine of atonement. Also, it does not explain the universal tendency toward evil among members of the human family. Pelagianism is an example of an early deviation in which human reason was substituted for divine revelation in the development of theology. Throughout church history this basic procedural defect has resulted in a great deal of theological error.

Semi-Pelagianism (5th century A.D.)

Semi-Pelagianists believed that Adam's descendants were affected by the fall, but through a special endowment of the Holy Spirit called "common grace" given to all men, it is possible for men to exercise free will and thus saving faith. Just as semi-Pelagianism was a fifth century reaction to Augustinianism, "Arminianism," a revival of semi-Pelagianism in the early post-reformation period, was a reaction to sixteenth century Calvinism. Semi-Pelagianists believe that saving faith originates within man's free will. The difficulty with this view is the same as with Pelagianism: it is inconsistent with the biblical teaching of total depravity, and it doesn't explain man's universal propensity to sin.

Both Pelagianists and semi-Pelagianists believe that all men can exercise free will; whereas total depravity teaches that when Adam sinned he fell into bondage to sin and lost the capacity to freely choose to love and obey God, and hence to exercise saving faith. Since these views are contradictory, they cannot all be correct. For those who accept the full verbal inspiration of the Bible, it's a fairly straightforward process to eliminate Pelagianism as inconsistent with the general teaching of the Bible (Rom. 5:20-21, esp. vv. 18-19). Also, semi-Pelagianism lacks biblical support and is contradicted by the Bible's clear teaching on total depravity and election. While some people are clearly Calvinistic (believing in total depravity) and others are clearly Arminian (or "free will," believing that through common grace men can exercise faith unto salvation) much of contemporary Christianity is a blending of these two contradictory positions. Often this is seen in the acceptance of eternal security (which is consistent only with total depravity and sovereign grace) along with a conditional view of election (which is consistent only with semi-Pelagianism). Regrettably, it appears that many Christians are unaware that eternal security and free will are incompatible doctrines. While Calvinism and Arminianism are each coherent systems, the combination of these is not; thus in this case it appears that a great many people hold to a blended system of belief that is theologically conflicted.

The transmission of sin

We have examined the three major views of how Adam's sin affected the human family; we now need to address a related question: How can Adam's descendants be held liable for Adam's sin as total depravity implies? Before we deal with the various views as to how Adam's sin is transmitted to his descendants, we must first discuss a related topic—the origin of the soul. There are two major views on how man obtains a soul. One view is called "creationism" (unrelated to cosmological creationism), and the other is called "traducianism."

The origin of man's soul

Soul creationists believe that for each newly conceived child, God creates a sinless soul that will eventually be joined to the physical nature propagated by the parents. Proponents of this view are not agreed as to when the soul is joined to the physical nature. Some believe the union of soul and body occurs at conception and others that it occurs later, as late as birth. (The popular view that people exist in heaven prior to their conception on earth is related to this view.) There are a number of problems associated with soul creationism. First, it requires that sin be transmitted through the physical nature, since that is all that man passes down. Such a view seems contrary to the New Testament, which teaches that the source of man's sin resides in his inner (immaterial) nature (cf. Mark 7:21-23). As early as the late first century Christianity began a shift toward an anticosmic worldview. This was largely due to the influence of Platonism, which was prevalent in the Roman world. Platonism exerted a profound influence on the development of Christian theology from the early second century forward, with the material world being viewed as either inferior, or evil. This anticosmic influence in Christian theology was expressed in such doctrines as amillennialism (the belief that the kingdom of God is a present spiritual reality rather than a physical reality to come) and the doctrine of soul creation. An additional problem with soul creationism is that it seems contrary to God's moral nature to create a sinless, eternal soul and then condemn that soul to inevitable corruption by joining it to a sinful material nature. This would seem to be the moral equivalent of chaining an innocent victim to a sinking ship.

Traducianism is the view that the human soul is passed from parent to child. Traducianism is a helpful theory for several reasons: 1) It avoids the problems associated with soul creation. 2) it helps us to understand how the entire human race fell when Adam sinned. If the soul is passed from parent to child, then working backwards we can see that at one time all the soul of the human family was in Adam in un-individuated form. Consequently, in Adam the entire human family fell. While this line of reasoning might seem odd from a modern perspective, we have to remember that it must be viewed from the biblical perspective. According to traducianism we have in us a portion of the same soul that was in Adam.

As such, we have inherited a fallen soul with a sin nature. So, we are what Adam became: sinful. While this may be difficult to accept, there is a strong biblical basis for such a view. In Hebrews 7:4-10 the writer makes the point that when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi, who would not be born for several generations, was within Abraham; thus, Levi, though unborn, paid a tithe to Melchizedek. This is a highly significant case because the writer of Hebrews argues that this action was substantively attributable to one yet to be born. Again, the challenge is to see the unity of the human family from God's perspective.

Traducianism explains not only how we can be responsible for Adam's sin, but also why we sin—because we have a fallen, sinful soul from the very beginning of our individual existence (cf. Ps. 51:5). [The traducian view also may help to explain the reason for the virgin conception of Christ. If the sin nature is passed through the male, the avoidance of natural conception could have been the means through which God supernaturally brought his Son into the world without sin. While it is generally believed that there is a connection between the virgin conception and Christ's sinlessness, we should note that no such connection is explicitly stated in the Bible.]

Theories on the imputation of sin

The imputation of sin is a complex area of theology; one of the reasons is confusion over whether the imputation of sin to the race occurred immediately when Adam sinned, or mediately as the race was propagated, or through some combination of these. If one takes the view that sin was imputed to the entire race immediately, then they would hold to either the federal view, in which Adam by divine covenant represented the entire race in his choice, or that Adam was the natural head of the race and thus all of humanity (being substantively in Adam when he sinned) actually participated in his sin. Alternatively, some have taken the position that sin is passed down generationally (mediately) from parent to child.

In the headship view, Adam is seen as making a representative choice on behalf of the entire human race. This could be due to either natural headship (as the father of the race), or to his appointment by God (federal headship). The federal view presumes the existence of a covenant between God and man establishing Adam's federal (representative) headship; and since no such covenant is found in scripture, this view requires such a covenant to be inferred (such is the position of covenant theology). The other alternative is based on some type of substantive or seminal connection. The substantive view is that all humanity was within Adam when he sinned and therefore the entire race participated in Adam's sin and fell immediately. An alternate, the seminal view, is that sin is passed down as the race is propagated generationally. The headship view can be compatible with either creationism or traducianism. However, soul creationists must hold to some form of headship, since the non-headship views are only compatible with traducianism. Note how Paul expresses the imputation of sin in Romans 5:12-21.

> [12]Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned —[13]for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. [14]Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. [15]But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of

the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. [16]The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. [17]For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. [18]So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. [19]For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. [20]The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, [21]so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (NASB)

Paul said that through one man sin entered the world, and death entered through that sin (v. 12, *tēs hamartias,* "the sin"). Eve's sin resulted in her own death, but Adam's sin resulted both in his death and in the death of his descendants, including even those who lived prior to the giving of the Law, who in the absence of law could not have committed any personal sin (vv. 13-14). In fact, Paul declared that the spreading of death to all men derived from the fact that in Adam's act all men sinned (v. 12). [If we were to suppose that Paul meant that all men die (eventually) because all men sin (eventually), then we would be left with no explanation as to why those who lived prior to the Law died; for Paul states that they did not sin after the likeness of Adam (v. 13-14), who committed a personal transgression by disobeying a divine command. Thus it seems that Paul's teaching requires us to understand that Adam's sin and condemnation was attributed to the entire race.] Actually we can find elements of all of these views in Paul's statement in Romans 5:12-21. The following is a summary of the major points we have observed:

1. When Adam sinned, the entire human race became sinful and died. (Christ is the only exception, though scripture is not clear on how he was protected from contracting the guilt of original sin, and a sin nature.) Romans 5:12-21 is clear that Adam's sin is reckoned to be the sin of every one of his natural descendants.

2. It appears that all of Adam's natural descendants begin life with a fallen nature that has been passed down from one generation to the next (cf. Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Psa. 51:5; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Mk. 7:21-23; Jn. 3:19; Rom. 3:9-12, 23; 8:7,8; 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:17-19; 5:8; Tit. 1:15).

3. All of Adam's natural descendants are born under condemnation. Man enters the world lost (Jn. 3:16), condemned (Jn. 3:19; Rom. 6:16ff.; 8:1), spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), and hostile to God (Rom. 5:10, 8:7; Col. 1:21).

4. There seem to be both immediate and mediate aspects in the transmission of sin. When Adam sinned, the act was attributable to the entire race; however, the corrupt nature appears to be passed from one generation to the next.

Salvation

The necessity of Christ's death for man's sin

According to some theories of the atonement (the accident theory, the moral influence theory, and the martyr theory) the death of Christ was not necessary for man's redemption; however, the Bible is clear that Christ's death was necessary in order for man to be redeemed. Scripture states that Christ died in our place; this view is called "substitutionary atonement" (Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21). The Greek word most commonly denoting substitution is *huper,* meaning, "on behalf of" (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 2:9, 14-17; Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 10:1-14). These passages tell us that Christ's death satisfied God's righteous demands for judgment upon sin, both Adam's original sin and our personal sin. We are told that Christ traded places with us, taking our sin and imparting to us his righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). This is an amazing truth. However, it is important to remember that this transaction is not automatic, as held by universalists; it is applied only to those who receive (*i.e.,* yield themselves to) Christ for who he claims to be, which is nothing less than God, Savior, and Lord. Those who reject him remain liable for their sin.

The extent of Christ's atonement

While Christ died for all men, his sacrifice secures forgiveness and reconciliation only for those who respond in faith to his offer of salvation. Another way of stating this is that Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficient only for those who respond in faith. Scriptural support that Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all sin (the position referred to as "unlimited atonement," or "general redemptionism") is found in 1 Timothy 2:6, and 4:10; John 1:29; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1, and 3:9; and 1 John 2:2.

The application of Christ's atonement

In order for Christ's atonement to become effective for an individual, a number of things must occur. In some cases a sequence for these events can be determined; in other cases several events happen instantaneously, and thus simultaneously. Some of the major elements of salvation are discussed below.

Election

The word "elect" means, "to choose" (Heb. *bahir*, and Gr. *eklektos*). Israel is referred to as an "elect nation" (Isa. 45:4), meaning that God chose them from among all the nations to be the recipients of special promises. Election is also used to denote the fact that God chooses men and women unto personal salvation (Eph. 1:1-12); this is sometimes referred to as personal, or individual election. Historically, two views of personal election have been advocated, one is "conditional election" and the other is "unconditional election." Both of these views place election prior to creation. Some of the major passages on election are: Romans 9:1-29 (esp. vv. 6-24); Ephesians 1:3-10, and John 6:37 (cf. vv. 44, 65). In John 6:37-65, note that the single greatest defection Jesus experienced in his followers was on the occasion that he spoke concerning personal election (cf. v. 66). Regrettably, election has proved to be a stumbling block for many. The question is not: Does the Bible teach election? There can be no doubt that the Bible teaches some view of election. The question is: What view does it teach? This issue is largely settled by one's prior conclusions regarding man's fallen nature. If one accepts that fallen man is totally depraved, only the unconditional view could be correct, for a totally depraved person would never freely choose to yield himself, or herself, to God.

a. Conditional election

Conditional election is the view that God chose people to salvation based on his foreknowledge that they would exercise faith in Christ. According to this view election is conditioned upon foreseen faith, making faith the cause and election the effect. Conditional election is a semi-Pelagian view in that it bases faith in man's free will. Most of the passages used in support of conditional election deal not with election, but with the

general call to salvation (*i.e.,* invitations to "whosoever"), which proponents view as incompatible with unconditional election. However, as will be seen, the general call of God is not incompatible with unconditional election. The two principal arguments used in support of conditional election are as follows:

1. *The argument from fairness:* Of the two views, the conditional view seems, at least on the surface, to be more fair than the unconditional view, since God simply validates the individual's free choice.

2. *The argument from foreknowledge:* There are two principal passages that appear to link election to divine foreknowledge: Romans 8:29-30 and 1 Peter 1:1-2. It is argued on the basis of these passages that God based election on the choice he foresaw men would make. (Foreknowledge is sometimes referred to as "prescience.")

However, there are serious problems with the conditional view. Note the following:

1. The biblical support usually cited for conditional election doesn't actually support the position. Neither Romans 8:29-30 nor 1 Peter 1:1-2 state that God based election on foreseen faith; these passages only say that God foreknew the individuals whom he elected, which would be prerequisite for either view.

2. Conditional election is incompatible with total depravity, since a totally depraved person would never freely choose to yield himself or herself to God.

3. The greater fairness of the conditional view is merely an illusion; it assumes that God could have determined to elect conditionally or unconditionally and would have chosen the view that seems most fair. However, if total depravity is true, then conditional election is impossible (like a square circle), and it cannot be argued that an impossible position would have been more fair. (That would be like saying that imaginary candy is sweeter than real candy.)

4. The conditional view reverses the cause and effect relationship clearly indicated by 1 Peter 1:1-2, where election (being "chosen") is indicated to be the cause of faith (referred to there as, "obedience to the truth"). Peter said that the recipients of the letter were chosen (elected)

by the foreknowledge of God, "that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" (NASB). As we have already seen, foreknowledge is prerequisite for both views, and Peter clearly indicated that the choosing is causal to the obedience of faith.

5. The description given of election in some passages is compatible only with the unconditional view (Rom. 9:6-24; Eph. 1:13-14, esp. vv.5, 11); on the other hand there seem to be no passages in which the description is compatible only with the conditional view. (See the first point above.)

b. Unconditional election

Unconditional election is the view that God chose individuals to salvation according to his own will for reasons he has not revealed. This view doesn't attempt to answer the question of why God chose some and not others. According to this view faith is given to elect individuals on the basis of grace (*i.e.,* it doesn't originate in man's free will). Note the following arguments:

1. Peter clearly indicated that election (choosing) is causal to faith in 1 Peter 1:1-2 (*i.e.,* the believers were chosen unto the obedience of faith).

2. Total depravity is consistent only with unconditional election. Men, being totally depraved, aren't spiritually neutral; they live in a state of hostility toward God, and are unable to voluntarily submit themselves to him (Rom. 8:5-8, esp. v. 8).

3. Unconditional election is the view that is described in the New Testament (Eph. 1:1-12, esp. vv. 5 and 12; Rom. 9:6-24). Romans 9:6-24 is an especially important passage. One of the key reasons for believing Paul was teaching the unconditional view is that he anticipated his readers would protest with the objection: "That's not fair!" (vv. 14 and 19)—an objection that wouldn't have been made against the conditional view. Thus, the fact that Paul anticipated a strong objection of unfairness clearly indicates he taught the unconditional view.

On the surface, unconditional election seems unfair when compared to the hypothetical view of conditional election. However, we must consider

several factors. First, given the fact of man's total depravity, the conditional view is not a viable option. Another issue that's sometimes raised against unconditional election is that it diminishes man's responsibility to exercise faith. However, men still must exercise faith to be saved. Even the elect cannot be saved apart from faith. Unconditional election simply recognizes that the ability to exercise faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-9), not an act of free will. It is also alleged that unconditional election diminishes the motivation to evangelize, since the elect will be saved anyway. That's not true. The proclamation of the gospel is essential in order for anyone to come to faith (Rom. 10:14-17). Note what this objection implies: that men will only be faithful to evangelize if the salvation of others hangs in the balance—yet how fair would it be if God allowed one man to determine the eternal destiny of another?

Some believe that unconditional election implies double predestination (the election of some to life and others to damnation). Such is, in fact, the historic position of Calvinism. Nevertheless, there seems to be no general scriptural support for double predestination. Some point to Romans 9:17 and verses 22-23; however, that harkens back to the issue addressed previously, that God tolerates, even uses the non-elect in order to bring about the salvation of his elect; such doesn't require, or even imply double predestination. God does not need to secure the perdition of the non-elect; they are already condemned.

Calling

Calling is a special ministry of the Holy Spirit; it's related to conviction (cf. Jn. 16:7-11). There are two calls referred to in the Bible in relation to salvation. One is a general call, in which God issues a genuine invitation to all men to come to him (Jn. 3:16); the other is an effectual call in which God brings men unto himself (Rom. 8:28-30). In Calvinism, the effectual calling is often referred to as "irresistible grace."

a. The general calling of God

The general call is the invitation that God extends to all men everywhere to come to Christ and be saved (Mt. 11:28; 28:19; Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 11:26; Rev. 22:17). The general call is a genuine offer of salvation to all men, based upon the death of Christ for all.

b. The effectual calling of God

The effectual call is the invitation and impetus God grants to the elect that cannot fail to result in the exercise of saving faith (Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 2 Tim. 1:9).

c. Questions concerning calling

Question: If unconditional election is true, is the general call of God to the non-elect sincere? Why would God issue a call to one that he has not elected?

Answer: Yes, the general call of God is sincere because God has provided for the salvation of all men and women in Christ, and he genuinely desires their salvation (Jn. 3:16), even though man's condition, as a result of the fall, renders the redemption of the entire human family unattainable.

Question: Why would God issue a call to people he knows have been rendered unable to respond by virtue of total depravity?

Answer: We don't know, but we do know that man's inability to respond in faith stems from his fallen nature, for which each man is responsible, which is why he is in need of salvation in the first place. Thus, a man's self-imposed inability to respond does not absolve him of responsibility for making a choice; it simply makes the outcome a function of a prior choice—the choice to sin at the fall, for which all men are responsible. [This is analogous to the case of a drunk driver who causes an accident. He can't argue that he isn't responsible since he was drunk, because he's responsible for his drunken state. Similarly, while a sinner's nature renders him unable to come to God, he is nonetheless responsible for his sinful state *via* his participation in humanity's original sin. (See the previous discussion of original sin.)]

Question: If the effectual call is irresistible, does this violate man's choice; in other words, is salvation forced upon the elect?

Answer: No, because God is capable of making an irresistible offer that employs, rather than preempts man's will. (We do this frequently with others, offering them something we know will induce them to a particular choice.)

Repentance and faith

Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. We can't consider one without talking about the other.

a. Repentance

Repentance is rejection of sin previously embraced; it is a sincere reversal of thinking about sin. Note the following observations regarding repentance.

1. God's grace is the source of repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18).

2. Godly sorrow is the motivation of repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

3. Repentance makes faith possible (Acts 20:21).

4. Repentance and confession are the same thing expressed in different terminology (1 Jn. 1:9).

b. Faith

Saving faith is obedience (voluntary submission) to the gospel truth. There are three essential ingredients necessary for faith.

1. Truth

Saving faith is based on truth; without truth, one cannot exercise such faith (Rom. 10:17). Paul said that faith that is not based on truth is worthless (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Cor. 15:12-17). However, knowledge of the truth doesn't always lead to faith; sometimes people know, and yet reject the truth. The minimum truth required for salvation is the knowledge of who Christ is, and what he accomplished for our salvation (*i.e.,* the gospel, cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-11).

2. Voluntary obedience

Note the connection between faith and works in James 2:14-26. James said that a person can distinguish true faith from spurious faith because the nature of true faith is that it yields to truth, and therefore will naturally be manifested in the way one lives his or her life. James made a very interesting observation: James said that the demons believe too, but their belief is not saving faith, because while knowing the truth (*i.e.,* the facts), they choose to rebel. One can know what the Bible says

and believe every word, and still be lost if they don't yield to that truth. Mere acceptance of truth as fact is not faith; faith is a submission of the will to the truth. (1 Pet. 1:22; 2:8; 3:1; 4:17; Rom. 2:8).

3. Opportunity to choose

Why is opportunity essential for faith? Because one can't yield to truth unless there are choices to be made. Suppose God had placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, but hadn't given them an opportunity to make a morally significant choice, how would they have been able to exercise faith? God allows us to experience trials in order to give us the opportunity to yield to him and grow in faith. Thus, trials are actually opportunities in disguise (Jam. 1:2-4, 1 Pet. 1:3-7).

Forgiveness

In regard to salvation, forgiveness means that God doesn't exact from the sinner the penalty due for his or her sins, since that penalty has been paid by Christ (Rom. 4:7; Eph. 1:7 cf. Col. 1:14). Forgiveness of the penalty for sin, which is accomplished once when a person exercises faith in Christ (Col. 2:1314; Heb. 10:11-14), and forgiveness of the discipline for sin, which occurs as often as a believer confesses sin (1 Jn. 1:9), should not be confused. When a person is redeemed, the penalty for all sins is immediately forgiven. This operation will never need to be repeated. However, when a redeemed person sins, though the penalty is forgiven, God may find it needful to discipline his child to get him or her back on the right path. Keep in mind that the ultimate goal of redemption is holiness. We must be careful not to confuse punishment and discipline. Punishment is what the unredeemed will experience in Hell; discipline is God's corrective training of his child, and though unpleasant at the time, it is actually a means of grace. If a saved person commits sin and is unrepentant, God uses discipline to bring about correction in his or her life. Through sincere repentance of one's sin, the believer may avoid discipline, though they still might experience the natural consequences of sin. We should not think of confession as simply giving God a list of our sins; he already knows what we have done. The word "confess" in 1 John 1:9 (Gr. *homologia*) means to have the same attitude or judgment upon our sin as does God. In other words, God wants his children to come to see

their sins the way he sees them, insofar as that is possible. When the child of God does that, discipline serves no further purpose.

Justification

Justification is a judicial act of God in which a believing sinner is declared righteous and completely acceptable to God (Rom. 3:21-28; 4:1-25; 5:1, 15-21; 8:30; Gal. 2:16). Justification doesn't change the person; it changes their standing before God. Note the following observations in regard to justification:

1. Justification involves the transfer of penalty from the sinner to Christ (Rom. 5:12-21).

2. Justification involves the transfer of Christ's righteousness to the believing sinner (2 Cor. 5:21).

3. Justification involves a restoration to God's favor. Whereas previously sinners were under condemnation and enemies of God, having been justified they are restored to favor and blessing.

Regeneration and indwelling

Regeneration is the act of God in which the spiritually dead sinner is made alive. Regeneration and indwelling are two aspects of the same operation. Indwelling is the continuation of what begins with regeneration (Titus 3:5). [The Greek term *palingenesia,* translated "regeneration," means to be "born" (*genesia*) "again" (*palin*). A similar expression, *anagennao*, from *ana* (meaning "again") and *gennao* (meaning "to bring forth") is used in 1 Peter 1:23 and is translated, "born again."]

Before man's fall, he lived in continual communion (fellowship) with God. Man's spirit and God's Spirit were in vital union, such that man was spiritually alive. When Adam sinned, God, because he is holy, withdrew from that relationship, leaving Adam spiritually dead. That condition Adam passed on to all of his naturally conceived descendants. The only remedy for spiritual death is regeneration, which is the re-establishment of vital union between God and a believing man or woman. This can only happen if a person's spirit is first cleansed of sin. By dying in our place, Christ made it possible for us to be forgiven when we accept him as God/Savior. Once a person is cleansed of sin, God, through the Holy Spirit,

instantly establishes a vital union with that person's spirit, infusing spiritual life. The continuedness of this relationship is referred to as "indwelling." (See the Appendix: "Regeneration and Indwelling in the Old Testament," pp. 117-138.)

Union with Christ

Union with Christ refers to the union in which the believer experiences a dynamic and life-giving relationship with Christ. This work is virtually indistinguishable from indwelling, except that the focus is on the connection to Christ rather than the Holy Spirit. A number of New Testament analogies illustrate this truth. For example: 1) a foundation and its building (1 Cor. 3:10-15); 2) a husband and his wife (Eph. 5:22-30; Rev. 19:6-9); 3) a vine and its branches (Jn. 15:1-6); 4) a head and its body (Eph. 4:15-16); 5) Adam and his descendants (Rom. 5:12-21). Several other biblical expressions also indicate the union between Christ and the believer: 1) being "in Christ" (Jn. 14:20); 2) Christ being "in us" (Jn. 14:20; Col. 1:27); 3) "partaking" or "sharing" in Christ (Heb. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:4). The believer's union with Christ should not be misunderstood as a combining of essence; rather the two are brought into a special spiritual life-giving relationship. This idea can be extended to the entire Body of Christ. If Christ is in union with every believer, then every believer is joined, through Christ, to every other believer (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:7-16). It's important to realize that this is a real and spiritually substantive relationship, not merely a figurative expression.

Sealing

Sealing is the work of God by which the believer's standing before God is made secure (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). The Holy Spirit's work of sealing the believer into Christ is directly related to perseverance, which is often referred to as "eternal security." The believer is sealed into Christ by the Holy Spirit to be safely delivered to God on the day of final redemption when he, or she, will be glorified eternally. In order for a redeemed person to lose their salvation, either Christ or the Holy Spirit would have to fail, which of course, makes the loss of salvation impossible.

Adoption

Adoption is the work of God by which he makes the believer in Christ a member of his family with all of the privileges and blessings of family membership. In the New Testament, the figure of adoption is used only by Paul (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).

Spirit baptism

Spirit baptism is the work of the Holy Spirit in which the believer is made part of the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13ff). Note the following concerning Spirit baptism:

1. Spirit baptism is unique to the Church age (from Pentecost A.D. 33 to the conclusion of the Church age at the rapture). The rationale for this statement is as follows:

   a. The Church is the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24).

   b. Spirit baptism places one into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13).

   c. In Acts 1:5 Christ referred to the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit as future. In other words, prior to Pentecost (A.D. 33) there was no Spirit baptism, and thus, no Church.

   d. In Acts 11:15-17, Peter identified Pentecost as the beginning of the Church and the beginning of the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit.

2. All Church-age believers partake of Spirit baptism. Note the following evidence:

   a. This truth is expressly stated in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

   b. Ephesians 4:5 implies that all who are part of the Body of Christ have been baptized into Christ.

   c. Believers are nowhere exhorted to seek Spirit baptism; thus it is reasonable to presume that it is automatic.

3. Spirit baptism occurs only once in the life of a believer.

4. The results of Spirit baptism are:

   a. The believer is made part of the Body of Christ (with all of the benefits and privileges, cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 4:4-5; Gal. 3:26-29).

b. Believers are united with Christ (Col. 2:8-12, esp. v.12; Rom. 6:1-10), and with one another (1 Cor. 12:1-31).

A proper understanding of Spirit baptism is essential to many other doctrines, especially to the doctrine of the Church and to eschatology. Certain prophetic promises were made to the Church; unless we understand that the Church is distinct from Israel, to whom other prophetic promises were made, we will have a tendency to confuse these prophetic programs.

Sanctification

Sanctification refers to how a redeemed person is made holy; it's a necessary part of the salvation process since God's holiness limits the relationship he can have with sinful men. While some see sanctification as distinct from salvation, it's actually an integral part of the salvation process, along with forgiveness, justification, regeneration, union with Christ, sealing, adoption, Spirit baptism, and ultimate glorification.

Theologians have attempted to explain sanctification from various perspectives. One common approach is to view the believer's ongoing struggle with sin as owing to the fact that he has two natures—a holy (sinless) nature, and a sin nature. According to the two-nature view, the nature that the believer chooses to nurture manifests itself to the greatest extent. While this model does illustrate the conflict between righteous and sinful impulses that occur within the believer as described by Paul in Romans 7:13-25, it fails to address the key issue in sanctification: how transformation of the believer's human nature (the totality of his being) takes place. The two-nature view simply lacks enough explanatory value to be of much use. Additionally, there is considerable ambiguity over what is meant by the term "nature." If the new (holy) nature is one of the two natures and the sin nature is the other, then which nature is being transformed? The new nature is already holy and the sin principle cannot be made holy (Rom. 7:13-25). On the other hand, if the unsanctified part of the believer's human nature is simply under the domination of a sin principle operative within, then while the sin principle itself cannot be made holy, the human nature can, but this leads us back to a single nature.

Another common approach is to focus on the positional aspect of sanctification, emphasizing that the work of sanctification is essentially a divine work, already accomplished both declaratively (judicially) and according to the reckoning of God who sees the end from the beginning and can view the process as complete though it isn't actually complete (with respect to the present). Support for this view is drawn from 1 Corinthian 1:2; 6:11, and Hebrews 10:8-18. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul addressed his letter to "the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified [Gr. *hēgiasmenois*, perfect participle—denoting a present condition resulting from past action] in Christ Jesus, saints by calling…." In 1 Corinthians 6:11 he said, "…but you were washed, but you were sanctified [Gr. *hēgiasthēte*, aorist passive—denoting completed action], but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and in the Spirit of our God." The grammar of these passages seems to imply that washing (associated with regeneration, cf. Tit. 3:5), sanctification, and justification (all aorist verbs) occur simultaneously. In Hebrews 10:10 the writer says, "By this will we have been sanctified [Gr. *hēgiasmenoi*, perfect participle] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This is identical to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 1 and 6. Also, in Hebrews 10:14 the writer says, "For by one offering He has perfected [Gr. *teteleiōken*, perfect tense] for all time those who are sanctified" [Gr. *haiazomenous*, present passive participle, *i.e.,* "those who are being sanctified"]. Here we clearly see the two ideas of the "already" and the "not yet." The idea that God has perfected what is being sanctified seems to have a declarative element (with respect to the judgment of God), as well as a temporal element that is reflected in the believer's progressive experience.

Another view is what might be regarded as a temporal view; it's organized around the timing of the various operations leading to total sanctification. According to this view the redeemed person is made holy in some limited sense at the moment of redemption, then continues to be sanctified in their present walk, and will be fully and finally sanctified at the appearing of Christ. This too seems to be a valid model, but it leaves some questions unanswered. For instance, the temporal view neither specifies what part of man is sanctified when, nor does it give us a clue as to the specifics of the sanctification process. Nevertheless, understanding

that sanctification occurs within a temporal frame of reference involving past, present, and future, is important.

A somewhat existential view emphasizes that when a person is regenerated, they are separated from the penalty of sin; then as they grow in their walk with the Lord they are progressively separated from the power of sin; finally when they are with Christ they will be separated from the presence of sin. This is similar to the temporal view; only the emphasis is placed on how the believer's state of being is impacted with respect to sin as the overall process is brought toward completion. While this view does not specify what part of the believer (spirit, soul, body) is affected at each stage, it does deal with the state in which the believer exists as the process unfolds.

Finally, a view that might be regarded as an objective view explains that the believer's spirit is made holy at the moment of salvation, while the soul (including the mind and emotions) are progressively sanctified, though not completely, throughout the Christian life; and last, the body will experience its sanctification at the appearing of Christ to transform the believer's body. This perspective is similar to the last two (the temporal and existential views) in that it incorporates a temporal element, but in this case the focus is on the believer's own objective nature (spirit, soul, body).

All of these views in varying ways attempt to deal with the relationship between "what is" and "what is to come," and they all have some explanatory and illustrative value, though none is complete by itself. Since it's difficult to build a comprehensive view around abstractions like "time," "justice," and "divine reckoning," it's helpful if we use man's objective nature (spirit, soul, and body) as the basis of a more integrated view. If nothing else, this might make it easier to conceptualize how some of the elements of the various views fit together. In the following discussion we will explore how the objective view, which focuses on the sanctification of the human nature, is developed biblically, and then how the elements from the other views can be correlated.

The Bible describes sanctification as occurring in three stages: sanctification of spirit, soul (inclusive of heart and mind), and body; they

are the objects upon which the work of sanctification is performed, and together they comprise the sum total of the believer's human nature.

a. Immediate sanctification of the believer's spirit

Immediate sanctification is the sanctification of one's spirit the moment he or she is regenerated. In order for the Holy Spirit to be united with the person who exercises faith in Christ, the believer's sinful spirit must be made holy. Sin was the cause of man's spiritual death in the first place, and in order for union with God to be re-established there must be, minimally, a reversal of what caused man's spiritual death (though certainly more than the minimum is accomplished in redemption). Because God is holy, union with God is predicated upon holiness. When a person is regenerated, he or she must also be cleansed, not only judicially, but actually. Paul alluded to this aspect of sanctification when he said: "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10). In Romans 7:14-25 Paul described the conflict between the already sanctified inner man (7:22) and the unsanctified part of his nature, which he termed "the flesh" (vv.14,18,25) or "the bodily members" (vv. 23,24), but which we should understand to include the soul (the heart and mind), since the body does not have an independent capacity to make moral choices apart from the heart and mind. Paul said,

> [14]For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. [15]For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. [16]But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. [17]So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [18]For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. [19]For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. [20]But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [21]I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. [22]For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, [23]but I see a

different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. [24]Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? [25]Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. (NASB)

When a person is regenerated, their spirit is immediately sanctified (Rom. 8:10). This is a final (completed) operation. Thus, for the regenerated person, their spirit is as holy as it will ever be. Man can contribute no more to the sanctification of his spirit than he can contribute to his own redemption, which is absolutely nothing; it is entirely of God. Because this occurs instantly at the moment of regeneration, it is referred to as "immediate sanctification."

b. Progressive sanctification

Progressive sanctification refers to the sanctification of the soul (the heart and mind). This aspect of sanctification isn't instant as in the case of immediate sanctification; rather it begins at the moment of regeneration and progresses over the remainder of the believer's natural life. No one reaches a state of perfection in this life. Nevertheless, it is God's will that his children be progressing in the direction of holiness. Perhaps the level to which one attains is less significant than the fact that there is continued progress toward the goal, which will be fully formed in us only when we are finally changed by Christ at his appearing. How does God sanctify the soul of man? He does it through the process of transformation. The sin principle (*i.e.,* evil, cf. Rom. 7:21, 23,25) cannot be transformed, but its power over the believer can be ameliorated as the human nature is transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul said in Romans 12:1-2, "I urge you therefore brethren [note the responsibility of the believer], by the mercies of God [*i.e.,* "on account of," or "in view of God's mercy shown to you"], to present [*parastēsai*, aorist infinitive, denoting decisive action] your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship [*tēn logikēn latreian humōn*, "which is your reasonable service" to God in view of what he has done for you]. And do not be ["be being," present tense] conformed

to [*suschēmatizesthe*, "molded into the shape of"] this world, but be transformed [*metamorphousthe*, *i.e.,* reflecting in one's life a profound transformation originating from within] by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is—[that] which is good and acceptable and perfect." Paul said that as we assimilate the word of God by faith, we are transformed such that our outer life reflects the renewal within. In progressive sanctification our progress will depend, to a large degree, on our own choices, though we must not forget that God often brings about circumstances to move us in the right direction. Given these facts, we should not be surprised to find that not all believers progress at the same pace, or to the same degree. If we choose to live carnally, according to the sinful impulses of our fallen nature, our progress will be negatively impacted. That was happening to some of the believers at Corinth in Paul's day (1 Cor. 3:1-9), and it happens to the rest of us to one degree or another, at one time or another. That being the case, it is important to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, or what the Bible calls "walking in ("by," or "according to") the Spirit/spirit," cf. Gal 5:16, and being "filled (controlled) by the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). On this aspect of sanctification see: Romans 12:1-2; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; and Ephesians 4:11-16, 17-23.

Progressive sanctification differs from immediate sanctification in that it is a process rather than an instantaneous operation, and it depends upon the believer's active participation. We can only assume that whatever is lacking in the sanctification of the soul, which in all cases will be considerable, will be completed by God upon the believer's death or rapture, as the case may be.

c. Final (ultimate) sanctification

Final, or ultimate sanctification refers to the last stage in the overall sanctification process, the sanctification of the believer's body. This will occur when Christ comes and either resurrects or changes believers, giving them a glorified, eternal body. Since the final sanctification of the redeemed person is an instantaneous operation, the believer cannot contribute anything to his or her final sanctification. Paul alluded to the final sanctification of the believer in Romans 8:18-25 when he said:

[18]For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19]For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. [20]For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope [21]that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22]For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. [23]And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. [24]For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? [25]But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (NASB)

He goes on to describe the actual event that will result in the transformation of the bodies of believers in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and John says, "…We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2b).

The physical body is the last part of man's nature to be sanctified. Once this occurs, sanctification will be complete. However, since no one but Christ has received a glorified body, no one has yet been completely sanctified. The final sanctification of Church-age saints will occur at the rapture of the Church.

d. Correlating information from other perspectives on sanctification

When a person is regenerated their spirit is immediately sanctified. For the one having placed his or her faith in Christ this is a past action, and it was at that time that they were released from all penalty for sin, past and future. In the believer's present experience, to the extent that he or she is being sanctified, they are being delivered from the power that sin has over them. At some point in the future every believer will be delivered from the presence of sin, at least the presence of sin within, when their nature is fully transformed. Of course God can see the end from the beginning, and

in some respects chooses to regard his redeemed as though this process were already accomplished, which in fact it is from a declarative (judicial) standpoint. The status the believer enjoys before God is referred to as his "position" and his present state as his "experience."

The Permanence of Salvation

When one exercises faith in Christ the process of salvation that is begun is irreversible; it is impossible for a person, once redeemed and regenerated, to ever be lost again. The two views on this subject, the view of divine sovereignty, represented imperfectly in classic Calvinism, and the free will view (represented in Arminianism), see the process of salvation in fundamentally different ways, and as one might expect, they hold divergent views regarding the permanence of salvation. The view of divine sovereignty is that God initiates faith and secures man's salvation. Arminians believe that man initiates faith by an act of free will enabled by common grace, and thus, man procures his own salvation, but that salvation is only secure as long the person, through his or her free will, continues to exercise faith. Hence, Arminians generally believe in a doctrine called, "the security of the believer," by which they mean that a person is secure as long as he or she remains a believer. Obviously such a view should not be confused with the doctrine of eternal security. The Bible teaches that God is absolutely sovereign in both the initiation and continuance of salvation. Such a view is the only view compatible with total depravity, unconditional election, and eternal security.

There are a number of reasons why a saved person can never become lost. Those reasons relate both to the nature of saving faith and to the preserving work of each of the members of the Trinity. It is important to understand that this truth is not intended to suggest that believers are free to live unrighteous lives. Rather, an appreciation of this truth should cause us to acknowledge a great debt, as we realize that we have not saved ourselves, nor can we by our own efforts add anything to the grace freely given to us. We are saved, now and always, for one reason: because of what God has done (Rom. 9:16). This ought to be a very humbling truth.

The case for eternal security

While much biblical support could be produced in support of eternal security, the following argument is one of the simplest proofs: In order for a saved person to become lost one of two things would need to happen: either, 1) he would have to be separated from God by something other than himself, or, 2) he would have to separate himself from God. (Logically, these are the only two possibilities.) According to Romans 8:31-39, the first option is impossible. Paul clearly includes everything in his list of things that can never separate a believer from Christ. He even says that nothing in the present or future can separate us from Christ, and he includes physical things, circumstances, supernatural powers, and even the continuation of life itself. The second option is also impossible because the believer would have to be included in the list of things that cannot separate him or her from Christ. In other words, when Paul said "nothing," it is clear that he was excluding everything (meaning, "absolutely nothing"), and that would include the believer. John addressed this point in 1 John 2:18-19, when he said that those who profess Christ, only to renounce their profession, were never genuinely saved. Had they been saved, they would not have returned to a state of unbelief. The logical implication is clear: one of the fundamental qualities of saving faith is that it perseveres.

Why is it that a saved person cannot lose his or her salvation? The answer is that God is at work to bring the believer's salvation to completion. Note how each member of the Trinity is involved in preserving the child of God.

a. The preserving work of the Father

1. It's God's responsibility to bring salvation to the point of completion (Philp. 1:6).

2. God will not allow a saved person to reach the point of perdition (lostness), cf. 1 Cor. 11:28-33, also 5:5.

b. The preserving work of the Son

1. Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for all sin, for all time (Heb. 10:14).

2. Christ's high priestly ministry ensures forever the salvation of those who come to him (Heb. 7:25).

c. The preserving work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit places the believer into Christ and seals him, or her, unto the day of redemption (*i.e.*, until their salvation is completed when Christ appears and they are changed into his likeness, cf. Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30). The purpose of sealing is to preserve something unspoiled. Each believer is in Christ, and Christ is in the Father (Jn. 10:28-30); the Holy Spirit has sealed them there and all three members of the Trinity are intent on preserving the believer until their redemption is finally completed. We can sum this up with a simple question: If a sheep gets lost, whose fault is it, the sheep, or the shepherd? One of the major faults in understanding this is that we tend to forget who is who. We are the sheep; God is our shepherd. If a child of God were to be lost, it would be God's fault; which is precisely why it can't happen. This truth isn't a license to sin; when correctly understood, it should lead one to profound humility, thankfulness, worship, and obedience.

Passages frequently misunderstood

Some New Testament passages have been misunderstood to imply that a saved person could become lost again. While we cannot cover all of the passages in this brief treatment, some representative passages are discussed below.

a. Passages describing personal apostasy are often misunderstood as applying to believers

Most of the difficulty involves a misunderstanding of personal apostasy. (This subject is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.) Virtually every New Testament book mentions personal apostasy. The early church, like the present-day church, attracted many people who had not genuinely yielded their lives to Christ. These people became part of the local churches, and some even became leaders. In the course of time, some of these reformed, but untransformed individuals turned back from their profession of faith, returning to their old religion, or going on to the next. They had heard the gospel and known the truth, but they had never trusted the Savior. They had come to the full knowledge of who Christ is, even experiencing a measure of sanctification through exposure to biblical truth and observing the power of the Holy Spirit working in the midst of the church, but they had never taken the plunge of personal faith. We could describe them as "reformed," but not "transformed." Because this was a widespread problem, those in the local churches who professed faith were exhorted to make sure their faith was genuine (2 Cor. 13:5); such warnings to the local churches and exhortations to self-examination are easily misunderstood. It is imperative we understand that an apostate was never saved in the first place; they renounced their profession of faith because they never possessed true faith. When they turned away from their profession, these individuals were doing what was in keeping with their true nature of unbelief. (2 Peter 2:22, one of the principal passages on apostasy, uses the illustrations of a dog returning to its vomit, and a pig returning to the mud.) A doctrinal problem emerges when one reading these warnings mistakenly assumes that these individuals were once saved. Some of the primary passages describing personal apostasy are: 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-22; Hebrews 3:1-14; 6:4-12; 10:26-31; 12:14-29; John 15:1-6, cf. Mt. 13:1-43, the parables of the kingdom of

Heaven. (Some of these passages will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five.)

b. Negotiating grammatical difficulties

Some passages are misinterpreted to imply loss of salvation because of confusion over grammar. Colossians 1:21-23 is an example. The key to the interpretation of this passage is the conditional particle (Gr. *ei* = "if"), which is a first class conditional (indicative, not subjunctive) and should be translated "since." When the grammar is correctly understood, the meaning is quite clear. Paul wasn't suggesting that some of the Colossians might run the risk of losing their salvation; he was confident they did possess genuine faith.

Corporate salvation

If by corporate salvation one means eternal salvation (*i.e.,* redemption from the penalty of sin) based upon some group membership, no such thing is taught in the Bible. Eternal salvation is always individual, based on personal faith (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 4:1-25). While God did bless national Israel corporately under the Mosaic covenant, such blessing did not constitute eternal salvation. The Bible does refer to the salvation of Israel in the future (Isa. 44:1-5, 21-23; Jer. 3:15; 23:14-18; 31:1, 27-34; Ezek. 11:19-20; 20:1-44; 36:25-32; 37:11-14, 21-28; 43:6-9; Hos. 6:1-3; 14:4-8; Joel 2:12-17, 28-32; Mic. 7:18-20; Zech. 13:7-9; Rom. 11:25-27); however, that is not corporate salvation, since each individual Jew must place their faith in Christ to be part of that group. In fact, those who do not believe will be purged from Israel during the tribulation period (Zech. 13:8-9; Ezek. 20:33-38). (See the discussion of law and grace in Chapter Three.)

The Function of the Law and the Superiority of Grace

Salvation is wholly by grace; the reason is simple: God's standard is perfection, and no human being, other than Christ, can reach that standard by his or her own effort. Every man, other than Christ, and every woman who has ever lived is a sinner (Rom 3:23); in their natural, unredeemed condition they stand condemned before a holy God (Rom. 6:23). The question is: What part, if any, does the Law play in salvation, and subsequently in the Christian life?

God gave the Law at Mt. Sinai. He never intended for it to be a means of salvation, but that it should show man his sinfulness and need for repentance and faith in the promised Savior. Religion, as it is commonly practiced, turns the purpose of the Law upside down. Men took what God intended as a means of driving them to seek his mercy and grace, and repackaged it as a goal to be obtained by their own efforts. Of course, in order to sustain the notion that man can keep the Law, it's necessary to either elevate man's capacities, or to diminish the absolute holiness represented in the Law; in essence, either raising man to God's level, or lowering God (or his standard) to man's level. If one adopts such a view of the Law, the result is legalism (externalism)—the belief that man can produce righteousness of his own that is acceptable to God. Legalism is an extremely dangerous belief. In its most radical form it can keep one from exercising faith in Christ, which is essential for salvation, and in the case of Christians who fall into this error, it's only one step removed from the notion that our salvation depends not so much on God, as on ourselves, and is thus subject to being lost.

In Jeremiah 31:31-33, God declared that the covenant made at Sinai would be replaced by a better covenant; in saying this he acknowledged that the covenant of the Law was both inadequate and temporary. The writer of Hebrews developed this theme in 8:13 by pointing out, "When He said, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear." The covenant of promise that God made with Abraham is the foundation of all the kingdom promises of the Bible; it's the covenant the New Testament

writers refer to as the basis for understanding the work of God in history, both past and future. Its promises relate both to personal redemption (Gal. 3:6-9), and to the visible kingdom of God to come in the future (Rom. 4:13; 11:25-32). The covenant of promise is the central covenant of the Bible; everything else in the Bible must be seen in light of this covenant in order to be fully appreciated. The Law, which came over 400 years later, did not, indeed could not supercede the promises that God made to Abraham (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:15-19), nor was the Mosaic covenant given as a means of fulfilling those promises. The Law, as a covenant, was temporary; it was a stop-gap measure until the new covenant, which implements and enables the promises made under the Abrahamic covenant, could be brought into force by Christ's atoning sacrifice. The Law was, in essence, a spiritual "band-aid," not a cure. It was like a crutch to a cripple; Christ's atonement is the cure. Once the cure has been applied the crutch is no longer needed, indeed it becomes an impediment. Some argue the point that since the Law embodies the moral precepts of God, and since morality does not change, the Law must be eternal. Such thinking is unbiblical. The Law is not holiness. Wasn't God holy before the giving of the Law? The Law simply conveyed the standard of holiness to man, along with specific penalties and the certainty that the transgression of any of these expectations not sufficiently atoned for (ultimately in God's perfect sacrifice) would bring condemnation. When Christ died, he completely satisfied the demands of the Law, such that those who believe in him now fully meet God's demand for perfect holiness and are no longer even capable of breaking the Law, since Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness for everyone who has faith in him (Rom 10:4). The true believer in Christ is incapable of breaking the Law, because the Law no longer has jurisdiction over him or her (Rom. 7:1-25; 8:1-11). To use an illustration, I live in the state of North Carolina (USA). If, while in North Carolina, I do something that is illegal in Canada, I cannot be charged with breaking Canadian law, because I'm not under the jurisdiction of Canadian law. In the same way, if I break one of the moral precepts of the Law, I cannot be condemned because I'm not under the Law, but in Christ, wherein all of the Law has been fulfilled by Christ on my behalf. Does this excuse my sin of doing what is contrary to God's holy nature? Of course not; my sin is still sin, and it can ruin my testimony and incur many other unpleasant consequences. So it's foolish

and wrong to do such things, most especially because they displease God, and may incur his discipline (1 Jn. 1:9); but the one thing my sin cannot do is result in my condemnation, because I am no longer under the Law's jurisdiction.

While the Law, as law, has no applicability to the believer in Christ, the question remains: Do the moral precepts contained within the Law have applicability to the Christian life? The answer is "Yes," but only as moral precepts, not as a law having the power of condemnation. Most of the moral components of the Mosaic Law are repeated in the New Testament. This is often taken as evidence that the Law is still applicable to the believer. However, it must be understood that the Mosaic Law is never repeated in the New Testament as law. The moral precepts are repeated as moral precepts so that believers can live free from the natural consequences of evil that can still ruin our lives and rob us of our time, talent, testimony, and effectiveness for Christ; but there is no divinely imposed penalty for their violation, only natural consequences—which can be considerable.

The Law is neither the means, nor the measure of holiness. The Law is powerless to produce even a single act of righteousness. Not only that, the Law isn't even a good indicator of personal holiness; by the standard of the Law even the Pharisees who rejected Christ appeared holy, because all the Law deals with is external conformity. Conversely, we might conclude that a person exhibiting outward conformity to the Law to be progressing in sanctification, but if that person harbored sin inwardly we would be wrong. It is amazing to see how selective people can be in determining which laws they will use in evaluating their spirituality. Most of us can do a pretty good job, at least outwardly, of keeping commandments like "Don't steal," "Don't worship idols," "Don't commit murder," but there are few who can claim to have kept the two most important commands, which both Jesus and Paul state are the keys to all the rest, that is, to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as one's self (Mt. 22:37-38 cf., Deut. 6:5). In light of so high a standard, who among us measures up? Paul certainly didn't seem happy with how he stacked up against the Law (Rom. 7:1-25). Herein is the problem with legalism: Instead of promoting the work of the Holy Spirit within, it focuses one's attention on external behavior, which is a very poor indicator

of spiritual development. In so doing it either depresses us if we are honest, or we develop a distorted, unrealistic, and self-righteous view of ourselves, thinking that we are succeeding when we are actually failing.

Let's look at some of the New Testament passages regarding the superiority of faith to the Law. We will focus on Hebrews 7-9, Galatians 2:11-5:26, and Romans 3:21-10:15.

The superiority of grace over law seen from Hebrews 7-9

Hebrews chapters 7 through 9 were written to address the obsolescence of the Law and its replacement by the new covenant. Let's step through these three chapters and see what they have to say about the present applicability of the Law.

Hebrews 7:1-10

Melchizedek was a priest-king in the pre-Israelite city of Salem (later called Jerusalem). All that is known of him from the Old Testament is recorded in Genesis 14:17-20 and Psalm 110:4. According to Hebrews 7:1-10 he seems to have been a prefigurement of Christ. That is not to say that he was an appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ—he was not, since a thing cannot illustrate itself; he simply illustrated certain characteristics of Christ. The writer of Hebrews goes to great length to demonstrate that the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the Levitical priesthood under the Law. His argument is that Abraham, and thus by extension Levi —Abraham's future descendant—paid tithes to Melchizedek; and since the lesser pays tithes to the greater (v. 7), Melchizedek must have been greater than Levi, and thus his priesthood must have been a greater priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. As we are about to see, the superiority of the Melchizedekian priesthood is a precursory argument leading to the conclusion that the new covenant is superior to and replaces the Law.

Hebrews 7:11-17

In verses 11 and 12 the writer makes the point that the priesthood and the covenant (*i.e.,* the Law) cannot be separated; a change in one requires a change in the other. Verses 13 through 15 demonstrate that a change of priesthood has already taken place: Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek—a superior priesthood. The stage is now set for the argument that since the priesthood has changed, the covenant (the Law) has been set aside. Some argue that this is "antinomian." Such an argument is without merit. The Law did not create righteousness; righteousness has its roots in God's eternal character, and the passing of the Law does not leave us without righteousness. The Law was a mere candle in a dark, sinful world allowing fallen men to walk without

stumbling until God sent a greater light; by comparison, Christ is like the noon-day sun. One hardly needs a candle in the full light of day.

Hebrews 7:18-28

If there has been a change of priesthood, it is indicative that there has been a change of covenant. (Law, covenant, and commandment are used somewhat interchangeably in this epistle.) Why was the former covenant set aside? —Because it was weak and useless; it had no power to perfect, or transform. Note that this is God's assessment of the Law. Did God do a poor job in giving the Law? No, it was only a temporary light, a candle, and when seen for what it was, the Law was good and served its purpose. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. (18) For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished" (NASB). It is sometimes claimed that this statement supports the eternality of the Law, but those who make that claim fail to hear all that Jesus said. It's not uncommon to see the last few words of this passage ("…until all is accomplished") omitted when the passage is quoted, and no wonder, those words tell us that the Law is not eternal. Both the Law and the Prophets will be fulfilled; the Law was fulfilled in Christ's righteousness and atoning death (Rom. 8:1-4; 10:4; Heb. 10:1-18), and the messages of the prophets will be fulfilled just as they were spoken, even to the smallest letter. (The term "Law" as used in verse 18 encompasses the entire Old Testament, which is variously referred to as "the Law," "the Prophets," "the Writings," or some combination of these terms.) Christ's priesthood is evidence of a better covenant (vv. 20-22), and his priesthood abides forever (vv. 23-25); thus, "He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him…."

Hebrews 8:1-13

Hebrews chapter 8 serves to summarize and reinforce the concepts communicated in chapter 7. The amount of space devoted to this subject underscores its importance. Notice how this section begins with a summary: "Now the main point…is this." And what is the main point? We have such a high priest as has been described in the previous section; it is an accomplished fact. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father,

demonstrating the completeness of his atoning work. He ministered the true sacrifice in the true sanctuary, of which the earthly was only a copy, and therefore inferior. He is the mediator of a better covenant (v. 6) enacted upon better promises (*i.e.,* the unconditional promises made to Abraham, cf. Gal. 3:15-18). Again, he states the temporary nature of the Law in verse 7 and backs up the statement by quoting the prophecy of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31:31-34. In verse 13 he restates the main point that the Law is now obsolete and ready to disappear. At the time this letter was written, the ceremonial system of worship was still in place, and Jewish Christians still participated as they had been taught for generations, but that would soon change with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

Hebrews 9:1-10

The writer goes on to describe the earthly tabernacle (temple) in which the sacrificial provisions of the Law were carried out. He described the outer area (the holy place) wherein were kept the lamp stand, the table, and the holy bread. Behind the holy place separated by a veil was the holy of holies, containing the Ark of the Covenant. Having given the physical description, he goes on to describe the system of worship that took place in the temple. While the priests regularly entered the outer room (the holy place), only the high priest entered the holy of holies, and only once a year, having offered the appropriate sacrifices for himself and for the people. The point is this: As long as the outer tabernacle stood, it signified that the way into God's presence was not open; man could only approach God through the sacrificial system given under the Law. (Men were, of course, still saved by faith alone.) No doubt the hearers would have been familiar with the fact that upon Christ's death the veil of the temple, which was several inches thick, was ripped from the top to the bottom (Mt. 27:51). While the rending of the veil was an immediate sign of the obsolescence of the Law and the covenant of which it was a part, it would be the final destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 that would bring an end to the practice of temple worship. What is the implication? Simply that the old covenant is passé. In the light of what Christ accomplished on the cross, the former covenant is no longer needed, and it is precisely the implication of that point that many miss; if the Law were still needed, that would imply some insufficiency in the atoning work of Christ.

Hebrew 9:11-17

Since Christ has entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle, what need is there for the earthly copy? He entered not through the blood of sacrificial animals, but by his own blood. He entered once and for all—the Just for the unjust—and obtained our eternal redemption. Here we see the great difference between the shadow and the reality. The sacrifices made under the Law could only sanctify the flesh, merely covering sin from sight (10:4), but Christ's sacrifice cleanses the conscience (the inner man) from dead works to serve the living God. It is not the Law that empowers one for divine service, but the transformation from within, made possible only by faith in the atoning work of Christ. There is no greater source of power and motivation for holy living than that of inner transformation, something the Law is powerless to accomplish. Which covenant is superior, the Law, or the new covenant in Christ's blood? If we re-establish the Law that God has removed out of the way, we make ourselves prisoners to the powerlessness of dead works; we return voluntarily to the prison cell from which Christ freed us.

Hebrews 9:18-28

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant (v. 15) sealed with his own blood; that covenant is the only basis of sanctification from sin. Even sins committed by God-fearing worshipers in the Old Testament could only be remitted, ultimately, as a result of Christ's atonement. Under the Law the sprinkling of the blood of animals sanctified the earthly tabernacle and its implements, but the blood of Christ sprinkled the heavenly tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was only a shadow of the heavenly. Why return to the shadow when one has the reality? To illustrate the folly of this, we may well imagine a young woman who has fallen in love with the picture of a man, who when he appears in the flesh finds that she does not love him so much as his picture. In the same way, some are unwilling to give up the shadow for the reality; they are so stuck in legalistic thinking that they are blinded to the true nature of the redemptive work of Christ, a redemption of the world not through Law, but through the power of a resurrected Savior, who will come again in power and glory to claim what he has purchased, and personally rule in righteousness forever.

As a covenant the Law is obsolete, because its requirements were satisfied at the cross. Paul said in Colossians 2:13-15: "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (14) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (15) When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (NASB). For the one who places his or her faith in Christ, the Law is completely fulfilled at the cross, much as a debt is marked "PAID" when it's satisfied. One might well ask what purpose the Law still serves, that is, if it still has a use beyond historical and informational purposes. This is the principal question addressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

The superiority of grace over law seen from Galatians 2:11-5:26

In this letter Paul addressed what he termed a "desertion" (NASB) from God to a different gospel (1:6). This was a serious theological matter, and quickly brought with it a forceful response from the Apostle (1:8). Those who introduced their heretical teaching of Christian bondage to the Law had done so amid sharp personal attacks upon Paul, his character (1:10-14), and his apostleship (1:18-2:10). Paul began his retort to this vexing problem brought on by the Judaizers with a historical discussion of the issue as it relates to the Church in general (2:11-21).

Galatians 2:11-21

Paul recalled how Peter, a Jew, while visiting in Syrian Antioch, had dispensed with certain elements of the Law in his personal life, but upon the arrival of other more strict observers of the Law, Peter hypocritically separated himself from the Gentiles. Paul recalled how he rebuked Peter, asking if he, being a Jew, lived like a Gentile, how could he justify compelling the Gentiles to live like Jews? After all, the Law never justified anyone (2:16).

Paul went on to address the question of whether justification by faith and the believer's release from the curse of the Law makes Christ the cause of sin. The answer is a resounding "No!" Such thinking, as Paul now refutes, is characteristic of legalism. It goes like this: "The teaching of grace and release from the Law produces lawlessness." But such legalistic thinking results not in righteousness, but a rebuilding of what was once destroyed (the curse of the Law) and a re-imprisonment of the soul as a transgressor in bondage to the penalty of the Law. Legalism never produces true righteousness; it only makes its adherents slaves and prisoners. Paul said in verse 19, "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God." What does that mean? How does "dying to the Law" result in the ability to live to God? He explains in verse 20 the truth to which legalists are blind, that those who are in Christ have already died with Christ and that all of the requirements of the Law have been fully satisfied. This is not a setting aside of the Law, but rather the fulfillment of the requirements of the Law in Christ. As such, grace becomes not an

excuse to sin, but the power to continue serving God in spite of the fact that we frequently fail. The Apostle John said those who taut grace as license to sin, do not know Christ, or the power of the Spirit of God (cf., 1 Jn. 1:1-6; 3:9-10). Are we so foolish as to think that the Law could accomplish more than the living and indwelling Christ and his Holy Spirit? The idea that righteousness comes through external regulation is the philosophy of legalism, but as Paul concludes in verse 21, if the Law were a means of righteousness, then Christ would have died in vain. For Christians to rebuild the Law as a means of obtaining righteousness is to nullify the grace of God. Paul next turned his attention to the question of what, if any use the Law has in the Christian life.

Galatians 3:1-9

Paul began with a severe reprimand: "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you." The implication is clear: The church had fallen, as it were, under the influence of a spell. These were tough words both for the Galatians and for those who had misled them. Paul's first question was simply this: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" He had a purpose in asking such a question. The Galatians had received the Holy Spirit at the time they placed their faith in Christ; this undoubtedly resulted in the manifestation of spiritual gifts. Paul wanted the Galatians to consider the absurdity of their shift from grace to law. If the Holy Spirit, whose presence is the evidence of salvation in progress, could not be attained on the basis of law, but by faith alone, how could they now think that the process of salvation could be completed by observance of the Law? It's easy to see why Paul used the analogy of witchcraft, for to Paul it seemed that only one under a spell could be so thoroughly misled. Will a man enter salvation by faith and then seek to complete that salvation by the deeds of the Law? That would be like bringing a high-powered speedboat up to top speed and then switching off the engines and trying to maintain the momentum with a broken paddle! If the Law had sanctifying power, Christ would not have had to die in the first place (cf., 2:21).

In 3:6-9 Paul makes the case that faith, as the means of obtaining righteousness before God, was established long before the Law was given, since Abraham "believed God and it was reckoned to him as

righteousness." Thus, even before the Law was given, the principle of justification by faith had already been established, and the Law, which came later, could not change that. It could only lead men to the conclusion that they need God's forgiveness and righteousness, made possible by Christ's atoning work, of which the Old Testament sacrifices were merely a prefigurement.

Galatians 3:10-18

Paul next began to deal with the true effect of the Law (3:10-18), and how that relates to God's intended purpose for the Law (3:19-4:7). We may well skip to Paul's question in 4:21: "Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?" What does the Law accomplish? Paul said it places one under a curse (3:10), that it has no power to justify (v. 11), and that the Law is not of faith (v. 12). This ought to be obvious, but Paul was pointing out that faith and Law are two completely incompatible principles. Simply put, one who walks by the Law can't be walking by faith. The incompatibility of the two is obvious. One might ask how faith and Law could be incompatible if they both have their origin in God, but in so saying they miss the point of the Law entirely. The Law was never intended to be a means of obtaining righteousness; it was intended as a light to show man his sinfulness. When we go into a lavatory, we turn on the light so we can see that our hands are dirty. We don't wash with the light; we wash with soap, for soap has the power to cleanse, whereas light has only the power to reveal. In the same way, the Law has only the ability to reveal sin; it has no power to cleanse. Law and grace both come from God, and when used for their divinely intended purpose they are completely compatible. However, they become incompatible when we attempt to use the Law to accomplish what only grace can do.

Legalists object that it is possible to keep the Law (often citing Deuteronomy 30:11-14). However, when God commanded the children of Israel to keep the Law (Deut. 29:9) and told them that it would not be too difficult for them (Deut. 30:11-14), he was referring not just to the moral code, but to the Law comprehensively, which through the sacrificial system made provision (at least typically and symbolically) for failure to perfectly keep the moral code. In other words, the provision of sacrifice under the Law anticipated failure on the part of the worshipers to keep the

moral code even outwardly, to say nothing of keeping it inwardly. However, when the provisions of the sacrificial system were applied, the Law, when viewed comprehensively, was considered to have been kept. In other words, the system contained a remedy of sorts, albeit symbolic, of God's ultimate sacrifice of his Son. The point is that while the Law, as a system, could be kept (if one includes the remedy of sacrifice), the moral component of the Law cannot be kept by men in their fallen state. When legalists imply that the Law can be kept, they mean that the moral code can be kept, and that is a thoroughly unbiblical idea, even from a strictly Old Testament perspective; not only is it an unbiblical idea, it's contrary to faith. Faith doesn't say, "What can I do to establish my own righteousness?" but rather, "I believe that God has done for me what I could not do for myself." These two principles are mutually exclusive; to live by one is to deny the other. Paul is clear on this point, and he quotes Leviticus 18:5 as support. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law (v. 13) in order that we might receive the blessing of the promise (Jer. 31:31-33) on the basis of faith alone. Faith is the divinely appointed means of obtaining righteousness, and the Law that came over four hundred years later did not, indeed could not change that (vv. 16-18), since the eternal covenant of promise had already been ratified (v. 15).

Galatians 3:19-4:7

Here Paul addressed the purpose of the Law. He began with the question: "Why the Law then?" In other words, given what has already been said—that the promise of salvation is by faith, and the Law is not of faith—he now addresses what must certainly be the question remaining in the minds of his hearers: If the promise was to be received by faith, why did God subsequently give the Law over 400 years later? His answer is straightforward: The Law was added because of transgressions until Christ, the promised seed, should come. In other words, Paul said that the Law was a stopgap measure, never intended to be permanent. It was, as it were, a "bandage" until the wound could be cured. He quickly addressed an additional question sure to arise in the minds of his readers: If faith and law are incompatible principles, is the Law somehow contrary to the promises of God? Paul's answer is "No," the Law doesn't contradict the promise by faith simply because the Law was never an alternative to faith. That is to say, the Law was never intended as a means of obtaining

righteousness; its only purpose was to shed enough light in the darkness to point the way to the only true solution to the problem of sin; that solution is Christ (vv. 23-24). The Law pointed the way to Christ through the power of condemnation—foreclosing all options but one: faith in Christ. Some insist that those who teach grace through faith alone are opposed to the Law; that is untrue. The Law, when properly understood, was never an alternative to faith; it is rather an inducement to faith, that is, it shows the need for faith. But once faith appears, the Law serves no further purpose; indeed its continued application would be injurious to faith. One could make the case that the real antinomians are those who distort the purpose of the Law by attempting to make it into something that it is not, thus perverting the true intent of the Law.

Galatians 4:8-20

Paul reminded the Galatians that before they came to know God, or rather came to be known by him, indicating God's sovereignty in their salvation, they were slaves of a religion consisting of rules and regulations. These things, Paul said, are "weak" and "worthless," mere "elemental" (elementary) things. Paul expressed his concern that perhaps his ministry had been in vain, for (by implication) Paul's ministry, and by extension all of his apostolic letters, were tuned to a completely different frequency, indeed a different form of religion. This is serious talk, and it underscores Paul's firm belief that faith and Law are completely incompatible when the Law is viewed as a means of obtaining righteousness.

Galatians 4:21-31

Paul now draws upon familiar source material from the Old Testament. He isn't interpreting that material, but merely using it to illustrate his point. Legalists among the Galatians advocated a blending of faith and law, but Paul warned that faith couldn't co-exist with law. The very presence of law is injurious to faith, for it tells one to draw close to God through self-effort, and to measure our progress by the same. Paul's point is that just as Isaac and Ishmael could not co-exist together, without Ishmael's presence being detrimental to Isaac, neither can faith and law co-exist. Any attempt to combine the two will ultimately end in the destruction of faith, for saving faith involves trusting God to do what one

acknowledges he cannot do for himself. Just as God commanded that the bondwoman and her son were to be sent away, so now Paul applies the same to the Law; there is simply no place for legalism in the life of faith.

Galatians 5:1-12

The Law represents slavery, and Paul urged the Galatian believers, having been freed from that bondage, not to return to it. His warning in verses 2-4 is poignant. He told them that if they returned to the Law, Christ would be of no benefit. He said in verse 4, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (in terms of their beliefs). These were people who having made a profession of faith in Christ were seeking to be perfected in the flesh, according to the Law (cf. 3:3), and in so doing were manifesting the shallowness of their faith. Paul had in mind that if those in the Galatian Churches who were involved did not heed his warning, they might ultimately prove not to be true believers after all. This warning is consistent with other New Testament teaching regarding personal apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Pt 2:1-21; 1 Jn. 2:19; Heb. 3:1-14; 6:4-12; 10:26-31; 12:14-29).

It is faith, not the Law (and certainly not faith plus Law) that leads to righteousness (v. 5). The Law, symbolized by circumcision, means nothing to those who are in Christ (v. 6). Before the legalists came on the scene the Galatians were running well, but the legalists proved to be a stumbling block to their faith (v. 7). Paul asserts that this legalism did not come from God (v. 8), and he was concerned that the entire church could become corrupted by this false teaching (v. 9). Nevertheless, he expressed his confidence in the Galatians, that they would adopt the correct doctrine that salvation, all of it from start to finish, is of faith (vv. 10-12).

Galatians 5:13-26

Does freedom from the Law mean freedom to sin? Certainly not! It means freedom from condemnation; it means freedom to please God out of a heart of love, joy, and gratitude, without fear. The Law is completely fulfilled by love, and that is Christ's command to his Church, to love the brethren (Jn. 13:34). We are saved by grace through faith, and commanded

and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love one another; of what advantage is the Law?

Given what Paul has said, the question that arises is this: Does the Law have relevance in the present era—the age of grace? The Law is of two parts; there is in the Law that part in which the perfection and holiness of God is seen, and which the Law merely illuminates, though dimly in comparison to Christ, and there is that part which prescribed the obligations of the Jewish nation with respect to the covenant made with them. The knowledge of God and the holiness he requires will always result in condemnation to those who fall short of God's perfect standard. However, the covenantal aspect of the Law, that is, its operative principle of external working through regulations, penalties, ceremonies, etc., has been replaced by the inner working of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the new covenant. Sin is still sin. But the operative principle has changed; "the law" (the moral compass) is now written within, and transgressions are not the domain of civil or ceremonial and sacrificial law, they are matters of relationship, matters of the heart (Jer. 31:31-33). What the Law could not do working from without, the implanted law, the Law of the Spirit, accomplishes from within; thus is the demise of the Law for those who believe, and there can be no return to it; it was replaced because it was useless for anything but light, and a far greater light has arrived. What this means is that the proper pursuit of righteousness is forevermore removed from the realm of laws and regulations, and centered in the only place from which personal righteousness can originate: within the redeemed and sanctified heart wherein the Spirit of God dwells and performs his work. Those who wish to return to the Law in order to bring about righteousness fail to understand the true nature of the task; it is not the mere reformation of behavior, but the transformation of soul and spirit by the power of the gospel, a task that can only be accomplished through faith.

The superiority of grace over law seen from Romans 3:21-10:15

Paul fought a running battle with legalism in the early church; they too had those within their number who thought that righteousness could be produced through the keeping of the Law, and this conflict shows through clearly in his epistle to the Romans. Because of his teaching regarding law and grace Paul was, in so many words, accused of being an antinomian (cf. 3:8). Let's see how Paul dealt with this subject in this letter to the Roman Christians.

He began his letter by arguing that all men in their natural (unsaved) state stand condemned before God. In Romans 1:16-2:16 he argued that those who are without the Law are condemned because they have not yielded themselves to the knowledge of God in creation (1:18-19). Beginning in 2:17-29 he argued that those who do have the Law, referring to the Jews, are also condemned because they have not kept it. In 3:1-20 he addressed the question sure to have arisen in the minds of his listeners: If the Jews stand condemned too, what is the advantage in being a Jew? His answer is simple: The Jews were entrusted with the promises of God, promises that God fully intends to keep, even though the Jews, as a people, have thus far failed to respond in faith (2:2-4). The great advantage of being a Jew is not as some might suppose, that they are the inheritors of the Law, but rather that they are the inheritors of the promises of God (3:3-4). It is important to recognize that Paul's teaching on this subject comes some twenty-five years after the Jewish nation rejected Jesus as their Messiah, signifying that their rejection had not nullified the unconditional promises of God. (Paul will return to that topic in chapter 11.) The advantage of being a Jew is that God made special promises to them, promises he intends to keep in spite of the unbelief of some (3:3-4). Of what advantage then is the Law? None, insofar as producing true righteousness. Its only real benefit is that through men's failure to keep the Law, the righteousness of God is demonstrated; that is to say, it shows man how unholy he really is. The one who does not have the Law is condemned apart from the Law, by his conscience; and the one who has the Law is condemned by the Law, but in both cases the end result is the same (3:9-20). How so? —Because the Law is powerless to transform sinners into

saints, and we are all sinners (3:23). What is the solution to this problem? That's the question Paul hopes all who read this letter will ask, and his answer is given in 3:21-8:30.

Romans 3:21-31

Paul began by pointing out that there is a kind of righteousness available to men that cannot be obtained by means of the Law; it is the righteousness of God granted to men upon the exercise of genuine faith (v. 21). Paul wanted his readers to be assured that this is not some novel idea; it is a truth clearly set forth in the Old Testament (*i.e.,* "being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets"), and in the next chapter of Romans he will develop these Old Testament roots further, but first he wanted to fully develop his explanation of the kind of faith that leads to righteousness (3:21-31). The faith that results in true righteousness is faith in Christ, regardless of one's status as a Jew or non-Jew (v. 22). All men are sinners (v. 23), and any who are to be saved must be justified as a free gift from God. This righteousness can't be purchased or earned; it can only be received as a gift, by faith (v. 24); it's made possible only because of Christ's atonement on the cross (v. 25). Christ's sacrifice demonstrates God's righteousness, because God had "passed over" the sins of believers in the Old Testament era, that is to say: in view of what he knew Christ would do on the cross, God did not judge the sins of Old Testament believers; instead he "passed over" those sins, suspending judgment until Christ had paid the penalty (vv. 25-26).

Given the fact that all men must be reconciled to God by faith apart from the works of the Law, all boasting is excluded (vv. 27-28). No one will ever contribute any righteousness, not even a speck, to that needed for his or her salvation. Does this concept in any way disparage the Law? Certainly not, because the Law was never intended for any purpose other than leading men and women to acknowledge this very fact, so that they might repent of sin and turn to God for mercy and grace. Paul now returns to an earlier thread in the discussion and seeks to establish the fact that grace through faith is a concept that preceded the giving of the Law, and therefore, the application of law is subordinate to justification by faith. (Note that this is also a prominent theme in his letter to the Galatians.)

Romans 4:1-25

Paul began by asking whether Abraham was justified by works or by faith. His answer is that Abraham has nothing about which to boast, because he too received righteousness by faith (vv. 1-3). Paul anticipated that some of his readers might attribute Abraham's righteousness to his circumcision (a work), so he made the point that Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised (vv. 9-12). In fact, circumcision had nothing to do with Abraham obtaining righteousness. Paul contends that the promise made to Abraham and to his descendants is not to be realized through the Law, but through faith. If fulfillment were to come through the Law, then the promise would be nullified (v. 14-15). When we understand the nature of the Law as condemnatory, then we see why the promise (both the kingdom, and the righteousness to enter it) must be based on faith, for the Law has no power to produce righteousness, only the power to condemn (vv. 16-17).

Paul continues in chapter 5 to discuss the nature of grace through faith and its superiority to the Law. It should be obvious, but perhaps it should be reiterated that Paul's entire treatise in this section was occasioned by a flood of legalism into the church. Given the amount of space devoted to the correction of this error, it's apparent that this was a nearly universal problem that had to be dealt with in almost every church, so we shouldn't be surprised that it's still a problem today.

Romans 5:1-11

Paul said that we are justified by faith, and the result is peace with God. Whereas the natural man in his unsaved condition is at war with God (8:7-8), the justified man is at peace, and anticipates sharing in God's glory (v. 2). Though we enter into that hope through various difficulties, the result will be perseverance (v. 3), proven character (v. 4), and a hope that does not disappoint (v. 4), because that hope is in a God who does not break his promises. Christ died for us even while we were sinners. He didn't wait for men to become suitable objects of salvation, or to commend themselves through works of righteousness, for men are incapable of producing such works (v. 8). It's a hard truth to accept, but the fact is that God simply does not need our help in saving us, nor do we have any help to offer, though we can gratefully receive his love and forgiveness, and respond with a thankful heart filled with praise.

Romans 5:12-21

When Adam fell, the entire human race fell. How this can be, is difficult to understand; yet it is true. When Adam sinned, the entire human race died spiritually and the natural world was deeply impacted in ways we are still struggling to understand. Even before the giving of the Law, all men eventually died, evidencing the universality of the effects of sin throughout the human race. Adam's sin was different from any other sin prior to the Law, for Adam broke a divine commandment, and until the giving of the Law there were no other such commandments. Prior to the Law all men and women died because they were sinners, having inherited both their guilt and their nature from Adam. After the Law, there were commandments that could be broken; now man could be "doubly dead," dead because of his connection to Adam, and dead because of his personal disobedience. The Law was like a blanket smothering man in condemnation; for no sinner could keep it, not even the smallest part of it, at least inwardly. Man is sinful through to the core, and every level of his being—body, soul, and spirit—is under the influence of evil, selfish motives. Why did God give the Law? It was a light intended not to correct man's problem, but to expose it so the solution could be applied. The solution is grace, the grace of God manifested in Christ and his sacrifice on the cross; for just as through Adam's sin death spread to all men, so in Christ's one act of obedience on the cross there resulted justification of life to all who would accept it by faith (vv. 15-21, cf. 3:21-22). The question sure to arise is this: If the Law was useful in the past to show men their sinfulness, and thus their need of grace, could it not be useful for that purpose today? Of course it could; in fact, the Law has been doing that throughout history, though its covenantal force ceased at the cross. This is one of the great benefits of the reading and preaching of the Old Testament, but we don't have to become a slave to know that we don't want to be one; we have the record of life under the Law in scripture so we can learn from men's experiences in the past. The fact is that if men refuse to learn these lessons from scripture under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, they wouldn't learn them under the Law either. We don't need to return to the Law, what we need is the powerful proclamation of the whole truth of scripture, both Old and New Testament truth. Paul next turned his attention to the more practical matter of life under grace, and answers questions sure to arise in the minds of his readers.

Romans 6:1-14

Undoubtedly Paul was aware of the accusations that had been made against him concerning his teaching of grace, and he proceeds to answer the questions of those who might innocently misunderstand, or others who might intentionally distort his position. The first question Paul addressed was this: Does the teaching of grace imply that believers should not be concerned about sin (v. 1)? The logic Paul addressed runs like this: The more one sins, the more grace God bestows; therefore, sin is good because it promotes grace. Paul's answer was firm: "Absolutely not!" Such thinking is a complete misunderstanding of grace (v. 2). Grace is not freedom to sin; it's freedom from sin (vv. 5-7) and its terrible effects. That release is first from sin's power (death), then from sin's perversion of the human nature (at the completion of our redemption, the redemption of the body), and finally from sin's presence (in God's eternal kingdom). What possible motivation could a regenerated person have for returning to that which killed him in the first place? Paul put it this way: "You have died with Christ and have been raised up with Him for this purpose—that you might walk in newness of life"(vv. 3-5). The one who has faith in Christ has, in God's manner of reckoning, been crucified with Christ in order that they should no longer be slaves to sin. How does this work? Before faith, a man or woman is a slave to sin; every part of their nature—body, soul, and spirit—is under sin, but when faith comes (as a gift of God, cf. Eph. 2:8-9) Christ's death, with all of its sufficiency and efficacy, becomes theirs. The application of the atonement accomplished by Christ's sacrifice is wrought in stages. First, the spirit is immediately cleansed of sin (Rom. 8:10), and the Spirit of God takes up residence within the believer infusing him with spiritual life (regeneration); then the Spirit of God works progressively to sanctify the soul (the seat of the heart and mind); finally, God will redeem the bodies of his saints when Christ returns for them. Notice the character of this work: It is a work of redemption from the power, perversion, and presence of sin. In light of this, how could anyone suggest that further entanglement with sin could be good? There is nothing in the redemptive work of Christ that leads one toward sin. Of course, there will always be those who use grace as an excuse to sin, just as there were those in Jesus' day who distorted the intent of the Law to justify their sin. Such people are always with us, but their distortion of the truth isn't an argument against the truth; it's only an indication of their own foolishness and self-

deception. Believers under grace are going to sin because they are not yet perfect (experientially); but grace, properly understood, promotes holiness and imparts the power through the regenerating and indwelling Holy Spirit to produce works consistent with righteousness (Rom. 8:3-17); this is something the Law cannot do. How is the power of sin broken? It's broken not by the Law, but by grace (vv. 12-14). Paul was so burdened to emphasize this truth that he repeated essentially the same arguments again in verses 15-23.

Romans 7:1-6

Paul continued his argument by drawing upon a concept with which his readers were already familiar—that the law of marriage is binding until death (vv. 1-3). He then took them to the next level by explaining that their participation by faith in Christ's death had caused them to die to the Law that they might be married to another, that is, to Christ (v. 4). This transfer from the bondage of the Law, to being joined to Christ, is the only way believers can bear spiritual fruit. In fact, Paul points out that the Law actually arouses sinful passions (v. 5). How so? It is a well-known truth that when a sinner is told not to do something, he, or she, wants to do it all the more. (Parents of small children will relate to this, but the principle holds true of adults as well.) True righteousness cannot be produced by the prescription of external regulations (legalism); righteousness is the product of a transformed life (v. 6); Paul called it "newness of spirit" (not "Spirit" as the NASB has it, but "spirit," *i.e.,* the renewed, regenerated human spirit within the believer). The Law cannot produce righteousness; even acts of outward obedience to the Law must be distinguished from righteousness. Righteousness is more than outward obedience; it is obedience from the heart, an obedience that exalts God and responds to his grace. Thus, true righteousness is obedience that is borne out of the love of God, just as sin is borne out of the love of self. Such acts of righteousness only come from one who is being led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7:7-12

If the Law arouses sinful passions (v. 5), is it then sinful in some way? Paul's answer is an absolute "No!" It's not the fault of the Law that we are sinners incited by the words, "Thou shalt not!" On the contrary, apart from the Law we would not know what sin is (v. 7). Unfortunately, the more a

sinner discovers about sin, the more he's drawn to it (v. 8); that's not the fault of the Law, but the perverseness of our fallen nature. The principle we take away from this discussion is that by the Law is the knowledge of sin; that knowledge revealed to a sinner doesn't produce righteousness, but a downward spiral of condemnation and more sin. The Law can be useful in the hands of the Holy Spirit to draw God's elect unto himself, but it can never produce righteousness. Nevertheless, the Law does still serve an instructive purpose: to show man his sin. Paul next focuses on the heart of the problem. There's nothing wrong with the Law; it's just that our problem can't be solved from the outside; it can only be solved through a process of sanctification that begins within man's innermost being.

Romans 7:13-25

Paul described the perplexing situation in which he found himself, and which is true of everyone who has begun the process of sanctification; he found that he was not doing the good he desired in his inner man, but the very thing he didn't desire: sin (v. 15). In so saying, he wasn't disparaging the Law; rather he was acknowledging his sin, as evidenced by the fact that he agreed with the Law's assessment of his sinfulness (v. 16). Contrary to this, antinomianism denies either the reality of, or responsibility for sin; thus Paul's position should not be seen as antinomian. By acknowledging his sin for what it was, Paul confessed agreement with the Law, not that he was under the power of the Law, but that sin is always sin, even for a person under grace. Being under grace doesn't change the nature of sin, but it does change how sin is dealt with. Under the Law there were legal prescriptions for dealing with sin (albeit symbolic rather than efficacious). Under the Law Paul would have observed those prescriptions, which would have had no efficacy, but would have reminded him of the redemption to come in the work of Messiah; however, under grace Paul experienced conviction wrought by the indwelling Spirit of God and the recognition that his only acceptability before God was based upon God's gift of righteousness through faith in Christ. Would Paul have been better off under the Law? Would he have been less likely to continue in sin? Of course not, sin is a universal problem whether under Law or grace. For anyone who is tempted to think that the application of the Law would make an individual, or a society more righteous, they should carefully review the history of ancient Israel;

that history is filled with idolatry, social injustice, and personal and national sin of every sort (Acts 7:1-53).

Paul made a very interesting statement in verse 17. He said, in essence, "I'm not the one doing these things, but the sin dwelling in me is doing them." Was Paul attempting to sidestep responsibility for his sins? Certainly not; he had already acknowledged his responsibility (v. 15), but he was revealing a profound insight into the nature of salvation, of which one of the components is sanctification (separation from sin). Here he revealed that sanctification is a progressive work. When he came to faith in Christ, something happened within Paul, he became a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17), his inner man (*i.e.,* his spirit, 7:22 cf. 8:10) was sanctified. Now that inner man, living in continual union (fellowship) with the Holy Spirit, desired only to please God. So why did Paul, as a believer, continue to struggle with sin? Because only his spirit was sanctified; his flesh (a euphemism for the body and mind) was still unsanctified, and will not be completely sanctified until he is transformed in Christ's presence (1 Thess. 5:23). Until that time Paul, and all believers still in their natural bodies, wrestle with sin (vv. 21-25). Why did Paul share his deeply personal struggle? Because he knew it to be universal; it is a part of the progress of faith by which we are sanctified.

Having addressed the universality of the struggle with sin, Paul was then ready to deal with the question of how the believer is to live in light of this struggle, not through the application of the Law, but through inner transformation by the Spirit of God.

Romans 8:1-11

For the sinner, and we are all sinners, there is no greater truth than that expressed in Romans 8:1. We may be sinners; however, for those in Christ there is no condemnation. Paul tells us why in the next three verses: because Christ has fulfilled the Law for us (v. 4), that is, for those who are not seeking to be justified by the deeds of the flesh (*i.e.,* by works). The Christian life is a Spirit-led life. We are saved by faith, and we are transformed into Christ's image by faith, as we walk by the Spirit. God knows that just regulating a person's outward behavior doesn't produce true righteousness; but changing a person on the inside produces the kind of true humility and brokenness over sin that we see evidenced in Paul's

own experience, a brokenness that exalts only God and refuses to gauge itself by what others do, or don't do. It's easy to see why law and grace don't mix. We can't operate on both principles. If we choose to be governed by law we will either experience condemnation and shame, or we will convince ourselves that we can meet the standard, in which case we become self-deluded and self-righteous. On the other hand, if we choose to be governed by grace, we acknowledge that we are needy sinners able to please God only through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and though we might fail a thousand, or a million times, God still loves us and is there to move us forward no matter what circumstance we may have created for ourselves.

Romans 8:12-17

Does grace mean that the believer simply gives up on living righteously? Absolutely not! We are under obligation, not to the flesh, or to the Law, but to the one who has loved us. In fact, Paul went so far as to say that it is those who are being led by the Spirit who are the sons of God (v. 14). Does that sound like an abandonment to sin? Those who know Christ as Savior don't serve him out of the fear of retribution (the principle of law), but because they have been adopted into a new family, and God has become their Father (v. 15), and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within (vv. 14,16).

Romans 8:18-30

God cursed the world when man fell; he did that in order to make redemption possible (vv. 19-22); in the meantime life is difficult, but God is at work doing what men cannot do for themselves. God gives those who place their faith in Christ his Spirit, that is to say, he implants the Holy Spirit within them, both as a guarantee of the complete redemption to come (Eph. 1:13-14) and as a help at the present time (Rom. 8:26). Ultimately, it is God who sees the believer through this process (vv. 28-30). It isn't up to the believer to save himself, or to sanctify himself, or to glorify himself; all of that is God's work.

Paul isn't quite finished with the conflict between the principles of law and grace, next he points out the reason for Israel's failure (9:30-10:21), and their ultimate conversion through the triumph of faith (11:1-32).

Romans 9:30-10:15

Paul began with this enigma: How is it that the Gentiles, who were not pursuing righteousness, attained righteousness, while the Jews, who were pursuing righteousness, failed to obtain it? The answer, Paul said, is because the Jews were pursuing righteousness through works of the Law rather than by faith; and since the Law is powerless to produce righteousness, the Jews failed—though a few, like Paul, obtained righteousness by faith. While the Jews were seeking their own righteousness in accordance with the Law, they failed to subject themselves to the righteousness of God that is by faith (10:1-3). Why? Because faith and Law are mutually exclusive. The Law does not lead one to Christ until he or she gives up and confesses that they are unable to keep the Law. As long as one thinks he can keep it, he is under the delusion of self-righteousness. That's why in verse 4 Paul said: "For Christ is the end of the Law to everyone who believes." Faith can only begin when one realizes they can't keep the Law, and that's just as true of a saved sinner as it is of an unsaved sinner!

Trying to keep the Law is the ultimate self-deception. In order to think we can, we have to be under the delusion that we can do what only God can do, that is, to ascend into Heaven (v. 6), or descend into Hell and rise again (v. 7). In essence, when we seek to obtain our perfection by the Law, we act as if we were God! Paul seems to be implying that legalism is actually a form of idolatry. The key to righteousness is not the Law, but faith in Christ (vv. 9-12). Can the Law transform a believer into a more spiritual person? According to Paul the answer is "No." As we have seen, the Apostle repeatedly refutes the notion that the Law plays any part in sanctification. The Law is powerless to bring about anything but condemnation and death, and it's incompatible with the concept of inner transformation by the power of the Spirit on the basis of grace through faith. Do we need to know about the Law and man's failure under law historically? Of course; the Holy Spirit can use that as he can all other scripture to our benefit, but that isn't the same as being subject to the Law.

Conclusions on the relationship between grace and law

From the passages we surveyed one thing is clear: The New Testament provides no support for legalism. The New Testament is emphatic in stating that the promises made to Abraham, which include both eternal salvation and the kingdom, can be obtained only through faith, and it is equally emphatic that faith and law cannot co-exist, since law is injurious to faith. This does not deny the goodness of the Law (when properly understood for what it was intended), nor does it result in antinomianism; rather, it leads to the recognition of a higher law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, a different kind of law with transforming power.

There is a reason the word "gospel" was chosen to describe the message of Christ's atoning work. The word "Gospel" means "good news." Before the cross, the message received from the Law was bad news, news of death and condemnation (Rom. 7:9-10). The gospel of Christ is the good news of freedom, life, and righteousness provided on the basis of grace through faith in Christ, plus nothing. The voice of legalism is the voice of slavery, death, and despair. It is, as Paul pronounced, a tainted and "accursed gospel," which proceeds from the rationalizing mind that has yet to comprehend the transforming power of the true gospel of grace through faith alone.

Personal Apostasy

The doctrine of personal apostasy is a prominent teaching in the New Testament; it is discussed or alluded to in almost every book. In fact, an understanding of this truth is essential if one is to understand salvation; it is also essential to the interpretation of many New Testament passages. Personal apostasy refers to an individual falling away from their profession of faith. The key question concerning these individuals is whether they were ever genuinely saved. Since many passages indicate that apostasy inevitably results in eternal damnation, this issue is of considerable importance.

Personal apostasy defined

The word "apostasy" comes indirectly from a Greek word that appears in 1 Timothy 4:1. The word *aphistēmi* (translated "fall away" in the NASB) is the verb form of *"apostasia"* from which we transliterate the English "apostasy." The idea is to departure from something. The significance of a departure is, of course, determined by the context, *i.e.,* what one is departing from. In 2 Timothy 2:19 Paul uses this word to encourage Christians to depart from evil (the NASB says, "abstain"), whereas in Hebrews 3:12 the author uses it to warn people not to fall away from the living God. Obviously, departing from sin, and departing from God are actions that result in very different consequences. It is important to recognize that the occurrence of the word *apostasia* (or other related terms) doesn't necessarily indicate that a passage is referring to personal apostasy; likewise apostasy is frequently described in passages where this term is not used. Some of the key passages in the New Testament dealing with this subject are: 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Hebrews 3:1-19; 6:4-8, 10:26-31, 12:14-29, 2 Peter 2, 1 John 1-3, and Jude 5-16.

Personal apostasy described

The description of apostasy given in the New Testament is of an individual who, while fully understanding the truth of the gospel and having at one time professed faith in Christ, ultimately falls away from his or her profession. As we will see, this happens because they were never genuinely saved. We have to be careful not to confuse "the faith" (the gospel) with personal faith (a personal choice). Apostates defect from "the faith," because they have no personal, saving faith.

The Greek and Roman world was not a friendly place prior to the influence of Christianity; it could be very cruel, and the social effects were everywhere to be seen, from the exposure of unwanted infants and the elderly, to rampant moral degradation even under the guise of religious worship. Where Christianity penetrated this darkness, there were people who were attracted to the life of local churches and the care that Christians showed to one another; there were also those who saw the church as an institution to be exploited. Whatever the case, many people associated themselves with Christianity who had never genuinely yielded to Christ resulting in regeneration. Christ foretold this gradual infiltration by unbelievers in his parables recorded in Matthew 13. Some of these individuals eventually returned to their former religion, or went on to the next religion. This phenomenon was perplexing and distressing to the churches. As a result, there are numerous references and explanations, as well as warnings concerning apostasy throughout the New Testament. Unfortunately, the modern church has largely lost sight of this teaching, and the result has been confusion and incorrect interpretation of many New Testament passages. Lack of a clear understanding of personal apostasy is also at the heart of much of the divide between Calvinists and Arminians, though there are other important differences as well. The following are some of the major New Testament passages describing or warning against personal apostasy.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

In this passage Paul described an apostate as one who departs from "the faith" (v. 1). Some have mistakenly taken Paul's statement to mean that these individuals were previously saved. However, this is a reference to a

departure from the gospel itself, not from personal faith. We must not confuse "the faith" with personal faith in Christ (cf. Jude 3); "the faith" refers to the body of truth (inclusive of the gospel) that defines Christianity; personal faith (*i.e.,* "saving faith") is submission to the gospel (cf. 1 Pt. 1:22; 2:8; 3:1; 4:17). Of course, in order for someone to depart from the faith, they must have professed to believe the faith at one time. In other words, an apostate is one who professes to believe the truth for a time, but later turns from that profession. There is no way to tell from a profession if the faith professed is genuine; true faith can only be seen through a transformed life.

2 Peter 2:1-22

Peter described the same type of person that Paul described in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. Notice the similarity: 1) In verse 15, he "forsakes" (relinquishes) the right way. 2) In verse 20, after escaping the defilements of the world by the knowledge (*epignosis*) of the Lord and Savior, he reverts back to those defilements. The question we need to answer is whether there is any indication the individuals described were once saved, and there are three lines of evidence that clearly indicate Peter was not talking about people who were ever saved.

The first line of evidence is found in 2 Peter 2:20. Peter said: "…the last state has become worse for them than the first." Verse 21 defines the two states to which verse 20 refers; the first state is: "…not to have known the way of righteousness." The second state is: "…having known it, to turn away." If we took this statement to refer to saved people, Peter would be saying that these individuals were better off before they were saved, which could not be true. That makes it fairly obvious this passage cannot refer to people who were once saved. No matter what kind of Christian one might be, it could never be properly said of them that they were better off before they were saved. The Arminian view of this passage is that the people described were saved and lost their salvation, in which case they certainly would be worse off, but not worse off than they were before they knew the gospel as this passage says, only worse off than they were before they lost their salvation. However, Peter said they are worse off than before they knew the gospel. What does that mean? The idea seems to be that these individuals were better off before they turned away from the truth, because

up to that point they could have yielded themselves in faith and been saved, but now they have rejected the truth, and in so doing they have rendered themselves with no recourse.

The second line of evidence is found in verse 22. What does the proverb of the dog returning to its vomit mean? A dog returns to its vomit because that's a dog's inner nature. Why does a pig wallow in the mud? Because wallowing in the mud is a pig's inner nature. Giving a pig a bath on the outside doesn't change its inner nature. This proverb simply illustrates the difference between external reformation and inner transformation. Even having experienced a measure of personal reformation, an apostate turns away from the faith because he, or she, was never transformed through genuine faith in Christ. Personal reformation may involve both attitudes and actions (soul and body) but does not involve a renewed spirit, as does transformation. When such a person departs from the faith and denies the Savior, they are simply doing what is consistent with their nature; they may have appeared to be a saved person from what could be seen from the outside, but their nature was never changed. For some, that true nature will display itself (cf. Luke 11:24-28), while for others, they will remain as "hidden reefs" within the local church (Jude 12). While apostasy may be perplexing and disheartening, it's the "hidden reefs" who pose the greater danger to the local church, especially if they serve in positions of leadership.

The third line of evidence indicating that these individuals were never saved is to be deduced from the doctrine of eternal security. They couldn't have been saved, because a saved person can't lose their salvation. (See the chapter on the permanence of salvation beginning on page 51) Note the final lot of these individuals: Verse 1 says that they will be "destroyed" (Gr. *apollumi,* which means, "to destroy utterly," a total and final destruction). This is the same term that is translated "perish" in John 3:16; there the ones perishing are set in bold contrast to the saved. (In Matthew 15:24 *apollumi* is translated "lost"; the idea is that lostness indicates a future of eternal damnation.) In 2 Peter 2:9, Peter indicated that these individuals will be kept under punishment "for the day of judgment." In 2:17 he said: "the black darkness has been reserved" for them. This phrase, composed of six Greek words, is repeated in only one other place in the New Testament: Jude 13. A comparison of Jude 5-13 indicates that Jude

was speaking in reference to the same type of people Peter had in mind. Note that Jude adds the word "forever," clearly indicating the eternally lost condition of those in question.

Hebrews 3:1-14

There are three major views on the meaning of this and the other related passages in Hebrews (6:4-14; 10:26-31; 12:14-29). The first view is that these passages are warnings to Christians not to live carnally. According to this view the "rest" referred to in Hebrews 3:18-4:13 doesn't illustrate salvation, but the rest a believer enters into when he, or she, learns to trust and obey God; thus it denotes a level of spiritual attainment. Proponents of this view argue that if the rest mentioned here, which Israel failed to enter, represents salvation, then that would imply that even Moses was not saved, since he did not enter the promised land. This objection fails to take into account the fact that Israel in the wilderness is used here only analogically; therefore, Israel's failure is not an example of personal apostasy, but an analogy. There is a difference in saying that something is analogous to a particular thing, and in saying that it is an example (*i.e.,* the very thing itself). The second view is an Arminian view that says these passages are warnings to Christians not to apostatize, and thus forfeit their salvation. The case will be made here that the correct view is that these passages are warnings to people in the church about the danger of failing to take possession of salvation (*i.e.,* the failure to exercise saving faith), thus falling beyond hope into apostasy. (When we come to Hebrews 6:4-8, we will note an additional view, the hypothetical view, with respect to that passage.)

The major problem that must be dealt with in Hebrews 3:1-14 is determining who is addressed. In verse 1 the address is clearly to "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling," and in verse 6 to the house of God (in so many words). Again, in verse 12 they are referred to as "brethren." There can be no doubt that these are references to a group of saved people. However, each time the readers are addressed as "brethren," or some other term indicative of genuine faith (cf. vv. 1-6a, 12), the address is qualified. The identification as saved people established in verses 1-6a is qualified in verse 6b (where "if" is the third class conditional—"*ean"* {subjunctive mood—implying that the state of the

condition is uncertain}; in other words, they may or may not actually be of God's house). What the writer was saying is this: You are what I have called you (in verses 1-6a), assuming you hold fast (v. 6b). What is the opposite of holding fast? Verse 12 defines it as "falling away" (*apostasia*). Again, the identification as saved people established in verse 12 is qualified in verse 14, and once again "if" is the third class conditional, subjunctive mood. In other words, the author courteously addresses his audience according to their profession since he doesn't know their hearts, but he does so with clear qualification. His form of address contains the cordial assumption that they are what they claim to be, though he clearly has concerns that some may eventually prove to be apostates, as have others that have already departed. There is a parallel to this form of address in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Three times in 2 Corinthians Paul referred to his readers as "brethren," twice as "beloved" and in the first verse he addressed the letter to "saints," but in 13:5 he warned that some might not be saved. Clearly his appellations were conditioned upon true faith in Christ. Even though Paul addressed the readers as "saints" and "brethren," he knew the likelihood that in any church there are some who, though they fully understand the gospel, have yet to act on it. The writer of Hebrews does the same; he writes to a local congregation warning them about the possibility of apostasy, even though he is convinced that most of them are genuinely saved (cf. 6:9). After all, how else could such a letter have been addressed? We could hardly expect him to have addressed it to "saints and potential apostates," that would have been offensive. While the passage is addressed to those professing faith in Christ, it is a warning of the danger of failing to take possession of salvation through genuine faith.

The presence of these conditions is clear evidence that the author was concerned about the salvation of some in the local church. His assertion is that those who are truly saved are those who "hold fast the beginning… firm until the end," (*i.e.,* they are not of those who "fall away"). This should not be construed to imply works salvation. The idea is not that one is saved because he or she holds fast, but that holding fast is an invariable characteristic of true faith. So much so, that falling away indicates there was never saving faith. Failure to make this distinction is the basis for much confusion. This agrees with the message of 1 John 2:18-19. Therefore, we should understand the "rest" referred to in 3:15-4:13 as

illustrating salvation through means of faith. Those who have placed their faith in Christ have entered that rest; all who have not entered are exhorted to do so before it's too late. Again, there is no indication that a saved person could become lost. The message is simply this: It is those who hold fast to the end that have saving faith.

Hebrews 6:4-12

The three basic interpretations of the Hebrews apostasy passages were given above; however, we need to mention one additional interpretation given to 6:4-12, which we will refer to as "the hypothetical interpretation." It asserts that this passage describes what would happen "if" a saved person could apostatize (which proponents view as impossible); thus, according to this view we have a hypothetical used for the sake of making a point. However, this view fails to recognize that the warning concerns a very real problem, as indicated both in the book of Hebrews and elsewhere in the New Testament.

This passage was addressed to a believing audience; however, the key to its interpretation is distinguishing between those addressed (a mixed group that was presumptively Christian) and those being described. Those described have five qualities: 1) they have been enlightened; 2) they have tasted of the heavenly gift; 3) they have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit; 4) they have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come; and, 5) they have fallen away. How do we know that apostasy (as we have defined it) is in view in this passage? First, because of the description; the individuals described are ones who have "fallen away." The word *parapipto* is a strong term; it means, "to defect." [Although *parapipto* is used only here in the New Testament, we can get some feel for the term by observing the usage of *pipto* in Romans 11:11 where it is translated "fall" and refers to a complete and irrecoverable fall. *Parapipto* (*pipto* with a prepositional prefix) is an intensified form of *pipto*.] The nature and the magnitude of this defection can be seen in the last half of verse 6, "…since they are re-crucifying the Son of God for themselves and putting him to public ridicule" [author's translation]. Note the following: We are told that they "re-crucify" the Son of God (*i.e.,* they display in their own hearts and minds the same hostility, rejection, and contempt toward Christ as did those who crucified him. This rejection is both personal and

public; they re-crucify him "to," or "for" themselves (middle voice) and put him to "open shame" (ridicule). This is clearly the same description given of apostasy elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pt. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:18-19). While some imply that carnality in the life of a believer is figuratively a re-crucifixion of Christ, such a thought is completely foreign to the book of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 10:10-14). Re-crucifixion of Christ in the heart and mind of an individual can only be taken as rejection; it is a falling away which, as we have seen from Hebrews chapter 3, disqualifies one from the title of "brethren," and being "partakers of a heavenly calling." The second reason we know this passage describes apostasy is because of the examples given. In verses 7 and 8 the two types of ground represent two types of people. There are those that respond with fruit and those that respond with thorns and thistles (cf. Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23). The ground described in verse 8 is clearly representative of the person described in verse 6 who "falls away." Notice the description of this ground: "... it is rejected and a curse is at hand (impending), of which the end is unto burning" [author's translation]. The word "curse" is *katara*, which elsewhere in the New Testament refers to eternal condemnation. Of course, it would be impossible for a saved person to suffer condemnation; otherwise, what was he, or she, saved from? Some find what they suppose to be a loophole in the word "nigh" (AV) or "close" (NASB). The argument given is that this can describe saved people because it doesn't say that they are cursed, only that they are "close" to being cursed. But, if as has been established, a saved person cannot be lost, how close can one get to something that is absolutely impossible? It is as ridiculous to think that a saved person could be close to condemnation as it is to think that such could be condemned. The word translated "close" is *eggus*. Its usage here has the sense of that which is impending (cf. 2 Pt. 2:3b). The idea is that the judgment of the apostate has not been carried out yet, but that it will be carried out when he faces the Lord whom he has persistently denied with full knowledge. The third reason for believing that the person described in Hebrews 6:4-12 is an apostate (as defined) is that apostasy is indicated by way of contrast with true faith. Verse 9 says, "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way" (NASB). The word translated "accompany" is *echomena,* which in the middle voice, as here,

means, “to seize” or “to possess for one’s self.” Notice that the writer distinguishes his readers in general from the individuals he has just described: They (the believers) had taken possession of salvation, clearly implying that those described earlier (vv. 4-8) had not. There are two responses to the gospel: one is to take possession of salvation; the other is to turn from it, or passively ignore it (which is just another form of rejection). The people described in verses 4-8 are those who having received the gospel message, and perhaps at some superficial level having embraced it, ultimately turned away.

We have seen no indication that the individuals described in this passage were ever saved. Let’s now take a closer look at each of the clauses used to describe these apostates. The first clause occurs in verse 4, and describes the subjects as “…those who were once enlightened.” The word “enlightened” is *photizo*, and its use here is figurative. The idea is of a person coming to understand the truth of the gospel. The question is: Does enlightenment come before or after saving faith? The answer is: “Both.” One certainly comes to understand some things only after coming to faith in Christ, but they must understand the gospel before they can make the decision to come. Thus, sufficient light must precede faith in order to make faith possible. The question with respect to the passage is whether the reference to enlightenment indicates saving faith, and since enlightenment must precede faith, it cannot be evidence of such. Thus, there is no evidence in this clause that the individuals described possessed saving faith. (Note also that John 1:6-13 says that all men are enlightened at some time.)

The second clause (v. 4) describes the subjects as ones who “…have tasted of the heavenly gift.” While there is some uncertainty as to what the heavenly gift refers, the key to unraveling this statement lies in the word “tasted.” Obviously this is a metaphorical use of the word, since the heavenly gift is not something that could be literally, physically tasted. The word *geuomai,* when used this way, means “to perceive,” as in, “a taste of reality.” It’s not necessary for a person to be saved to perceive the gift of God, because perceiving salvation through the illuminating and convicting work of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the *epignosis* (the sure knowledge of the truth) that one must possess in order to exercise

faith. Thus again, this perception must precede faith, for it is what makes faith possible, and therefore it cannot be taken as evidence of faith.

The third clause also occurs in verse 4, and describes the subjects as having been made "partakers of the Holy Spirit." There is general agreement that no one could be saved unless they first become a recipient of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That work includes illumination, conviction, and calling. Actually, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit there would be no call to accept or reject. Because we normally regard "partaking" as active (*i.e.,* the result of a choice), it's easy to misunderstand what the writer was saying. No such choice is indicated here, since "partake" is in the passive voice. In other words, these are not individuals who chose to partake (by an act of faith), but people who were only passive recipients of the illumination, conviction, and general calling of the Spirit. To put it another way, we could say that they were made partakers of the Spirit in the same way that a person is made a partaker of the judicial system when he or she receives a speeding ticket.

The fourth descriptive clause is in verse 5 and pictures the subjects as those who "have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come." Again we have the word "tasted" (*geuomai*), and as before it is here used metaphorically (see the explanation above). These individuals are said to have perceived the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, possibly a reference to the ministry of the Spirit in signs and wonders as manifested in the early churches. But this could be said of anyone within the church, whether saved or lost; so again, there is no implication that these individuals were saved.

The fifth descriptive clause occurs in verse 6 and pictures the subjects as having received all of the aforementioned benefits "and then have fallen away." The question is: What did they fall away from? The answer is that they fell away from what they had—the opportunity, by virtue of knowledge and conviction, to respond to the gospel. Here we encounter a hard concept, hard in the sense that it is not pleasant to consider, but there comes a time in the life of every person who persists in refusing the gospel when their refusal becomes permanent by their own choice. There is a time in the life of every person when they are at the closest point they will ever be to coming to Christ—maximum light, conviction, persuasion, etc.

If they refuse at that point, they will never come. Since no unsaved person knows when he or she is at that point, refusing to place one's faith in Christ at any opportunity could potentially render him, or her, beyond hope. This was a poignant warning to those within the church who had come out of the world and into the church, but who had failed to enter into salvation, hence the strong parallel to Israel's wandering in the wilderness described in Hebrews 3:7-4:11. Consequently, while this passage was written to a group of professing Christians, the writer was describing the problem of those in the group who might eventually apostatize because they were never genuinely saved.

Hebrews 10:26-31

Verse 26 begins with the word "for." When we examine verses 26-31, which describe the path to apostasy, what we find is that this section stands in contrast to verses 19-25, which describes true belief. Note also the parallel between 10:19-25 and 3:1-6, and between 10:19-25 and 3:12-14. It is very clear that we have in these passages a recurring warning against apostasy.

In this passage we see six reasons why the people described in verses 26-31 are apostates (as defined here, *i.e.*, those who professed faith at one time, but later turned away because they never actually possessed true faith). The first reason is given in verse 26 where the text says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." We know from our previous discussion of 2 Peter 2 that "the knowledge of the truth" refers to an understanding of the gospel (This identification is consistent throughout Peter's writings, see 1 Peter 1:22.) Here we have a person who "sins willfully" (*i.e.,* makes a conscious choice of sin over Christ) after receiving the sure knowledge of the gospel (the *epignosis*). What we must understand is the nature of this state (the word "sinning" in the original is a present participle and indicates a continuing condition, or state). The word "willful" is *ekousios*, which means "voluntary." In other words, the description is of a person who has abandoned himself to a state of sin. In light of 1 John 3:6-10 this cannot describe a Christian who is merely struggling with sin; this is the description of a person who has willfully abandoned himself to sin and does not know Christ, regardless of what he

might claim. (Virtually the whole of 1 John is devoted to this theme.) The second reason why this passage is describing apostasy (as defined) is found in verse 26b, which reads, "…there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The word *apoleipetai,* translated "remains," means "to be left." We could say, "…there is left no sacrifice for sins." The reason why there is no sacrifice for sin is because the person has rejected the only sacrifice capable of atoning for his sin. The third reason this passage is describing apostasy (as defined) is found in verse 26. Here we are told what this person doesn't have: a sacrifice for sins. In verse 27 we are told what he does have: the prospect of a terrifying future. Note this very important fact given in verse 27: these people are classed as "adversaries" of God. They are adversaries whom God will judge with a consuming fire. The NIV reads: "…but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." The fourth reason why this passage describes apostasy (as defined) is found in verse 29. Here we see three parallel statements; they all indicate a rejection of the gospel expressed differently. The first statement says that these individuals have "trampled under foot the Son of God." *Katapateo,* which is translated "trample" means "to spurn" (when used figuratively, as here). The idea is an outright rejection. In other words, the individual considers the Son of God as "worthless," like dirt beneath his feet. The second statement says that he "regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified." "Unclean" (*koinos*) means "common." The idea is that this person has no appreciation for the sanctity of Christ's death; it evokes no positive response from within. The third statement says they have "insulted the Spirit of grace" (the Holy Spirit). Our English word "insult" doesn't carry the force that *enubrizo* indicates. The idea is an arrogant, insolent, scornful, even blasphemous disregard of the Spirit's work in calling men to salvation. In these three statements, we have three different pictures of the rejection of the gospel. The fifth reason why this passage describes apostasy (as defined) is seen in verses 30-31. *Ekdikesis,* translated "vengeance," refers to retributive justice; the idea is punishment in the strictest sense. The sixth reason why this passage describes apostasy (as defined) is in verse 39, where the author reflects back on what he has said in verses 19-38. Two words in the first part of this verse are critical to understanding who and what is being described here. "Shrink back" (*hupostolēs*) means, "to turn back"; the idea is equivalent to *apostasia* ("to

fall away"), "destruction" (*apoleia*) means "perdition." Perdition is lostness. Also, note the contrast presented in verse 39b. There can be no doubt that verse 39 identifies the people described in verses 26-31 as apostates.

Is there anything in this description that would lead us to believe these individuals were ever saved? Arminians point out that there are a few reasons for thinking that this is the case. First, since the writer includes himself in the group he refers to by the pronoun "we" (v. 26), some assume that he must be referring to saved people (since the writer was obviously saved). However, the verse itself defines who is included within the scope of this pronoun; it is everyone who has "received the knowledge of the truth," which encompasses both those who have responded positively (unto salvation) and those who have responded negatively (unto perdition). There is no grammatical or contextual reason for restricting this pronoun to refer only to saved people. [The scope of a pronoun must be determined by the context. For instance, the pronoun "we" in verse 39 is clearly restricted to saved people because the context limits the reference to saved people. In verse 26 the reference clearly includes unsaved people.] The second reason offered is that in verse 26 the subjects are said to have "received the knowledge of the truth." As we have noted above, one must receive the knowledge of the truth in order to make a decision to come to Christ; thus such knowledge precedes salvation and in no way indicates that these individuals were actually saved. In 2 Peter 2:20 Peter described people who received the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, but remain unsaved; we should not confuse "receiving the knowledge of the Lord" with "receiving the Lord." Receiving the knowledge of the Lord doesn't imply any decision on the part of the recipient. All that is indicated is that these individuals came to understand the truth of the gospel. The third reason offered is based on verse 29: The people in question were said to have been "sanctified" by the blood of the covenant (*i.e.,* by Christ's blood), which some take as an indication that the writer must have been referring to people who were once saved. When we hear the word "sanctify" (Gr. *hagiazo*) we tend to associate it with sanctification in regard to salvation. However, *hagiazo* is capable of a much broader use; in 1 Corinthians 7:14 it is specifically applied to the unsaved spouses of believers. *Hagiazo* carries the idea of placing something into a privileged

position. It might be a position of grace, or righteousness, or consecration, or opportunity. The question is: In what sense would it be appropriate to refer to a lost person as sanctified by the blood of Christ? The answer is that the death of Christ sanctifies every man and woman in that it puts each one into a position of opportunity to be saved (*i.e.,* it makes them "savable"). This clause has probably been the greatest sticking point in the interpretation of this passage for many, but it is important to recognize this is due to reading a very narrow concept of sanctification into the passage, rather than recognizing the biblical scope of the terminology. Just as there is a special sense in which only true believers are sanctified, so there is another sense in which all men, especially those that are exposed to the gospel, are sanctified.

As we have seen, there is nothing in this passage to indicate these individuals were ever saved; they are simply people who having come to understand the gospel said "No" (or "Maybe"—which is the same thing), instead of "Yes." The underlying message of the passage is this: Today is the day of salvation; don't put it off. Whatever a person may think, they are without excuse and without remedy if they fail to respond to the gospel (cf. Heb. 3:7-19). Delaying a decision after hearing and understanding can potentially render one beyond hope.

Hebrews 12:14-29

In these sixteen verses there are five statements that indicate this passage is a warning against personal apostasy (as defined here). The first is in verse 14b. What the writer was saying is this: Pursue salvation; don't stop short only to be lost. There are two contrasting responses to the gospel: one is to take possession of salvation (cf. Heb. 6:9, the NASB rendering, "accompany" is *echomena*—middle voice, which means "to possess for one's self"); the other is to turn away. Here the writer is clearly concerned that some may not press forward and obtain, by faith, that sanctification (salvation) without which they are lost. The second statement is in verse 15a. This one would be difficult to interpret, if not for the context of verses 14-16; however, given the context, it is apparent that coming "short of the grace of God" means failure to enter into salvation. The third statement is in verse 16. Here "godless" (*bebēlos*) means "irreligious." The writer is clearly describing apostasy. Even the

illustration of Esau is of one who had something within reach, but turned from it. (This should not be construed to imply that Esau was not saved; the reference to Esau is purely analogical.) The fourth statement occurs in verse 25a, and is an admonition about refusing him who warns from Heaven. *Paraitēsēsthe* (translated, "refuse") indicates a decisive rejection of God's warning of judgment. The fifth statement, which is found in verse 25b, describes those who turn away from God. Unlike some of the other apostasy passages in Hebrews, this one contains no statements that might easily be misconstrued to refer to believers. It is simply a sobering message: Don't be like Esau and trade your opportunity for a bowl of soup; if you do, you'll be sorry!

1 John 1:1-3:12

Virtually the entire book of 1 John comprises an extended contrast of vain profession versus true faith, and demonstrates that disingenuous faith sometimes manifests its true nature in open defection. For the sake of brevity we will focus primarily on the first three chapters of the book. In these chapters John discussed the problem of those within the local church who claimed to know God, but whose lives evidenced a different reality. The opening verses indicate that this church had become infected with an incipient form of gnosticism. We know that regardless of whether these individuals were connected with gnostic beliefs or not, they are clearly identified as those who deny that God came in the flesh (cf. 4:2); they professed to be in right relation to God but were characterized by corrupt living (1:5; 3:4-10), denial of sin (1:8-10), disobedience to the commands of God (2:3-4), hatred (or at least a lack of love) toward the brethren (2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:20), love of the world (2:15-17), in some cases open defection (2:18-19), denial that Jesus was the Messiah (2:22-23; 3:14-15), and denial of the hypostatic (personal) union of the divine and human natures of Christ (4:1-6). John made the point early that such individuals are excluded from the fellowship of God. He does this by way of contrast, stating that it is those who "walk in the light" who have fellowship with God, not those who merely profess.

It is a tragedy that the concept of fellowship with God has been so misconstrued. Perhaps the most prevalent view is that Christians who obey God and "walk in the light" are in fellowship with God, and those

Christians who sin and do not confess their sins are "out of fellowship"; hence, the misconception that confession restores broken fellowship with God. Such a view is completely at odds with the message of 1 John. John clearly contrasts two kinds of people: the children of God (true believers, whose life is characterized by walking in light), and children of the Devil (whose lives are characterized by walking in darkness and denying the faith), cf. 3:10. True believers have fellowship with God; everyone else is in darkness. This does not mean that believers do not sin, they do. But when they sin, saved people confess their sin and move forward. In fact, verse 7 clearly demonstrates than sin does not interrupt a believer's fellowship with God. John said: "…but if we walk in the light [*peripatomen*—present continual action] as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship [*koinonian*—present continual action] with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin [*kathapizei*—present continual action]" (NASB). Notice that these three actions occur simultaneously: walking in the light, having fellowship, and being cleansed from all sin. John doesn't say that if one walks in the light but falls into sin and loses his or her fellowship, that when they confess their sin fellowship is restored; he says this: If one is walking in the light, they are, at the very same time, experiencing fellowship with God and being cleansed from all sin. It should be apparent that John was not teaching that sin breaks fellowship, or that confession restores it. (This is not intended to minimize the importance of confession, which is a necessary component in experiential sanctification.) The fact is that Christians can no more lose their fellowship with God than they can lose their salvation. While this discussion may seem to be unrelated to the topic at hand, it is important to understand the subject with which John was dealing. According to John, there are two basic categories of people associated with the church: those who claim to be in right relation to God, and are, and those who claim to be in right relation to God, and aren't. Those who claim to be in right relation to God, but who do not know him, are the same people described in the previous passages who ultimately, if they persist in their unbelief, fall beyond hope (cf. 2:18-19). For the remainder of this survey we will proceed in the same manner as with the other passages, that is, to demonstrate that the individuals described are set in contrast to those who are saved.

In 1:5-2:2 John's argument proceeds from the nature of God. God is light without the slightest hint of darkness (v. 5), so God's children, who are in him, are children of light and walk in the light (vv. 6-7). This does not mean that they are completely without sin, for as verse 7 clearly says, their lives are characterized by three activities, all occurring continuously: they walk in the light, they have fellowship with God and with their brethren, and as they walk in the light they are being continually cleansed of sin. Of course, this is a very verbose statement, but John wanted to be certain his readers understood what he meant. Stated succinctly, what John said is this: If a person knows God, his life may not be perfect, but one thing is certain, it will reflect that he is a child of light rather than a child of darkness. In essence, John said that it is possible to see the evidence of true faith from the outside. This is an important truth that has been largely obscured in modern Christianity as we have lost our grip on the doctrine of conversion. Why did John make such a statement? Because the church was experiencing the destructive effects of those within that claimed to be right with God who were not what they professed to be. The only practical means of identifying true faith in another is conversion, *i.e.,* the outward change that manifests inner transformation, a change that can only be observed over time (cf. Mt. 13:19-23, esp. vv.20-21). [We must be careful in view of Christ's teaching in Matthew 13 that some seeds sprout quickly, but die. In that parable only those plants yielding fruit represent saved people. We must not be misled by those who readily respond to the gospel and appear to grow for a while. They may yet prove to be unfruitful. Only time will tell if their faith is genuine. We are not thus judging the new believer, but suspending judgment until the evidence is in.]

Apparently the particular form of unbelief that John was confronting had this characteristic: it tended to deny personal responsibility for sin. This makes a strong case that it might have been an early form of gnosticism, since that was a feature known to have been associated with gnostic beliefs. John's retort is clear and direct: If anyone says he has no sin, he is deceiving himself (v. 8), and calling God a liar, since God has declared all men to be sinners (Ps. 53:1-3). Confession of sin, that is, coming to grips with what we are, is one of the core characteristics of true faith, it's called "repentance," and it's one of the reasons many people refuse to come, because they cannot bring themselves to admit what they

are. Repentance isn't just something one does in order to obtain salvation, it's an integral part of faith; it's a turning from sin in order to turn to God, and it doesn't cease once a person is saved. Repentance continues to be a part of faith as one progresses through the Christian life. The person who doesn't manifest repentance, or as John says, "confession," only evidences that true faith isn't present.

In 1 John 2:3-11 John emphasized that the reality of true conversion (or as he put it, "knowing God") will manifest itself not only in the inner life of the believer, but in the outer life as well. James also dealt with this subject (Jam. 2:14-26), but John took it a step further; he not only asserted that the true knowledge of God is evidenced by obedience (vv. 3,5,6) and love of the brethren (vv. 7-11), but he stated categorically that where there is a lack of these, the claim to know God is invalidated. Such people live in the darkness, not in the light, and thus do not know God. This is tough language that the church needs to hear.

In 2:12-18 notice how John continues his contrast of true faith and false profession. In verses 12-14 he reasserts the position of the truly converted: Their sins are forgiven (v. 12), they know God (vv. 13-14), they have overcome the Evil One ("overcome" is *nenikēkate*—perfect active, *i.e.,* they now stand as victors based on the triumph of their faith) cf. vv. 13-14, they are strong spiritually (v. 14), and the word of God abides (continually) in them (v. 14). The love of the world is inconsistent with Christian faith. (John wasn't referring to the people of the world, but to worldliness, *i.e.,* the embracing of the world's ways and values.) Anyone who loves the world does not love the Father (v. 15), because the character of the world, that is, fleshly lust, material lust, and pride, do not come from the Father; they are the product of the darkness that is in the world. The world is destined to perish, but not the one who does the will of the Father, that is, the one who truly knows God.

In 2:19-27, having laid the foundational truth that there are two kinds of people within the visible church (those who truly know God, and those who merely profess to know him), John next embarked on his explanation of the apostasy of individuals within the local congregation. He reminds the believers that they are living in the last hour (*i.e.,* "the last time"—the *eschaton,* which from the Old Testament perspective began with the advent

of Christ). They had been taught that in the *eschaton* false Christs (antichrists) would come. [Jesus is the source of this information. It originates from his Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24:24). Whether these believers had access to any of the gospel accounts is unknown, but they certainly had access to apostolic teaching, which would have included this important information.] In verse 19, which is undoubtedly one of the most important explanatory passages in the New Testament, John made the profound assertion that those who have departed have done so because they were never "of us" (*i.e.,* of the children who dwell in light, that is, those who know God). In light of the reiteration in the second half of the verse, it is quite impossible to misunderstand his meaning. He says that we know they were not of us because if (*ei gar*, "for if"—giving the reason) they had been of us, they would have remained with us, *i.e.,* they would not have apostatized. John stated that the departure of these apostates happened for a purpose (*all' hina—"hina"* being a purposive particle) "in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us"; the sense is that not everyone who professes to be right with God is truly saved. This verse establishes two critical points with respect to the theme of the book and the New Testament doctrine of salvation: 1) the theme of this book is the contrast of true faith with mere profession; and, 2) it establishes the doctrine of the permanence of salvation, since it clearly states that anyone who departs from the faith they once professed was never genuinely saved. (See the previous discussion on the permanence of salvation beginning on page 51.)

John did not want his letter to sound as if the believers couldn't have figured this out for themselves (vv. 20-21); after all, they did have the Holy Spirit (v. 20). In verse 22 John returned to his discourse reiterating that the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah, God's Son in the flesh) speaks in the spirit of antichrist, which denies both Father and Son (v. 22). The denial of Christ is also a denial of the Father (v. 23), which answers the question some have posed, "Is it possible that some Jews who rejected Christ as Messiah were sincere worshipers of God?" Obviously, in light of John's statement there can be no doubt that those who rejected Jesus, as the Christ, could not have been sincere worshipers of the Father. (Note the implication here for the dual covenant theory.)

In 2:28-3:12 John continues his contrast with the admonition to abide in Christ, but adds an additional motivation: that we might have confidence and not shrink away from him (as will those who dwell in darkness) at his coming (v. 28). Again, he reinforces his previous statements to the effect that it is those who practice righteousness that are born of God ("practice" = *poion*, present active participle, signifying to practice as an ongoing manner of living). The one who practices sin (again, *poion*, as before) also practices lawlessness, because sin is lawlessness. The ones who walk in darkness blatantly disobey God's explicit commands (v. 4). Christ did not come to save men so that they would be free to sin, but so they could be free from sin (v. 5). He repeated what he had said before: "No one who abides in Him sins," not a reference to individual sins, everyone sins, but to the giving of one's self to live in sin. He admonished the brethren not to be deceived; true belief manifests itself in righteousness (v. 7). Where righteousness is absent, it is to be assumed that saving faith is also absent, and the subject is a child of the Devil (v. 8). John said that the Devil has sinned from the beginning, and Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil (v. 8); so by implication, the one who sins (continually, as a lifestyle) is not in Christ. Notice the strong dichotomy. John leaves no room for misunderstanding. He is not merely contrasting spiritual believers with carnal believers as some suppose; he is contrasting the saved with the lost. Not only does the one who is born of God not practice sin, he cannot, because God's seed (the indwelling Holy Spirit) abides in him. As if he had not stated this truth robustly enough already, John next connected all the dots so that no one would have any reason to misunderstand. He vigorously maintained that it is possible to tell who are children of God and who are children of the Devil by their lifestyles (v. 10). In an age of private religion and tolerance, this is not a popular text; and if strictly applied, which it should be, we would have to confess that there are probably far fewer saved people than the number professing faith would suggest.

There are other passages in 1 John where we see the same contrast between the truly saved and the professing but unsaved (3:14-15; 4:1-6, 7-10, 11-21; 5:1-12); nevertheless, the point is sufficiently made that there are two kinds of people within the professing church: those who know God, and those who say they know God, but don't.

The path to apostasy

In understanding the path to apostasy it is helpful to get a clear picture of what is involved in a person coming to faith in Christ. Probably the simplest statement is that faith is exercising positive volition (one's will) in submitting to the gospel (*i.e.,* the truth about who Christ is and what he did). Thus, faith is obedience to the truth of the gospel. The absence of either core ingredient (the gospel truth, or obedience of the will) precludes saving faith. Consequently, from the human perspective, there are two areas in which a failure can occur: failure to understand the truth of the gospel, and failure to act on that truth.

We know from several passages discussed already that an apostate has at one time known and professed to believe the truth. (2 Peter 2:20 and Hebrews 10:26 both use the term *epignosis*, referring to a sure knowledge or understanding.) Once a person comes to have the *epignosis* there are two things that could occur to lead him, or her, to apostasy. The most obvious fault would be an immediate and final refusal. The other, and perhaps not so obvious failure, is that in the absence of a positive decision to accept Christ, the individual might simply drift away from the truth (a more passive form of rejection). In either case the result is the same: a failure to exercise faith.

Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that one avenue of apostasy is that people are led astray into demonic doctrine. It is instructive to note that these doctrines are most often communicated through the vehicle of religion. If that is surprising, we should note what Christ said about the religious system of his day (Mt. 23:1-36, cf. 7:21-23). Undoubtedly many fall into apostasy after coming to understand the gospel because they simply delay in responding, and are diverted by false religion under the guise of truth.

In Hebrews 3:13 the writer said, "lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." What is meant by "the deceitfulness of sin"? Simply that sin promises fulfillment, but it delivers death. Sin always involves believing a lie (Heb. 10:26-27). Once a person has come to the sure knowledge of the truth, the choice to remain in a state of sin is inherently a rejection of Christ (cf. v. 29), which in some cases results in a final decision from which a person will never turn. The most dangerous

position that any person could be in is having come to a knowledge of the gospel, to delay responding, for each moment that “Yes” is withheld is another “No!”

Conclusions

The purpose in exploring the characteristics of apostasy is not judgmental, but practical and preventative; if we don't know what apostasy is and how it's manifested, we will be ill prepared to warn the church and deal with it when it happens. Just as some physical agents can be silent killers if we ignore the warning signs, so apostasy can be a silent killer within the local church.

What does apostasy look like? An apostate no longer holds to the truth of the gospel (1 Timothy 4:1 and Hebrews 6:6—they fall away from the faith; Hebrews 3:6,14—they do not hold fast; Hebrews 10:39—they shrink back to destruction; Hebrews 12:14—they do not pursue sanctification {the sanctification acquired by faith that is required for acceptance before God}; Hebrews 12:25—they turn away from God {by turning away from the truth}; 2 Peter 2:15—they forsake {relinquish} the right way). Apostates are often individuals who have permitted themselves to be deceived by false religion (2 Tim. 4:1-3). The heart of the apostate is evil and unbelieving (Heb. 3:12).

When an apostate chooses to remain in the church, they do so out of improper motivation. They do not remain in the church to worship and serve God. A person cannot reject Christ and love God (Jn. 5:23, cf. vv. 37-38); an apostate's motivation is clearly indicated in 2 Peter 2:3 and Jude 12. They are people who have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13; 10:26; 2 Pt. 2:9-15). An apostate's attitude toward Christ is one of absolute rejection (Heb. 6:6; 10:29; 12:25). Apostates by their own choice are hopelessly lost individuals (Heb. 6:6). Their hopeless condition is not due to God's rejection of them, but their rejection of him. If a person rejects Christ as Savior at the greatest level of revelation, conviction, and calling after coming to the full knowledge of the truth, they will never receive him (just as two magnets that don't come together at a certain distance won't come together at a greater distance).

Appendix:
Regeneration and Indwelling in the Old Testament

[The material in this appendix was adapted from the author's essay: "Regeneration and Indwelling in the Old Testament" (Biblical Reader Communications, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated all scripture quotations in this appendix are from the New American Standard Bible.]

Introduction

There is only one means of eternal salvation: salvation by grace through faith in Christ. However, that should not be interpreted to mean that the temporal aspects involved in the application of the various components of salvation (justification, regeneration, indwelling, sanctification, etc.) are uniform throughout history. We are living at a time when biblical theology—doctrine as derived directly from scripture—is being prostrated to the requirements, or convenience, of extra-biblical theological assumptions. The desire of covenantalists to demonstrate that there is only one people of God in history has led some to argue that the application of the atonement prior to the cross was the same as afterward. The objective of such arguments seems to be to demonstrate uniformity between the Old and New Testaments and to lessen any distinctions that might better be interpreted using dispensational, rather than covenantal interpretive principles. Ultimately, incorrect theology has a way of tainting biblical interpretation. It is not, as covenantalists hold, the covenant of grace instituted in the Garden with Adam that is the fountainhead of salvation, but the new covenant inaugurated at the cross. That cross is a stake driven into history, and it worked a profound change in the outworking of divine grace: sins committed under the Law could henceforth be remitted, not simply "covered" or "passed over" as under the Law. The cross and the change it wrought at a precise moment in time is the fountainhead of a dispensational understanding of history, and vital to sound biblical interpretation.

Salvation, while often thought of as a singular truth, is actually a process involving many distinct operations. Even today, after the cross, we refer to believers as the "saved," as if salvation were a completed work rather than a work in progress. However, the fact is that salvation is not complete until the entire process is finished, including justification, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. The fact that God, from his eternal perspective, regards one's salvation as complete, signifying the certainly of its ultimate achievement, doesn't make it actually complete (in time). It is important that we recognize the difference between how God regards a saved sinner, often referred to as the believer's "position," and the believer's actual experience, as a sinner still under the effects of

sin and the curse. No one, whether saved prior to the cross or after, has yet completed the salvation process, since Christ has not returned to resurrect or transform our physical nature. So, if in this New Testament era some aspects of salvation must await the out-working of temporal events (*i.e.,* the completion of sanctification and the redemption of the body) we should not be surprised to discover that the same was true of the Old Testament saints. Not only do they have to wait for bodily redemption, which like ours is even now not accomplished, but they also had to await the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross in order to have their sin remitted. (The sins of the Old Testament believers were not removed; they were merely "covered" until the time when Christ would make a cleansing atonement.) The fact that they lived prior to the cross resulted in their entering the stream of salvation events at a different point; thus just as we must wait for our glorification (despite the fact that God "reckons" it as a fact, cf. Rom. 8:31), so they had to await the cross for their remission of sin, despite the fact that God reckoned their faith as righteousness, cf. Rom. 3:21-26. All of this underscores the importance of a dispensational perspective of redemptive history.

Were the Old Testament believers regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Some covenantalists say "Yes," but the biblical evidence indicates that they were neither regenerated, nor indwelt by the Spirit of God prior to the cross. In surveying the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, one cannot help but notice the complete absence of any reference to the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the Old Testament saints. Likewise, the concept of the new birth, or regeneration, seems equally absent.[1] Nevertheless, many covenantalists insist that Old Testament believers were both regenerated and indwelt.[2]

How proponents argue for Old Testament regeneration and indwelling

Offering an affirmative statement for the regeneration and indwelling of Old Testament believers, Walter Kaiser writes:

> Never had an individual in the Old Testament been completely without the aid and work of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, Jesus held that the subjects of the new birth and the special work of the Holy Spirit in the gift of salvation were not new or inaccessible doctrines to Old Testament men and women before the cross. In fact, he marveled that Nicodemus could have been a teacher in Israel and still have been so totally unaware of this fact (John 3:10). Thus if salvation is not of works so that no man or woman ever could boast but is a gift of God to all who ever believed so that it might always forever be by grace (Eph. 2:8), then Old Testament saints were indeed regenerated by the Holy Spirit… Finally, in no way must this special profusion of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that operates much in accordance with the blessing found in the new covenant be interpreted in such a way as to suggest that the individual Old Testament saints and believers were unaware of any ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives apart from temporary endowments of the Spirit for special tasks at special times. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit was the author of new life for all who believed in the coming man of promise (= regeneration), and he also indwelt those same Old Testament redeemed men, at least to some degree, even as David testified in Psalm 51:11.[3]

Regardless of the position one takes with respect to the regeneration and indwelling of Old Testament believers, there seems to be a consensus that regeneration and indwelling occur co-extensively.[4] This is only reasonable since regeneration is the re-establishment of vital (life giving) union with God (Jn. 6:63; 7:38-39; 1 Cor. 6:11), and indwelling is simply the continuation of that relationship. Thus, the question of whether Old Testament believers were regenerated and indwelt is a singular issue. If they were regenerated, they were indwelt; and if they were indwelt, they

had been regenerated. The Old Testament historian, Leon Wood, states the relationship in the following way:

> By *indwelling* is meant the continuedness of the Spirit's residence within the saint following the occasion of regeneration. Regeneration is a momentary act, when spiritual life is imparted to a sinner. It happens instantaneously. Indwelling on the other hand, only begins then. It is the Spirit that enacts regeneration, and when he does he enters into the person, so that the person becomes "the temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16,17; 2 Cor. 6:16). Indwelling means that this relationship continues from that point on.[5]

Accordingly, proof that Old Testament believers were either regenerated or indwelt would support both claims. The arguments for the regeneration and indwelling of the Old Testament believers follow one of two patterns. The first pattern presupposes that all saved people, whether before or after Christ's death, are regenerated immediately when they exercise faith. The logic proceeds in this way: All saved people are regenerated at the time they are saved, and Old Testament believers were saved; therefore, Old Testament believers were regenerated, and thus indwelt. The other pattern of argument presupposes that all saved people, whether Old Testament or New Testament, are indwelt. This argument proceeds as such: Old Testament believers were indwelt, and indwelt people are regenerated; therefore, Old Testament believers must have been regenerated. Of course, both lines of argumentation are built on assumptions. In one case, regeneration is assumed in order to prove indwelling; in the other case, indwelling is assumed in order to prove regeneration.

How proponents attempt to support Old Testament regeneration

After conducting an extensive examination of every instance in the Old Testament where the Spirit is said to have come upon or left an individual, Leon Wood, himself a proponent of Old Testament regeneration, said:

> The conclusion has been definite: every instance concerned an aspect of empowerment for a task, with no instance seeming to involve spiritual renewal.[6]

Having concluded that none of the passages regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament support the regeneration of Old Testament believers, Wood proceeds to establish their regeneration based on two arguments. The first argument is that Old Testament believers lived in such a way as is only possible for a regenerate person; he cites Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David as examples. While there can be no doubt that these biblical characters, as well as a good many others, were the recipients of the Spirit's empowering, that fact does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that they were regenerated by the Spirit. Wood's second argument is one that argues back from the New Testament. Wood himself states that such an argument is necessary because, "For some reason, the Old Testament does not speak of the matter directly."[7] His argument is essentially that of the first syllogism given above (*i.e.,* that all saved people are regenerated at the moment they believe, and Old Testament believers were saved; therefore, they must have been regenerated, and thus indwelt). There are two serious flaws in this reasoning: The first is that the major premise assumes the conclusion. One cannot know that "all saved people are regenerated at the time they are saved" [major premise] without first knowing that Old Testament believers were regenerated at the time they were saved [conclusion]. Since the major premise assumes the conclusion, this argument is invalid due to circular reasoning. The second flaw results from ignoring temporal relations. To be sure, all saved people must eventually be regenerated; however, that fact in no way requires that Old Testament believers had to be regenerated at the moment they exercised faith, any more than that believers today must be glorified at the

moment they exercise faith, even though glorification must eventually occur in order for salvation to be complete.

Proponents of Old Testament regeneration offer two additional arguments. First, it is sometimes asserted that Jesus' surprise at Nicodemus' lack of knowledge about the new birth (Jn. 3:10) implies that such was, or at least should have been understood prior to the cross (see Kaiser's statement above).[8] To this we must agree; however, this in no way implies that regeneration was experienced in the Old Testament, only that Nicodemus as a teacher of the scriptures should have recognized that what Christ was teaching was part and parcel of the new covenant, which as the Messiah, he came to implement. Naturally, there were many things conceptualized in the Old Testament (prophetically), which should have been understood by informed and God fearing Jews, that did not become reality until certain events came to pass in the course of time *(*cf. Heb. 11:13). Second, it is suggested that since there is only one means of salvation in both the Old and New Testaments, we should assume little, if any, distinction between salvation in the Old and New Testaments. (Notice the very subtle covenantal assumption in this argument.) While it is true that there is only one means of salvation in history, that doesn't mean that the application of the individual elements of salvation must be uniformly timed. For example: although regeneration at the moment of faith is the New Testament pattern, that does not mean that it had to have been the Old Testament pattern.

How proponents attempt to support indwelling in the Old Testament

As Wood pointed out, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament make any reference to the indwelling of Old Testament saints. J. Oliver Buswell refers to Numbers 27:18 where the Spirit is said to dwell "in" Joshua. However, it should be pointed out that the word "dwell" does not appear in the original text and the Hebrew preposition *b*^{e} can mean "with" (associative) as well as "in" (locative). Therefore, we simply cannot prove anything more specific from this passage than the Spirit was "with" Joshua. Buswell also cites Isa. 63:11 where he states: "It is said of Israel under Moses' leadership that 'God put his Holy Spirit within him.'" This passage, however, is not referring to the Spirit's indwelling of Moses, but his being present among the people (the singular is employed here, as commonly, to denote "the people" or "Israel" collectively). It is also worth mentioning that Kaiser, who elsewhere argues passionately for Old Testament indwelling, fails to even mention the subject in his biblical theology of the Old Testament, a glaring omission were there any evidence to support Old Testament indwelling.[9],[10]

The question one must ask is: If inductive support for Old Testament indwelling is absent from the Old Testament record, is there any such evidence from the New Testament? Kaiser points to John 14:17 for support that Old Testament believers were indwelt. He writes:

> Likewise, John 14:17 is especially important, for it affirms that our Lord's disciples already had known the "Spirit of truth" because he was living with them. The prepositions are *para "*with," the same word used in John 14:23 of the Father and the Son's abiding in the disciples—a non-fluctuating relationship, and *en,* "in," with a present tense verb *éstai,* "is" (rather than "will be" as in RSV, NASB, and NIV).[11]

It is largely on this statement that Kaiser bases his assertion that Old Testament believers were indwelt. As can be seen, the weight of this argument hinges on the tense of the verb *éstai,* which Kaiser takes to be a present tense; however, *éstai* is unquestionably a future tense. [It is

possible that Kaiser meant *éstin*—present tense, which is found in a handful of later manuscripts; however, if that is the case he failed to state that he was following a later variant of the text. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that his entire argument hinges on the tense of this word, and the future tense is well attested.] Suffice it to say that Kaiser's argument from this passage fails to support the indwelling of the Old Testament saints.

Having noted the lack of both Old and New Testament inductive evidence for the indwelling of Old Testament believers, we now turn attention to the deductive arguments. The general line of reasoning may be stated as follows: Regenerate individuals must be indwelt and Old Testament believers were regenerate; therefore, Old Testament believers must have been indwelt. Wood puts forth this argument when he writes:

> …a strong argument that Old Testament saints were indwelt may be built on the fact that they were regenerated, as shown above. It was argued that, since they were regenerated, it must have been the Holy Spirit who brought this about. Now it may be argued that, since these Old Testament saints remained in a regenerated condition, it must have been the Holy Spirit who kept them so.[12]

The difficulty here is not with the major premise (that all regenerated people must be indwelt) but with the minor premise (that the Old Testament believers were regenerated). Interestingly, the major argument for the regeneration of Old Testament believers, as cited by Wood, is that they were indwelt. This is the circular path trod by all who argue for the regeneration and indwelling of Old Testament believers: they must have been regenerate because they were indwelt, and they must have been indwelt because they were regenerate. Is there any wonder one gets the distinct impression there is a lack of biblical support for either?

Before moving on, we should note one additional point. It is sometimes argued that the New Testament teaches that only people who are indwelt are truly saved. Passages such as Romans 5:5; 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 4:6; 1 John 3:24 and 4:13 are cited as support. In the New Testament regeneration and indwelling occur immediately when a person exercises faith. Therefore, in the New

Testament era it is only reasonable that a person who is not indwelt would also not be regenerate. However, in order to generalize that back to the Old Testament, one would have to assume that regeneration and indwelling occurred there at the time faith was exercised; of course that is what one is attempting to prove. Therefore, such arguments are merely circular reasoning. Sound dispensation interpretation (*i.e.,* interpreting within the framework of the theological/historical perspective of the subject material) could prevent such errors. Unfortunately, covenantalists generally do not interpret from a dispensational perspective, so they flounder in a soup of temporally uncorrelated theological ideas.

Summary of the case for Old Testament regeneration and indwelling

From the standpoint of induction, proponents have been unable to provide even the slightest support for the immediate regeneration of Old Testament believers, and with respect to deduction the arguments employed are faulty with respect to either the facticity of the premises or the logic of the arguments. The most common error seems to be circular reasoning. There is also a lack of inductive support for indwelling in the Old Testament. Wood's analysis of the Old Testament passages relating to the comings and goings of the Spirit fails to yield even one instance of regeneration.[13] If Wood's analysis is correct, then none of the instances of empowering in the Old Testament can be classified as indwelling. Furthermore, one cannot argue for the immediate regeneration and indwelling of Old Testament believers from New Testament normative experience, since such assumes its own conclusion (*i.e.,* it must assume that Old Testament and New Testament normative experience is the same), clearly a logical problem. Nothing short of clear inductive evidence from the Old Testament, or a clear New Testament reference specifically referring to Old Testament normative experience will suffice for proof. Proponents of Old Testament regeneration and indwelling simply have not produced any such proof.

Arguments that the Old Testament believers were not regenerated and indwelt prior to Christ's death on the cross

While the lack of evidence for the affirmative position is sufficient cause to view it with great suspicion, the lack of evidence for any position is not conclusive negation. We will now seek to provide evidence that Old Testament believers were not regenerated and consequently not indwelt until Christ actually secured their redemption by his atoning sacrifice.

Arguments against the immediate regeneration of Old Testament believers

Bear in mind the argument is not that Old Testament believers were never regenerated, but that their regeneration was accomplished only after Christ's death. In other words, they were redeemed, justified, regenerated, and indwelt at the moment Christ's sacrifice became the efficient means of their salvation. Accordingly, redemption, justification, regeneration, and indwelling could not have predated the cross, nor could the Old Testament believers have been received into God's presence in Heaven prior to the accomplishment of their salvation on the cross.

The rationale for this position can be stated as follows: Eternal redemption is exclusively a provision of the new covenant. No one was ever saved on the basis of the former covenant (*i.e.,* the covenant of Law, cf., Gal. 3:2 1; Heb. 10:1-18). Upon this fact, there is general agreement. Since eternal redemption (and likewise, justification, and regeneration) is effected exclusively through means of the new covenant, the question arises: "Could God have made application of Christ's atonement prior to the time Christ died? While there are several faulty arguments that seem to allow for this, scripture unequivocally asserts that the answer is "No." Hebrews 9:15-17 says,

> (9:15-17) And for this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant [the Law], those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. [16]For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. [17]For a covenant is

> valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives. [Explanation in brackets added]

Note the following observations from this passage: 1) Christ is now the Mediator of a new covenant; 2) that mediation is based upon his death having taken place (Gr. *genomenou*—aorist participle); 3) this new covenant makes possible the redemption of sins committed under the former covenant (the Law); 4) redemption under the new covenant is the basis upon which those who were called (contextually including those called under the former covenant) might receive the eternal inheritance; 5) the new covenant could not have been in force prior to Christ's death since a covenant has no force prior to the death of the one making the covenant.

We can now state our argument in the following manner: 1) Eternal redemption, and consequently, justification and regeneration/indwelling, are exclusively provisions of the new covenant. 2) The new covenant could not have been in force prior to the time of Christ's actual death (in time and space, *i.e.,* historically). 3) Therefore, no one could have been redeemed (and consequently, justified and regenerated/indwelt) prior to Christ's death. This is the reason why eternal redemption, regeneration, and indwelling are not pictured in the Old Testament, except prophetically as relates to the implementation of the new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). Hebrews 9:8 provides further evidence by stating that the very figure of the outer tabernacle signifies that the way into the holy place (the presence of God) had not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle stood. The readers were no doubt aware of the events surrounding Christ's death and the fact that the veil of the temple was torn in two when Christ died (Mt. 27:51). Both the teaching of Hebrews 9:15-17 and the symbolism from Matthew 27:51 are quite clear. The way into God's presence was inaugurated at the time of Christ's death—not before.

A faulty line of deduction has arisen in order to allow for a pre-cross application of Christ's atonement. John Feinberg states this position as follows:

> In trying to understand how this can be so before the event occurs historically, we must distinguish between God's perspective and

> man's. God has known about Christ's death from all eternity. Since he decreed it, it was an accomplished fact in history. Because God knows that the deed will be done (since he decreed it), and because he sees all of history (including the completed work of Christ) at once, God can grant man salvation, even before the sacrifice is performed in history.[14]

Feinberg's statement employs a combination of two lines of argumentation. 1) Since God knew from eternity that Christ would die for man's sin, he could make application of the atonement prior to Christ's actual death. 2) Christ's death became an accomplished fact from the instant it was decreed. Both of these arguments illustrate the fuzzy logic often employed by proponents of Old Testament regeneration.

The first issue to be addressed is whether the decree of God made the atonement immediately actual. On this point Feinberg seems a bit confused, for while he stated that the decree of God rendered the atonement actual, he also said, "It did not become a historical fact until it actually occurred."[15] While it is correct to say that the decree of God necessitated the events so decreed, it is not reasonable to think that the decree made those events actual (much less, immediately actual), since the decree of God necessitated not only the events, but also the means for bringing those events about and the temporal relations involved. To say that the decree of God made all decreed events immediately actual is to ignore the fact that God also decreed their temporal relations. The decree of God is that certain events will become real in history, not apart from history. Failure to make this critical distinction can lead to much theological confusion. That God intended and decreed that the new covenant and its redemptive benefits not be in force prior to the death of Christ is quite certain according to Hebrews 9:15-17. Feinberg's approach further underscores the inadequacy of covenantal interpretation to deal with many of the temporal issues involved in biblical interpretation. His argument from foreknowledge is susceptible to the same criticism. While God certainly knew what he would do in providing for the sacrifice of his Son, he also knew when he would effectuate the covenant under which man's redemption would be made possible *(*cf. Tit. 1:1-3). According to Hebrews 9:15-17, that divinely appointed time was at Christ's death.

Another inconclusive argument is that God's reckoning, or imputing of faith as righteousness to Old Testament believers (*e.g.*, Abraham, cf. Rom 4:9) somehow implies an actual transfer of righteousness to them. If this idea could be sustained, it would indeed be a powerful argument for the immediate redemption, regeneration, and consequent indwelling of Old Testament believers. However, such a transfer cannot be proven on the basis of imputation alone. The Greek term for reckoning (*logizomai*) refers to a purely cognitive operation, *i.e.,* a thought process; that is to say, it defines how God regarded, or thought of Abraham in the light of Abraham's faith. This in no way indicates an actual transfer of righteousness at that time. Such an understanding is the only view consistent with Hebrews 9:15-17.[16]

One objection that might arise is this: The Old Testament talks about redemption and forgiveness. Are we to conclude that the Old Testament believers knew nothing of cleansing from sin? The answer is that they knew of it, but only as prophetic of a future work. For instance, note how Jeremiah 31:34 uses the Hebrew term *salah* ("forgive") prophetically in relation to forgiveness under the new covenant. If the Old Testament believers were not redeemed until Christ died on the cross, how were their sins dealt with? Romans 3:21-26 addresses this.

> (3:21-26) But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, [22]even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction [23]for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24]being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; [25]whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; [26]for the demonstration, *I say,* of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Paul stated that the Old Testament believers were forgiven in the sense that their sin was "passed over" (Gr. *paresin*). Although holding a

somewhat modified view, the New Testament scholar, R. C. H. Lenski, made the following observation with regard to this "passing over."

> Paul's "passing over" is used for the sake of exactness in the present connection. What actually took away the sins of the Old Testament saints was Christ's blood. Until that blood was actually shed, all *aphesis* was, to be exact, a *paresis;* all "remitting" a "passing over." The final reckoning with the sins of the Old Testament believers was, as it were, postponed until the true mercy seat was set forth. In this way the Old Testament saints had their "remission," it was in the form of a "passing over."[17]

Did the Old Testament saints experience forgiveness? "Yes," God "passed over" the sins of Old Testament believers in anticipation of their actual redemption in Christ. However, that redemption was only anticipated in the Old Testament; its realization could only occur through the implementation of the new covenant, which according to Hebrews 9:15-17 had no effect prior to Christ's death. Thus, God did not judge the Old Testament saints; he simply "passed over" their sin until it was cleansed by Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Arguments against the indwelling of Old Testament believers

Just as there is no direct statement indicating that Old Testament believers were indwelt, there is also no direct statement indicating that they were not indwelt. Indeed, why should there be? The proof they were not indwelt is to be seen from the foregoing conclusion that they were not regenerated. As we have already observed, there is general agreement that regeneration and indwelling are co-extensive and indwelling is simply the continuedness of regeneration.[18] If the Old Testament believers were not regenerated, then we can be certain they were not indwelt.

It is occasionally asserted that John 14:16-17 provides positive evidence that Old Testament believers were not indwelt since Jesus asserted that the Spirit *will* (future tense) be "in you" (implying the Spirit was not hitherto indwelling believers). While this passage does seem to make such a statement, its value as a proof text in this dispute is limited since the distributive use of the plural (Gr. *en humin*) "in you*"* (plural),

i.e., "in *each one* of you (individually—distributively), rather than "among you" (corporately, as a group) cannot be absolutely proven.[19] Proponents of Old Testament regeneration and indwelling simply counter that this passage predicts a special presence of the Spirit "with" or "among" the Church corporately, not the beginning of the Spirit's work of regeneration and indwelling. Nevertheless, it is clear that Jesus was signaling a significant change in the ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers, a change from "*with* you" to "*in* you." (Note this transition is further supported by John 7:39, cf. 15:26; 16:13.) Despite the fact that the grammar of this passage is somewhat imprecise, given the Old Testament context that Wood has pointed out (with no clear examples of indwelling), and the personal, and permanent nature of the Spirit's work within the lives of each individual believer beginning at Pentecost, it seems reasonable that this passage does predict the beginning of the Spirit's work of regeneration and indwelling, and should not be so lightly dismissed by proponents of Old Testament regeneration and indwelling.

Conclusions

One thing that has been noted is the lack of any firm biblical support for either Old Testament regeneration or indwelling. The arguments offered in support of such are inferential, and tend to be plagued by circular reasoning based on unproven assumptions. Regeneration is assumed in order to prove indwelling, and indwelling is assumed in order to prove regeneration.

Why doesn't the Old Testament discuss the new birth? Why are there no clear examples of indwelling in the Old Testament? Why does the Old Testament view the veiled holy of holies as the place of God's dwelling, whereas the New Testament records the rending of the veil and declares the believer to be the temple (Gr. *naos* = the inner sanctuary, the holiest place) of God? Why is there no indication that Old Testament believers were received into Heaven prior to the cross? Why does the New Testament declare that God "passed over" (Gr. *paresis*) the sins of the Old Testament believers? Why does the New Testament refer to the Old Testament economy as "bondage" (Gal. 3:22-4:7)? The answer is that God is holy, and his justice could only be satisfied at the cross. While he could temporarily deal with men in the light of the salvation he knew he would ultimately provide for them, this had its limitations. It is only through the new covenant that God can receive sinners, and it is only the death of Christ that could implement that covenant and effectuate salvation.

The larger issue, however, is the way in which some covenantal theologians have dealt with this issue. The distortion of theological truth regarding salvation experience in the Old Testament by modern-day covenantalists is simply another attempt to hide the clearest of all dispensational dividing lines in redemptive history, the great divide between pre-cross and post-cross salvation experience. The fact is, it is the cross that is the stake in redemptive history from which dispensationalism emerges. Covenantalists clearly see the implication of acknowledging a distinction between pre-cross and post-cross salvation experience. Apparently they recognize that acknowledging such distinctions lends great support to a dispensational view of redemptive history, something they feel they must avoid at all cost. In the course of coming to the logical

end of their theological assumptions, covenantalists are themselves providing the clearest evidence of covenant theology's inadequacy as a means of understanding biblical truth. The fact is, any system of theology that ignores the temporal aspects of redemptive history, and the progressive nature of God's work, can never do more than distort the message of the Bible.

A Final Note

Knowing the truths of salvation, and knowing Christ as Savior, are not the same. Saving faith involves a personal commitment. Perhaps after reading this book you are unsure where you stand with God. The good news is that you can know that your sins have been forgiven and that you are a child of God, by placing your faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior. Church membership, while a great benefit, doesn't save, neither does participation in a ritual; just give your life to Christ, and then seek out a community of believers where you can be encouraged, grow spiritually, and serve.

Notes:

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[1] The necessity of the new birth, as a future reality, certainly could be deduced from passages such as Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31:-34. However, since the work of Christ was a future reality, so too was the new birth. Thus Jesus could say to Nicodemus, "You are the teacher of Israel and you do not know these things (in connection with the hope of Israel)?" Such certainly does not imply that regeneration was experienced in the Old Testament.

[2] "Permanent indwelling" is somewhat of a misnomer. Since the Bible links indwelling with regeneration (1 Cor. 6:17-20 cf. v.11; Gal. 4:4-5), indwelling is by its very nature permanent. In other words, there is no such thing as temporary indwelling. Temporary fillings of the Spirit in the Old Testament should not be confused with indwelling; filling conveys power, regeneration and indwelling convey life.

[3] Kaiser, Walter C. Jr., The Uses of the Old Testament in the New. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), pp. 94, 100.

[4] Wood, Leon J., The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), p. 69.

[5] Wood, p. 69.

[6] Wood, p. 64.

[7] Wood, p. 65.

[8] Kaiser, p. 94.

[9] Kaiser, p. 95.

[10] Kaiser, Walter C., Toward an Old Testament Theology. (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1978).

[11]Kaiser, The Uses of the Old Testament in the New, p. 94.

[12] Wood, p. 70.

[13] Wood, p. 64.

[14] John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in Tradition and Testaments, eds. John S. and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody press, 1981), p. 55.

[15] Feinberg, p. 54.

[16] One might ask why the previous objections raised against foreknowledge would not also apply to this second option. The answer is that this option does not involve an actual pre-cross application of the atonement.

[17] Lenski, R. C. H., The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1936), p. 261.

[18] Wood, p. 69

[19] The problem with using this passage as a proof against Old Testament indwelling is not due to the lack of a clear distinction between "with" (*para*) and "in" (*én*). We have only to compare the locative use of these prepositions where a concrete object is employed. In such usages, the meanings are quite distinct. The real problem is in sustaining the distributive sense of *én humin —"in you"* (plural), for unless the distributive—"in *each* of you"—can be sustained, the translation "*among* you" (in the group, associatively, rather than the individuals) would certainly be permissible, though perhaps insensitive to the larger biblical context.