

THE HEART
OF THE
REFORMATION



A
90
DAY DEVOTIONAL
ON THE
FIVE SOLAS

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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ORLANDO, FL

THE HEART OF THE REFORMATION: A 90-DAY DEVOTIONAL ON THE FIVE SOLAS
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PREFACE

With profound clarity and power, God Almighty spoke through the prophet Isaiah, declaring, “I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior” (Isa. 43:11). This was a message that the people of God needed to hear in Isaiah’s day. Facing the realities of national decline and the threat of foreign invasion, the men and women of ancient Israel and Judah were prone not to look solely to the Lord God for their salvation.

Sometimes this meant putting their hopes in the gods of the empires that ruled over the ancient Near East. At other times, this entailed their relying on their own wisdom and efforts to find rescue by negotiating alliances with other powers or paying them off for protection. In so doing, these ancient members of the covenant community would not have said that they were rejecting the Lord. Idolatry in that day did not result in abandoning the worship of the true God altogether but in worshipping other deities alongside the Lord of Israel. Moreover, in looking for assistance from other earthly powers, the men and women of Israel and Judah did not believe they were no longer trusting in the Lord. From God’s perspective, however, to not trust in Him alone was really not to trust Him at all.

Many of us might think that we no longer face the same temptation. Church history tells us otherwise. Even in the days of the Apostles, professing believers were beginning to forget that besides the Lord, there is no Savior. As we see in Paul’s epistle to the

Galatians, for example, some believed that trusting in Christ alone was not enough for salvation. Instead, faith had to be combined with works in order to make one worthy of salvation. Since that day, there have been people in the visible church who have looked not to Christ alone for salvation but Christ plus something else.

The dispute between those who believe that salvation is by faith in Christ alone and those who believe salvation comes through faith in Christ plus something else reached a high point in the Protestant Reformation. In this fifteenth-century movement, the Holy Spirit led a group of pastors and theologians, known as the Reformers, to recover the biblical gospel that had been obscured by centuries of errant teaching. The Roman Catholic Church in the medieval era taught that salvation comes only to those who have made themselves worthy of it—chiefly through partaking of the sacraments of the church. In this conception, no one could be sure of his or her salvation. In seeking to address these errors, the Reformers stressed that salvation comes not through faith plus works but through faith in Christ alone. Over time, this truth and other associated biblical doctrines that are necessary to preserving the core truth of the gospel came to be known as the five *solas* of the Reformation:

- *sola Scriptura*: Scripture is the only infallible authority for faith and practice.
- *solus Christus*: Christ in His person and work is the only Savior.
- *sola gratia*: Only the sovereign grace of God accomplishes salvation.
- *sola fide*: Faith is the only instrument by which we are united to Christ and receive all His benefits.
- *solī Deo gloria*: The purpose of salvation is to give all glory to God alone.

STUDYING THE SOLAS

The five *solas* of the Reformation are core biblical truths that reinforce the central teaching of the gospel and all of Scripture that only the Lord God Almighty saves us from sin, death, and Satan.

Moreover, the five *solas* help us to understand how and why the Lord is the only Savior. Thus, it is vital for all Christians to understand the five *solas* of the Reformation. In grasping them, we will know God better, love Him more, appreciate all that was necessary for our salvation more deeply, and be motivated to live in a manner that redounds to God's glory. They give us a framework for seeing how the various parts of God's plan of redemption fit together and for seeing the coherent, unified message of the Bible in all its beautiful diversity.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional has been designed to help believers understand the five *solas* of the Reformation and live in light of these precious truths. Over the course of ninety days, you will explore each of the five *solas* and see how they are grounded in the Word of God while also seeing how various other biblical truths are encapsulated in each *sola*.

The devotional is divided into five sections, each devoted to one of the *solas*. A short introduction that defines the *sola* to be studied begins each section of eighteen devotionals. We recommend that you read that introduction before beginning the devotionals of that particular section.

Each devotional gives the passage of the Scripture to be studied that day and highlights one or more of the most important verses from the passage for the subject of the study. Following the listed passage, you will find the body of the study, which will provide important background for the passage, an explanation of the text, and a discussion of how the passage relates to other texts of Scripture and theological concepts. Each devotional also includes a section that provides practical application, and a list of other passages that have bearing on the study is also given. It is recommended that you read the passage for the day's study in its entirety before moving through the other sections of the devotional.

May these devotionals assist you in coming to a fuller knowledge of our great God and Savior. To Him alone be the glory forever.

SOLA
SCRIPTURA

I

SCRIPTURE ALONE

DAY 1

NATURAL REVELATION

PSALM 19 “THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD, AND THE SKY ABOVE PROCLAIMS HIS HANDIWORK” (V. 1).

Reformation-era debates regarding divine revelation focused on the authority of Scripture and its relation to the authority of the church and the authority of church tradition. Though the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church would finally disagree with respect to the final authority and sufficiency of Scripture, there is one aspect of divine revelation on which they did find a large measure of agreement. Both Roman Catholic theology and Reformation theology confess that God reveals Himself in His creation.

In theological categories, we speak of God’s revelation of Himself in the created order as natural revelation. This is in contrast with special revelation, wherein God speaks directly to His people via a prophet or an Apostle. God’s revelation of Himself in natural revelation is less direct and is addressed not to a specific person or community but rather to humanity in general. For that reason, natural revelation is also known as general revelation.

We say that natural revelation is less direct than special revelation because in natural revelation, the Lord does not disclose specific truths about salvation, specific plans for individuals, or anything of that nature. Instead, He reveals Himself and His attributes in a general way. Essentially, God reveals Himself through natural revelation as the Creator of all things. As we see in today’s passage, the heavens themselves proclaim that they are the handiwork of a personal Creator (v. 1).

Psalms 19 emphasizes the universality of natural revelation. There is no place on the planet where God’s natural revelation does not proclaim that He is and that He has made all things. Romans 1:20–21 fleshes out this revelation a bit more, explaining that natural revelation proclaims God’s power and that we owe Him honor, thanks, and worship. It does not tell us everything there is to know about the Lord, and we can hardly build

an extensive theology based on natural revelation. But it does tell us enough—that we are creatures and that there is a Creator to whom our worship is owed.

At the end of the day, no one can be a true atheist because natural revelation is so clear. John Calvin writes, “[God’s] essence, indeed, is incomprehensible, utterly transcending all human thought; but on each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse” (*Institutes* 1.5.1).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 14;
Acts 14:15-
17; 17:22-
29; Romans
2:14-16

APPLICATION

Natural revelation is limited in its scope, but that does not mean it fails to achieve its purposes. God reveals Himself in nature so that no one will be able to plead ignorance of His existence on the last day. His message gets through, and we can appeal to creation as proof of His existence when we are talking with unbelievers. Let us not be afraid to use God’s natural revelation to point others to Him.

DAY 2

THE LIMITS OF NATURAL REVELATION

ROMANS 1:18-32 “ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY DID NOT HONOR HIM AS GOD OR GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BUT THEY BECAME FUTILE IN THEIR THINKING, AND THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED” (V. 21).

God has revealed Himself so clearly in the natural order that no person will ever be able to stand before the Creator and claim that there is insufficient evidence that He exists and should be worshiped. We have already seen how the Bible teaches this in texts such as Psalm 19, and today’s passage makes the point with even greater forcefulness. As Paul says in Romans 1:20, God’s “invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”

I

DAY 1 & 2

Romans 1:18–32 not only proclaims that the Lord has plainly revealed Himself in nature but also tells us that there are certain limits to natural revelation. To put it simply, we receive enough truth about God in natural revelation to know that He is there; however, we do not receive enough information to be saved. In fact, Paul tells us that when sinners come into contact with God's revelation of Himself in nature, they suppress the truth they have received. Without faith in Christ, when fallen people study God's creation, they become futile in their thinking and their hearts are darkened. They do not honor the Lord or give thanks to Him (v. 21). What is more, they exchange the truth that they have seen in the created order for a lie—they engage in all manner of false religion and idolatry, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (vv. 22–25). In sum, sinners who encounter natural revelation apart from grace and God's revealing His plan of salvation make God in their own image, and they refuse to worship the only Lord of all.

The idolatry that results when people receive natural revelation is not the fault of natural revelation. Instead, it is the fault of the sin that pervades fallen human beings. Natural revelation is insufficient for salvation, but God never intended it as a means of salvation. Instead, as Paul explains in Romans 1–3, the point of natural revelation is to show people truth about the Lord so that they can see the truth about themselves—namely, that they are sinners in need of salvation. But it takes more than natural revelation for people to be redeemed. For that, they need special revelation, the truth about God's work in history—preeminently in the person and work of Jesus Christ—that is available only via our Lord's speaking directly to His people and revealing to them truths that nature does not teach. Today, this special revelation is available only in Scripture.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
52:7; Nahum
1:15; Mark
16:15–16;
Romans
10:14–15

APPLICATION

We can appeal to natural revelation to show people certain truths about God's character and even to prove that they have violated the moral law that He has placed on the consciences of all people. However, no one will be saved only by looking at natural

revelation. We must preach the gospel—give men and women the truths of special revelation—or they cannot be saved from the wrath of God.

DAY 3

SPECIAL REVELATION

GENESIS 40 “JOSEPH SAID TO [PHARAOH’S OFFICERS], ‘DO NOT INTERPRETATIONS BELONG TO GOD? PLEASE TELL [YOUR DREAMS] TO ME’ ” (V. 8B).

In the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was written by men who embraced the biblical theology of the Protestant Reformation, we read that although natural, or general, revelation manifests the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, it is insufficient “to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation” (WCF 1.1). However, God did not leave us without revelation that teaches us how we can be saved. Thus, “it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare” His will of salvation to His people (1.1). Here, the confession references what we call “special revelation.”

Special revelation is that revelation from God that tells us the way of salvation and what it means to live in a manner that pleases Him. Typically, we identify Scripture as special revelation, and this is correct. Yet, in the history of His people, God has provided special revelation through other means as well. Note that the confession speaks of “diverse ways” in which special revelation has been given. If we look at the history of God’s people, we can see why it says such a thing. Consider today’s passage, for example, wherein Joseph interprets dreams given to two members of Pharaoh’s court. He specifically attributes dreams and their interpretation to God Himself (Gen. 40:8). So, at least at that early point in history, God sometimes spoke to people and revealed His will through dreams.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, we see that the Lord also

revealed His will to Israel through the priestly Urim and Thummim. Although we do not know exactly what the Urim and Thummim were, they were most likely stones or sticks of different colors that could be drawn from the breastplate in order to discern God's purposes. Prayer would be offered, and if the Urim was drawn, it would mean to do one thing, and if the Thummim was drawn, it would mean to do something else (Ex. 28:30; 1 Sam. 14:41).

We could multiply examples of the different forms in which special revelation once came. The most important of these, however, is the form of writing. When God spoke to His people, individuals such as Moses, the prophets, the Apostles, and others wrote down that revelation our Lord wanted us to have in perpetuity (Ex. 24:4; Jer. 36:4; 2 Peter 3:15). As we will see, special revelation ceased by the end of the first century, so the only special revelation we have today is the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Judges
6:36-40;
Joel 2:28-
29; Luke
1:1-4;
2 Timothy
3:14-15

APPLICATION

Many people are looking for a revelation from God in our day. We do not need to go looking for new special revelation, however, for we have all the revelation for how to serve God available to us in Scripture. If we want to know the will of God for our salvation and for our lives, we must study and know the Old and New Testaments.

DAY 4

GOD'S FINAL REVELATION

HEBREWS 1:1-4 "LONG AGO, AT MANY TIMES AND IN MANY WAYS, GOD SPOKE TO OUR FATHERS BY THE PROPHETS, BUT IN THESE LAST DAYS HE HAS SPOKEN TO US BY HIS SON, WHOM HE APPOINTED THE HEIR OF ALL THINGS, THROUGH WHOM ALSO HE CREATED THE WORLD" (VV. 1-2).

During the Protestant Reformation, people were looking for a word from God, just as they search for a word

from Him today. The Reformers, including individuals such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, proclaimed that there is but one place to find special revelation—the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. They asserted the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*: the only source of special revelation for the church today is the Bible; thus, the Bible is the only infallible authority for the church.

Since God has provided special revelation to people in other forms such as dreams (Gen. 40), how do we know special revelation today is found nowhere else besides Scripture? Today's passage helps answer that question. God did speak to His people in various ways and at various times. Yet "in these last days"—this era wherein the Lord is fulfilling His promises—He has spoken finally and definitively in His Son (Heb. 1:1–2). So, we look for special revelation nowhere but in Christ.

However, this does not mean we look only to the actual words that Christ spoke during His earthly ministry. Those words are included, of course, which means we receive the Gospels and other portions of the New Testament that record what our Lord said while He walked the earth (for example, 1 Cor. 11:23–25) as special revelation. But we also receive as special revelation that which Christ affirmed as special revelation, which is "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). This threefold designation of special revelation, we will see in due time, is coterminous with the thirty-nine-book Old Testament canon that we follow as Protestants.

What of the New Testament books that do not record what our Lord said during His earthly ministry? We receive those as special revelation as well because of the uniqueness of the Apostolic office. In the ancient world, as Dr. R.C. Sproul often observed, the title *apostle* was used even in the secular realm for those who had the full authority to speak on behalf of a higher official. Jesus' Apostles were His official spokesmen who bore His full authority, so their writings are as much the words of Jesus as any other portion of Scripture.

Only the Apostles speak with an authority equivalent to Jesus' during the new covenant era. There are no Apostles today because

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus

33:11a;

John 6:68;

1 Cor-

inthians

15:1-11;

1 John

1:1-4

there are no living eyewitnesses of the resurrection to confirm other Apostles (Acts 1:12-26; Gal. 1:18-2:10). Thus, special revelation ended with the death of the last Apostle in the first century.

APPLICATION

Many people today claim to be Apostles. However, to be an Apostle, one must be an eyewitness of Jesus' resurrection or be confirmed as an Apostle by other resurrection eyewitnesses (Acts 1:12-26; Gal. 1:18-2:10). This is impossible in our era, so there are no living Apostles giving us special revelation. We must be content with what we have—the Apostolic and prophetic words of Scripture. To look beyond these for a word from God is to look in vain.

DAY 5

GOD-BREATHED SCRIPTURE

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 “ALL SCRIPTURE IS BREATHED OUT BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, AND FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Human beings speak with their mouths as their breath moves across their vocal cords, causing the cords to vibrate and produce sounds that are formed into letters and words by our lips, tongues, and teeth. There is a breathing out that has to take place for speech, and understanding this reality helps us to understand Paul's point in today's passage. Scripture, he tells us, results from God's breathing out in speech. This is a rather clear way of saying that Scripture is the very speech of God. It is His Word.

The Greek word translated as “breathed out” in 2 Timothy 3:16 is *theopneustos*, and Scripture is the only thing described as such by the Apostles. Thus, Scripture has a unique character as the voice and words of the Lord. It uniquely serves as God's special revelation, as His inspired and revealed will for His people. Nothing

else today is *theopneustos*, so we can point to nothing but Scripture as the Word of God.

When we speak of Scripture as *theopneustos*, we are pointing to its divine inspiration. The Word of God written is identical to God's speech. It is exactly what He intended us to have as the revelation of His will and how to please Him. At the same time, this does not take away from the Bible's human character. God breathed out His Word, but He did so through the instrumentality of His prophets and Apostles. So, for example, the book of Romans is Paul's word, bearing the Apostle's unique style and character. Nevertheless, it is also God's Word, given by Him. That our Lord used a man to give us the book of Romans does not in any way make it less than the very speech of God. And this applies to all books of Scripture.

Following 2 Timothy 3:16 and other passages, the Protestant Reformers affirmed verbal plenary inspiration. Verbal inspiration means that inspiration pertains to the very words themselves, not just the meaning that the words convey. If Jesus could appeal to the tense of a verb to settle a theological question ("I am the God of . . ."; Matt. 22:23–33), inspiration must apply to specific words and even their specific forms. Plenary inspiration means that all the words of Scripture are given by God, not just some of them. We cannot say that the Lord spoke only the words of Scripture that pertain to doctrine but not those that record history. No, God spoke it all, using the distinct style of each human author to give us His Word for all of life. Paul says all Scripture—everything received as canon—is God's Word, not just select portions of it (2 Tim. 3:16).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
34:27; John
10:35;
Hebrews
3:7;
2 Peter
1:21

APPLICATION

The process of biblical inspiration is mysterious, for we do not know exactly how God moved the human authors of Scripture to give us His Word. Nevertheless, we know that Scripture is the Word of God, and so it can be trusted to give us nothing but the truth of God. When we want to know God's will for us, we must turn to Scripture, for it is there alone that we will find the Lord's guidance.

DAY 6

BIBLICAL SUFFICIENCY

2 TIMOTHY 3:17 “THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE COMPLETE,
EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK.”

We are considering the doctrine of Scripture affirmed by the Protestant Reformers, which is encapsulated in the Latin phrase *sola Scriptura*. According to the Reformation—and biblical—principle of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith for the church. Because the Word of God is the only *theopneustos*—God-breathed—special revelation that we possess today (2 Tim. 3:16), no rule of faith can supersede Scripture. There is no higher court to which we can appeal for faith and practice, for there is nowhere else besides Scripture where we can surely find God’s voice today. That God’s Word is inspired does not mean that He dictated it or that He overrode the personalities, gifts, and stylistic choices of the human authors through whom the written Word of God has come to us. It does mean that He worked in and through these authors such that their words are His words.

Sola Scriptura also leads us to the doctrine of biblical sufficiency. To say that Scripture is sufficient is to say that the Bible contains all that we need for determining what we must believe and how we are to live before God. Scripture must be interpreted if we are to understand what we are to believe and how we are to act, but the sufficiency of Scripture indicates that we need no other source of special revelation for faith and life in addition to the Bible.

Passages such as 2 Timothy 3:17 affirm the sufficiency of Scripture. Having affirmed that God’s Word is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (v. 16), Paul explains that Scripture is enough to make us “complete, equipped for every good work.” Scripture in its totality is all that is needed so that we will be completely prepared to serve the Lord. A good work is anything that is pleasing to God, so this text covers everything from determining sound doctrine to knowing the deeds the Lord requires of us as proof of our faith in Him (see

James 2:14–26). Being equipped for every good work requires understanding the doctrinal foundations of God-pleasing actions and the actions themselves, as is seen in how the New Testament Epistles typically move from presenting doctrine that must be believed to practical application and moral instruction. John Calvin comments on today's passage that to be complete means to be "one in whom there is nothing defective." To avoid being defective with respect to faith and life, we must study Scripture and put its teachings into practice.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Ezra 7:10;
Psalms
73:24;
119:105;
2 Peter
1:19;
Jude 3

APPLICATION

We are tempted to look for God's will in places other than the one place He has revealed it—His Word. As we ponder the will of God for our lives, we must be careful to follow the guidance of Scripture. It is sufficient to give us the principles we need to know to please God wherever we are and whatever we are called to do.

DAY 7

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

JOHN 10:35 "SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN."

Historians often describe the doctrine of Scripture, and particularly the authority of Scripture, as the formal cause of the Reformation. In philosophy, a formal cause is like a blueprint or plan; it is what determines the shape or form of something. To say that the final authority of Scripture was the formal cause of the Reformation is to say that the different views of biblical authority between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics explain why the Reformation took the shape it did. Because the Reformers believed Scripture is the only infallible authority for the church (*sola Scriptura*), they affirmed that church tradition and the bishops could be corrected by Scripture when Scripture conflicted with other authorities. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, said church tradition and the Magisterium (teaching officers of the church) were equal in authority to Scripture. Thus,

I

DAY 6 & 7

Rome would not allow herself to be corrected on matters such as justification and worship, for their views on those issues were determined by extrabiblical traditions, which they believed had divine authority.

That Scripture stands above all other authorities is evident from just a cursory reading of the Bible. First, Scripture's unique ontological (pertaining to being or essence) character as *theopneustos*—God-breathed—means that every other authority is on a lower level by nature. By definition, God is the highest authority possible (Heb. 6:13), so what He says is the final arbiter of truth. And if the only place we have His words is Scripture, then Scripture is the highest court of authority to which we can appeal. Nothing else is on the same level, for only Scripture is *theopneustos* (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Moreover, when we look at the example of Christ Himself, we find that He viewed Scripture as having the highest authority. In today's passage, for example, Jesus says that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Other traditions and authorities can be set aside (Matt. 15:1–9), but "the doctrine of Scripture is inviolable" (John Calvin).

To say that Scripture is the only infallible authority and the final authority for the church does not mean there are no other authorities to which we should pay heed as believers. God does invest His church, for example, with authority as "a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). But other authorities are secondary, and their authority is derivative; they have the right to command us only insofar as what they teach conforms to the written Word of God.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Deuteronomy 13;
28:15–68;
Matthew
5:17–20;
Mark 7:9–
13; Acts
15:1–21

APPLICATION

Church tradition and the teaching we receive in our local churches are vital for helping us understand the Scriptures. However, those authorities, as well as all other authorities, are subject finally to the Word of God. No one may demand that we believe or do something that is contrary to Scripture. Let us submit to God-ordained authorities in the church but only insofar as they teach what Scripture teaches.

DAY 8

THE POWER AND INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 55:10-11 “SO SHALL MY WORD BE THAT GOES OUT FROM MY MOUTH; IT SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME EMPTY, BUT IT SHALL ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH I PURPOSE, AND SHALL SUCCEED IN THE THING FOR WHICH I SENT IT” (V. 11).

The Protestant Reformers worked for many things, but perhaps the goal that they worked hardest to achieve was to restore the church’s confidence in Scripture. Stressing the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible, the Reformers sought to bring the Western church in submission to the Word of God after many years of the church’s following those who claimed too much authority for themselves. They recognized that Christians are perennially tempted to look for God’s power in things such as techniques, relics, the state, and individual personalities. But with respect to ministry, God has invested His power in one place, and that is His Word.

Isaiah 55:10-11 emphasizes the power that the Lord has invested in His revelation. The word that goes forth from the mouth of our Creator—which is Scripture, as Scripture is “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17)—cannot fail to accomplish the Lord’s purposes for it. When God sends forth His Word to bring about a person’s salvation, that person will not finally resist His revelation. It will convert the man, woman, or child that God intends to save. At the same time, when the Lord sends forth His Word to someone He has not chosen for salvation, that revelation will result in the hardened person’s hardening his heart even further. God’s Word is powerful and effective both to reveal the way of salvation to Christ’s sheep and to hide it from the goats, those who have not been chosen from the foundation of the world for redemption (Matt. 11:25-27).

Just as the Word of God cannot fail to achieve the purposes for which it is given, Scripture cannot fail to teach the truth. The Scriptures are infallible—that is, incapable of teaching error. This is a necessary consequence of divine inspiration and the

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Job 34:12;
Psalm
119:25, 107;
1 Corinthi-
ans 1:18;
Hebrews
4:12-13

omnipotence of God. Scripture is God-breathed, and since God is truth Himself (Jesus, who is God incarnate, identifies Himself as truth; John 14:6), He is incapable of telling any lie. “Every word of God proves true,” as Proverbs 30:5 tells us.

The power of God guarantees the infallibility of His inscripturated Word. Some people argue that it is possible for Scripture to contain errors because it was written by human beings, and human beings are capable of erring. However, being capable of error and actually making an error are two different things. “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10:27), and surely God can inspire people to write in such a way that their words cannot teach error.

APPLICATION

We affirm the human origin of Scripture, for it was written by human beings and bears the marks of human authorship. However, we also affirm the divine origin of Scripture, that God superintended the authors of the biblical text in such a way that the final product cannot teach falsehood. If we believe otherwise, then we have denied the omnipotence of God and have no reason to trust that He can save us.

DAY 9

SCRIPTURAL INERRANCY

PSALM 18:30 “THIS GOD—HIS WAY IS PERFECT; THE WORD OF THE LORD PROVES TRUE; HE IS A SHIELD FOR ALL THOSE WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM.”

Because Scripture is the only source of special revelation that we possess, it is the only infallible and final authority for the church. This is the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, which the Protestant Reformers embraced to correct errors that said other authorities such as post-biblical church tradition are equivalent to Scripture as a rule of faith. As we have seen, the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* is a necessary consequence of passages

such as 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which identifies only Scripture as “breathed out by God,” or divinely inspired. And because God is incapable of erring, whatever He inspires is likewise incapable of teaching error.

Our doctrine of biblical infallibility, which says that the Bible cannot teach error, has to do with the capability of Scripture—what it can and cannot do. But if Scripture is unable to teach falsehood, that has implications for Scripture regarding what it actually is. Because the Bible is incapable of teaching error, Scripture is actually free of error. The Word of God does not affirm anything that is false, and we refer to this doctrine as the doctrine of scriptural or biblical inerrancy.

Scriptural inerrancy is a good and necessary consequence of biblical infallibility, but it is also taught explicitly by the biblical writings. In today’s passage, for example, we find a strong affirmation that every word of the Lord proves to be true (Ps. 18:30). Commenting on this text, John Calvin writes, “The word of God is pure, and without any mixture of fraud and deceit, like silver which is well refined and purified from all its dross.” Other important passages that demonstrate the inerrancy of Scripture include John 17:17, wherein Jesus says to His Father, “Your word is truth.”

Importantly, when we speak of biblical inerrancy, we are speaking of the original text of Scripture, not its manuscript copies. We do not possess the actual hard copies that the Apostles and prophets wrote; instead, we have copies of these writings. Since only the Apostles and prophets were inspired, only the text that they wrote is inerrant. Various copies may, and do, contain differences, additional words, and other discrepancies between them. This is not a problem, however, for the Bible is preserved better than any other ancient book, and we are able to reconstruct the original text that the Apostles and prophets wrote even though all we possess is many, many manuscripts from scribes who copied the Bible.

APPLICATION

We do not have the original manuscript copies that the Apostles and prophets wrote; however, we can determine the original

FOR FURTHER STUDY

2 Samuel
7:28; Psalm
12:6;
Ecclesiastes
12:10;
Colossians
1:5b

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text by comparing the various manuscripts that we do have. We can be confident, then, that we have an inerrant Bible in its original languages. We need not fear that the Scriptures have any errors, so we may fully trust these writings. In so doing, we are trusting God Himself.

DAY 10**THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE**

DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9 “THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE” (VV. 6-7).

Commentators on Scripture during the medieval era developed a complex means of interpreting the Bible known as the *quadrigo*. According to the medieval *quadrigo*, every biblical passage had a fourfold meaning—a literal sense, a moral sense, an allegorical sense, and an anagogical sense. To know the literal or most obvious meaning of a passage was a good thing, but to know the higher moral, allegorical, and anagogical meanings was even better. Precious few, however, could attain to these other, more hidden meanings of Scripture. This tended to obscure the meaning and significance of the Bible for the uneducated, and it led to all sorts of fanciful interpretations among those who had more learning. Only the most “advanced” thinkers, for example, could see that the census recorded in Numbers was not really about the number of Israelite soldiers but rather about the several steps it takes for the soul to ascend to God.

Of course, there is nothing in Scripture itself that justifies such a view of biblical interpretation. In fact, if the Bible teaches anything about itself, it is that its basic message is clear enough for anyone—even a child—to understand. This idea is known as the clarity of Scripture, which is also called the perspicuity of Scripture. It was a doctrine that the Protestant Reformers embraced,

and they endeavored to return the church to the clearest, literal meaning of the Bible.

That the Bible is clear enough for even a child to understand is assumed in passages such as Deuteronomy 6:6–9. Moses instructs the people of Israel to teach the divinely revealed commandments of God to their children. This implies that the children are capable of understanding and applying the Word of God as their parents teach it to them. But note that it also implies that ordinary mothers and fathers are able to have a grasp of Scripture sufficient enough to teach it to their children. This is particularly notable, given that most of the people to whom Moses originally spoke these words would not have had much in the way of education, and many of them would have been unable to read at all. Neither of these factors, however, was a barrier to understanding enough about the Scriptures to be able to understand them and teach them to others.

The clarity of Scripture does not deny that some passages of Scripture are difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:15–16). It does mean that anyone who studies the Word of God can discern the basic message of salvation and what it means to please the Lord.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm
119:130;
Proverbs
1:8–9; Mark
12:35–37;
2 Timothy
3:14–15

APPLICATION

Many people treat the Bible like a puzzle or a secret code that is full of hidden meanings accessible only to a select few. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Scripture can be understood by anyone who puts in the basic effort to read it in its context. We can read and hear the Scripture with profit, knowing that God's message to us is clear.

DAY 11

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

LUKE 24:44 “[JESUS] SAID TO THEM, ‘THESE ARE MY WORDS THAT I SPOKE TO YOU WHILE I WAS STILL WITH YOU, THAT EVERYTHING WRITTEN ABOUT ME IN THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS AND THE PSALMS MUST BE FULFILLED.’ ”

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DAY 10 & 11

Facing the prospect of losing Europe to Protestantism, Roman Catholics convened a council to respond to the Protestant Reformers and their ideas. This gathering, the Council of Trent, met on and off from 1545 to 1563. Trent is one of the most important councils Rome has ever held, as it codified Roman Catholic dogma regarding justification, the sacraments, and other subjects.

One of the key questions Trent was tasked to answer for the church of Rome was the extent of the canon of Scripture—the list of books that the church acknowledges as divinely inspired and thus considers to be sources of theology. Against the Protestants, Trent declared that in addition to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament that the Reformers received as Scripture, the apocryphal or deuterocanonical books are also canonical for the Roman Catholic Church. But in stating that apocryphal/deuterocanonical books such as 1–2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, and others are Scripture, the Council of Trent also went against church tradition. The top Bible scholars in church history, including Jerome, did not believe the apocryphal books were Scripture, and even many Roman Catholics who attended the Council of Trent did not want Rome to declare those books canonical.

When we look to Jesus and the Apostles, it is clear that the Protestants were right. Every time Jesus and the Apostles quote from a book they regard as Scripture, they introduce the quote with a formula such as “it is written” or “Scripture says” (for example, Matt. 4:4; Rom. 10:11). Sometimes, the New Testament refers to apocryphal books, but such books are never quoted as if they are Scripture (for example, Jude 14–15).

Today’s passage shows us clearly that Jesus’ Old Testament canon included only the books in our Protestant canon. He refers to “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44), which corresponds to the traditional Jewish canon that contains the same books as our Old Testament canon, albeit in a different order. The Law refers to Genesis–Deuteronomy. The Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Isaiah–Malachi minus Daniel and Lamentations. The Writings are everything else in our Old Testament; sometimes first-century Jews called

this section “the Psalms” because Psalms is the largest and most famous book in the Writings.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Nehemiah
8:1-8;
Daniel 9:1-
2; Matthew
7:12; John
1:45

APPLICATION

Jesus is our Lord, so if we are to be faithful to Him, we do not want to have an Old Testament canon that is any different than the one He had. The apocryphal books can be useful as historical works and even as repositories of human wisdom, but they are not divinely inspired and cannot determine doctrine. We must derive our theology only from divinely inspired works, so let us be careful to prove all our beliefs by the inspired Scriptures.

DAY 12

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

2 PETER 3:15-16 “COUNT THE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD AS SALVATION, JUST AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO WROTE TO YOU ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN HIM, AS HE DOES IN ALL HIS LETTERS WHEN HE SPEAKS IN THEM OF THESE MATTERS. THERE ARE SOME THINGS IN THEM THAT ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, WHICH THE IGNORANT AND UNSTABLE TWIST TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION, AS THEY DO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES.”

If Scripture is the only infallible rule of faith and practice for the church, then it is vital that we know which books constitute Scripture. There are, after all, many books that claim to be from God or that others claim are from the Lord. How, then, do we identify what the Lord has inspired and what He has not?

Discerning the Old Testament canon is relatively easy, as we have seen. If Jesus is Lord, then we want to have the canon that He followed, and we know that His Old Testament canon was the thirty-nine-book Protestant Old Testament canon.

Things are more complicated when it comes to the New Testament. Yet, church history shows that there was an early consensus about the New Testament canon. Certain books—including

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the four Gospels, the Pauline Epistles, the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Peter, and 1 John—were universally accepted, with almost no one doubting their scriptural status. Some early believers, however, had questions about books such as Revelation and 2–3 John. In the end, certain objective factors helped move the church to receive these books as Scripture: they had a credible claim to Apostolic authorship, taught in accord with the other unquestioned books, and were read in churches in all parts of the known world. By the middle of the fourth century AD, the church had settled on the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, and the Protestant Reformers affirmed this canon just as the Roman Catholics did.

Although the aforementioned objective factors regarding the New Testament books were appealed to as the church was discerning the scope of Scripture, the reception of the canon also involved subjective factors as well. Because Scripture is from God Himself and because there is no authority higher than the Lord, the final reason why the church received the canon it did was due to its hearing the voice of God in the pages of the received books. While objective evidences for canonicity are persuasive and necessary, we are finally convinced to receive Scripture as Scripture by the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of His people. John Calvin wrote: “These words [of Scripture] will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted” (*Institutes* 1.7.4).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

John 14:26;
Acts 13:48;
1 Thes-
salonians
1:4–5;
2 Timothy
1:14

APPLICATION

In confessing the self-attestation of Scripture, we are affirming that the authority of Scripture does not derive from the church or any authority other than God Himself. We believe in Christ because the Holy Spirit convinces us, and we believe Scripture because the Holy Spirit convinces us. We have objective evidence for our beliefs and should affirm it, but only the Spirit can make us trust God’s Word.

DAY 13

RIGHTLY HANDLING GOD'S WORD

2 TIMOTHY 2:15 “DO YOUR BEST TO PRESENT YOURSELF TO GOD AS ONE APPROVED, A WORKER WHO HAS NO NEED TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH.”

Martin Luther is often identified as one who argued for the right of individual Christians to interpret the Bible for themselves. In large measure, this is correct. After all, Luther himself stood firm on the doctrine of justification by faith alone because he was convinced by his reading of Scripture that the doctrine was true even when much of the medieval church disagreed. Luther is also famous for translating the Bible into German so laypeople could read it or at least understand it when it was read to them. He and the other Reformers believed that the Bible was not a closed book available only to the scholarly elite and the clergy but rather the possession of all Christians.

Luther and the other Protestant Reformers, however, did not believe that Christians had the right in their private interpretation of Scripture to interpret it incorrectly. The doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does not mean that Christians are to pay attention only to their personal understanding of the Bible or that we can make the Scriptures mean whatever we want them to mean. After all, Martin Luther is often quoted as saying, “The Holy Spirit is no skeptic.” The meaning of Scripture is not so uncertain that we can all come up with our own views and never know the truth. That would be a skeptical view of divine truth that says it is wholly subjective and objectively unknowable. Scripture is the only infallible authority for the church, but it is not the only authority. There are other authorities that may command us insofar as they agree with Scripture. Church tradition, including the teaching of councils and individual theologians, as well as ordained teachers are lesser authorities that help us understand God’s Word and provide a measuring stick against which we can check our personal interpretations of Scripture. As a good rule of thumb, if we think we have come up with something new, it is likely that

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FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Ezra
7:1-10;
Nehemiah
8:1-8; Acts
20:28-32;
Ephesians
4:11-14

we have read Scripture wrongly. The Reformers, after all, did not claim to teach any new doctrines, and they regularly appealed to church fathers and others in support of their views.

With the right of private interpretation comes the obligation to interpret Scripture correctly. We must work diligently with the text to rightly handle “the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), as Paul tells us in today’s passage. Let us follow sound interpretative principles and read the Bible within the community of God’s people—the church—so that we do not go astray.

APPLICATION

For millennia, godly men and women who are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit who dwells in us have been reading and interpreting Scripture. We would therefore be foolish to ignore their writings and their teachings. It is good for us to have access to the writings of some of the best interpreters in church history, such as John Calvin and Martin Luther. They err at times, just as we do, but they are a helpful guide to understanding God’s Word.

DAY 14

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT TEACHING

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11 “THESE THINGS HAPPENED TO THEM AS AN EXAMPLE, BUT THEY WERE WRITTEN DOWN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION, ON WHOM THE END OF THE AGES HAS COME” (V. 11).

Recognizing our obligation to sound biblical interpretation, we will now consider one of the most important rules for identifying the meaning of a biblical text. Whenever we read the Scriptures, it is vital that we keep in mind the principle that the explicit, direct teaching passages of the Bible must control our interpretation of passages that convey their teaching less directly and more implicitly.

As an example of the distinction between passages that teach implicitly and those that teach more explicitly, let us consider what

the New Testament has to say about the resurrection of Jesus. The accounts of the resurrection in the four Gospels all describe the event in such a way as to make it clear that a miracle occurred in Jesus' rising from the grave. The presence of angels, an extremely heavy stone being rolled away, and appearances of Jesus all add up to a miracle having taken place, and since only God has the power to perform miracles, we can draw the conclusion that the Gospels implicitly teach that God raised Jesus from the dead. None of the Gospels, however, at least in their narration of the resurrection events, say directly that "God raised Jesus from the dead." But, we do find such explicit statements elsewhere in passages such as Ephesians 1:20. That text from Paul's letter would be an example of a passage that makes an explicit, direct teaching statement.

The implicit teaching passages of Scripture will shape our theology, but if we allow implicit teaching to contradict what the Bible says explicitly and directly, we will draw erroneous conclusions. For example, several passages of Scripture describe the Lord as relenting or changing His mind (for example, Ex. 32:14; Jonah 3:10). If we allow such texts to control our theology and override more explicit teachings found in God's Word, we will believe that like us, God sometimes encounters new information, unforeseen circumstances, or something else such that He experiences an actual change of mind as we might. Yet, the more explicit and didactic portions of Scripture tell us otherwise. Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind." Here we have a text that tells us directly that God does not do what certain passages seem to suggest. We conclude, then, that descriptions of God's changing His mind are anthropomorphic. God relents, but He knew He would do so all along. He does not change His mind like we change ours.

APPLICATION

Cults typically base their doctrine on obscure passages of Scripture and on conclusions they draw from implicit teaching that contradict the explicit teaching of Scripture. We must be careful never to do that. If our belief contradicts an explicit teaching of Scripture, we can be sure that we are believing something in error.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy
4:15-24;
Proverbs
8:33; Mark
4:1-20;
James 3:1

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DAY 15

READING THE BIBLE HOLISTICALLY

MATTHEW 19:1-9 “HAVE YOU NOT READ THAT HE WHO CREATED THEM FROM THE BEGINNING MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, AND SAID, ‘THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? SO THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO BUT ONE FLESH. WHAT THEREFORE GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NOT MAN SEPARATE” (VV. 4-6).

Having seen that we should be careful to let the explicit teaching or didactic portions of Scripture control how we understand passages in which the teaching is more implicit, we are now ready to apply that principle more broadly. If the explicit teachings of Scripture are to guide our interpretation of the Bible, then what we are saying is that the surest guide to the right understanding of Scripture is Scripture itself. There is a famous Latin phrase that encapsulates this idea: *Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*, which means “sacred Scripture is its own interpreter.”

That the best guide for interpreting the Bible is the Bible itself is a logical consequence of our doctrine of biblical inspiration. The author of a particular work can best tell us what he meant when he wrote that work. If God inspired the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17), God is the author of all of Scripture. So, since God is the author of all of Scripture, He is the One who can give us the definitive meaning of His Word, and since the only word we have from the Lord is His Word, the chief way we determine whether our interpretation of a specific passage is right is to compare it to the rest of the Bible’s instruction.

Dr. R.C. Sproul puts it this way in his message on historical narrative in his Ligonier Ministries teaching series *Knowing Scripture*: “We must be careful to read the Bible holistically. We ought not to draw interpretations from the text that are against interpretations that the Bible elsewhere draws itself. The Bible interprets the Bible; the Holy Spirit is His own interpreter.” If

our interpretation of one text contradicts our interpretation of another text, one or both interpretations must be wrong. They cannot both be correct because “God is not a God of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33), and He would not teach one thing in one passage and the opposite in another.

In today’s passage, we see how Jesus used Scripture to interpret Scripture. In the first century, Jewish rabbis who followed the famous rabbi Hillel had taken the allowance for divorce in the Mosaic law (Deut. 24:1–4) and stretched it far beyond its original intent. Instead of seeing the divorce laws as a gracious accommodation meant only for select circumstances, these rabbis who followed Hillel embraced divorce as a positive good that could be used to get out of any marriage relationship for whatever reason. But as Jesus shows, this was not the intent of the divorce laws. And how does He do it? By appealing to Scripture and showing that His opponents’ understanding of the law of Moses was incompatible with Genesis 2 (Matt. 19:1–9).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Daniel 9;
Luke 24:27;
1 Cor-
inthians
9:1–12;
Hebrews
10:1–18

APPLICATION

Understanding any one portion of Scripture correctly demands that we read it in the context of all of Scripture. That is why it is so important for us to be whole-Bible Christians. We must diligently study all that God has revealed, not limiting ourselves only to select books and passages of the Bible. Let us endeavor to study the whole counsel of God, growing in our knowledge of all of Scripture over the course of our lives.

DAY 16

INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE WITH THE CHURCH

ACTS 15:1–35 “THE APOSTLES AND THE ELDERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER TO CONSIDER THIS MATTER” (V. 6).

Today we return to our study of the doctrines recovered in the Protestant Reformation. We are focusing on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and those aspects related to

it, and as we have seen, *sola Scriptura* tells us that Scripture is the only infallible authority for the church, but not that it is the only authority. There is a place for other authorities over us in the church that are under the authority of God's speaking in His Word.

Protestant leaders did not reject authorities such as councils and creeds altogether; all they did was set aside those authorities and conciliar teachings that did not find their origin in God's inscripturated Word. They retained the use of ecumenical creeds such as the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon. They continued to read the early church fathers and even many medieval Christian thinkers to learn from their insights into Scripture.

Moreover, they held councils of their own and wrote new creeds and confessions. In doing so, Protestants followed the long-standing tradition of the church: gathering in council to settle disputes and address heresy. This practice went back to the Apostolic era, as we see in today's passage. When there was a controversy regarding whether to require circumcision for gentiles to be admitted to the church, the Apostles and elders of the church met at a first-century council in Jerusalem to discuss the matter. After a time of deliberation, the council decided that gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be Christians, and the conciliar decision was sent to the churches via letter (Acts 15:1–35).

The presence of Apostles at the Jerusalem Council gives it an authority that no later council can possess. What is notable, however, is that a decision of such significance was not settled upon by one Apostle, even though it could have been via divine revelation. Instead, the church as a whole considered the matter. This is instructive. If even the Apostles believed they should read and interpret Scripture in concert with the entire church, how can we do otherwise? We are not to be Lone Ranger Christians who go off by ourselves with our Bibles to figure out what God said, although personal Bible study is certainly a good thing. No, we read God's Word with the church, looking

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Deuteronomy 16:18;
Matthew 18:15–20;
Galatians 2:1–10;
1 Timothy 4:14

to one another and to appointed teachers and ministers to help us interpret Scripture correctly. We need God's people to help us know God's Word.

APPLICATION

Many of the greatest errors in church history arose when an individual was unwilling to read Scripture with the rest of the church. We cannot be unchurched Christians or Christians who are unwilling to submit to one another in the local body of Christ. If we are not seeking to read Scripture with the church and to learn from others both past and present, we will surely make many errors in understanding God's Word.

DAY 17

ILLUMINING SCRIPTURE

1 CORINTHIANS 2:10B-16 "THE NATURAL PERSON DOES NOT ACCEPT THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD, FOR THEY ARE FOLLY TO HIM, AND HE IS NOT ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THEM BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY DISCERNED" (V. 14).

Scholars of the Reformation regularly point out that in asserting the final authority of Scripture, the Reformers did not believe that unaided human reason was sufficient for the Bible to function as the last court of appeal in the church. The Reformers believed there was a place for reason, to be sure, but even the soundest rules of interpretation would be insufficient for appropriating the teaching of Scripture without the work of the Bible's divine author. In other words, the Reformers held to a view of *sola Scriptura* that embraced the work of the Holy Spirit in illumining His Word in the hearts and minds of His people. Word and Spirit must go together for people to know, believe, and be transformed by divine revelation.

In noting that the illumining work of the Holy Spirit is necessary when we read Scripture, we are not saying that unbelievers

are wholly unable to gain an understanding of the meaning of the biblical text. Non-Christians often are able to comprehend at least part of what a particular passage of Scripture means. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, however, a non-Christian cannot truly understand the significance of a particular text for salvation or come to saving faith. There is an understanding of Scripture that unbelievers can gain, but it is limited in its scope, and its efficacy will be only to harden the heart of the reader unless the Spirit does His work of changing the reader's heart and mind. John Calvin comments on today's passage: "It is not owing simply to the obstinacy of the human will, but to the impotency, also, of the understanding, that man does not attain to the things of the Spirit. Had he said that men are not willing to be wise, that indeed would have been true, but he states farther that they are not able. Hence we infer, that faith is not in one's own power, but is divinely conferred."

We require divine assistance to understand the full import of Scripture and to apply it rightly to our lives. The Holy Spirit must do His work of illumination, for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:10–16, only spiritual men and women can discern the things of God. And while the Holy Spirit certainly does this on an individual level, we must remember that the Spirit is given to all of God's people (12:13). We need one another to enjoy the full benefit of the Spirit's work of illumination, for the Spirit is often pleased to speak, as it were, through others, giving them insights to help us all know His Word.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm
119:18,
73; Isaiah
58:11; John
16:12–15;
Ephesians
1:15–23

APPLICATION

In all our study of Scripture, we must never forget our need of the Holy Spirit's assistance. As we read God's Word, let us pray that the Spirit would illumine it so that we would understand and apply it rightly. And let us pray for this illumination when we read Scripture together so that we will be led in paths of righteousness through the Scriptures.

DAY 18

PREACHING SCRIPTURE

1 TIMOTHY 4:13 “UNTIL I COME, DEVOTE YOURSELF . . .
TO EXHORTATION, TO TEACHING.”

Scholars of religion often note the importance of words for the Christian religion. We define orthodox theology with words, and the words of our prayers and songs express our piety. But the importance of words for biblical religion is most evident in our reliance on the written Word of God. Ever since the days of Moses, the reading of the Scriptures has been definitional for the religion of God's people, and as 1 Timothy 4:13 indicates, the public reading of Scripture must be a part of our worship services.

Yet, 1 Timothy 4:13 says more about the Scriptures in worship than that we are to read them aloud. Paul also tells Timothy and, by extension, all Christian pastors to be devoted to exhortation and to teaching. There is, in fact, a careful sequence laid out in today's passage. First the Word of God is to be read, and then it is to be explained. John Calvin comments, “[Paul] places reading before doctrine and exhortation; for, undoubtedly, the Scripture is the fountain of all wisdom, from which pastors must draw all that they place before their flock.”

Pastors and teachers have nothing to give to God's people besides what the Lord has given—namely, His inspired Word. So, essential to worship is exhortation and teaching based on that Word. The word “teaching,” or in some translations “doctrine,” has in view the systematic exposition and explanation of Scripture for the purpose of establishing what we are to believe. “Exhortation” refers more to the practical application of the text to God's people. Those who teach God's Word in the worship service are to explain and apply it, helping us learn how to love our Creator more truly and follow Him more rightly.

Scripture is clear enough that anyone can read it and discern the basic message of salvation. But some portions of the Bible are harder to understand than others, and so God has given the

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DAY 17 & 18

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Nehemiah
8:1-8;
Acts 2:42;
1 Corinthi-
ans 1:21;
2 Timothy
3:16-17;
4:1-2

church teachers to help us learn His Word and grow in grace and truth (Eph. 4:11-14). Because the Word is essential to our lives as Christians and because God has given us pastors, elders, and teachers to assist us in bringing this Word to bear on our lives, Christian worship conducted according to the Bible will always involve the teaching of the Bible.

Pastors, elders, and teachers must place a high priority on studying the Bible so that they may rightly proclaim it to their congregations. But laypeople are responsible as well to call on their leaders to teach them God's Word. Let us encourage our pastors, elders, and teachers to give us the Word of God in our worship.

APPLICATION

If God's people do not call for their pastors, elders, and teachers to bring them the Word, their leaders may be tempted to give them something different. We are all responsible to make sure that God's Word is faithfully proclaimed. If we are teachers, then we must take care to exposit the Word carefully. If we are laity, we must ask for the Word to be preached in our congregations and listen when it is.



**SOLUS
CHRISTUS**

II

C H R I S T A L O N E

DAY 19

THE DIVINE NATURE OF CHRIST

MARK 5:21-43 “TAKING [THE GIRL] BY THE HAND [JESUS] SAID TO HER, ‘TALITHA CUMI,’ WHICH MEANS, ‘LITTLE GIRL, I SAY TO YOU, ARISE.’ AND IMMEDIATELY THE GIRL GOT UP AND BEGAN WALKING” (VV. 41-42A).

If you have been a Christian for a number of years, you have likely heard a sermon on Peter’s walking on water (Matt. 14:22–33) that included this point: As long as Peter kept His eyes on Jesus, he was all right. Only when he took his eyes off the Lord did he start to sink.

That lesson applies not only to individuals but also to the church. When the church loses its focus on the person and work of Christ, it will quickly fall into darkness. Christianity is all about Christ—who He is and what He has done. Thus, if we make the focus of the church a particular political program, a sociocultural ideology, or even the church itself, we ultimately end up with no Christianity at all.

One of the great accomplishments of the Reformation was its returning the church’s focus to Christ. We could, in fact, say that the driving force of the Reformation was bringing the church back to its historic confession of Christ alone (*solus Christus*)—Christ alone is head of the church; Christ alone is worthy of adoration; Christ alone saves.

In seeking to recover the person and work of Christ, Protestants, particularly the Reformed, were not seeking to break new ground with respect to our Lord’s person. They only wanted to see historic Christian orthodoxy as represented in such statements as the Definition of Chalcedon taught clearly and without compromise. Protestants asserted with Chalcedon that Jesus is one person who possesses two natures, a divine nature and a human nature.

A nature is that which makes something what it is, those attributes that define it. For example, the divine nature is marked by divine attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence,

omnipresence, self-existence, eternity, and so on. To have a divine nature is to possess all the attributes that make God who He is. Thus, when we say that Jesus has a divine nature, we are saying that He possesses every attribute that God possesses in His divine nature. He is truly God.

Christ's possession of the divine nature is taught directly in passages such as John 1:1–18. We can also look to episodes in our Lord's life that reveal His divine nature to us. In today's passage, for example, Jesus creates life, raising a young girl from the dead, simply by commanding her to live (Mark 5:21–43). That is something only God can do, for He created life by speaking it into existence (Gen. 1). Another passage that reveals Jesus' possession of the divine nature is John 1:43–51. Here we see evidence of omniscience, as Jesus tells Nathanael that he was sitting under a fig tree before our Lord encountered him.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Micah 5:2;
Mark 2:1–
12; John
20:24–29;
Jude 5

APPLICATION

Other religions might say they respect Christ for being a good prophet or moral teacher, but Scripture will not allow us to stop there. Jesus is also truly God and worthy of our worship. To be a servant of Christ is to worship Christ as the incarnate Creator. Let us share the truth of His deity with those who claim to respect our Savior.

DAY 20

THE HUMAN NATURE OF CHRIST

MATTHEW 21:18 “IN THE MORNING, AS HE WAS RETURNING TO THE CITY, HE BECAME HUNGRY.”

During the earliest centuries of church history, much of the theological debate centered around the identity of Jesus. Was He merely human? Was He God? Was He both? Was He neither? Over time, sustained reflection on the Apostolic testimony of the New Testament led the church to affirm Christ's true deity. But the church fathers also confessed Christ's

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true humanity. The essentials of this teaching on the person of Christ were codified at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, and the confession produced by this council was adopted by the Protestant Reformers.

The Definition of Chalcedon says that in the one person of Christ are united a true human nature and a true divine nature without confusion, mixture, division, or separation. In other words, when the Son of God, who from all eternity possessed the divine nature, added to Himself a human nature, each nature retained its own attributes. The divine nature did not become human and the human nature did not become divine. Neither were the natures mixed together such that Christ was a strange human-divine hybrid, neither truly human nor truly divine. No, Christ was and remains the God-man. This is a mystery we cannot fully comprehend, but we must affirm it. If Christ is not truly human, He cannot atone for our sin, for only a human being can atone for the sin of other human beings. If Christ is not truly God, the atonement He offers does not have sufficient value to be applied to all the elect. If Christ is not the God-man, there is no salvation.

Many passages of Scripture teach the true humanity of Jesus. For example, today's passage describes the hunger of Jesus (Matt. 21:18). The ability to get hungry is an attribute of Christ's human nature, for God has no need of anything, even food. Similarly, Christ's growing weary and sleeping also reveal His human nature, for God neither slumbers nor sleeps (Mark 4:38; see Ps. 121:4). At a few points in His ministry, Christ also expressed ignorance of certain things (Matt. 24:36). Again, that is a revelation of Christ's humanity, for God is omniscient, and in His divine nature Christ is omniscient as well.

Importantly, Christ's humanity enabled Him to be tempted. Because He became like us in all respects except for sin, our Lord could be tempted as a man, and so He can help us when we are tempted (Heb. 2:17–18). He is not far removed from what we face, but having walked through it Himself, He can give us what we need to fight against sin.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Luke 24:36–43; John 11:35; Philippians 2:5–11; 2 John 7

APPLICATION

Christ is our Lord, but He is not a master who is unapproachable or who does not understand us. Having taken on our flesh, He is able to sympathize with us and He knows what we need for strength in our weakness. Let us not be afraid to run to Him when we are being tempted or to rest in His strength. He can sustain us in all things no matter how difficult they become.

DAY 21

JESUS THE LAST ADAM

1 CORINTHIANS 15:45 “IT IS WRITTEN, ‘THE FIRST MAN ADAM BECAME A LIVING BEING’; THE LAST ADAM BECAME A LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT.”

When we describe human beings, we can separate people into different categories. We can categorize people according to sex: male or female. We can separate them by country of origin: Russian, Chinese, Indian, Kenyan, British, American, Colombian, and so on. We can divide them by age: children, teenagers, adults. There are seemingly countless ways that we have devised to group individuals.

Yet with respect to our standing before God, the Apostle Paul knows of only two groupings: people who are in Adam and people who are in Christ. These groups are represented by different federal heads: Adam and Christ, respectively. To put it simply, that means that whatever the federal head does, the people who are in him share the consequences.

Those who are in Adam are reckoned guilty of his sin. Moreover, they also receive a corrupted moral and spiritual nature that inclines them to hide from God and His ways, as Adam did after his fall (Rom. 5:12–21; see Gen. 3). Those who are in Adam also receive a corrupted physical nature; their bodies decay and eventually die. “In Adam all die,” Paul explains (1 Cor. 15:22).

All who are ordinary descendants of Adam are in Adam until

by regeneration, faith, and repentance they move from being in Adam to being in Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 1:28–30). If we are in Christ by faith alone, we receive forgiveness of sin and our Lord’s perfect righteousness, by which we are accepted by God (Rom. 3:21–26). We also receive a new heart—our moral nature is being renewed such that we more and more die to sin and live to righteousness (Rom. 6:11). But in Christ we will even receive a renewed physical nature. At the resurrection our bodies “will be raised imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:52).

In sum, those who are in Christ will get back what they lost in Adam, but more accurately, what we will get back will be better than what we lost. As John Calvin comments, “[Adam] by his fall ruined himself and those that were his, because he drew them all, along with himself, into the same ruin: Christ came to restore our nature from ruin, and raise it up to a better condition than ever.” Christ can do this because He is the last Adam, the federal head whom God appointed in His mercy to stand in for us so that we will become the glorified saints God intends us to be (1 Cor. 15:45).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
3:15; Mat-
thew 4:1-
11; Luke
3:23–38;
Romans
8:31–39

APPLICATION

Christ came not merely to restore us to what we were before Adam’s fall but to give us something better. As the last Adam, Christ restores what was lost and guarantees that we will never lose it again. He gives us His perfect righteousness and is now conforming us into His image. If we are in Christ, we should be thankful daily for all that Christ has brought back to us as the last Adam.

DAY 22

JESUS THE TRUE ISRAEL

HOSEA 11:1 “WHEN ISRAEL WAS A CHILD, I LOVED HIM,
AND OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

Hosea the prophet ministered during the eighth century BC and focused his attention primarily on the northern kingdom of Israel. During the early part of Hosea’s

ministry, Jeroboam II ruled over Israel and the northern kingdom enjoyed a good deal of prosperity. But spiritually and morally, the Israelites were bankrupt, having fallen into idolatry that would ultimately cause God to drive them out of their land in 722 BC.

The people were in a sad condition indeed, and part of what made it so tragic was that the people had failed to be what God called them to be—a royal priesthood and a light for the nations (Ex. 19:5–6; Isa. 42:6). This failure occurred despite God’s having graciously adopted Israel as His son, as Hosea 11:1 indicates. Israel was not true to its filial identity and was finally cast out of the land. But Hosea also saw that God’s anger against His people would not last forever; He would provide a renewed Israel who would serve the Lord faithfully (vv. 2–12; see 2:14–23).

That hope for a new Israel—a true Israel that would embody all that God called Israel to be—persisted across the centuries into the New Testament era. This hope was finally fulfilled in the incarnation of God’s true Son by nature, Jesus Christ. Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfills Hosea 11 (Matt. 2:13–15). He is the true Israel, the faithful Israel who succeeds where old covenant Israel failed. Like ancient Israel, He came up out of Egypt, passed through the waters, and was tested in the wilderness (2:13–15; 3:13–4:11; see Ex. 12:40–42; 14:1–31; 16:4). Unlike old covenant Israel, however, Jesus passed the test. He is therefore worthy to be called God’s Son because of who He is in His deity and because of what He accomplished in His humanity.

The good news of the gospel tells us that we can be the true Israel of God as well. If we are in Christ, we share in the privileges and relationship He enjoys as God’s true Son. We are not sons of God by nature; rather, we are sons of God by adoption, His beloved children in Christ. As such, we inherit all the promises given to old covenant Israel. Those promises of God that Israel would rule over her enemies and enjoy abundant covenant blessings (for example, Isa. 14:1–2)—those promises are for all of God’s people, the true Israel of God consisting of Jews and gentiles who are united to Christ by faith alone. In Him we are the true Israel of God, heirs of the glorious destiny promised to God’s old covenant people (Zeph. 3:14–20).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
44:21–23;
Jere-
miah 30;
Nahum 2:2;
Romans 11

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APPLICATION

Ultimately, the Israel of God is not an ethnic designation but a spiritual one. God's covenant people includes all those who put their faith in the true fulfillment of Israel, Jesus our Lord. Together, Jews and gentiles united to Christ have a common and exalted end. Let us rejoice in our status as the Israel of God and work to break down needless divisions in the body of Christ. God's people are one Israel in the Savior.

DAY 23**JESUS THE MESSIAH**

ISAIAH 45:1-13 "THUS SAYS THE LORD TO HIS ANOINTED, TO CYRUS, WHOSE RIGHT HAND I HAVE GRASPED, TO SUBDUCE NATIONS BEFORE HIM AND TO LOOSE THE BELTS OF KINGS, TO OPEN DOORS BEFORE HIM THAT GATES MAY NOT BE CLOSED" (V. 1).

Biblical Christianity emphasizes the principle of *solus Christus*, that Christ alone saves His people for the sake of His glory, which is the glory of the triune Godhead. Thus, people who are truly Christian never tire of hearing about who Christ is and what He has done in salvation. And one of the best ways to understand the person and work of Christ is to consider one of His chief titles, Messiah.

"Messiah" is the English translation of the Hebrew word *mashiach*, which means "anointed one." The Hebrew word for Messiah comes into the Greek as *christos*, from which we get the English word Christ. So, when we speak of Jesus Christ, we are actually speaking of Jesus the Anointed One or Jesus the Messiah.

We will see in coming days that the title Messiah points to the threefold office of Jesus as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Today we will consider one of the most important appearances of the title in Scripture. Interestingly, the title "messiah" in Scripture is applied to the Persian King Cyrus, for Isaiah 45:1 refers to Cyrus as God's "anointed," as God's messiah.

Cyrus is celebrated in Scripture because he conquered the Babylonian Empire and issued the decree that allowed the Jews to leave exile and go back to the promised land in 538 BC (2 Chron. 36:22–23). For that reason, the concept of the messianic office includes the work of deliverance as a primary focus. God, through Cyrus, delivered His people from captivity in Babylon and by that deliverance announced to the world that He—Yahweh, the Lord of Israel—is the only God and the only source of salvation (Isa. 45:22–23). Cyrus, though he did not know the Lord, was God’s instrument for rescuing His people and revealing to the world that He alone is God, the Sovereign over all creation (vv. 5–7).

If this was true for Cyrus, how much more is it true for Jesus? Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, and like Cyrus, He was commissioned to deliver God’s people. Unlike Cyrus, however, Jesus knew the one true God; in fact, Jesus is the incarnation of the one true God. The deliverance Jesus brings, therefore, is far greater. It is a deliverance that rescues us from estrangement from God. It is a deliverance that frees us from the root cause of all discord—namely, sin. Jesus is the Christ, the One in whom God directly acts to save us from our wickedness (Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:11).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus 3:7–
8; Psalm
2; Matthew
26:6–13;
Acts 18:24–
28

APPLICATION

In his lecture on Isaiah 45, Martin Luther draws another parallel between Jesus and Cyrus: “Just as Cyrus would by his power and his expense set them free, so Christ would redeem us by His Word and grace, without cost.” Luther affirms that there is no cost that we pay for our salvation, for Jesus paid it all. Because God’s deliverance through Christ is perfect, there is no price we pay for eternal life. All we must do is believe in Jesus and we will be saved.

DAY 24

JESUS THE ONLY SAVIOR

JOHN 1:43–51 “JESUS SAW NATHANAEL COMING TOWARD HIM AND SAID OF HIM, ‘BEHOLD, AN ISRAELITE INDEED, IN WHOM THERE IS NO DECEIT!’ NATHANAEL SAID TO HIM,

‘HOW DO YOU KNOW ME?’ JESUS ANSWERED HIM, ‘BEFORE PHILIP CALLED YOU, WHEN YOU WERE UNDER THE FIG TREE, I SAW YOU.’ NATHANAEL ANSWERED HIM, ‘RABBI, YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD! YOU ARE THE KING OF ISRAEL!’ ” (VV. 47-49).

We have been covering the person and work of Christ in our focus on the biblical, Reformation principle of *solus Christus*—Christ alone. Studying the encounters Jesus had with people also helps us understand who our Lord is and what He has done.

Among the most striking realities of the modern West is the deep feeling of alienation that people experience. Because of technology, we are more connected to one another than ever before. Yet at the same time, we seem more disconnected from one another than we ever have been. Many of us do not know our neighbors. We experience an emotional separation between each other as individuals but also between us and our society, our occupations, and our purpose.

Scripture explains why this sense of alienation exists, telling us that it is rooted in our separation and estrangement from our Creator. Having broken God’s law in Adam, sinners find themselves hiding from God and blaming one another for their predicament (Gen. 3:1–13). Our alienation on the human level can be remedied only by reconciliation between us and God, so it is understandable that the Old Testament contains many accounts of joy and celebration when people found access to the presence of God. For example, several psalms extol the beauty and joy that people found when they went up to worship God in the Jerusalem temple (Pss. 26:8; 27:4). Consider also the joy that Jacob expressed when he met the Lord in the wilderness and had his vision of a ladder (Gen. 28:10–22). This ladder, on which angels ascended and descended, connected the earth to heaven, providing a means of access to God’s presence.

Jesus references this story in His meeting with Nathanael, as recorded in John 1:43–51. Nathanael is certainly correct that Jesus’ knowledge of his location before meeting him was amazing, but Jesus says that the greater sign will be when Nathanael sees angels

ascending and descending on the Son of Man (vv. 48–51). Our Lord’s message is clear—He alone is the means of access to God’s presence. He is Jacob’s ladder.

That Jesus is the only way to heaven is not popular in our pluralistic and relativistic society, but we profess that He alone can reconcile us to our Creator not on our authority but on the authority of Christ. We must never compromise on the fact that Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Leviticus
16; Ezekiel
43:1–9; Mark
15:33–39;
Hebrews
10:19–22

APPLICATION

Human beings try to ascend to heaven in various ways, always relying on their own merit for entry into eternal life. But there is no other way to God than through Jesus. We cannot enter heaven on our own merit; neither will Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna, or any other figure take us there. If we do not tell other people that Jesus is the only way to God, we are not truly loving them.

DAY 25

OBEDIENCE IN CHILDHOOD

LUKE 2:52 “AND JESUS INCREASED IN WISDOM AND IN STATURE AND IN FAVOR WITH GOD AND MAN.”

As we continue to focus on the person and work of Christ, it is time to consider the obedience of Christ and its role in our salvation. As the Protestant Reformers noted again and again, there is no salvation for God’s people apart from Christ’s obedience during His earthly ministry. In fact, as we will see when we cover the doctrine of justification, the obedience of Christ is the only ground of our being declared righteous in God’s sight. Only His perfect obedience grants us citizenship in the kingdom of God.

As a helpful summary of biblical, Reformation doctrine, the Westminster Confession of Faith in several places emphasizes the role of Christ’s obedience in salvation. In 8.5, for instance, the confession states, “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience,

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and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.” This statement refers to what theologians have traditionally identified as the active and passive obedience of Christ. The active obedience of Christ refers to His keeping the law of God in our behalf, obeying every statute the Lord gave to humanity. Christ’s passive obedience, on the other hand, refers to the suffering and death by which He paid the penalty for the sins of His people. His active and passive obedience are equally necessary—Christ’s passive obedience discharges the debt our transgressions have incurred, and His active obedience gives us the positive status of covenant keepers so we can inherit eternal life.

Our Savior’s active obedience can give us this positive status before God because it is perfect. Jesus never failed to do what His Father commanded Him to do, and He never did anything contrary to the will of His Father. No one could convict Him of sin (John 8:46). Consequently, Christ’s obedience encompasses His entire life. From birth until death, Jesus always followed the Lord’s will.

Today’s passage points us to the obedience Christ rendered as a child and teenager as He grew to maturity. Though as the Son of God He was always pleasing to His Father, as the incarnate Lord He grew in favor with God as a man. The Father’s favor for His Son as the Messiah who does what we should have done in keeping the law never declined or reached a standstill (Luke 2:52). Even as a young man, He was doing what was necessary for our salvation.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
20:12;
Deuteronomy 5:16;
Proverbs
13:11; John
4:34

APPLICATION

From His first breath to His last, our Savior was committed to doing what was necessary for our salvation. He resolved always to obey His Father and never failed. Such commitment encourages us to trust Him with all that we have and are. If He is so committed to our salvation, we know that we are safe in His hands no matter what may come our way.

DAY 26

OBEDIENCE IN BAPTISM

MATTHEW 3:13-15 “JESUS CAME FROM GALILEE TO THE JORDAN TO JOHN, TO BE BAPTIZED BY HIM. JOHN WOULD HAVE PREVENTED HIM, SAYING, ‘I NEED TO BE BAPTIZED BY YOU, AND DO YOU COME TO ME?’ BUT JESUS ANSWERED HIM, ‘LET IT BE SO NOW, FOR THUS IT IS FITTING FOR US TO FULFILL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ ”

Jesus, if He was to save His people from their sin, had to render perfect obedience to God. We find this truth in passages such as Hebrews 5:8–9, where the author says that Christ was made perfect and the source of eternal salvation because He learned obedience. In other words, Jesus qualified Himself to be the Savior by flawlessly obeying all of God’s commands. He had to render perfect obedience as a man in order for men and women to be righteous in Him before the Father.

Christ rendered obedience to His Father by keeping every statute given to Israel. This included more than just the Mosaic law, for later in the history of the Jews, God sent John the Baptist to command His people to repent and be baptized (Luke 1:5–17; 3:1–6). Thus we have the context for understanding the words of Jesus in Matthew 3:15 that He had to be baptized by John “to fulfill all righteousness.” As Dr. R.C. Sproul has often said, by submitting to John’s baptism, Jesus kept that additional command given to the Jews and thus could stand before God having done all that God had commanded His people to do. Of course, Jesus’ baptism, while a fulfillment of God’s command, was not precisely the same as the baptism that the other Jews received. John pointed out that Jesus had no inherent need for baptism, and Jesus did not correct him (vv. 13–14). In other words, John knew that Jesus did not need to repent because He had no sin. Nevertheless, it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized, so Jesus went through the rite in preparation for His ministry though not as part of repentance, for He had no transgressions for which to repent.

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FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Leviticus
18:5; Mat-
thew 5:17-
18; Mark
1:9-11;
Galatians
4:4-5

Additionally, Christ's obedience to God in being baptized is one of the earliest examples we have of Jesus' identifying Himself with His people. Many commentators over the years have pointed out that by being baptized with His people, Jesus showed His solidarity with them. In His baptism, Jesus became like those He came to save, taking on their duties. There are echoes of substitution here, of Jesus' placing Himself in the stead of those He came to save. This motif of substitution, of course, becomes more prominent throughout Christ's ministry, and it reaches its ultimate fulfillment on the cross where He dies as a ransom for many, as the atoning sacrifice who takes the place of His people under divine judgment (Matt. 20:28; Mark 15:34; John 11:49-52). But at His baptism, Jesus began His journey as our substitute in earnest.

APPLICATION

We are called to obey every command God has given us, but our obedience does not secure our salvation. Only the obedience of Christ can do that. Our obedience is a reflection of whether we are grateful for our Lord's obeying God perfectly in our place. When we fail to obey, we are not showing gratitude for what Christ has done, so let us seek to obey God so that we may properly express thankfulness to our Savior.

DAY 27

OBEDIENCE IN TEMPTATION

LUKE 4:1-13 "JESUS, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, RETURNED FROM THE JORDAN AND WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT IN THE WILDERNESS FOR FORTY DAYS, BEING TEMPTED BY THE DEVIL" (VV. 1-2A).

From the very beginning of Jesus' earthly life, He never failed to obey His Father and thus He qualified Himself to be our High Priest (Heb. 5:8-10). All His days, Jesus kept the commandments of God, yet there are particular episodes of obedience in His life that are especially instructive for

us. One of the most important of these is the temptation of our Lord by Satan.

Paul tells us explicitly that Christ is the new Adam (Rom. 5:12–21), the progenitor of a new humanity that will love and serve the Creator. He tells us directly that to be in Christ is to be in the last Adam and to be part of His redeemed people who will be all that God intended humanity to be. But other New Testament authors teach us this concept as well, though they do so indirectly. By focusing much attention on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—teach us that Jesus is the last Adam. By telling the temptation story, they make this point more implicitly than Paul does, but they make it just the same.

Just consider this: What was the fundamental temptation that Adam faced in the garden of Eden? It was whether he was going to trust God and live by His Word even when the alternative offered by Satan—to become as God—might seem better on the surface. The devil tempted Jesus in a similar way. After forty days of no food and living in a harsh wilderness, the temptations Satan offered to turn stones to bread and to rule in comfort over all the world’s kingdoms certainly would have looked appealing to most people. But Jesus chose to trust God and live by His Word, and so He resisted Satan successfully (Luke 4:1–13).

Satan tempted Adam by twisting what God had said, not correcting Eve when she added to what the Lord had told her (Gen. 3:1–6). In a similar way, the devil tempted Jesus, quoting Scripture selectively and not balancing it with the rest of the Old Testament’s teachings on subjects such as putting God to the test, true worship, and how the Lord sustains His people. And how did Jesus defeat Satan? By knowing God’s Word in all its fullness and not setting one portion against another (Luke 4:1–13). He interpreted Scripture by Scripture, thus knowing and using Scripture’s true meaning against the enemy.

By overcoming Satan’s temptation, Jesus succeeded where Adam failed in Eden, and our salvation was made possible. (It was actualized in Christ’s death and resurrection.) He also gave an example for us. To resist temptation, we must know and live by God’s Word.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Prov-
erbs 1:10;
Matthew
4:1–11;
Hebrews
4:15;
James 1:13

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APPLICATION

As we grow in our knowledge of and love for God's Word, we grow in our ability to recognize the sin in our own hearts and to identify temptation when it confronts us. Growing in God's Word also shows us God's glory, convincing us that He is better than anything sin has to offer. If we want to grow stronger against sin, we must grow in our understanding of God's Word.

DAY 28**OBEDIENCE UNDER THE LAW**

GALATIANS 4:4-5 "WHEN THE FULLNESS OF TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, BORN OF WOMAN, BORN UNDER THE LAW, TO REDEEM THOSE WHO WERE UNDER THE LAW, SO THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE ADOPTION AS SONS."

Dr. J. Gresham Machen, the renowned defender of biblical orthodoxy in early twentieth-century Presbyterianism, sent a telegram just before his death that read: "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Machen's message indicates that we need both the death of Christ and His life of obedience to save us. It is not enough for our sins to be removed by the atonement; we also need a positive record of righteousness, obedience that fulfills the demands that God gave mankind to take dominion over the world for His glory (Gen. 1:26-28).

The recognition of our need for Christ's active obedience to God goes back through the Protestant Reformation to the Apostles. As we see in today's passage, Christ was born "under the law" to redeem those who are "under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5). But what does it mean to be under the law? In effect, it means to be obligated to keep the law perfectly in order to enjoy a right standing before God. By being born under the law, our Savior consented to fulfill its demands so that we can be released from its death

sentence against those who do not obey it perfectly. John Calvin comments, “Christ chose to become liable to keep the law, that exemption from it might be obtained for us.”

We must be careful here. Paul is thinking primarily of the Mosaic law in Galatians 4:4–5, but we are not to understand the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works given to sinners wherein they were expected to earn their righteousness before God. Remember that God gave the Mosaic law after redeeming His people. For sinners, grace precedes law, and seeking to be faithful to the law is how sinners thank God for His grace. Nevertheless, the law promises life to those who keep it perfectly (Lev. 18:5). Those who do it perfectly will be justified (Rom. 2:13). But sinners cannot keep the law with the perfection God demands, and recognizing this, God included in the law the gracious provision of sacrifices to atone for sin.

Yet none of this means that God could simply set aside His demands. In Adam we failed to please the Lord, and a just God cannot simply set His commands aside. His justice demands that His law be kept. In substance, the moral commands given to Adam are found in the Mosaic law, and by keeping these commands, our Savior did what we never could. By coming under the law and living a perfect life, He kept God’s demands on our behalf. His record of perfect law keeping is now ours by faith alone in Him (1 Cor. 1:30–31).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah 53:9;
Romans
10:4;
2 Cor-
inthians
5:21; Phi-
lippians
3:2–11

APPLICATION

If we are in Christ, we are redeemed from the law and are “not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned” (Westminster Confession of Faith 19.6). We are now liberated to use the law according to the purpose for which God gave it to redeemed people—as a guide to holiness. We seek to obey the law not to save ourselves but to manifest the holy character that God seeks from His redeemed children.

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DAY 27 & 28

DAY 29

OBEDIENCE IN SUFFERING

HEBREWS 5:8-10 “ALTHOUGH HE WAS A SON, HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED” (V. 8).

Reformed Protestantism has for centuries taught that Christ’s obedience throughout the entire course of His earthly life was necessary for our salvation. Our Lord’s active keeping of God’s commandments was necessary so that Christ could be our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). But in addition to Jesus’ active obedience, we also need His passive obedience, His suffering the curse of God so that we could be cleansed of our sin (Rom. 3:21–26).

As we consider the passive obedience of Christ, we must remember that it does not mean that our Lord was merely a passive recipient of suffering in His death. Yes, He suffered because other men beat Him and crucified Him, but Christ was active even in this. He gave Himself over to sinful men so that He could die in our place (Mark 15:16–20). He willingly laid down His life; no one took it from Him (John 10:18).

All the suffering Christ endured from birth until death falls under the category of passive obedience, but in particular we are talking about the suffering Jesus endured in His crucifixion when we are considering His passive obedience. Today’s passage refers to this suffering, noting that by this suffering Christ learned obedience (Heb. 5:8).

The phrase “learned obedience” is interesting and might strike us as odd. After all, Jesus is God incarnate (John 1:1–18), and certainly God does not grow in His knowledge. But remember that Jesus is also truly man and can grow in knowledge according to His human nature though not according to His divine nature. The seventeenth-century Reformed theologian John Owen comments that by “learned obedience,” the author of Hebrews means that Jesus came to understand suffering by experiencing it Himself. By walking through suffering as a man, Jesus has shared the human condition of suffering and can now help us when we suffer.

Yet in His suffering, Christ also experienced something that we will never know. Owen notes that there is something “peculiar in that obedience which the Son of God is said to learn from his own sufferings, namely, what it is for a sinless person to suffer for sinners.” In some ways, the sufferings of Christ are analogous to ours, but in other ways, they are unique to Him in His role as our Mediator. In fact, it was through obeying God and experiencing the curse of suffering that our sin deserves that Jesus was made perfect as our High Priest. By offering Himself as our atonement, Christ fulfilled His appointed task and became “the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9–10).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
39; Isa-
iah 53;
Mark 8:31;
1 Peter
2:18–25

APPLICATION

The suffering that Christ endured at the hands of other men was unjust, and yet He endured it. Although there are times when we are called to fight back against unjust suffering, there are times when we are to endure it for the sake of gospel witness. Discerning what we should do in a given situation is difficult, so let us be in constant prayer that God would give us discernment for when and when not to submit to suffering.

DAY 30

CHRIST OUR PROPHET

JOHN 4:19 “THE WOMAN SAID TO [JESUS], ‘SIR, I PER-
CEIVE THAT YOU ARE A PROPHET.’ ”

With the affirmation of *solus Christus*—Christ alone—the Protestant Reformers were calling for the church to return to the bedrock Christian conviction that Jesus is sufficient for salvation. The church, the sacraments, and other things are important, even essential, for Christian living, but in themselves they do not save. It is Christ who saves, and His work of salvation is sufficient for us because of the perfection of His person and work.

One of the common ways that the Reformers conceptualized

II

DAY 29 & 30

the person and work of our Savior was under the rubric of Christ's threefold office as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Today we will consider Christ as our Prophet. Any study of the Gospels will show us that Jesus was considered a prophet during His lifetime. For example, the woman to whom Christ talked at the well in Samaria confessed that Jesus was a prophet, and Jesus did not correct her (John 4:19). He accepted the designation because He fulfills the prophetic office.

Question and answer 24 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism fleshes this out by explaining that Christ is our Prophet because He reveals "to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation." Jesus reveals to us the way to the Father, pointing to Himself as the only avenue through whom we can be reconciled to God (John 14:6). In fact, Jesus not only gives us the words of God but is the very Word of God, the incarnation of God's salvation (1:1–18).

When we refer to Christ as our Prophet, we are not referring only to what He taught during His earthly ministry. All of God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation, is the result of Christ's executing His office of Prophet. Yes, the Holy Spirit comes to the fore particularly when we are discussing the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures (see 2 Peter 1:21), but the Spirit was not working by Himself in revealing God's will to God's people. As the Father, Spirit, and Son are perfectly united and share one essence (Matt. 28:18–20), the words that the Spirit gave are no less the words of the Father and the Son. Jesus, therefore, speaks to us in every word of the Bible.

That Christ is the Prophet sent by God points to the perfection of His teaching. John Calvin writes, "The purpose of this prophetic dignity in Christ is to teach us, that in the doctrine which he delivered is substantially included a wisdom which is perfect in all its parts" (*Institutes* 2.15.2). His Word never fails to save those whom He wants it to save (Isa. 55:10–11).

APPLICATION

History is filled with false prophets who deceived many people but were ultimately proven not to have a word from God. Christ, however, is the true Prophet whose Word is absolutely trustworthy

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy
18:15–22;
Amos 3:7;
Matthew
21:11;
Hebrews
1:1–4

and whose Word never fails to accomplish His purposes for it. He executes His prophetic ministry today through His inscripturated Word, and if we want to know God's will for us, we must be committed to studying the Scriptures.

DAY 31

CHRIST OUR PRIEST

HEBREWS 2:17 “[CHRIST] HAD TO BE MADE LIKE HIS BROTHERS IN EVERY RESPECT, SO THAT HE MIGHT BECOME A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST IN THE SERVICE OF GOD, TO MAKE PROPITIATION FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE.”

Under the old covenant, the priests represented the people before God, bringing sacrifices on their behalf to cover their sin and cleanse the temple and tabernacle. The most important work of the priesthood occurred on the annual Day of Atonement, when Israel's high priest took the blood of the sacrifice into the Holy of Holies to atone for the nation's sins (Lev. 16). That annual cleansing by the intermediary who represented the people was necessary to maintain the covenant relationship between the Lord and the Israelites.

By the time of the Reformation, there was much focus on the church's priests as intermediaries between the people and God who offered up a sacrifice of atonement in the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) at each Mass. The Reformers objected strongly, for they rightly saw that a continuing priesthood that propitiated (turned away) the wrath of God through the ongoing sacrifice of the Mass was a repudiation of Christ's office as our High Priest. As we see in today's passage and many other texts in the book of Hebrews, there is only one priest and intermediary between the people and God—Christ Jesus our Lord (Heb. 2:17).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains that “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us” (WSC 25). Here we see

that our Lord's priestly work includes both His effectual never-to-be-repeated sacrifice for our sin and His effectual intercession on our behalf.

When we speak of Jesus as our Priest or High Priest, we are referring first to the perfection of His sacrifice. Old covenant priests repeated their sacrifices again and again because the blood of bulls and goats cannot truly atone for the sin of human beings. Only a human being can atone for other human beings, so a man had to die if true atonement was ever to be made. Christ Jesus offered this perfect atonement, suffering and dying as a man to cover our sin. The perfection of His atonement means it cannot and need not be repeated, and any attempt to do so calls into question the sufficiency of His work (Heb. 9–10).

Christ is our all-sufficient Savior because He is our Priest. Not only does He offer the true atonement for our sin, but He also ever lives to intercede for us (7:25). It is good news indeed that Christ prays for His people, for it means that He cannot fail to save His elect. Being the Son of God, He knows how to intercede for us before His Father perfectly such that none of His own will ever be lost.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Numbers
11:1–3;
1 Samuel
12:19–
25; Mark
14:22–25;
John 17

APPLICATION

We find it difficult to know how to pray for ourselves, but Christ does not have that problem. He prays for us perfectly before His Father such that if we trust in Him, we cannot fail to persevere in faith. Our perseverance ultimately depends on Christ's faithful prayers for us. If you are discouraged this day, know that if you trust in Jesus Christ, He is praying perfectly for you right at this very moment.

DAY 32

CHRIST OUR KING

REVELATION 17:14 “THEY WILL MAKE WAR ON THE LAMB, AND THE LAMB WILL CONQUER THEM, FOR HE IS LORD OF LORDS AND KING OF KINGS, AND THOSE WITH HIM ARE CALLED AND CHOSEN AND FAITHFUL.”

News of war in foreign lands appears on our television screens every night. Online, we are informed of the latest political scandal and the opposition's jockeying to take advantage of it. In the newspapers, the headlines warn of impending economic doom or the spread of some deadly disease. Our fallen world can be a scary place, and there seems to be no end to the bad news headed our way.

Such problems make us long for a wise king, do they not? They make us hope for one who can address the root causes of these issues, defeat our enemies, and protect us from every danger. The Bible tells us of such a king—Jesus the Messiah.

In revealing to us the person and work of Christ, Scripture tells us that Jesus is not only our Prophet and High Priest but also our King. As we see in today's passage, Christ is "Lord of lords and King of kings," and He will defeat all His foes (Rev. 17:14). This is such an important truth for us to remember as we live in this fallen world. So often, we experience seeming defeat in our battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. But the good news of the gospel tells us that these defeats are only temporary, for Christ has ascended to the right hand of God the Father and has been given the name above all names (Acts 2:33; Phil. 2:5–11). He is the omnipotent ruler of His people, and He cannot fail to bring us the final victory. Hope for the Christian is never lost, for we serve One who "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25), and He will not fail to conquer them all.

Christ, indeed, is King of His people. But His authority is not only over His servants in the church. Because He is "King of kings" (Rev. 17:14), He also sits enthroned over all rulers, which means that their subjects must ultimately bow to Him. As those who have been commissioned to preach the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14), our job is to announce the reality of Christ's present reign and to call people to bow down to Jesus as the sovereign over all. And all people will bow down—some willingly, because He has given them new hearts, and some by force as He compels them to bend the knee before sending them to eternal judgment (Ps. 2).

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FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm
10:16;
Zechariah
9:9; John
12:12-16;
Revelation
11:15

“Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies” (WSC 26). He subdues our stony hearts and makes us willing subjects of His kingdom—a kingdom that will never end because He is conquering all its enemies.

APPLICATION

God’s kingdom is a monarchy ruled over by the perfect King who will not fail to execute justice. Knowing this will sustain us as we face the many injustices this world has to offer. Christ sees them and He will set them all right in the end. He calls us to be ambassadors of His kingdom, to proclaim His reign of justice, warning people that they can enjoy the peace of His kingdom only if they bow the knee to Him today.

DAY 33

PENAL SUBSTITUTION

ISAIAH 53 “HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS; HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; UPON HIM WAS THE CHASTISEMENT THAT BROUGHT US PEACE, AND WITH HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED. ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY; WE HAVE TURNED—EVERY ONE—TO HIS OWN WAY; AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL” (VV. 5-6).

In our consideration of Jesus as our High Priest, we saw that His death is one of the key aspects of His priestly work.

Christ’s death, Hebrews 9:11–28 explains, was a sacrifice offered “to put away sin.” We cannot understand the work of Christ unless we understand what happened in our Lord’s crucifixion.

As we consider the issue of our Lord’s atonement, let us note that Scripture describes what the crucifixion accomplished in a variety of ways. For example, the death of Jesus is described as the ransom paid to God to free us from our bondage to sin and also as the defeat of Satan (Mark 10:45; Col. 2:13–15). Christ even describes His death as the supreme illustration of His love for

His friends (John 15:13). However, while we should not forget how the atonement is these things, we must emphasize that the chief reality of the atonement is that it was a penal substitution.

In penal substitution, the penalty that is due to us for our transgression is paid by a substitute—namely, Jesus Christ. The principle of penal substitution undergirds the old covenant sacrificial system. God told Adam that the penalty for sin was death (Gen. 2:16–17). In the old covenant sacrifices, the people placed their hands on the sacrificial animals, thereby identifying with them, and then the animals were put to death (see Lev. 4). This depicted the transfer of sin and guilt from the sinner to the substitute. The sinner could live because the animal died in the sinner's place, bearing the punishment the sinner deserved.

But since “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4), the animal sacrifices of the old covenant did not effect true atonement. They were types and shadows that pointed to the only true atoning sacrifice, which was offered once for all on Calvary by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (vv. 5–18). This final and only effective act of penal substitution was foreshadowed by the entire old covenant sacrificial system and explicitly predicted in Isaiah 53. The prophet tells us that God laid on the Suffering Servant (Christ) our iniquity (Isa. 53:6)—our sin was transferred to Him in the atonement. He was “pierced” and “crushed for our iniquities . . . cut off out of the land of the living . . . for the transgression of [God's] people” (vv. 5, 8). In other words, Christ endured the punishment His people deserve in their place. If we trust in Him alone for salvation, we need not fear eternal death, for Jesus bore our sin on the cross so that we will not receive everlasting judgment (v. 10; John 3:16).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Leviticus
5:14–19;
Jeremiah
33:8;
1 Corin-
thians 1:4–
9; 1 John
4:10

APPLICATION

All people have a sense of guilt for their transgressions no matter how hard they try to suppress it. The only way to lose the weight of guilt is to have it removed through atonement. If you have trusted in Christ alone for salvation, you need not feel guilty before God this day, for He has paid for your sin. If you have not trusted Christ, your guilt will be removed when you rest in Him alone.

II

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DAY 34

PARTICULAR ATONEMENT

JOHN 10:11 “I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.”

By dying on the cross under the wrath of God that we deserve, Christ atoned for the sins of His people (Isa. 53). Note the qualifier “His people” in that sentence. When we discuss the atonement, it is insufficient to talk about it in general terms. Since penal substitution involves the one person, Jesus Christ, dying in place of others, we need to understand who those others are. Christ died intending to save people, but whom did He intend to save?

Most professing Christians would probably say that Jesus died for everyone in the world without exception. Yet, a careful reading of Scripture shows us otherwise. Christ, in fact, atoned only for the sins of His people, not the sins of every person who has ever lived.

John 10 is a key passage on this subject. Jesus says in verse 11 that He lays down His life for His sheep. If our Savior did atone for the sins of all people without exception, then everyone who has ever lived would have to be His sheep. Yet just a few verses later, Jesus makes reference to those who are “not among [His] sheep” (v. 26). It turns out that there is a difference between two groups of people that is significant to our discussion. Some people are the sheep of Jesus and some are not His sheep. But our Lord does not claim that He died for those who are not His sheep; rather, He died for His sheep alone.

In addition to the biblical evidence for Christ's dying only for His elect, there are also important logical considerations. Christ in the atonement bears the punishment for sinners, so God would be unjust to punish in hell anyone for whom Christ died. If Christ bore the punishment for all sinners without exception, then either everyone who has ever lived must be in heaven or those who are in hell are being unjustly punished. (Their crime is being punished twice—once in Christ and once in them.) Yet we know that

God is perfectly just and that some people go to hell (Deut. 32:4; Rev. 21:8). Christ, therefore, must have died only for those who are actually saved in the end.

Some have said that Christ died to save all people but that unbelief keeps some from receiving salvation. Yet, while we must believe in Jesus to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31), unbelief is sin and is therefore also covered by the atonement. If Christ died for all unbelievers, we are back either to universalism or to God's unjustly punishing sin twice. Thus, the only unbelief for which Jesus atoned is the unbelief of those who finally, by the work of the Spirit, abandon their unbelief and trust in Him alone for salvation.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
40:1-2;
Ezekiel
16:62-63;
Matthew
1:21;
1 John
3:16

APPLICATION

Christ died for all kinds of people; that is what passages telling us that He made propitiation for the world mean (1 John 2:2). But Jesus did not die for everyone without exception. God chose a particular people, including men and women from every tribe and tongue, and Christ died for them specifically to atone only for their sin. If you believe in Jesus, He had you particularly in mind when He made atonement for your sin. He loves you in particular that much.

DAY 35

CHRIST RESURRECTED

1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-22 "IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR AS BY A MAN CAME DEATH, BY A MAN HAS COME ALSO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO ALSO IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE."

Christ alone saves His people, and we have focused much attention on how His obedience during His life and atoning death on the cross are essential for our salvation. One

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DAY 34 & 35

aspect of His work, however, that is easy to overlook when we are considering how Jesus saves us is His resurrection. Without our Lord's resurrection, there would be no salvation.

First, Romans 4:25 tells us that Jesus was “raised for our justification.” To understand what this means, we have to remember that death was not a part of God's original creation but was introduced as part of the punishment for sin (Gen. 2–3). Jesus could die on the cross only because the sins of others were imputed to Him, placed on Him so that He could bear the punishment we deserve (Isa. 53). If Jesus had actually been a sinner Himself, there could be no salvation, for one sinner cannot atone for another sinner; an atoning sacrifice must be without blemish (Heb. 7:23–28). Christ's resurrection proves that He Himself was not a sinner—in fact, God's raising Christ from the dead is His declaration that His Son is perfectly righteous. Death could not hold Jesus forever because Jesus was not a sinner Himself, and God's wrath on our sin was exhausted on the cross. The Father had to raise His Son from the dead because perfect justice demands that death cannot hold on to a person when there is no sin present. Christ had no sin of His own, and there was no sin left to be punished once Christ's work on the cross was over. So, Jesus' resurrection was a necessity.

We know that God accepted Christ's payment for sin and that Christ is perfectly righteous because Jesus rose from the dead. Thus, we know that trusting in Jesus alone will save us. We know that He has a perfect righteousness with which to clothe us, as is promised in the gospel (2 Cor. 5:21). And because we have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us through our union with Him by faith alone, we will likewise be resurrected unto everlasting life (Rom. 6:1–11). So, the second truth about Christ's resurrection is that it guarantees our resurrection. That is what Paul tells us in today's passage when he refers to Jesus as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20–22). Firstfruits are the initial harvest of a crop that proves the entire crop will come to maturity and be harvested. Christ is the firstfruits of the dead—His resurrection with a glorified body proves that all those who are in Him by faith will be resurrected unto glory as well.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Job 19:25–
27; Daniel
12:1–3;
Matthew
27:45–
53; John
11:25–26

APPLICATION

We understandably think readily of the cross when we consider the saving work of Christ because the atonement pays for our transgressions and cleanses us from sin. But Christ's resurrection is equally important. Without His resurrection, Christ's death would have been no more significant than the death of any other person. Meditate on the resurrection today and thank God for how it guarantees your salvation.

DAY 36

CHRIST ASCENDED

EPHESIANS 4:9-10 "IN SAYING, 'HE ASCENDED,' WHAT DOES IT MEAN BUT THAT HE HAD ALSO DESCENDED INTO THE LOWER REGIONS, THE EARTH? HE WHO DESCENDED IS THE ONE WHO ALSO ASCENDED FAR ABOVE ALL THE HEAVENS, THAT HE MIGHT FILL ALL THINGS."

Jesus lived a perfect life, died an atoning death, and rose from the dead to save us. But we cannot fully understand the person and work of Christ in relation to our redemption unless we also consider our Lord's ascension. As Peter said at Pentecost, Jesus was "exalted at the right hand of God" after His resurrection (Acts 2:14-36).

Christ's ascension benefits us in many ways. First, it marks His formal assumption of His kingly office. Because the Son humbled Himself, took on our flesh, and fulfilled His mission, the Father "highly exalted" Him (Phil. 2:5-11). Having eternally enjoyed an authority equal to the Father's with respect to His deity, Christ ascended to heaven to execute authority over all in His humanity as well. The God-man now reigns over all, putting all His and our enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25).

Paul in today's passage describes a second way that Christ's ascension furthers the good of His people. The Apostle tells us that Jesus ascended above all the heavens "that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:9-10). John Calvin comments on this filling, explaining

that “while [Jesus] is removed from us in bodily presence, he fills all things by the power of his Spirit.” According to His human nature, Christ is in heaven, for that is where His human body and soul are present. But through the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with His people here on earth.

Calvin continues: “Did [Christ] not fill them before? In his divine nature, I own, he did; but the power of his Spirit was not so exerted, nor his presence so manifested, as after he had entered into the possession of his kingdom.” It is better for us that Jesus is not presently among us in the flesh. Jesus Himself said, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (John 16:7). For the Holy Spirit (the Helper) to fully exercise His ministry among God’s people, Jesus had to ascend to heaven. His ascension and His sending the Spirit mean we are in the last days before the renewal of creation (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2). Moreover, by His Spirit, we can now fellowship with the whole Christ, in His deity and in His humanity, for by the Spirit Christ bridges the distance between us and His physical body in heaven. Christ is omnipresent according to His divine nature, so He has always been at hand everywhere. But until Jesus ascended to heaven and sent His Spirit, only the people who came into direct contact with Him as He ministered in Galilee and in Judea encountered Him in His humanity. Since His ascension, we can commune with Christ in His humanity no matter where we live.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 68;
Proverbs
30:4; John
3:13; Acts
2:29–36

APPLICATION

The ascension of Christ makes it possible for people all over the world to commune with Him both in His deity and His humanity. The whole Christ is present to us so that we can benefit from His humanity even though His physical body is localized in heaven. Let us fellowship with Him in prayer today, asking God to conform us to the image of His Son.



SOLA
GRATIA

III

GRACE ALONE

DAY 37

GOD'S FIRST COVENANT WITH MANKIND

GENESIS 2:15-17 "THE LORD GOD COMMANDED THE MAN, SAY-
ING, 'YOU MAY SURELY EAT OF EVERY TREE OF THE GAR-
DEN, BUT OF THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND
EVIL YOU SHALL NOT EAT, FOR IN THE DAY THAT YOU EAT
OF IT YOU SHALL SURELY DIE' " (VV. 16-17).

Biblical Christianity stresses the grace of God, the unmerited favor that He shows to His elect and His initiative to save people from their sin. Yet we cannot understand His grace apart from His dealings with people in history. We have to go back to the time before salvation was necessary in order to know the grace of God.

Today's passage describes the prohibition found in the first covenant our Creator made with human beings. In this covenant of works, sometimes called the covenant of creation or covenant of life, God forbade Adam and Eve from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:15-17). Perfect obedience to this covenant would have confirmed Adam and Eve in life; they would have been reckoned as righteous before the Lord and would have inherited eternal life. We know this from the warning of death attached to breaking this covenant as well as from Romans 5:12-21. In the Romans passage, Paul draws a parallel between the first Adam and the last Adam, who is Jesus Christ. He tells us that Christ's obedience brings justification (the declaration of righteousness) and eternal life for those who are in Him (those who believe in Jesus). Given the parallel, we know that Adam would have secured the same blessings for those who are in him (all his descendants) if he had been obedient.

That we call the first covenant with Adam the covenant of works does not mean there is nothing gracious about it. We could say that it was by grace that the Lord created anything and entered into a relationship with our first parents. However, the grace that leads to salvation was not a part of the pre-fall state. We refer to

the covenant with Adam as the covenant of works because human effort was the means by which the blessing was to be secured. The good deeds of obedience in being fruitful, taking dominion of the earth, and abstaining from the forbidden tree would have merited eternal life for Adam and his descendants (Gen. 1:28; 2:15–17). This is unlike the covenant of grace that is instituted after Adam's sin, for in that covenant, it is God's grace and not our works through which we receive eternal life.

As we know, Adam and Eve broke the covenant of works, plunging them and all their descendants—save one, Jesus—into sin (ch. 3). Human nature became corrupted such that all our faculties—mind, body, heart, and soul—are tainted by sin (Rom. 3:9–18). No sinner can render the kind of obedience God requires in the covenant of works, so salvation must come another way—namely, by grace alone.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Hosea 6:7;
Romans
5:12–21;
1 Cor-
inthians
15:47–49;
1 Timothy
2:8–15

APPLICATION

Because of Adam's sin, we are born corrupt and cannot please God apart from grace. We are wholly dependent on the Lord's unmerited favor for our salvation and for any of the good works that we do in gratitude for salvation. Let us remember our dependence on God's grace that we would be moved to great humility and thankfulness.

DAY 38

COVENANTAL INTERVENTION

GENESIS 3:15 “I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR OFFSPRING AND HER OFFSPRING; HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL.”

When Adam and Eve broke the covenant of works, creation was thrown into upheaval. Pain and futility were introduced into the created order such that now men and women face great sorrow and hardship as they seek to fulfill

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the creational mandates of work and child-rearing (Gen. 3:16–19). Moreover, human nature was radically corrupted. From our youth, our bent is not toward fellowship with the Lord as it was before the fall but away from Him into disobedience (8:21).

The introduction of sin means that without God's intervention, we cannot obey our Creator as He commanded. It also means that without the Lord's actions, we will not even want to obey our Maker. Thankfully, God did intervene so that the death He promised Adam for eating the forbidden fruit would not be eternal for those whom He loves (see 2:15–17). Furthermore, He engaged in a covenantal intervention, as we see in today's passage.

Genesis 3:15 gives us what is traditionally known as the *proto-evangelion*, the “first gospel.” It is the first revelation of the covenant of grace. Under the covenant of works, a works principle was instituted whereby the blessings of the covenant would come about through the efforts of human beings—by obeying God perfectly, we could gain eternal life. However, under the covenant of grace, blessings are obtained by a grace principle that says someone else inherits the blessing of eternal life, and we share in it not through our good works but through faith alone. God's grace to His people under the covenant of grace will produce obedience in them, but our obedience does not merit eternal life for us (see Rom. 4; James 2:14–26).

Sin and Satan conspire against human beings to keep us in bondage to wickedness and not in a right relationship with the Lord. Thus, the first revelation of the covenant of grace promises the final defeat of our enemies. In Genesis 3:15, God graciously ordains a war between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of Satan. The word “offspring” is a collective singular, meaning that it can refer both to a plurality and to an individual. Christ is ultimately the seed of the woman, and we see grace in that it is He, not us, who does the work necessary to defeat the devil. He bruises the serpent's head, striking the fatal blow in the war. In Christ, we become the seed of the woman who share in His victory. God crushes Satan under our feet because Christ vanquished him on the cross (Rom. 16:20a).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Zechariah
3:1–5;
Hebrews
2:14;
1 John
3:8b; Rev-
elation 12

APPLICATION

God could have abandoned all people when Adam fell, leaving us totally under the devil's domain with no desire to resist him. But the Lord graciously intervened to give His people the will to resist Satan, and even better, God pledged to send the Savior to do all the work needed to save us. Let us thank God for our salvation this day and pray that He would strengthen us against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

DAY 39

THE COVENANT OF PRESERVATION

GENESIS 8:20-22 “THE LORD SAID IN HIS HEART, ‘I WILL NEVER AGAIN CURSE THE GROUND BECAUSE OF MAN, FOR THE INTENTION OF MAN’S HEART IS EVIL FROM HIS YOUTH. NEITHER WILL I EVER AGAIN STRIKE DOWN EVERY LIVING CREATURE AS I HAVE DONE. WHILE THE EARTH REMAINS, SEEDTIME AND HARVEST, COLD AND HEAT, SUMMER AND WINTER, DAY AND NIGHT, SHALL NOT CEASE’ ” (VV. 21-22).

God’s saving grace was first revealed in history after Adam and Eve broke the covenant of works. He gave a promise, recorded in Genesis 3:15, that the offspring or seed of the woman would defeat the devil. Throughout Christian history, theologians and pastors have seen in this promise a prediction of Christ, who would vanquish Satan and pay the price to reconcile sinners to our Creator. Reformation leaders agreed with this assessment. Martin Luther, for example, commented that Genesis 3:15 tells us the Son of God “will bruise Satan, utterly.”

Genesis 3:15 is the first revelation of the covenant of grace, and from that moment in history until the consummation, the covenant of grace and the covenant of works have continued side by side. God still demands that people keep the covenant of works, as seen in that He repeats many of the same commands given to

Adam before the fall, giving them to successive generations who live after the fall (compare, for example, Gen. 1:28 and 9:7). But now, after the fall, we cannot keep God's law. We are born guilty and morally unable to obey the Lord perfectly as He demands. What the covenant of grace actually does is provide a way for someone else—Christ our Lord—to keep the covenant of works in our place and give us a right standing before God that leads to eternal life (Rom. 5:12–21; 2 Cor. 5:21).

It is a covenant of grace because we do not do what is necessary to merit redemption and because Christ's righteousness is given freely to all who believe only in Him for salvation (Eph. 2:8–10). But the fullness of the covenant of grace was not revealed in total when God cursed Satan (Gen. 3:15). Instead, over time, God elaborated on the promise to defeat the devil. He entered into several successive covenants, all of which are part of the covenant of grace, each of which unfolds redemption more clearly. The first of these is His covenant with Noah after the flood.

God's covenant with Noah helps us understand that our salvation happens in and through human history. After all, God promised Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by a flood. He would preserve a stable order wherein He would eventually send Christ for our salvation (8:20–22). The covenant with Noah also underscores that redemption does not come through the efforts of even the most righteous sinner. Righteous Noah manifested his sin right after the flood, indicating that someone else must save us (9:20–21).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
1:14–19;
Psalm
104:19;
Jeremiah
33:20;
Acts 14:17

APPLICATION

How often do we think about the good gift of a stable and predictable natural order? The consistent rhythm of the seasons, the sun and moon, and even the weather enables us to make plans, grow crops, and do a host of other things. Let us thank God for the natural order He has established, and may we use the stability it offers for the sake of His glory.

DAY 40

THE COVENANT OF FAITH-RIGHTEOUSNESS

GENESIS 15 “[ABRAHAM] BELIEVED THE LORD, AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” (V. 6).

Every covenant that is a subset of the covenant of grace unfolds for us key aspects of God’s plan of salvation, which redeems us not through our merit but through God’s free gift. With Noah we see that the world into which the Lord finally sent the Savior continues only by gracious preservation. It is only by grace that the natural order continues, for “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21) and God must be patient, delaying His final judgment, if the world is to continue and His elect are to be saved. With Moses we are given the law to show us our failure and drive us to God’s grace, and we see that obedience follows redemption as the means by which we show gratitude to the Lord, not as the means to merit redemption. With David we see that salvation ultimately restores God’s people to their rule over the earth and that redemption is purchased by the King of kings who bears their deserved curse.

With Abraham we get the clearest revelation of the means through which we appropriate the blessings of grace. Today’s passage records the formal ratification of God’s covenant with Abraham. The patriarch, having heard that the Lord will give him and Sarah a son even though their advanced age should make it impossible, believes God’s promise. And we read that because Abraham believed the Lord, God counted him righteous (Gen. 15:1–6). The Apostle Paul uses this episode to show us that our justification—our being declared righteous before God and heirs of eternal life—comes through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, which we receive only by faith (Rom. 4). Our faith is not meritorious; it merely receives the gracious provision of Christ’s perfect righteousness, which is imputed or placed on our record when we trust in Jesus alone for salvation. John Calvin writes, “Faith does not justify us for any other reason, than that it reconciles us unto God; and that it does so, not by its own merit;

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but because we receive the grace offered to us in the promises, and have no doubt of eternal life, being fully persuaded that we are loved by God as sons.”

Besides revealing the faith-righteousness scheme of justification, the covenant with Abraham shows that God’s promises to His people cannot fail. By walking through the pieces of animals as “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch,” the Lord tells us that if the covenant is broken, He will be made like the dead animals (Gen. 15:7–20). But since God cannot change, He will never be subject to such a fate. And if He will never be subject to destruction, the promise must be fulfilled.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

2 Chroni-
cles 20:20;
Habakkuk
2:4; Luke
18:9–14;
Gala-
tians 3

APPLICATION

What is to be our response to the Abrahamic covenant? It is to forsake any claim to merit that we might think we have and to rest on Christ alone for salvation. We must continually turn to Jesus in faith, repenting of our sin and admitting that we have no merit of our own. Let us trust in Christ this day and exhort others to do so as well.

DAY 41

THE LAW COVENANT

DEUTERONOMY 5:6 “I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, WHO BROUGHT YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY.”

Even God’s covenant with Israel through Moses is part of the covenant of grace, that overarching covenant between the Lord and His people first announced in Genesis 3:15 wherein He pledged to defeat sin and Satan, redeeming us from those enemies. It may seem surprising at first, however, that the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. After all, the New Testament frequently places grace in opposition to law, and the Mosaic law is a defining feature of God’s covenant with national Israel through Moses (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:4). In fact, the law is so

prominent in the Mosaic covenant that it would not be inappropriate to call it the law covenant.

Yet when we consider the giving of the law and the task of the law, it becomes clear that the Mosaic covenant is indeed an essential part of the covenant of grace. First, let us consider today's passage, which appears immediately before the Ten Commandments, which are the heart of the Mosaic law. In Deuteronomy 5:6, God reminds the people of Israel that He brought them out of the land of Egypt and the house of slavery. And this happened before He revealed His covenant law to them. Thus we have an important pattern that defines God's relationship to His people even under the new covenant: salvation precedes obedience. In other words, God does not first give the law and tell us that our obedience to it will save us. Instead, He saves us and then gives us the law as the means by which we show our gratitude for our redemption. Note also that the Lord's redemption of Israel was His work alone, which is entirely in keeping with the covenant of grace. Only God sent the plagues and performed the miracles that persuaded Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, and only God intervened at the Red Sea to destroy the Egyptian army (Ex. 4:1–15:21).

The task of the law also shows us that the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. Here we are thinking primarily of the second use of the law, wherein the law reveals our sin and drives us to Christ. Although God never intended for sinners to save themselves by doing the law, the law does promise that those who keep it perfectly will enjoy everlasting life (Lev. 18:5; see Gal. 3:12; 5:3). But it does not take honest sinners long to realize how far short they fall of God's perfect standard. In trying to keep the law, we see the inadequacy of our obedience. This drives us to look for another to keep the law in our place, even Jesus Christ, who "is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus 24;
Deuteronomy 31:16–18; Romans 10:5;
Galatians 3:15–29

III

APPLICATION

Even after we have trusted in Christ, the law continues to show us our need for Him. If we meditate on God's commandments, we soon see that we have not kept any of them with our whole heart, mind, soul, or strength. We are driven to our knees in repentance

before God. Meditate on one of the Ten Commandments and consider how you have failed to keep it. Then, go before the Lord in repentance.

DAY 42

THE KINGLY COVENANT

2 SAMUEL 7:1-17 “MY STEADFAST LOVE WILL NOT DEPART FROM HIM, AS I TOOK IT FROM SAUL, WHOM I PUT AWAY FROM BEFORE YOU. AND YOUR HOUSE AND YOUR KINGDOM SHALL BE MADE SURE FOREVER BEFORE ME. YOUR THRONE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED FOREVER” (VV. 15-16).

God’s covenant of grace, the solution to our having violated His covenant of works with Adam, is progressively unfolded in Scripture through a number of subcovenants that reveal different aspects of the Lord’s gracious dealings with His people. The final subcovenant before the consummation of the covenant of grace in the new covenant is the Davidic covenant, which is first described in 2 Samuel 7:1-17.

Divine grace is revealed in God’s covenant with David both in His establishment and in His maintenance of David’s kingly line. First, 2 Samuel 7:8 refers to how our Creator chose David to be king, taking him from being a simple shepherd and making him the ruler over Israel. The reference here is to the history recounted in 1 Samuel 16:1-13, wherein we read of Samuel’s anointing David to succeed Saul as Israel’s king. We see God’s grace operating in this account, for David was chosen not for any outward kingly qualities or political expertise, but because his heart was devoted to the Lord (v. 7). Of course, in the final analysis, that David had a heart for God was the Lord’s doing. No less than any other sinner, David was born with a deceitful heart and had a heart to serve the Creator only because God gave David a new heart to love Him (Jer. 17:9; Ezek. 36:25-27).

We also see divine grace in operation in God’s kingly covenant with David in the Lord’s pledge to maintain the Davidic throne.

God did not persist in loving Saul in a manner that would have kept Israel's throne in Saul's family, but the Lord pledged in the Davidic covenant never to remove His love from David's line (2 Sam. 7:15–16). This is an act of grace, for no ordinary descendant of David could merit the continuation of kingship. After all, in making a kingly covenant with David, the Lord told David that He would discipline David's sons for their sin (v. 14). David's line would suffer the consequences for its failures, but God would preserve the throne in David's family nonetheless.

In ancient Israel, the king represented his people before God in a special way. When the king was obedient, Israel was blessed, but when he was disobedient, the nation suffered (Isa. 36–39). Ultimately, this paved the way for a unique son of David to bear the consequences of His people's sins so that they could enjoy the blessings associated with His perfect obedience. This final Son of David is also the Son of God—Jesus Christ—who atoned for the sins of His people so that they could become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

1 Chron-
icles
17; Psalm
89; Luke
1:26–38;
Revelation
22:16

APPLICATION

In addition to making His people righteous before God, Jesus, Son of David and Son of God, also restores to humanity the rule over creation originally given to us in creation (Gen. 1:26–28). Those who are in Christ by faith will reign with Him over the universe (2 Tim. 2:12). No matter our present vocation, we who are in Christ have a glorious destiny as corulers with Him over creation. Let us praise Him for showing us such grace.

DAY 43

THE COVENANT OF GRACE FULFILLED

JEREMIAH 31:31–34 “THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, DECLARES THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAW WITHIN THEM, AND I WILL WRITE IT ON THEIR HEARTS. AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE” (V. 33).

III

In our consideration of the Mosaic covenant as part of the overall covenant of grace, we were careful to note that one of the reasons God gave the law of Moses was to show His people beyond a shadow of a doubt their need for grace. If even those whom the Lord redeemed by grace from Egypt could not keep God's law perfectly, then what hope does the rest of humanity have of rendering the perfect obedience God requires to be righteous before Him? By latching on to the law and using it to increase their sin, fallen people are shown their absolute need of the Lord's gracious intervention to set things right (Rom. 7:7–25; Gal. 3:15–29). Sinners cannot in themselves be the seed of the woman who the Lord said would destroy sin and Satan (Gen. 3:15); their only hope is for a singular Seed to fulfill the covenant of grace. United to Him, they can share in His victory.

Christ is the fulfillment of the covenant of grace. He upholds the universe by the word of His power, fulfilling God's promise to Noah to maintain the world as the arena for salvation (Gen. 8:22; Heb. 1:3). He takes on the curse for our breaking covenant with the Lord, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham that He would deal with the consequences of our sin (Gen. 15; Mark 10:45). He obeys God's law perfectly in our stead, doing what Adam should have done, so that we can be reckoned as righteous in Him, men and women who have fulfilled God's will where both Adam and the collective nation of Israel failed (Gen. 3; Lev. 18:5; Matt. 4:1–11; Rom. 5:12–21). He is the Davidic king for whom God builds an everlasting house—the church triumphant, which inherits eternal life (2 Sam. 7:11; 1 Peter 2:4–5).

Today's passage, one of the most important passages on the new covenant in Christ, which fulfills the covenant of grace, shows us what life under the fulfilled covenant looks like. Here we see clearly that the final aim of grace is not to set aside God's law in every way. God's saving grace is opposed to the law in the matter of justification—we are declared righteous by grace through the faith-imputation of Christ's righteousness. But grace is not opposed to law in our sanctification. For by grace, God writes His law on our hearts, giving us the will to obey Him in order to thank Him for our great salvation, not to merit eternal life (Jer.

31:33). John Calvin comments, “The Gospel brings with it the grace of regeneration: its doctrine . . . penetrates into the heart and reforms all the inward faculties, so that obedience is rendered to the righteousness of God.”

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Deuteronomy 30:6;
Ezekiel
11:14–20;
Romans
6:14; Titus
2:11–14

APPLICATION

The process of God’s writing His law on our hearts begins in this life but is not completed until our glorification. Christians grow slowly but surely in their willingness to obey and to repent for even the smallest sins, and at Christ’s return, the covenant of grace will be consummated in a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Until then we pursue holiness, anticipating that great day to come.

DAY 44

THE GRACE OF PREDESTINATION

EPHESIANS 1:3–4A “BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS BLESSED US IN CHRIST WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES, EVEN AS HE CHOSE US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND BLAMELESS BEFORE HIM.”

Grace alone—the doctrine that we are saved only by God and not on account of anything we do—was a guiding principle of the Reformation. In opposition to medieval theologians who taught that God’s grace was necessary but insufficient for salvation, the Reformers emphasized the Bible’s stress on the necessity and sufficiency of grace for salvation. Many medieval theologians taught that we must contribute our own merit to achieve final salvation, but Reformation theologians stressed that even our grace-fueled obedience to God cannot be added to grace as a meritorious basis for eternal life. From first to last, salvation is the work only of God’s grace.

Having considered the outworking of this principle in history

III

DAY 43 & 44

through our study of God's covenant of grace, it is now time to look at the outworking of salvation by grace alone in the manner by which we are redeemed individually. First, today's passage shows us that the Lord's saving grace begins operating for our salvation long before we are even born. Ephesians 1:3–4a tells us that even "before the foundation of the world," God chose those whom He would save from their sin and His wrath. In eternity past, the Lord numbered His people, choosing to set His saving love not on every human being but only on His elect.

Some people have taught that this election was based on God's foreseeing our obedience or on His knowing who would respond to the offer of salvation in Christ. Scripture denies these ideas forcefully. Paul tells us that we are chosen "in him"—namely, Christ (v. 4a). We were chosen not on account of what we have done but on account of what Christ has done. We were chosen not apart from Christ and His work for the salvation of His people but in Him as the recipients of the benefits of His work. And Paul also explains that we were chosen not because God knew we would be blameless and holy but in order that we would be blameless and holy. Our faith and growth in Christ are the result of our election to salvation, not the basis of it.

Lest we miss the point that we were chosen for redemption only by grace and not on account of anything we have done or because of our family history, Paul in Romans 9:6–13 uses Jacob and Esau as paradigms of God's electing grace. Jacob was chosen for salvation long before he could do anything good or bad. Esau, from the same family, was passed over for salvation before he could do anything good or bad. None of our actions, not even our good choice to believe in Jesus, moved the Lord to choose us for salvation.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
25:19–28;
Isaiah
65:9; Mat-
thew 22:14;
Ephesians
1:11–12

APPLICATION

That nothing in us moved God to choose us for salvation is hard for many people to accept. But Scripture is clear that God chose us only on account of His good pleasure. We cannot take credit in any way for our salvation. We believe only because God first chose us. This should lead us to great humility and to never consider ourselves more highly than we ought.

DAY 45

GRACE AND REPROBATION

ROMANS 9:14-24 “WHAT IF GOD, DESIRING TO SHOW HIS WRATH AND TO MAKE KNOWN HIS POWER, HAS ENDURED WITH MUCH PATIENCE VESSELS OF WRATH PREPARED FOR DESTRUCTION, IN ORDER TO MAKE KNOWN THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY FOR VESSELS OF MERCY, WHICH HE HAS PREPARED BEFOREHAND FOR GLORY—EVEN US WHOM HE HAS CALLED, NOT FROM THE JEWS ONLY BUT ALSO FROM THE GENTILES?” (VV. 22-24).

Saving grace, God’s unmerited favor toward those He has chosen to love unto salvation, cannot accurately be understood apart from our knowing what we deserve. So, when the Apostle Paul explains the sheer graciousness of the Lord’s grace and mercy, He sets it against the backdrop of what we have actually earned from His hand. Romans 9:14-24 is the key text here as the Apostle considers humanity as a whole in God’s predestination of some people to redemption.

Paul emphasizes that those whom the Lord chooses to save and those whom He does not choose to save both come from the same lump of clay (vv. 21-24). What must be stressed here is that God, the potter, in choosing whom to save, has only one humanity to choose from and this humanity is a fallen humanity. No ordinary human being has a right to eternal life, for all people (except Christ) are sinners in Adam (5:12-21). If God deals with one lump of humanity and this lump is not neutral (for it is impossible to be neutral with respect to God; see Matt. 12:30), then the lump is either righteous or fallen. If the lump were righteous, there would be no need for grace. No, the lump in view must be a fallen lump, for only in that context is grace necessary.

Since we deserve only eternal death apart from God’s intervention, we cannot complain if the Lord shows grace and mercy only to some of us. By definition, grace and mercy are undeserved, so if the Lord chooses not to give them to someone, He is not depriving that person of what he has earned. God chooses some for salvation and chooses to pass by—to not elect for eternal life—others, in

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DAY 44 & 45

order to reveal Himself as both Savior and Judge (Rom. 9:14–21). The grace shown in predestination unto salvation has a flip side in reprobation, God's leaving some in their sins and to the just consequences of those sins.

Because election to salvation is by grace, it is not based on anything in us. It is unconditional. That is, God's purpose in choosing Joe for salvation instead of James is not because Joe is more righteous or smarter or for any other reason besides His choice to love Joe for the sake of His glory. But in an important respect, reprobation is unconditional as well. True, the reprobate do deserve punishment, but God does not pass over James and choose Joe because James is more evil than Joe is. In fact, many who end up in heaven committed worse sins than many of those who go to hell. That is because God's election is based not on the degree of our sin or our personal righteousness. It is based only on His free choice to forgive those whom He chooses to forgive.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Malachi
1:1–5;
Matthew
11:25–
27; John
10:22–30;
1 Peter
2:8b

APPLICATION

The elect get what they do not deserve—salvation; the reprobate get what they deserve—condemnation. The doctrine of election should not lead us to pride or to consider ourselves inherently holier than others. It should be a continual reminder to us that we are among the worst of sinners and that we are in Christ only because God chooses to love undeserving sinners. May the doctrine of election make us more aware of our sin and the grace of the Lord.

DAY 46

THE GRACE OF REGENERATION

EPHESIANS 2:1–9 “GOD, BEING RICH IN MERCY, BECAUSE OF THE GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN OUR TRESPASSES, MADE US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST—BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED” (VV. 4–5).

John Calvin, commenting on today's passage, makes the point that "everything connected with our salvation ought to be ascribed to God as its author." This statement is quite radical in light of common beliefs about salvation that we find in the Christian community. Most professing Christians are happy to attribute their salvation to divine grace. Few would say that they deserve heaven. Yet when questions are asked about the reasons why people choose faith in Christ, many believers are unwilling to say that God chooses some for salvation or authors their decision to believe. In the name of a particular view of free will that says we must, at every point, have the equal ability to choose between right and wrong, many Christians end up denying—perhaps without meaning to—God's sovereign, effectual grace.

Calvin takes from Scripture his view that every part of salvation is authored by God. This includes even our decision to believe. We believe only because the Lord makes us willing to believe. Apart from grace, we are fully unwilling to believe. Our hearts are dead in sin, and dead hearts—just like dead bodies—cannot move of their own accord (Eph. 2:1–3). We must not stretch the metaphor too far; Paul is not saying that human beings are unable to make choices without God's grace. Unredeemed sinners, after all, make choices every day. What the Apostle means is that unless God's grace resurrects our dead hearts, we cannot make decisions that are pleasing to the Lord. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8), and to be dead in trespasses and sin is to be in or controlled by the flesh.

If we are dead with respect to the things of God, unable to choose what the Lord finds pleasing—and He certainly approves of the choice to repent and believe in Christ alone for salvation—then our Creator must intervene drastically if we are to be redeemed. He changes our hearts without our asking Him to do so, making us willing to believe. This work is referred to in theological categories as God's work of regeneration, and it is described in Ephesians 2:4–7. Even while we were dead in our trespasses, the Lord brought us to new spiritual life and, as a consequence, we believed. Faith does not precede regeneration. It is not that we believe and then our hearts are changed; rather, we believe after

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FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Ezekiel
36:22-38;
John 3:1-
8; James
1:18

God first changes our hearts. Regeneration precedes faith, which is a gift, part of what is “not [our] own doing” (vv. 8–10). Having been given new hearts, we cannot help but believe.

APPLICATION

God’s saving grace is not weak but powerful and effectual to save. It can bring dead souls to life, and since the life that God gives is far more powerful than death, no one to whom saving grace is shown will fail to be regenerated. If God wants to save someone, that person will be saved. No resistance to divine grace can endure. We therefore pray for God to change hearts, knowing that salvation is His powerful work alone.

DAY 47

THE GRACE OF JUSTIFICATION

TITUS 3:4-7 “BEING JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE WE MIGHT BECOME HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE” (V. 7).

From first to last, God saves His people by grace alone. In divine election, He chooses men and women in Christ for redemption based on nothing in them but only on account of His gracious choice to set His love on them (Rom. 9:1–29; Eph. 1:3–6). Furthermore, in regeneration, God acts alone and wholly by His grace. He takes hearts dead in sin and makes them alive unto Him, giving them the gifts of faith and repentance (Eph. 2:1–9). Through the reading and especially the preaching of His Word, God by His Holy Spirit makes us born again of imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:22–25). His saving grace finally overcomes the resistance of all those whom He has chosen to redeem, and they are brought to new spiritual life that cannot be lost.

Today’s passage explains that as the Lord applies the salvation purchased by Christ to His people, our justification—being declared righteous and forgiven of sin—is also a work of grace (v. 7). It is impossible to overstate this point, for justification by

grace alone through faith alone, apart from our works, is central to the gospel. This is the doctrine that the Protestant Reformers proclaimed against the medieval system of salvation, which said grace is necessary for justification but that our final justification also requires our good works.

When we study texts such as Titus 3:4–7, it is easy to understand why the Reformers were so insistent on the gracious character of justification. As verse 5 tells us, God “saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness.” Paul sets up in this verse the antithesis to justification by grace alone. If justification is by grace, it cannot involve any of our own deeds of obedience, no matter how pleasing to the Lord they may be. To look to the works done by us in righteousness as the root of justification and not the fruit of justification is to take grace off the table. Our righteousness before God is wholly a gift. The righteousness of Christ is a perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), so not even our best works can be added to it. To try to add any works to the righteousness of Christ is, in fact, to take away from the righteousness of Christ. It is to say that what our perfect Savior has done is not perfect after all.

Our new hearts are a gift. Our faith is a gift. And our righteous status before God is a gift as well. Only by grace do we stand before God unafraid.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
53:11;
Luke 18:9–
14; Romans
3:21–26;
Galatians
5:4

APPLICATION

It is critical that we know our good works do not and cannot justify us. The very honor of Christ is at stake in this. If we suggest our works are necessary for justification, we are saying what Christ gives us is insufficient, which denigrates His work. By upholding justification by grace alone, we are honoring the Lord Jesus Christ.

DAY 48

THE GRACE OF SANCTIFICATION

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13 “THEREFORE, MY BELOVED, AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, SO NOW, NOT ONLY AS IN MY PRESENCE BUT MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, WORK OUT YOUR OWN

III

DAY 47 & 48

SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, FOR IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.”

Reformation theologians set various concepts in opposition when explaining how God’s gracious salvation is applied to human beings. They did so because the Bible sets various concepts in opposition. Therefore, we must do so as well if we are to be faithful to Scripture and to the Reformers’ example.

With respect to salvation, it is important to see that we oppose grace and merit, not grace and human activity. What do we mean by this? At no point in salvation does our merit enter into the equation. We do not and cannot merit or earn election, regeneration, faith, justification, sanctification, or glorification. There are points in salvation, however, where we do act, though not in a meritorious way. For example, we act in the exercise of faith. We do something because we put our trust in Christ. Though faith is God’s gracious gift, God does not believe for us. We believe. But—and this is essential—our believing is not meritorious. The Lord does not take our faith as a payment for eternal life. He does not reward faith; faith merely lays hold of Christ and His righteousness, and that is what merits eternal life.

Another place in salvation where grace and human activity are not opposed is in our sanctification, our growth in Christ and progress in holiness over our lifetimes. Just consider Philippians 2:12–13, wherein Paul tells us to work out our own salvation “with fear and trembling.” Clearly, Paul has some human activity in mind. But Paul stresses God’s initiative. We work because God works in us. The Lord’s grace is operative in sanctification. He works in us to give us the will to obey Him, and He works in us to produce good works of obedience. These good works are the result of grace, but they are not meritorious of salvation. God looks upon and is pleased with our sanctification, but it is not because we keep His commandments that we receive eternal life. We receive eternal life because Christ kept God’s commandments perfectly.

Grace and our own merit are opposed at every point in

salvation. We can make no claim on God. But grace does not mean we are passive in the outworking of the Lord's redemption. At key points—such as sanctification—we act, not to earn our place in heaven but because Christ has earned our place in heaven and because He is working in us to prepare us for heaven. God initiates, sustains, and completes our holiness. We act in a non-meritorious way to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we produce good works because God's sanctifying grace alone guarantees them.

APPLICATION

Until we are glorified, the presence of sin remains in us, affecting all that we do. Thus, our obedience cannot merit salvation because none of our obedience is perfect. But God is pleased to accept good works done in Christ and by grace, using them to conform us ever more to the Lord. So, we act and obey, not to earn heaven but because heaven has been earned and secured for us by Jesus.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy 28:9;
Romans 8:13;
2 Corinthians 7:1;
Hebrews 13:20-21

DAY 49

THE GRACE OF PERSEVERANCE AND GLORIFICATION

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 “I AM SURE OF THIS, THAT HE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK IN YOU WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION AT THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST.”

During the Protestant Reformation, the debate was never over the necessity of grace. To this day, both Roman Catholics and Protestants agree that divine grace is necessary for salvation. Neither group advocates a Pelagian view that would say that grace is helpful but not strictly necessary to be saved.

There was no real debate regarding the necessity of grace during the Reformation, but there was disagreement on the sufficiency of grace. To put the disagreement most simply, Rome said then and continues to say now that grace enables but does not compel salvation. Not everyone who receives the grace of God ends up in heaven. That is because grace in itself cannot initiate, sustain, or

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complete salvation without free human assent and cooperation. And since human assent and cooperation are not guaranteed by grace, many receive grace but do not persevere in faith. This understanding puts the final decision with respect to salvation in our hands. Though Roman Catholicism would not state it so crassly, its official teaching makes the human will decisive in redemption.

Magisterial Protestantism and its heirs in the Reformed tradition, however, argued for the necessity and sufficiency of grace in salvation. Grace enables and compels. Everyone to whom saving grace is shown perseveres to the end and dies in faith. Human beings act at various points in salvation, particularly in sanctification, but their salvation is not sustained by their cooperation. Rather, they continue to believe because God's grace is effectual and guarantees perseverance. As today's passage tells us, when the Lord initiates salvation, He always finishes what He starts (Phil. 1:6). He sustains and completes the redemption of all to whom redemption is given.

God keeps in salvation all those whom He saves. Everyone who is justified is also glorified; there is no such thing as a person who experiences conversion and justification but then falls away finally and fully from grace (Rom. 8:29–30). Many people make a false profession of faith and fall away because they were never truly saved to begin with (1 John 2:19). True, believers may succumb to significant sin. As Dr. R.C. Sproul says in his book *Can I Lose My Salvation?*, “Each and every Christian is subject to the possibility of a serious fall.” But he also notes that no true Christian will experience a total fall from grace. God's grace will not let His people fall away finally. He loves us enough to guarantee our final redemption.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalms
37:28;
97:10;
145:20;
Mark 4:1-
20; Phi-
liippians
2:12–13;
Hebrews
10:39

APPLICATION

Knowing that God will keep us in grace inspires us to work out our salvation, obeying Him as evidence that He is indeed preserving us. And when we see someone apparently fall from grace, that is our cue to pray for that person. We do not know whether God may yet restore that person, and we know that the Lord works through our prayers to accomplish His will.

DAY 50

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE

ACTS 2:42 “THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF BREAD AND THE PRAYERS.”

God saves and preserves us by grace alone, according to His sovereign will. At the same time, the Lord has established several means by which He ordinarily meets us with His grace. We call these “ordinary means of grace,” or those places where Christ normally gives Himself to us.

Today’s passage shows us how the three ordinary means of grace—Word, prayers, and sacraments—functioned in the Apostolic church. First, note that the earliest Christians devoted themselves “to the apostles’ teaching.” This practice confirms what we have said about the importance of reading and teaching the Word of God, for the Apostles’ teaching comes to us today only in the canonical Scriptures.

Second, during the Apostolic period, the early church was devoted to “the prayers.” The early church was a praying church, and prayers were an integral part of early Christian worship. This is not surprising. After all, the first Christians were mostly of a Jewish background, and prayers were an important part of synagogue worship. Moreover, prayers were also offered to God during worship conducted at the temple in Jerusalem. Notably, Solomon prayed at the temple’s dedication (1 Kings 8), but prayer was also a regular part of daily temple worship. For example, the people confessed their sins when they brought their sacrifices (Lev. 5:1–6). Of course, the book of Psalms is itself a prayer book, and many of the psalms were written specifically for use in public worship. Several of them were for “the choirmaster” (for example, Ps. 61), and public worship was the occasion for the choir to sing (2 Chron. 29:25–30). In fact, it is under the category of prayer that singing finds its place in Christian worship. The various psalms were sung prayers, and it is right to sing unto the Lord under the new covenant as well. Singing also has an

III

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

2 Chroni-
cles 29:25-
30; Psalm
5; Romans
12:12;
1 Timothy
2:1-2

instructional purpose, as biblically faithful songs enable us to teach and admonish “one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in [our] hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

Finally, Acts 2:42 says the early Christians devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread.” This is almost certainly a reference to the Lord’s Supper, perhaps with an accompanying fellowship meal. In the Lord’s Supper and in baptism, we encounter our Savior.

APPLICATION

We often think of prayer as a spiritual discipline for private worship and devotion, and so it is. But prayer is also a public devotion that is to be a part of corporate worship. When we sing hymns or pray in unison, let us do so with our hearts and minds fully engaged. And during the pastoral prayer, let us think carefully on the pastor’s words and ask the Lord for the prayer to be answered.

DAY 51

THE SIGN AND THE THING SIGNIFIED

1 PETER 3:18-22 “BAPTISM, WHICH CORRESPONDS TO THIS, NOW SAVES YOU, NOT AS A REMOVAL OF DIRT FROM THE BODY BUT AS AN APPEAL TO GOD FOR A GOOD CONSCIENCE, THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST, WHO HAS GONE INTO HEAVEN AND IS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, WITH ANGELS, AUTHORITIES, AND POWERS HAVING BEEN SUBJECTED TO HIM” (VV. 21-22).

John Calvin, in his commentary on Romans 4, writes that “by themselves [sacraments] profit nothing, yet God has designed them to be the instruments of his grace; and he effects by the secret grace of his Spirit, that they should not be without benefit in the elect.” This encapsulates what the Reformed tradition has called the sacramental union between the sacrament’s outward sign and its spiritual reality. Essentially, this concept tells us that when the sacraments are received in faith, God’s

grace works through them to accomplish His purposes in those who trust in the Lord. Sacraments are not bare testimonials of our faith, though they do testify to faith when we are baptized and partake of the supper. Instead, the sacraments are primarily about God and what He does. They reveal His promises visibly and convey His benefits when we receive them in faith.

Passages such as 1 Peter 3:18–22 show us this sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. Note how Peter states very explicitly in verse 21 that baptism “saves you.” We know from the rest of Scripture and even from this text itself that Peter cannot mean that baptism is the instrumental means of salvation or that it automatically redeems everyone who receives it. In context, Peter connects the salvation conferred in baptism with the salvation conferred to Noah’s family in the flood. Of course, not all of Noah’s family experienced eternal salvation through the protection of the ark in the flood. After all, Ham was later cursed by the Lord even though he had been protected from the floodwaters (Gen. 9:18–25). So, contrary to those traditions that affirm baptismal regeneration, we cannot speak of baptism as somehow automatically conferring what it signifies every time it is administered. It is possible to participate in the sacraments and not receive the grace exhibited therein.

Nevertheless, Peter does say that baptism “saves you,” so there is more going on in the sacrament than simply a visible testimony of faith. Although the bestowal of grace in the sacraments is according to God’s sovereignty, His granting of such grace is so closely connected to the sacraments that we can speak of the sacraments as producing certain effects. Westminster Confession of Faith 27.2 states, “There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.”

APPLICATION

Scripture frequently describes the sacraments as accomplishing certain things without telling us how they do so. Thus, we must take care in describing how baptism and the Lord’s Supper are

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy
10:12–22;
John 6:51;
Acts 2:38;
Romans
6:3–4

III

DAY 50 & 51

used by God to accomplish the promises conveyed therein. As with many spiritual truths, God gives us certain parameters and boundaries, and to go beyond what God says is to risk falling into great error.

DAY 52

WORD AND SACRAMENT TOGETHER

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-25 “THE LORD JESUS ON THE NIGHT WHEN HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BROKE IT, AND SAID, ‘THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS FOR YOU. DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.’ IN THE SAME WAY ALSO HE TOOK THE CUP, AFTER SUPPER, SAYING, ‘THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD. DO THIS, AS OFTEN AS YOU DRINK IT, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.’ ”

Sacraments sign and seal the covenant of grace, tangibly representing the promises of God and confirming our faith. They make the spiritual truths of the gospel alive to our senses, providing us as embodied creatures with helps for knowing and continuing in the Lord's grace. We are so connected to the physical world that we often have trouble grasping unseen spiritual realities. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are God's gifts to us to assist us in understanding and believing spiritual truths.

As helpful as the sacraments are for conveying truth about the world we cannot see with our physical senses, we must be clear that the mere actions involved in administering water, bread, and wine do not in themselves explain or depict anything. That is to say, without the Word of God, the sacraments are empty signs. We need to hear words from our Creator—the words of institution given for the sacraments and the preaching of His special revelation—so that the sacraments have something to sign and seal.

First and foremost, the sacraments are about what God does, and God works salvation in His people through the preaching and teaching of His Word. The Apostle Paul writes, “Faith comes from

hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Along the same lines, the Apostle Peter asserts, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). The Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts not primarily through the sacraments but through the faithful preaching of His Word. Without the Word, the sacraments do not have anything to sign and have no promises to seal on our hearts.

God’s promises always accompany His institution of sacraments. In Genesis 17, for example, the Lord’s pledge to be God to Abraham and His descendants is given alongside the command to circumcise. Paul in today’s passage gives us the words of Christ in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. In telling us to eat of the bread and drink of the cup, Jesus affirmed His giving of His life for our salvation. Sacraments are important, even vital, for the spiritual health and nurture of God’s people, but the preaching of God’s Word has a certain priority. The Word of God gives us something for our faith to latch on to, and the sacraments confirm tangibly that which is promised in the Word, encouraging us to keep clinging to God’s promises.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
2:15-17;
Exodus
12:1-28;
Acts 2:42;
1 Cor-
inthians
12:13

APPLICATION

Many of us come from a background in which the sacraments were mere afterthoughts, so we are thankful when we find churches that take these ordinances of God seriously. Yet we must never prioritize the sacraments over the preaching of God’s Word. Instead, the preaching of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments must go together. Let us not let eagerness to meet Christ in His sacraments cause us to neglect meeting Him in His Word.

DAY 53

BAPTISM AND UNION WITH CHRIST

ROMANS 6:3-4 “DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT ALL OF US WHO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? WE WERE BURIED THEREFORE WITH HIM BY

III

DAY 52 & 53

BAPTISM INTO DEATH, IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MIGHT WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.”

Christian baptism includes a testimony of our belief in Christ, but it refers chiefly to God and to what He does for believers. Baptism, Westminster Confession of Faith 28.6 tells us, actually confers divine grace, albeit only to those to whom the grace belongs—the elect. We know this to be the case since only the elect of God receive His saving, regenerating grace (Rom. 9:1–29) and since the New Testament speaks of baptism in ways that make it more than a visible depiction of spiritual realities. Something actually happens in baptism—grace is conferred—but only to the elect, who invariably respond to that grace with repentance and faith, though the time of response does not necessarily coincide with the time of baptism.

Today we will look at how Scripture speaks of baptism as accomplishing what it signifies with respect to uniting us to Christ. Using today’s passage as a proof text, Westminster Confession 28.1 speaks of baptism as the sign and seal of “ingrafting into Christ,” or union with Christ. According to Romans 6, our baptism buries us with Christ in His death. Paul does not say we are buried with Christ because we are baptized. No, we are joined to Christ in His burial because God elects us, regenerates us, and grants us faith (Eph. 1:3–6; 2:8–9). Still, as union with Christ is dependent on the grace of God exhibited and conferred to the elect in baptism, Paul can say our baptism buries us with Christ.

Admittedly, we cannot describe exactly how this happens. We cannot be united to Christ apart from personally trusting in Jesus (John 3:16; Rom. 4), so baptism in itself cannot unite us to Christ. Yet we cannot have faith without the gift of God’s saving grace, which is somehow conferred to the elect in baptism since baptism is a sign of that salvation. Ultimately, there is mystery here that must be preserved. We tend to err by collapsing the sign and the thing signified together such that baptism regenerates all who receive it, or by so divorcing the sign and

the thing signified that baptism confers no spiritual benefit even to the elect.

Whether we are immersed, sprinkled, dipped, or receive a pouring, we come under water—are buried—in baptism. Thus, our union with Christ is signed and sealed. And if we are truly baptized into the death of Christ, we are also united to Him in His resurrection. Baptism is God's promise to believers that our old Adamic selves have been crucified and that we are new, resurrected creations in Christ.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
54:5-8;
1 Corin-
thians 10;
Galatians
2:20;
Colossians
3:3

APPLICATION

Scripture tells us that we are new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but we often feel as if we are still old creations in Adam who are enslaved to sin. But if we have faith, we have been baptized into the death of Christ and have died to sin. In your struggle against sin, look to the waters of baptism as proof that you have died to sin and have been raised with Christ such that you need not give in to temptation.

DAY 54

THE LORD'S SUPPER AND FEEDING ON CHRIST

JOHN 6:22-59 "WHOEVER FEEDS ON MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD HAS ETERNAL LIFE, AND I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY. FOR MY FLESH IS TRUE FOOD, AND MY BLOOD IS TRUE DRINK. WHOEVER FEEDS ON MY FLESH AND DRINKS MY BLOOD ABIDES IN ME, AND I IN HIM" (VV. 54-56).

Today's passage has been at the heart of the debates between different churches over the meaning of the Lord's Supper. In John 6:22-59, we read that we must feed on the flesh of Christ and drink the blood of Christ to have eternal life. Considering that Jesus says the bread and wine of the supper are His body and blood (Luke 22:14-20), most interpreters have seen some kind of connection between today's passage and the Lord's Supper.

III

DAY 53 & 54

Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans read this text as referring to some kind of physical presence of our Savior's body in the sacrament. According to Roman Catholicism, the essence of the bread and wine becomes the actual body and blood of Jesus without ceasing to look, smell, taste, and feel like bread and wine. Lutheranism teaches that the physical body and blood of Jesus are present mysteriously in, with, and under the elements. Reformed theology rejects both of these views as compromising biblical Christology. Christ possesses a true human nature with a true human body (John 1:14), and a true human body cannot be present in more than one place at a time. Both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran views of the supper end up making the physical body of Jesus present in many places simultaneously.

Leading Reformed figures such as John Calvin and the Westminster divines have affirmed Christ's spiritual presence in the supper. Our Savior's human body is localized in heaven, but Christ is a divine person who also possesses the true divine nature, which is omnipresent. In His deity, Christ is present everywhere. Since His deity is united to His humanity without confusion, change, division, or separation, we commune with the whole Christ in His humanity and deity when we commune spiritually with the omnipresent Son of God. His human body remains in heaven, but in His deity He can close the gap between us and His human nature in heaven. We cannot say much more about this mystery that we cannot fully comprehend.

The context of today's passage shows us that to eat and drink Christ's flesh and blood is not a carnal act but rather a spiritual act of trusting in Jesus. John 6:22–59 parallels the eating that leads to eternal life with belief, making the two things identical. The Lord's Supper signs and seals this belief, showing that the One in whom we believe is both God and man, having a true human body. We need the humanity of Christ no less than we need His deity, and the physical elements of the supper impress this on our hearts and minds.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
12:1–28;
Deuteronomy 31:8;
Matthew
18:2;
1 Corinthians
10:16–17

APPLICATION

John Calvin comments, “There is no other way in which he can become ours, than by our faith being directed to his flesh.” The bread and wine of the supper are God’s seal that those who believe that the God-man suffered as a man and was raised from the dead will live forever. When we take the supper in faith, we are communing with Christ and marked as those who will inherit eternal life.

SOLA
FIDE

IV

FAITH ALONE

DAY 55

THE SINS OF THE GENTILES

ROMANS 1:18-32 “THOUGH THEY KNOW GOD’S RIGHTEOUS DECREE THAT THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS DESERVE TO DIE, THEY NOT ONLY DO THEM BUT GIVE APPROVAL TO THOSE WHO PRACTICE THEM” (V. 32).

The doctrine of justification *sola fide*—justification by faith alone—finds its most in-depth explanation in Scripture in the book of Romans, and so we begin our study of this precious doctrine in Romans 1. But Romans 1 does not give us the full-orbed doctrine; rather, this chapter is part of an argument that stretches some eight chapters before the Apostle is finished. He starts His explanation of the doctrine of justification in Romans 1 by explaining why justification is necessary in the first place. As we will see, the reason we need to be declared righteous before God in the gospel is because we are unrighteous before Him without it.

For a first-century Jew such as Paul, there were really only two ethnic groups—Jews and gentiles. Romans 1:18–32 establishes that the gentiles are sinners. Paul explains that even now the wrath of God is being revealed against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings who by this unrighteousness suppress the truth (v. 18). We read that people are guilty before our Creator because they have failed to honor God as God—they have failed to worship Him alone—and because they have not given Him the thanks He is owed (v. 21).

How does God reveal His wrath? We are accustomed to thinking of God’s wrath as the pouring out of His anger in judgment against sin. The Bible does speak of God’s wrath in this way, predicting a final day of the Lord on which the Almighty will bring great destruction on impenitent sinners (Isa. 13:9). However, we should see such descriptions of God’s wrath as the ultimate fulfillment of our Creator’s judgment against sin and sinners. That is because God is now showing His wrath in the lead-up to that final day. He does so by handing sinners over to their sin, allowing

them to store up greater judgment for the day of the Lord. This is what Paul says in Romans 1. The wrath of God is revealed as God hands people over to further idolatry, homosexuality, debased minds, slander, covetousness, disobedience to parents, and a host of other sins (Rom. 1:19–31).

It is important to note that God does not give people who are unwilling to sin over to sin. His judgment, at least on this side of eternity, is to give sinners exactly what they want in preparation for the final day of judgment. And this is manifestly just, for sinners not only sin, but they take the extra step of justifying their sin and the sin of others. They approve of sin—calling evil good and good evil—and they encourage others to do so as well (v. 32).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
8:15; Psalm
90:9;
Romans
3:23;
1 Thessa-
lonians
2:13–16

APPLICATION

In our day, we see people agitating in the streets for the freedom to sin how they want without any consequences. This evidences God's giving them over to their sin in His wrath. But all hope is not lost. God still rescues people who have been handed over to sin, and we should pray that He would do so for people who are reveling in their transgressions, no matter what their transgressions may be.

DAY 56

THE SINS OF THE JEWS

ROMANS 3:9–18 “WHAT THEN? ARE WE JEWS ANY BETTER OFF? NO, NOT AT ALL. FOR WE HAVE ALREADY CHARGED THAT ALL, BOTH JEWS AND GREEKS, ARE UNDER SIN” (V. 9).

Many first-century Jews believed that their status as the physical descendants of Abraham gave them an automatic advantage before God with respect to their righteousness. In other words, while these Jews would have acknowledged their sin verbally, in reality they did not believe they were actually sinners, or at least they did not think that

IV

their sins would exclude them from God's kingdom. After Paul's conversion to Christ, he did not believe that Jews were inherently more righteous than the gentiles, but we see him make reference to this common Jewish assumption at different points in his writings. For example, in Galatians 2:15 the Apostle says, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners." Paul is not denying the sinfulness of Jews in this text; rather, he is appealing to common knowledge as he writes to the gentiles in Galatia. Even they knew that many Jews regarded only gentiles as true sinners.

Given that common belief, Paul's argument in Romans 2:1–3:20 had to have been particularly jarring for many first-century Jews. Having established the sinfulness of the gentiles in 1:18–32, Paul spends most of chapters 2–3 explaining that the Jews are just as guilty before God as the pagan gentiles are. It is not that there are no advantages to being a Jew, for the Jews possess the oracles of God. The Lord revealed Himself to the Jews under the old covenant in a way that He did not reveal Himself to the gentiles. But with respect to righteousness, Jews have no better claim than non-Jews. "All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin" (3:9).

In 3:9–18, Paul collects several Old Testament texts from books including Psalms, Proverbs, and Jeremiah to show that Jews are not any less sinful or less guilty before our Creator than the gentiles are. Sin is a universal condition. Every naturally conceived descendant of Adam, Jew or gentile, has broken God's law and is worthy only of death. But that the Jews are also sinners is particularly important for understanding how the problem of sin and unrighteousness is finally solved. The Jews possess the law of God, and yet they are no more righteous than the gentiles are before the Almighty. This shows us that however God saves sinners, it cannot be through their own keeping of the law. That is because no sinner can keep the law perfectly, and perfection is what God demands if one is to be justified or declared righteous by keeping the law (2:13). If one is to be justified by the law, mere possession of it is not enough.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Ecclesiastes 7:20;
Isaiah
24:5; Jer-
emiah 7:1-
29; Acts
7:51-53

APPLICATION

Apart from Christ, all people are under sin (Rom. 3:9). Without Christ, people may still be good citizens. They may be nice neighbors. But they are under sin and not reconciled to God. We can appreciate them for their virtues, but we cannot assume that they are going to heaven because they are nice people. Everyone needs Christ to be reconciled to God, so let us share the gospel, as we are able, even with unbelievers who are nice and kind.

DAY 57

THE LAW AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ROMANS 3:19-20 “NOW WE KNOW THAT WHATEVER THE LAW SAYS IT SPEAKS TO THOSE WHO ARE UNDER THE LAW, SO THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE STOPPED, AND THE WHOLE WORLD MAY BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD. FOR BY WORKS OF THE LAW NO HUMAN BEING WILL BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT, SINCE THROUGH THE LAW COMES KNOWLEDGE OF SIN.”

Paul’s epistle to the Romans “is purest gospel,” Martin Luther wrote in his preface to Romans in his translation of the New Testament. It is not hard to understand why Luther said that. Within the first few verses of Romans, Paul refers to himself as “set apart” to proclaim “the gospel of God” and then focuses on the gospel as the source of the righteousness of God for believers in Christ (1:1, 16–17).

But as we have seen, Paul does not begin his exposition of the gospel with a definition of the gospel; rather, he spends several chapters setting the stage for that explanation by explaining why human beings need the gospel. Sin and the estrangement it creates between people and their Creator mean that sinners need reconciliation with God. And sin is a universal condition, afflicting Jew and gentile alike. Every man, woman, and child—except Jesus—has broken the law of God (Rom. 1:18–3:18). “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23).

IV

Facing this predicament, fallen people have the natural propensity to try to do better, to endeavor to build up a record of goodness and righteous works that will outweigh their transgressions. This is a futile endeavor. We know what is good from the law of God, but sinners who are under the law—sinners who try to obtain their righteousness before God by keeping the law—have their mouths stopped when they try to plead their own righteousness before God. If we seek to keep the law in order to be justified—in order to be declared righteous by God and no longer under His wrath—we will fail, for the law of God does not give us what we need to be reckoned as righteous. Instead, it gives us the knowledge of sin, telling us that we are sinners (vv. 19–20).

Note that in today's passage, Paul is not giving the full doctrine of the law of God. The law does more than give us knowledge of sin and convict us of our sin. It also tells us what pleases God, and it restrains sin, keeping people from being as bad as they possibly could be (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8–11). But with respect to the justification of sinners, Luther says, "The law was given only that sin might be known."

Today's passage has the Mosaic law primarily in view but not to the exclusion of the law on the conscience. God's eternal moral law is contained within the Mosaic law (alongside the ceremonial and civil law), but not everyone has access to Scripture. However, the moral law is found also on our consciences, where it testifies that we have broken it (Rom. 2:14–16). Thus, God's moral law, however we possess it, only condemns us with respect to justification.

APPLICATION

When you read the law of God, are you convicted by your own failure to keep it? Although we do grow in our obedience over the course of our Christian lives, we should nevertheless be convicted of how far short we fall of God's standard when we read His law. Then, we realize that we must continue looking to Christ alone for salvation. As you read God's law, consider where you have fallen short and look again to Jesus for your redemption.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

2 Kings
22:8–20;
Nehemiah
8:1–9; 9:1–
3; Acts
15:1–11;
2 Corin-
thians 3

DAY 58

RIGHTEOUSNESS ACCORDING TO THE LAW

ROMANS 2:13 “IT IS NOT THE HEARERS OF THE LAW WHO ARE RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD, BUT THE DOERS OF THE LAW WHO WILL BE JUSTIFIED.”

Human beings from every time and place almost universally believe that they are saved through doing of good works. In fact, only biblical Christianity teaches that the salvation of sinners is not based on the merit that accrues to their good deeds.

From a biblical perspective, it is understandable that people would believe their own good works will earn them a place in heaven. After all, God's first covenant with human beings, the covenant of works, granted eternal life based on perfect obedience to its demands. Adam would have received everlasting life for himself and his descendants if he had not sinned (Gen. 2:15–17; Rom. 5:12–21). As children of Adam, all people have at least a vague memory of that covenant that informs their beliefs. Furthermore, all people, no matter how strenuously they claim otherwise, know that there is a God who makes demands and holds us accountable (Rom. 1:18–3:20).

As we will see, our salvation is actually dependent on good works, but not the good works of sinners. Instead, only the good works of Christ are the basis of our being found righteous in the sight of God (2 Cor. 5:21). The point is that God demands perfect obedience to His law, and that is why Christ's obedience can justify us. Our obedience cannot make us righteous in His sight because we cannot obey Him perfectly.

Two strands of biblical teaching come together to tell us this. First, the law that God gave to Israel holds out to us a theoretical possibility of salvation. Keeping the law will bring life, and the keepers of the law will be justified, as Paul says in today's passage (Rom. 2:13; see Lev. 18:5). But Paul also says that Jews cannot be justified by keeping the law, even those Jews who in the main conform to its requirements (Rom. 3:19–20; Phil.

IV

3:2–11). How can it be that keeping the law will make us righteous in God's sight and that Jews who keep the law cannot stand on their obedience to make them righteous before God? The only answer is that when it comes to our justification—God's legal declaration that we are righteous in His sight—keeping the law can make us righteous only if we never fail to obey it.

Second, Paul tells us that the reason we cannot be justified by keeping the law has nothing to do with the law in itself. The problem is our fallenness (Rom. 7:7–25). Our sin makes us unable to obey the law perfectly, and that is why the law cannot justify us.

APPLICATION

John Calvin, commenting on Romans 3:20, writes, “[The law] is indeed by itself, as it teaches us what righteousness is, the way to salvation: but our depravity and corruption prevent it from being in this respect of any advantage to us.” It is futile for us to try to claim righteousness before God based on our obedience. If we do that, we must have perfection, and since we do not have perfection, trying to use the law to justify ourselves brings only condemnation.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Deuteronomy
32:45–47;
Proverbs
7:1–2;
Galatians
3:21; 5:3;
6:13;
James 2:10

DAY 59

HUMAN INABILITY

ROMANS 5:17 “IF, BECAUSE OF ONE MAN’S TRESPASS, DEATH REIGNED THROUGH THAT ONE MAN, MUCH MORE WILL THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE ABUNDANCE OF GRACE AND THE FREE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS REIGN IN LIFE THROUGH THE ONE MAN JESUS CHRIST.”

Galatians 3 features one of Paul’s most extended treatments of the law of God, and it includes this remarkable statement: “If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (v. 21). If any law could bestow salvation, then it would be the law

revealed through Moses, which contains, in written form, the eternal, moral law of God that is written on the consciences of all people (Rom. 2:14–16). But even God’s perfect law cannot save sinners, prompting us to ask several questions: Why can’t God’s law save us? Why is it unable to give us the righteousness we need to stand before the Lord unafraid? Is the law inherently defective?

The answer to these questions is that the law’s inability to provide for us the righteousness that avails before God’s judgment has nothing to do with the law itself. In reality, the law cannot give us the righteousness we need because of who we are. Romans 7:8–12 asserts the inherent goodness of the law and tells us that the law brings death, not life, because of what sin does with it. When sinners receive the law of God, they are provoked to greater sin. Our fallenness responds to divine law by stirring up the desire to transgress this law within us. This desire is something we have possessed since the fall, but the law gives it more power apart from our regeneration.

Today’s passage describes the origin of these sinful desires. When Adam sinned, we who are his descendants died (5:12–15). Paul is referring not only to physical corruption and death in this text, although those things are part of the fall. He is also talking about spiritual death. Death entered the world through Adam’s sin, and people die even when they do not have God’s law in its inscripturated form. That people die apart from the giving of God’s law shows that they are sinners who continue to sin. Death reigns even over those whose sinning is not like Adam’s, over those whose sinning is not in response to a direct command from God such as the written law that some possess (v. 14). People die physically because they sin, and their sin is a form of spiritual death that leads finally to physical death.

When in Adam we chose to break God’s law, we inherited not only his guilt and condemnation (vv. 16–17) but also a corrupt nature that makes us unable to keep God’s law. We ourselves are the problem, and our corruption means we can never use the law as a means to justify ourselves even if we wanted to. We simply cannot meet God’s perfect standard.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalms 51:5;
Jeremiah
17:9; Mark
7:14–23;
Ephesians
2:1–3

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APPLICATION

With Augustine before them, the Protestant Reformers insisted that we are not born neutral but rather are born guilty and corrupted. This is what the Apostles taught, and it is what we must remember lest we give unbelievers hope that they can be good enough to merit salvation. All people need the renewal of the Holy Spirit if they are to look to Christ for salvation and do what is pleasing to Him.

DAY 60**THE OBEDIENCE OF ONE**

ROMANS 5:18-21 “FOR AS BY THE ONE MAN’S DISOBEDIENCE THE MANY WERE MADE SINNERS, SO BY THE ONE MAN’S OBE-
DIENCE THE MANY WILL BE MADE RIGHTEOUS” (V. 19).

Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), apart from our works, was a guiding principle of the Reformation. Ultimately, however, the Reformers emphasized justification by faith alone because they wanted to guard the truth that we are declared righteous before God because of Christ alone (*solus Christus*). Faith, we will see, is the means by which we receive the righteousness of Christ and not, properly speaking, what actually secures our justification. We must have faith in Christ to be justified, but faith is not the righteousness that avails before God’s judgment. Only the obedience of Christ can do that.

We have seen that the law of God, though it was not given to sinners as a covenant of works or as a means by which to secure one’s own righteousness, nevertheless holds out the promise of justification for all who keep it perfectly (Rom. 2:13). We have also seen that God’s original covenant with humanity was one wherein Adam would have earned eternal life for himself and his progeny if he had perfectly obeyed God (Gen. 2:15–17; Rom. 5:12–21). These truths tell us something very important: God demands complete obedience. Keeping His commandments halfway or even most of the way is not enough to meet His judicial standard. And since

our Creator is fully just, He cannot simply change His demands when they are not met. After the fall, God gave sacrifices to His people so that they could maintain fellowship with Him as they continued to fall short of His perfect standard. But the Lord never relaxed His demand for perfection. From a legal standpoint, God still demands that we be perfect (Matt. 5:48).

But we have also seen that because of sin, not because of any flaw in God's law, this standard is impossible for us to meet. So, in His grace, God chose a different way to give us the perfect obedience we need to stand before Him. He chose to accept the obedience of another in place of our own. This is what Paul tells us in today's passage. "By the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Paul is looking at all of Christ's obedience from birth to death as a whole, and he is speaking of righteousness in a forensic or legal sense. The flawless obedience of our Savior is what constitutes us as righteous or what provides the basis for God's declaring His people righteous. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his commentary on Romans: "The question is not whether we are going to be saved through works; the question is whose works. We are saved through the works of the one who alone fulfilled the terms of the covenant of works."

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Zechariah
3:1-5;
Matthew
27:22-23;
Hebrews
5:8;
1 Peter
2:22

APPLICATION

The good news of the gospel is that Christ obeyed for us. He took upon Himself the yoke of the law, fulfilling it perfectly on our behalf. There is no righteousness of any creature that can be added to the righteousness of Christ, for it is perfect. Let us rejoice in His righteousness and tell others that they can stand before God unafraid if they are clothed with Christ's righteousness by faith alone.

DAY 61

GOD'S INITIATIVE IN JUSTIFICATION

TITUS 3:4-6 "WHEN THE GOODNESS AND LOVING KINDNESS OF GOD OUR SAVIOR APPEARED, HE SAVED US, NOT BECAUSE OF WORKS DONE BY US IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ACCORDING

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DAY 60 & 61

TO HIS OWN MERCY, BY THE WASHING OF REGENERATION AND RENEWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" (VV. 4-5).

In Scripture, the word *salvation* and related terms are used in various ways. Sometimes, an author such as Paul uses these words to describe the whole process of salvation, which begins in our election by God and is completed in our glorification. Romans 10:1 uses "saved" this way when Paul expresses his desire for his Jewish kinsmen to be "saved." Paul is thinking of the entire scope of salvation: he wants the Jews to be redeemed by Christ and enjoy all the benefits of salvation—justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.

At other times, Paul uses such words to refer only to one aspect of salvation. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul speaks of those who are "being saved," a clear reference to the ongoing purification from sin that believers experience in their sanctification. In today's passage, Paul speaks of how Christ has "saved us," and he is plainly thinking of justification—being declared righteous—since he also says that we have been "justified by [God's] grace" (Titus 3:4-7).

This text stresses the divine initiative in justification. God did not justify us based on the works we have done in righteousness. Justification is by grace alone, apart from any works that we have done and apart from any works other sinners have done for us. God achieves justification for us, and as we have seen in Romans 5:12-21, He does this through the works of Christ alone. As we continue our study of the doctrine of justification, it will be important for us to remember this fact, for several other theological systems say that God justifies us through His work but also on account of the good works that we do.

Today's passage also says that God saved us "by the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Roman Catholicism takes texts such as this one and argues that we are justified initially through the instrument of water baptism. This interpretation cannot be correct, for Paul's most systematic treatments of justification make it clear that faith is the only instrument through which we receive the righteousness that justifies us (Rom. 4:5; Gal. 2:15-16). Paul

refers to baptism in Titus 3 because baptism is a picture of something that occurs in our justification. Washing with water removes dirt from the body, and in justification, our sins are removed from us and put on Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Baptism itself does not justify us, but in baptism God promises to remove the sins of all who believe the gospel. John Calvin comments that salvation “is [not] contained in the outward symbol of water, but . . . baptism tells to us the salvation obtained by Christ.”

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus 20:2;
Romans
4:16;
1 Corinthians 1:4;
Ephesians
2:8-9

APPLICATION

God uses Word and sacrament, according to His good pleasure, to create and sustain faith in His elect. We will benefit from God's promises only by faith, so merely hearing God's Word preached and receiving baptism and the Lord's Supper guarantee nothing. But these things necessarily reveal the promises of God, and our faith cannot be sustained without them.

DAY 62

FAITH AND JUSTIFICATION

HABAKKUK 2:4 “BEHOLD, HIS SOUL IS PUFFED UP; IT IS NOT UPRIGHT WITHIN HIM, BUT THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY HIS FAITH.”

Scripture tells us again and again that none of us has kept God's law sufficiently enough to be declared righteous based on our own obedience. The Preacher, who authored Ecclesiastes, tells us, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl. 7:20). Genesis 8:21 asserts, “The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.” And Paul, after surveying Scripture and the evidence in the world around him, concludes, “All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God’” (Rom. 3:9–11).

Consequently, the only way we will stand in the day of judgment is if God gives us a perfect righteousness that another has achieved

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for us. This righteousness is the righteousness of Christ, by which many are reckoned or declared righteous (Rom. 5:19). At the final judgment, only Christ's righteousness will preserve us unto eternal life.

Our Creator will accept the righteousness of Christ in place of our own, but a key question remains: How do we appropriate His righteousness? Only by faith. The sacraments and our good works of true but imperfect obedience are important, but they are not the means by which we receive the righteousness of Christ. Scripture is clear: justification is based only on the righteousness of Christ, which is received only when we renounce all claims to having met God's standard and trust only in Christ for salvation (Luke 18:9–14; Rom. 4). Faith is the only instrument by which we receive the righteousness of Christ.

The Apostles were not the first to teach that we can survive God's judgment and inherit eternal life only through faith. Paul, in fact, turns to the Old Testament for this teaching, arguing his point from Habakkuk 2:4: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (see Rom. 1:17). Habakkuk lived in the late seventh century BC and despaired that God had not brought judgment on the people of Judah, who were guilty of flagrant sin (Hab. 1:1–4). The Lord responded to Habakkuk, telling the prophet that He was going to judge Judah by sending Babylon against His people, but this confused Habakkuk because Babylon was terribly wicked and needed to be judged herself (1:5–2:1). In light of this, it would have been tempting to believe that one would survive the judgment on Judah and on Babylon by one's own righteousness. But God told Habakkuk that life would be found only through faith (Hab. 2:4). Those who are righteous in the day of judgment are righteous not through their own works but only through faith.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis 15:6;
Romans 4:5;
9:30–33;
10:5–10;
Galatians
3:10–14;
Hebrews
10:32–39

APPLICATION

It is easy to look at the wickedness in the world and believe that since we are comparatively more righteous, God approves of us based on our works. In reality, however, none of us has met the perfect standard, so trying to stand on our own works is foolish. We must rest in Christ alone, continually rejecting any claim to a righteousness of our own that will avail before our Creator.

DAY 63

FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

ROMANS 4:1-5 “TO THE ONE WHO WORKS, HIS WAGES ARE NOT COUNTED AS A GIFT BUT AS HIS DUE. AND TO THE ONE WHO DOES NOT WORK BUT BELIEVES IN HIM WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY, HIS FAITH IS COUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” (VV. 4-5).

The doctrine of justification is at the heart of the gospel, for justification explains how we are found acceptable to God. To understand this doctrine, then, is to understand the gospel itself.

Like the other doctrines explained in the New Testament, justification can be understood only against its Old Testament background. First, we must understand what happens in justification. In justification, God solves the legal or judicial problem that we have on account of our being lawbreakers who have violated His commandments, and He does so by means of a legal declaration of our status, not by inward transformation. In Deuteronomy 25:1, judges are commanded to be in the business of “acquitting the innocent.” Clearly, when a judge acquits an innocent person, he is not changing that person but merely making a declaration about that person’s status before the law. Having considered the evidence, the judge declares legally that the defendant is not a lawbreaker based on the evidence. Notably, the word “acquitting” translates the Greek verb *dikaioō*, which is the same verb used in Romans 4:5 when Paul says that God justifies the ungodly. In justification, God does not change a person, although all who are justified have been given a new heart to believe in Christ. In a manner similar to that of an old covenant judge, God, the great Judge, considers the facts of the case and pronounces sinners righteous in His sight.

But what are the facts upon which the Lord justifies us? As we have seen, the righteousness of Christ is the basis for our justification. We must have faith, but faith itself is not the righteousness that justifies us. If it were, then our justification would be based

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FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Proverbs
17:15; Mat-
thew 5:6;
Romans
8:33-34a;
1 Cor-
inthians
1:30

on something we do, since we believe in Christ, and Paul is adamant that justification is not based on any human action or effort (Rom. 4:1-2). Saving faith is pleasing to God, but as even our faith is imperfect, it cannot serve as the meritorious basis for our justification. This is alluded to in today's passage, where it would be more accurate to translate "his faith is counted as righteousness" in Romans 4:5 as "his faith is counted unto/for the end of righteousness." Our faith is the instrument of justification because through it God counts or imputes the perfect righteousness of Christ to our account. Our faith is unto righteousness—it is the means through which we receive the obedience of Christ, which is the righteousness that justifies us.

APPLICATION

On an earthly level, we consider it unjust for a person to be tried for the same crime twice. So it is in our justification by God. It would be unjust for Him to declare us righteous and then go back and pronounce us unrighteous. Once God declares us righteous in His sight, we enjoy that verdict forever. We no longer have to fear the judicial sentence of condemnation if we are in Christ.

DAY 64

JUSTIFICATION AND SIN

ROMANS 4:6-8 "DAVID ALSO SPEAKS OF THE BLESSING OF THE ONE TO WHOM GOD COUNTS RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM WORKS: 'BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED; BLESSED IS THE MAN AGAINST WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT COUNT HIS SIN.' "

Sola fide—faith alone—is sometimes called the “material cause” of the Reformation because the substance or material of the debate between the Protestant Reformers and the Roman church concerned the instrumental means of justification. The Reformers and their opponents both understood that

we must be declared righteous to endure God's judgment and enter into eternal life. But they disagreed on the instrumental means of justification and the basis upon which the declaration is made. The Roman Catholics held that the basis of God's declaration is the righteousness of Christ and the righteous works that we produce in cooperation with grace. They also said that the instrumental means of justification are the sacraments of baptism, which initiates people into the state of justification, and penance, which restores people to the state of justification after mortal sin. The Protestants argued that the basis for the declaration of justification is only the righteousness of Christ and that faith alone is the instrument by which this righteousness is imputed to us, or put on our record.

Romans 4:1–5; 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 1:30; and several other passages, we have seen, together teach us that justification is based on the imputation of Christ's righteousness through faith alone. That imputation is one side of the double exchange that happens in justification. Positively, the perfect obedience of Christ is credited to us. Negatively, sin is taken away from us. In justification, God credits us with a righteousness that is not our own but is Christ's, and He takes our sin and puts it on Christ, who bore the divine judgment against it on the cross. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Romans 4:6–8 proclaims this removal of sin and guilt, sometimes called the non-imputation of sin because sin and guilt are not imputed to us but to Christ. Paul tells us that Psalm 32:1–2 includes David's teaching about justification that God does not count sin against the person whom He declares righteous. It is not that justification means we are not sinners; rather, it means that the Lord no longer holds our sin against us. And this is good news indeed. Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his book *Faith Alone*: "In our redemptive forgiveness God does not charge us with what we owe. He does not count our sins against us. If he did, no one (except Jesus) would ever escape his just wrath. No one but Christ would be able to stand before God's judgment."

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm
130:3–4;
Isaiah
55:6–7;
Micah 7:18–
20; 1 John
2:12

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DAY 63 & 64

APPLICATION

Nothing can change the fact that we have sinned. But what can change is our status before God's judgment seat. In justification, our sin and guilt are removed and we are covered by Christ's obedience, enabling God to declare us righteous in His sight. If we are in Christ, our sins will never be held against us on the day of judgment. In Christ, we are truly free of condemnation. That is a cause for great rejoicing.

DAY 65**NOT BY ANY OF OUR WORKS**

ROMANS 4:9-12 "IS THIS BLESSING THEN ONLY FOR THE CIRCUMCISED, OR ALSO FOR THE UNCIRCUMCISED? FOR WE SAY THAT FAITH WAS COUNTED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. HOW THEN WAS IT COUNTED TO HIM? WAS IT BEFORE OR AFTER HE HAD BEEN CIRCUMCISED? IT WAS NOT AFTER, BUT BEFORE HE WAS CIRCUMCISED" (VV. 9-10).

Dr. R.C. Sproul writes in his book *Faith Alone*: "For Rome the declaration of justice [justification] follows the making inwardly just of the regenerate sinner. For the Reformation, the declaration of justice follows the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the regenerated sinner." When it comes to justification, the difference between Reformation theology and Roman Catholic theology is not over the necessity of grace, faith, and the obedience of Christ. Rome has always taught that no one can be justified apart from these things. The difference between Rome and the Reformation is that in Roman Catholicism, justification is based on an inherent righteousness, a righteousness that God infuses into us and with which we cooperate in order to increase our justification. For biblical, Reformation theology, justification is based only on the righteousness of Christ, which is an alien righteousness, a righteousness that is not inherently ours because it consists only of Jesus' good works.

So, the real dividing line between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation is one word—*alone*. Justification is not only by faith; it is by faith alone. Justification is not only by grace; it is by grace alone. Justification is not only by the work of Christ; it is by the work of Christ alone. If we add even one work of ours as part of the basis for justification, we have missed the gospel. Paul stresses that we are not justified by our works, and he illustrates it by showing that Abraham was justified before he obeyed the law. He was justified by faith alone apart from circumcision (Rom. 4:9–12). The only way to preserve that teaching is to insist that the only meritorious basis for our justification is the obedience of Christ imputed to us. Once we make our justification dependent on an inherent righteousness that combines Christ’s merit and our merit, we have lost the gospel of grace.

The teaching that none of our good works are part of the basis for justification is so clear that many have tried to get around it by saying that since Paul mentions circumcision in Romans 4, he means only that works of the ceremonial law cannot justify us but obedience to the moral law can. This fails to understand that Paul is using circumcision in this text as a preeminent example of the law’s commandments that represents the entire law. John Calvin comments that under circumcision “is included every work of the law; that is, every work to which reward can be due.” Indeed, justification is not by any works wrought by us in righteousness (Titus 3:4–7).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm
73:25–
26; Isa-
iah 64:6;
2 Cor-
inthians
5:21; Phi-
lippians
1:9–11

APPLICATION

Justification is by faith alone. We must be clear on that word *alone*, for without it we do not have the gospel. If we try to add one work of ours to Christ, then we are accountable to do all the law and to do it perfectly for our justification (Gal. 5:3). And of course, we cannot do this. We must stand firm on the doctrine of justification by faith alone and never compromise it lest we be cut off from Christ and His perfect righteousness.

IV

DAY 66

WHY FAITH?

EPHESIANS 2:8-10 “FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH. AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST. FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND, THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM.”

Faith—and only faith—is the instrumental means of justification. In other words, it is through faith alone that we lay hold of or appropriate the sole basis for our justification—namely, Christ’s righteousness (Rom. 4). Faith itself is not the righteousness upon which God declares us righteous in His sight; only the obedience of Christ is the evidence, as it were, upon which our Creator pronounces His verdict that we are just and heirs of eternal life (5:12–21). Yet, the righteousness of Christ cannot be ours apart from our receiving and resting in Christ alone—it will not be imputed to us apart from faith.

But why is faith and not something else the instrumental means of justification? To answer this question, we must understand something of the character of saving faith. First, in keeping with the truth that our salvation is due to God’s mercy alone, faith is the only instrumental means of justification because faith is the gift of God. When Paul speaks of the “gift of God” in Ephesians 2:8, he is not referring merely to the grace of God described earlier in the same verse. It would be redundant to refer to grace as a gift because by definition grace is a gift, and furthermore, the grammar of the verse demands that “gift of God” refer to the entire grouping of grace, salvation, and faith in verse 8. The perfect righteousness of Christ is God’s gift to us, and even the means by which we receive it is the Lord’s gift given to us in regeneration. Our election unto salvation that bears fruit in justifying faith “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16), and no one whom our Creator mercifully draws to Himself fails to trust in Christ (John 6:37–40). Even

though we exercise faith, we have it because God gives it to us through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the “founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

Of course, today’s passage says that the good works we do after we are justified are also gifts of God (Eph. 2:10), but they are not the means by which we lay hold of Christ’s righteousness. Why? Because although faith is something we do—we trust in Christ—the character of saving or justifying faith is to rest and receive, not to offer something meritorious to God. Abraham’s faith is the paradigm of justifying faith—he received the promise of God and trusted in it, not offering anything else to conceive the promised son Isaac, for he had nothing to give (Gen. 15:1–6; Rom. 4:16–25). Saving faith can be likened to an open hand that simply receives what is offered, admitting that we have nothing in ourselves.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalms 142;
Jeremiah
31:9; Luke
18:9–14;
Philippi-
ans 3:2–11

APPLICATION

In our justification, we are like beggars before God. All we present is an open hand, asking the Lord for His mercy and grace. Justifying faith is conscious that we deserve nothing but condemnation and does not try to make any excuse for sin or offer any merit in exchange for Christ’s righteousness. Do you have that kind of utterly dependent trust in the Lord?

DAY 67

WHAT IS SAVING FAITH?

JAMES 2:14–19 “YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE; YOU DO WELL” (V. 19A).

Because faith is the only instrumental means by which we receive the righteousness of Christ and so are declared righteous heirs of eternal life (Rom. 3:21–4:25), it is critical that we understand what saving or justifying faith is. After all, our Lord Himself warns that on the last day, some will believe that they have been servants of Christ but in fact will be cast out

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of the kingdom because they never actually believed in Him and hence never did His will (Matt. 7:21–23). We do not want to be numbered among that self-deceived group, and knowing what saving or justifying faith looks like will help keep us from making a false profession of trust in the Savior.

When the Protestant Reformers considered the question of saving faith, they found in Scripture three aspects that are essential for true faith. The first of these is *notitia*, which is the intellectual content of what we believe. Saving faith is faith in the person and work of Christ, so we must know something about Jesus and what He has done if we are to have actual faith in Him. This is evident from the very existence of the Christian gospel—we tell people about Jesus, giving them biblical content for them to believe.

The second component of saving faith is *assensus*, or belief that the content of the Christian gospel is true. It is possible to know something and not believe it is true, and in fact we know many things that we do not believe are true, such as the content of other religions. But as the Christian faith is dependent on the historical reality of things such as the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:17), we must not only know that Christianity proclaims the content of Christ's historical resurrection, but we must also believe that the resurrection happened (Rom. 10:9).

Finally, saving faith includes *fiducia*, which is placing trust in the One revealed in the content that is believed to be true. Knowing what God has revealed and believing it to be true is a good thing, as we read in today's passage, but it is not enough (James 2:14–19). Even demons know and assent to the truth of God's revelation, so merely knowing and believing necessary truths for salvation such as the oneness of God are insufficient for redemption (v. 19b). Mere knowledge and belief, as John Calvin comments, "can no more connect man with God, than the sight of the sun carry him up to heaven." We also need to place our trust in Christ personally to save us. We must believe that Jesus came to save us personally. We must place our lives in His hands, pledging ourselves to follow Him no matter the cost.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 31:6;
Proverbs
16:20; Isa-
iah 50:10;
Mark 9:14-
24

APPLICATION

By placing ourselves in Christ's hands for salvation, we are not denying that saving faith is essentially something that one receives. That is because when we trust in Christ, we are not saying: "Here we are, and You are lucky to have us. Look what we can do." Rather, we are saying, "Lord, we have nothing and are owed nothing; please take us and use us as You will." In giving ourselves to Christ, we are still asking for Him to give us everything, for we have nothing.

DAY 68

JUSTIFICATION AND OUR GOOD WORKS

JAMES 2:20-26 "FOR AS THE BODY APART FROM THE SPIRIT IS DEAD, SO ALSO FAITH APART FROM WORKS IS DEAD" (V. 26).

One word—*alone*—separates the biblical doctrine of justification by faith from the doctrine of justification by faith as defined by Roman Catholicism and several other theological traditions. It is not enough to say that we are justified by faith, for everyone who professes a belief in sacred Scripture confesses that we are justified by faith. The division is between those who believe, with the prophets and Apostles, that justification is by faith alone (Gen. 15:1-6; Rom. 3:21-4:25; Gal. 3:10-14) and those who believe that justification results from a combination of our faith and our good works.

However, to deny that our good works are in any sense part of the basis of God's declaration that we are righteous in His sight is not to deny that Christians should—indeed must—do good works. Our good works are related to our justification, but we must understand how they are properly related to God's justifying verdict. Simply put, good works follow God's decree of righteousness as the fruit of saving faith.

James 2:12-26 is one of the clearest passages in Scripture on this subject. In this chapter, the Apostle is concerned to distinguish

authentic faith from the mere profession of faith. James critiques the person who “says he has faith” in verse 14 and then says in verse 18 that you cannot demonstrate faith without good works. Why are good works the necessary proof that faith is real? The answer is because everyone who has actually trusted in Christ is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). God declares us righteous not based on His transformation of us but only on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Christ (v. 21; see Rom. 5:12–21). Nevertheless, all who have trusted in Jesus alone for salvation have also been transformed by Him and are being renewed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18). They cannot help but do what is right, though imperfectly to be sure. And if there are no good works in the life of a professing believer, that person has not been changed and so has not been given the gift of faith, which requires the change God the Holy Spirit works in our regeneration (John 3:5; Eph. 2:8–9).

In Scripture, the word translated as “justify” sometimes means “prove” or “demonstrate” (Matt. 11:19). That is how James uses it in today’s passage. Our works, James teaches, demonstrate our faith. That is, our faith is justified or proven by our works. As John Calvin comments, we are not justified “by a bare and empty knowledge of God,” but true, justifying faith is outwardly revealed in our desire and efforts to obey the Lord.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah 5:1–7; Matthew 3:8; John 15:8; Romans 7:4

APPLICATION

John Calvin also comments that the doctrine of justification by faith alone does not make good works superfluous, but it only takes “away from them the power of conferring righteousness, because they cannot stand before the tribunal of God.” Our good works do not justify us, but if we do not have them, we do not have the faith through which we lay hold of the justifying righteousness of Christ.

DAY 69

KEEPING GRACE GRACIOUS

ROMANS 11:6 “IF IT IS BY GRACE, IT IS NO LONGER ON THE BASIS OF WORKS; OTHERWISE GRACE WOULD NO LONGER BE GRACE.”

Good works are an essential part of the Christian life. We see in Romans 1:5, for example, that Paul was called to preach so that the “obedience of faith” might occur in “all the nations.” The Apostle preached the gospel in order that people would believe and bear the fruit of obedience that flows from true saving faith. Furthermore, those who profess faith show that they are not just all talk but actually possess faith when they do not deny God by doing evil works (Titus 1:16). In other words, when we do good and not evil, we reveal that we have actually placed trust in Christ for salvation.

We must insist that works prove our faith. The Apostles know nothing of people who can make Jesus their Savior without also submitting to Him as Lord. To tell people that they can be carnal Christians, that they are secure in Christ simply because they make a verbal profession of faith but have nothing to show in the way of love for others and service to God, is to give them a false assurance. Without any works whatsoever, we do not have the faith that justifies (James 2:14–26).

But in insisting that works are necessary to prove faith, we must be on guard lest we make our works part of the righteousness that we think moves God to declare us righteous in His heavenly courtroom. It is a careful line to walk indeed to insist that works are necessary to prove our faith but that our works do not in any way justify us, but we must be committed to this lest we deny the graciousness of grace. As Paul says in Romans 11:6, if our election unto salvation and our justification are in any way based on our works, grace will “no longer be grace.” Justification depends on the empty hand of faith “in order that the promise may rest on grace” (4:16), which thereby allows us to give God the glory alone for salvation. If justifying faith merely rests in

IV

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Micah 6:4;
John 1:17;
Romans 5:1-
2; 2 Peter
3:18

Christ and receives His righteousness, we make our redemption entirely the work of the Lord, which not only redounds to His glory but also gives us assurance. If our judicial standing before God is based not on what we do but only on what Christ has done, then we can do nothing to take ourselves out of His hands (John 10:27–29; Rom. 8:31–39).

To come before God with the empty hand of faith that receives Christ requires that we first release any claim of righteousness. We must relax our grip on our good works, confess our utter reliance on divine mercy, and not bring our achievements before God as if He owes us His righteous declaration for our obedience (Luke 18:9–14).

APPLICATION

All true Christians have a desire to obey God, but how do we separate that from our trusting in our own works? We know that we are trusting in our righteousness when we begin to think that our standing before God is based on our obedience. When we find ourselves thinking this way, we must return to the gospel and remember that we stand before God unafraid only when we are covered by the obedience of Christ.

DAY 70

FAITH AND SANCTIFICATION

ACTS 26:12–18 “THAT THEY MAY TURN FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT AND FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD, THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS AND A PLACE AMONG THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED BY FAITH IN ME” (V. 18).

Martin Luther could hardly be accused of teaching that we are justified by our good works, and this makes quite remarkable what he says about saving, justifying faith in his introduction to Romans from his translation of the Bible. He says that because of faith, we “freely, willingly and joyfully

do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown [us] such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire!”

Luther’s statement reminds us that faith not only leads us to be declared righteous in God’s sight but also results in our sanctification, which is the inward transformation we experience from the point of our conversion on. When we consider sanctification, note that Scripture speaks of it in two ways. First, the Bible describes the reality of positional or declarative sanctification. When we trust in Christ alone for salvation, we are definitively set apart as God’s holy people, our Creator’s special possession (1 Peter 2:9–10). We are holy in God’s sight and are forever marked as His. And yet, Scripture also tells us that until we are glorified, we are often unholy in practice. So, God’s Word calls us to engage with the Lord in the process of sanctification wherein we more and more die to self and live unto Christ, seeking to obey Him in all things. Because we have been marked out as holy, we are commanded to be holy, to become in our experience what we are already in God’s sight (vv. 11–12).

How does this process of sanctification advance? Since today’s passage says we are “sanctified by faith” in Christ (Acts 26:18), the answer is that faith is no less essential for our sanctification than it is for our justification. We must believe God in order to bear fruit for God. Our Creator calls us to do many things that seem strange from a this-worldly perspective. We are exhorted not to trust in princes, our bank accounts, or anything else in this world but to believe Christ and do what He says even when we know it will come at a great cost to us personally (Ps. 146:3; Luke 14:25–33). We will not place Him first and suffer for His name’s sake by obeying Him even when it is difficult unless we believe that He will reward us with more than we can ever imagine (Mark 10:29–31). In other words, without faith, we cannot pay the cost of discipleship that is required to conform us to Christ’s image. We are justified by faith, but even the sanctification and good works that follow our justification are based on faith.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Romans
6:15–23;
Galatians 3:2;
2 Thessalonians
2:13; Jude
20–21

IV

DAY 69 & 70

APPLICATION

Even our progressive sanctification—our life of growing in holiness that is the necessary fruit of justification—depends on faith. By faith, we grow in Christ, trusting in the promises of God so completely that we end up following His commandments. When we feed our faith with the truths of God's Word, we are equipping ourselves to grow in holiness.

DAY 71**LIVING ACCORDING TO FAITH**

GENESIS 22:1-14 "THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CALLED TO HIM FROM HEAVEN AND SAID, 'ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM!' AND HE SAID, 'HERE I AM.' HE SAID, 'DO NOT LAY YOUR HAND ON THE BOY OR DO ANYTHING TO HIM, FOR NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD, SEEING YOU HAVE NOT WITHHELD YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, FROM ME'" (VV. 11-12).

Spend some time listening to testimonies of people who have been converted to Christ, and it probably will not be too long until you hear a promise that believing in Christ will make your life easier in some way. Most people who say such things or who give the impression that the life of faith is easy are motivated by a desire to see as many people converted to Christ as possible, so their ways of speaking about Christ are understandable. However, such individuals do a disservice to people who are considering the claims of Christ. In truth, trusting in Jesus adds complications to our lives that we do not have before placing our faith in Him. Often in the Christian life, we have to trust God in hard places, believing that He is commanding us to do things that are ultimately for our good even if we cannot yet understand how that could be so.

The life of Abraham illustrates this point. Abraham often had to trust God when it was difficult to do so, and he sometimes failed to believe the Lord. He was promised many descendants,

but when God seemed to be taking too long to fulfill His promise, Abraham took matters into his own hands and fathered Ishmael with his wife's maid Hagar (Gen. 15:1-6; 16:1-16). Such an action shows us that Abraham did not necessarily find it easier to trust God than we do.

However, the greatest test of Abraham's faith did not come until years after he had Ishmael. Decades passed and finally Sarah conceived a child, and Isaac, the son of the promise, was born (21:1-7). The couple's trust in God was finally vindicated after years and years of waiting, and we can hardly imagine the joy that Isaac brought to his parents. But soon this trust was tested again when Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac, the son for whom he had waited for what no doubt seemed like an eternity (22:1-2).

Abraham did pass his test, but clearly he struggled to do so. He did not set out with Isaac right away, but he delayed his trip until morning, maybe even hoping that God would call off the test (v. 3). It seems that Abraham could finally move forward because he believed God would provide a substitute for Isaac (v. 8), but since God did not tell him that explicitly, he must have endured great agony until the Lord finally did provide the lamb just in time (vv. 9-14). Abraham was no superhuman saint; he struggled to trust God when it seemed impossible to do so. But he did trust God, showing himself to be a model of faith for us.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Job
1:20-21;
Habakkuk
3:17-18;
Matthew
15:21-28;
Hebrews
11:32-40

APPLICATION

Authentic faith does not trust God only when times are good. It also believes God and acts upon His Word when doing so guarantees great difficulties. Resolve now to trust God even when it is hard, and ask the Lord to give you the courage, conviction, and stamina to continue following Him even when doing so means you must pay a high cost.

IV

DAY 72

THE FRUIT OF FAITH

ROMANS 1:16-17 “THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL LIVE BY FAITH”

(V. 17).

Authentic faith in our Creator is not a blind leap into the dark, but it is a committed trust in God based on His revelation of Himself in nature and in Scripture. It is not an act of irrationality but a conviction grounded in the surety of the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15). Knowing that the Lord is trustworthy, faith holds firm to God even in the most difficult of circumstances, confident that He will never fail to keep His promises (Gen. 22:1-14).

Faith is eminently rational because it is faith in the supreme revelation of God—Jesus Christ. And as we see in the Gospels, those who trust in Jesus are never the same. Faith results in a life of ever-increasing obedience to our Maker, in our being willing to die unto ourselves more and more and to take up our cross in following Jesus (Mark 8:34).

In sum, righteous people live by faith; their continuing trust in God demonstrates that our Lord sees them as righteous, and they bear fruit in acts of righteousness. This is part of what Paul is getting at in today’s passage. Of course, our acts of obedience are not the ground on which we are declared righteous in God’s sight, for only the perfect righteousness of Christ is the basis for our acceptance by God (Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:21). This righteousness is received only by faith. Nevertheless, those whom God declares righteous He is also conforming to the image of His Son. Faith continues after our conversion, our trust in God proving that we have been reconciled to Him in Christ and moving us to greater and greater obedience.

A few days ago, we saw that one essential component of saving faith is *fiducia*, which is the personal trust that we place in Christ to save us. But *fiducia* means not only that we entrust ourselves to Christ once but that we do so over the course of our lives. We give our lives continually to Jesus, pledging and living out our

loyalty to Him. Inspired by our personal trust in the promises of God, we are loyal to Him, and we strive never to compromise our loyalty to Him and His way.

Loyalty to God bears fruit in our continuing commitment to Him but also in our loyalty to others. Those whom God has declared righteous live lives of integrity because they live by faith, by abiding trust and commitment to God. Living by faith means we keep our promises to God and to other people. It means we can be trusted when we make commitments. By faith, we are being conformed to Christ, the eminently trustworthy One, and so we imitate Him in becoming more trustworthy ourselves.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Joshua 2;
Proverbs
2:6-8; John
15:13;
Ephesians
4:25

APPLICATION

Are you a trustworthy person? As believers have been predestined to be conformed to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29) and Christ is supremely trustworthy, then evidence of Christian growth comes as we become more trustworthy. As we live by faith, let us seek to become more trustworthy friends, relatives, workers, and citizens.

SOLI
DEO GLORIA

V

GLORY TO GOD ALONE

DAY 73

THE PRIMACY OF DIVINE GLORY

ISAIAH 42:8 “I AM THE LORD; THAT IS MY NAME; MY GLORY I GIVE TO NO OTHER, NOR MY PRAISE TO CARVED IDOLS.”

One of the most basic distinctions we make in considering the doctrine of God is between the communicable and incommunicable attributes of God. Communicable attributes are those divine attributes that can be shared in some way with human beings. For example, God can love and show mercy, and humans can show love and mercy as well. There is a similarity, though not an identity, between human love and divine love. Incommunicable attributes, on the other hand, are divine attributes that cannot be shared in some way with human beings. Divine eternity and self-existence are wholly unique to God, for, unlike human beings, God has no beginning and He depends on nothing outside Himself for His existence.

When it comes to the divine attribute of glory, we see in Scripture that human beings can in some ways reflect the Lord's glory. First Corinthians 11:7, for instance, describes man as the “glory of God.” Yet God's glory is incommunicable in some respects. This is what Isaiah 42:8 teaches us when it tells us that our Creator will give His glory to nothing and to no one else.

The context of Isaiah 42:8 has to do with salvation, for in verses 1–7, the Lord speaks of His working justice for His people, His opening of the eyes of the blind, and His freeing of His people from bondage. The glory that is revealed in God's work of salvation He will not share with others. It is His and His alone, and any attempt to take away from that glory by giving sinners a meritorious role in their salvation is a grave sin against the Lord.

Moreover, that God will not share His glory in salvation with others indicates the primary purpose of salvation. It would be easy for us to think that the chief aim of God in our redemption is our restoration. While the Lord is certainly seeking the restoration of His people in salvation, His chief goal and impetus in

saving sinners is His own glory. He will not share this glory in salvation, so it must be precious to Him above all else.

If God's highest aim is the furtherance of His own inherent glory—and ultimately, everything He does is for His own glory—then that must be our aim as well. Our entire lives must be spent working to make much of His name, not our own. No other goal of ours should be greater than to see the Lord's glory magnified and proclaimed everywhere. To be a true servant of God is to seek His glory.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 57:5;
Isaiah
48:1-11;
1 Corinthi-
ans 10:31;
Jude 24-25

APPLICATION

Jesus tells us that God bestows a certain kind of glory on us in salvation (John 17:22), but this is not the kind of inherent divine glory that Isaiah is talking about. There is a glory that belongs to God alone, that existed before all things, and that is the reason for all things. We are called to point our friends and family to that glory by what we say and by what we do.

DAY 74

THE LIGHT OF GLORY

EXODUS 34:29-35 “WHEN MOSES CAME DOWN FROM MOUNT SINAI, WITH THE TWO TABLETS OF THE TESTIMONY IN HIS HAND AS HE CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN, MOSES DID NOT KNOW THAT THE SKIN OF HIS FACE SHONE BECAUSE HE HAD BEEN TALKING WITH GOD” (V. 29).

God esteems the glory that is inherent to His divine nature so highly that He will share it with no other (Isa. 42:8).

Among other things, this tells us that the Lord's greatest aim is to see His glory revealed throughout creation and that we should also make exalting the glory of God our highest goal. If the Lord values His glory above all else, then His glory is the most valuable thing in existence, and we would be fools to set a higher value on anything but that which our Creator deems most valuable.

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So, we are to make the exaltation and proclamation of God's glory our chief aim, but that raises the question of what, exactly, God's glory is. The answer is not a simple one, and there will be limits to what we can say about it. However, Scripture does reveal several aspects of God's glory, and today's passage points us in the direction of one of the central aspects of divine glory—bright, refulgent light.

As we see in today's passage, when Moses met with the Lord to receive divine revelation, his face then shone with such intensity that the Israelites could not bear to look upon it (Ex. 34:29–35). That such brightness was a reflection of divine glory is confirmed in passages such as Revelation 21:23, which says that the glory of God will be the source of illumination in the new heaven and earth. There is an incomparable brightness, a dazzling whiteness of light that is inherent to our Creator's very being. This light is so incredible, in fact, that when the plan of redemption is fully consummated and creation has been transformed, the complete unveiling of this glory will illuminate the entire universe.

When we think of dazzling light, we also think of such concepts as purity, holiness, and truth. The blindness associated with judgment also comes to mind. This is not surprising because Scripture also associates these concepts or attributes with light (Ps. 43:3; Isa. 6:1–7; Hos. 6:5; John 12:41). Because of this, we can think of glory as in some sense summing up all the divine attributes. In the bright light of the glory of God we find the fullest picture of His holiness, His righteousness, His truth, His justice—of His very character. And since God is incomprehensible—we can know Him truly though not fully and not in the way God knows Himself—it makes sense that we run into some difficulty whenever we try to describe His glory. We can say much about it, but there is much that we cannot say until that day when we see His glory in the new creation.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

1 Chroni-
cles 29:11;
Psalm 57:5,
11; Isaiah
60:1–3;
2 Corinthe-
ans 4:1–6

APPLICATION

Scripture gives us many indications of what the glory of God means, but like His other attributes, God's glory is not fully comprehensible to creatures. There is a greatness and magnificence

to the Lord that cannot be expressed, and we won't ever be able to comprehend God entirely—even into eternity. We are to exalt His glory because it is the highest good and the only thing that can ultimately satisfy human beings.

DAY 75

THE GLORY OF DIVINE BEAUTY

ISAIAH 28:5 “IN THAT DAY THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL BE A CROWN OF GLORY, AND A DIADEM OF BEAUTY, TO THE REMNANT OF HIS PEOPLE.”

Inherent to God's very being is His divine glory, His refulgent light that expresses His nature as holy, true, righteous, and just (Rev. 21:23; see Ps. 43:3; Isa. 6:1–7; Hos. 6:5; John 12:41). Yet while pure light, brighter than we can even begin to imagine, is part of what defines the glory of God, there are other ways in which Scripture speaks of divine glory. Certain biblical passages connect divine glory with divine beauty, as we see in Isaiah 28:5.

Divine beauty is something that the modern church does not often think about, but it is essential to who the Lord is. Our Creator is so beautiful that David's highest desire was to gaze upon the very beauty of the Lord (Ps. 27:4). We also see how much God esteems beauty in the description of the tabernacle and the priests' garments. The holy garments of Aaron were made “for glory and for beauty” (Ex. 28:2). Glorious colors and precious metals were ordained by the Lord for the tabernacle, His earthly dwelling place under the old covenant (Ex. 26). Being made in God's image (Gen. 1:27), human beings esteem beauty and work to make their homes, their clothing, and other things beautiful. Since God Himself is beautiful and the standard of beauty itself, we cannot help but yearn for what is lovely.

We have seen that God has an inherent divine glory that He will not share with any creature (Isa. 42:8). However, that does not mean that there is no glory at all that He will give to His people. There is a glory of beauty that our Creator will bestow

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
28:2; Psalm
96:5-6;
Isaiah 4:2-
6; 52:1;
60:9;
Romans
10:15

on His children, as is evident in today's passage. This glory is God Himself, who will be for the remnant He saves a "crown of glory" and a "diadem of beauty" (28:5). The Lord has already made His people beautiful by clothing us with the robe of the perfect righteousness of Christ (61:10), but that beauty is not yet fully evident to all creation. But on the last day, in our glorification, all creation will see that God has declared us righteous and made us His people when the "hope of righteousness" is fulfilled (Gal. 5:5). On that day, Matthew Henry comments, "God will so appear for [His people] by his providence as to make it evident that they have his favour towards them, and that shall be to them a crown of glory; for what greater glory can any people have than for God to acknowledge them as his own? And he will so appear in them, by his grace, as to make it evident that they have his image renewed on them, and that shall be to them a diadem of beauty; for what greater beauty can any person have than the beauty of holiness?"

APPLICATION

God has an inherent beauty of glory that cannot be shared with mere creatures. However, there is a beauty He bestows on His people, the beauty of Christ's perfect righteousness that will vindicate us as God's children and citizens of heaven's glory on the last day. Are you looking forward to that day of the Lord's vindication of His people?

DAY 76

THE ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17 "THIS LIGHT MOMENTARY AFFLICTION IS PREPARING FOR US AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY BEYOND ALL COMPARISON."

Scripture places a high value on God's glory, and it is not hard to figure out why. Since the inherent glory of the Lord is something that He will not share with others (Isa. 42:8),

we know that His glory is something He prizes highly; indeed, He prizes it more highly than anything else. We should therefore set the glory of God as the goal and overarching emphasis of our lives. Whatever we lose for the sake of making the Lord's glory known will be worth it when we see the dazzling light and beauty of the divine glory (28:5; Rev. 21:23).

Glory has to do with light and beauty, but those aspects do not sum up what the Bible means when it speaks of the glory of God. Interestingly, the Hebrew word *kabod*, which is translated into English as “glory,” has the root meaning of “weight” or “heaviness.” This offers a clue that glory has to do with weight, and this is confirmed by passages such as 2 Corinthians 4:17, which speaks of the “weight of glory.”

But when we speak of glory as having to do with weight or heaviness, what exactly do we mean? Essentially, we are talking about worth or value. Things of value are often measured by their weight—for example, precious gemstones such as diamonds. Scripture often speaks of the weight of precious metals when it is talking about prices or trying to measure generosity and wealth (Gen. 23:16; 24:22). So, glory and worth are correlative concepts. God has a glory that surpasses the glory of anything else in existence because He is of infinite value and worth.

So, when we are ascribing glory to God, we are ascribing worth to Him. We are telling others of His value and unsurpassed worth. This, in turn, should shape what we do in and for Him. Our worship should evidence great beauty and reverence, for the most worthy being deserves that kind of worship. The Lord's perfections should be regularly on our lips, for if we truly value something, we will not fail to tell others about it. If God has infinite worth and value, we should speak of His marvelous character. Since we are to do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), we should have high standards for our work and for how we treat other people. To work and relate for the sake of the glory of God means doing things well and loving people rightly, for we are seeking to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to the infinitely worthy One (Rom. 12:1–2).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

2 Samuel 22:4;
Psalm
73:25–26;
Colossians
1:9–12;
Revelation
4:11

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APPLICATION

How much worth do you ascribe to the Lord? We are apt to spend a great deal of time thinking about and working for that which we value highly, so the amount of time we dedicate to thinking about God's glory and talking to others about it can be an indicator of how worthy we find Him. Let us seek to give glory to God and to help others understand His infinite worth.

DAY 77**GLORY AND PURITY**

JOHN 12:41 "ISAIAH SAID THESE THINGS BECAUSE HE SAW HIS GLORY AND SPOKE OF HIM."

John 12:41 records an interesting statement—namely, that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus. One might wonder how this was possible, for Isaiah lived some seven hundred years before the life and ministry of Christ. But the context helps us understand exactly what John is talking about. John 12:39–40 refers to Isaiah 6:10 and the word given to Isaiah when he was called to ministry and given a grand vision of the holiness of God. Isaiah saw God's glory (see Isa. 6:1–7), and John tells us that in seeing God's glory at that point, the prophet saw the glory of Jesus. This is a strong indicator of the deity of Christ, for if Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus when he saw the glory and holiness of the Lord, the prophet must have seen the preincarnate Son of God.

But if Isaiah saw the glory of God when he had his vision of the Lord in His majestic holiness, then we also see our definition of the glory of God fleshed out. That is, when the Bible speaks of the glory of God, it is also making reference to His holiness. And it is doing so in the two main senses of the concept of holiness. First, holiness refers to "set-apartness." To be holy is to be set apart from what is common, and if God's inherent glory is something that He will share with no one (42:8), then in His glory our Creator is set apart from all else. Holiness is also used in Scripture with reference to moral purity. So, God's glory goes hand in hand with

God's purity. The beautiful light of divine glory is so blindingly pure because our Creator is perfectly pure, free of all taint of evil. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Our Creator cannot be tempted with evil, and He tempts no one with evil (James 1:13). God is absolutely pure and free of sin—so pure, in fact, that He is not even capable of sin. This holiness coincides with His glory.

That the light of our Lord's glory and His perfect holiness go together helps to explain passages such as John 3:19. Taking on human flesh, God became incarnate in the person of Christ Jesus and came into the world as the light of the world. Yet, the result was to confirm wicked men in judgment, for they, being evil, have loved the darkness rather than the light. The darkness of evil cannot stand the light of God's glory, for it is the light of His holiness. Only when someone's sin is atoned for can he stand in the presence of divine glory (Isa. 6:1–7). We must be purified to endure the glory of God (Heb. 12:14).

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
10:17;
Ezekiel
28:20–22;
John 8:12;
Romans
13:12

APPLICATION

We will not love what is holy if God does not make us holy, and in Christ the Lord not only declares us righteous in our justification but also purifies us in our sanctification. If we trust in Jesus, we will be able to endure His presence on that last day. And as we seek to grow in holiness, we will love holiness more and more, and we will grow in our longing to view the glory of God.

DAY 78

THE SOVEREIGN GLORY OF GOD

PSALM 8 "O LORD, OUR LORD, HOW MAJESTIC IS YOUR NAME IN ALL THE EARTH! YOU HAVE SET YOUR GLORY ABOVE THE HEAVENS" (V. 1).

Post *tenebras lux*—"After darkness, light"—was one of the mottoes of the Reformation. For too long, the light of God's truth in the gospel had been obscured by man-made

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traditions that made human beings responsible for meriting their own salvation. So, when the Reformers recovered the gospel from under the layers of inherited man-made doctrines and practices, it was as if a light had dawned in the church once more.

We could also look at the Reformation motto as a rediscovery of the true glory of God. Scripture often describes the glory of God as a bright shining light (Rev. 21:23), and given that divine glory is also associated with beauty, worth, and holiness (Isa. 28:5; John 12:41; 2 Cor. 4:17), rediscovering the truth of the gospel also entailed a recovery of divine beauty, worth, and holiness. For the God of Scripture proclaimed by the Reformers is so holy that only He can provide us with the righteousness we need to stand before Him. And in His work of salvation, we see the beauty of the Savior and we understand by His grace that He alone is worthy of all praise.

In addition to light, beauty, worth, and holiness, Scripture also associates divine sovereignty with divine glory. We see this in today's passage, which proclaims that God has set His glory "above the heavens" (Ps. 8:1). That is language pertaining to our Creator's rule and reign, and the rest of Psalm 8 bears that out. Verses 3–8, for instance, speak of God's sovereign choice to give human beings a high place in His creation and of His delegating His rule over the creatures to humanity.

Other texts also tie glory and divine sovereignty together. First Chronicles 29:11 features David's song of praise in which he ascribes to God both glory and kingly reign over creation. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, Paul says that God calls us into His kingdom and to His glory. The Lord is referred to in 1 Timothy 1:17 as the "King of the ages," and glory is ascribed to Him in that passage. The glory of God is expressed in His sovereign reign over all things.

We have said before that God's glory, from one perspective, can be considered a summary attribute. It sums up many different aspects of the character of the Lord, such that to say God is glorious is to say He is beautiful, true, worthy, pure, and sovereign. Christians long to see the glory of God because in that glory they see the nature and attributes of God.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
15:18;
Psalm 24:7–
10; Luke
19:37–38;
Revelation
11:15–19

APPLICATION

Because God is glorious, He is sovereign over all things. Because God is sovereign over all things, He is glorious. We cannot separate these attributes of His character, and one of the reasons that we emphasize the complete sovereignty of God over every detail of creation is because we want to emphasize His glory. God is most glorified by us when we ascribe to Him full control over all things, even our salvation.

DAY 79

GOD'S GLORY AND OUR JOY

PSALM 105:3 “GLORY IN HIS HOLY NAME; LET THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD REJOICE!”

Jonathan Edwards, widely regarded as one of the most significant Protestant thinkers of the past three hundred years, is known for his emphasis on the glory of God. In his book *The End for Which God Created the World*, Edwards observes that God's pursuit of His own glory is not contrary to our happiness. In fact, by seeking to display the fullness of His glory, the Lord is at the same time seeking our joy.

How can this be the case? Since the highest aim of our God is to reveal His glory—He does all things for the sake of His name and will share His inherent divine glory with no one else (Isa. 48:9–11)—then His glory must be the highest good possible. After all, what else would the perfectly good Creator place first besides the greatest good? But if God's glory is the highest good possible, then we will find our greatest joy in the revelation and proclamation of that glory, for there is nothing greater in existence than His glory and therefore nothing that could bring us greater joy.

Today's passage demonstrates the connection between the glory of God and our joy. The psalmist calls for the people of God to glory in His holy name, to revel in the revelation of His holy character, and to understand the goodness and beauty of the Lord. This exhortation goes hand in hand with the psalmist's

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call for those who seek the Creator to rejoice (Ps. 105:3). We seek the Lord as we glory in His name, and as we glory in His name we find ourselves rejoicing, for seeking the glory of God is the very purpose for which we were made. As Isaiah 43:1–7 explains, the people of God were made by Him for the sake of His glory.

Because we who believe in Christ alone for salvation are the people of God, we also have assurance that He is able to establish us as blameless in the presence of His glory with great joy (Jude 24). Our Lord will certainly be glorified, and He will be glorified in His wrath and in His salvation. For those who do not know God in Christ, the revelation of His glory will be a day of doom, not a day of great joy (Ezek. 30:3). But for those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God, it will be a day of unsurpassed joy.

To seek the glory of God, therefore, is not contrary to our joy. In the end, when we deny ourselves for the sake of the Lord's glory, we are not giving up anything at all. For we will experience the fullness of eternal joy in His glorious presence.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalms 149;
Isaiah
41:14–16;
Romans 5:1–
2; 1 Peter
1:3–9

APPLICATION

For all eternity, we will find our joy in the infinite glory of God. We proclaim the gospel and call people to bow to the glory of the Lord not only because He has commanded us to do so but also because we know that only the redeemed, in the presence of the glory of God, will enjoy the fullest human joy possible. As we share the gospel, we should call people to repent for the sake of their eternal joy.

DAY 80

GOD'S CONSUMING GLORY

EXODUS 33:17–23 “[THE LORD] SAID, ‘YOU CANNOT SEE MY FACE, FOR MAN SHALL NOT SEE ME AND LIVE’ ” (V. 20).

After Israel's idolatry with the golden calf (Ex. 32), Moses sought assurance from God that He would indeed not utterly destroy Israel but would go with the people and

remain with them to set them apart from other nations (33:12–16). The Lord, by His grace, reassured Moses that He would stay with Israel, but then Moses made a remarkable request of God—he asked to see the divine glory (vv. 17–18).

This request was incredible for several reasons. First, it shows us that the true source of our assurance is God Himself. Moses had already seen God’s mighty act of salvation in delivering Israel from the Egyptians in the crossing of the Red Sea (ch. 14). However, given the sin of Israel, Moses sought greater assurance that the Lord would not break His covenant with His people even though they had broken covenant with Him. The only assurance that could satisfy Moses was to have a vision of God Himself.

Second, Moses’ request is remarkable because in response God did reveal an essential truth about His glory—namely, that it is all-consuming. As we see in today’s passage, the Lord agreed to show Moses His goodness but not His face directly, for no one can see the face of God—the fullness of His glory—directly and live (33:19–20). Moses would have to be content with a more indirect revelation of divine glory. He would get to see the Lord’s “back” but not the Lord’s “face” (vv. 21–23). Since “God is a Spirit, and has not a body like men” (Catechism for Young Children 9; see John 4:24), we know that “back” and “face” are anthropomorphic terms. The Lord does not literally have a face or a back like ours, but these are metaphors for a direct vision of God’s glory (face) and a lesser, indirect vision of the same glory (back).

The Lord was gracious in granting Moses’ request and letting Him see His glory only indirectly. One day, in fact, we will see the glorious face of God, but that cannot happen until all sin has been removed from us. We will see God because we will be like Him on that final day (1 John 3:2), but until then, any sinner who would see Him directly would be consumed. The Lord in His glory is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), and so sin and sinners cannot be sustained in His presence. Until we are fully renewed after God’s image in our glorification, John Calvin comments, “it must needs be that the incomprehensible brightness [of divine glory] would bring us to nothing.”

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Numbers
16; Deuter-
onomy 4:24;
Psalm 21:8-
9; Hebrews
10:26-31

V

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APPLICATION

That God in His glory is a consuming fire should shape us in many ways. It should make us more reverent in worship and more humble in prayer, for the God with whom we deal is not to be trifled with. He is the holy Lord of the universe, and He should be treated with the deference and honor that He deserves. He loves us deeply, but He is still our King and Sovereign.

DAY 81**GOD'S GLORY AS CREATOR**

REVELATION 4:11 “WORTHY ARE YOU, OUR LORD AND GOD, TO RECEIVE GLORY AND HONOR AND POWER, FOR YOU CREATED ALL THINGS, AND BY YOUR WILL THEY EXISTED AND WERE CREATED.”

Continuing our study of the glory of God, we begin today by noting that there are at least two angles from which we can approach the topic of divine glory. We have been focusing on what we might call the “divine angle.” In other words, we can talk about God’s glory from the perspective of defining what glory is and how it is manifested in our Lord’s character. But we can also talk about the glory of God from a “human angle.” Here we are thinking more about the human response to divine glory. For instance, one cannot read very far in Scripture without reading an exhortation for people to “give glory” to God (for example, Josh. 7:19).

What does it mean to give glory to our Creator? Essentially, giving glory entails treating God with the gravitas that He deserves. God possesses infinite weight—that is, infinite worth—and we must respond accordingly. Because He is infinite in His perfections (Job 37:16; Rom. 11:33), we cannot add glory to the Lord, so giving glory to Him does not mean that we increase His glory or supply glory that He lacks. However, we can honor God. We can approach Him with the praise He is due. That is how we give glory to God.

God is due glory for who He is, but the Scriptures tell us also to give glory to the Lord for what He has done. We see an example of this in Revelation 4:11, where the elders and creatures in heaven proclaim that God is worthy to receive glory because He created all things by His will. The Lord is the source of existence, the One who has being in Himself and therefore gives being or existence to everything else. He is self-existent, depending on nothing else for His existence, but His creation is dependent, so it would not and could not exist apart from His willing it into existence. Only God can speak to nothingness and call things to exist (Heb. 11:3).

It would take a being of unsurpassed worth, a being who is perfectly powerful—indeed, all-powerful—to bring something into existence that previously had no existence. God did not simply rearrange preexisting matter to make the universe; He called matter itself into existence. Consequently, God possesses great glory as the Creator of all things, and because He in His glory created all things, He is worthy to receive glory from us. We are His creatures; He is our Creator. Therefore, our highest honor and praise should go to Him alone. We can revere nothing greater than we revere God, for there is nothing greater than our Creator.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Genesis
1:1; Psalm
90:1-2;
Isaiah
40:28;
43:15;
45:7,
18-19;
Colossians
1:15-16

APPLICATION

It is easy for us to take the existence of the universe for granted, to think that we are owed things simply because they exist. However, nothing would exist if God had not created the universe, so we should regularly give the Lord glory for His creation, for making us and for making everything that we enjoy. Have you this day given God the glory for being your Creator?

DAY 82

GOD'S GLORY IN SALVATION

ROMANS 9:22-24 "WHAT IF GOD, DESIRING TO SHOW HIS WRATH AND TO MAKE KNOWN HIS POWER, HAS ENDURED WITH MUCH PATIENCE VESSELS OF WRATH PREPARED FOR DESTRUCTION, IN ORDER TO MAKE KNOWN THE RICHES OF HIS GLORY

V

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FOR VESSELS OF MERCY, WHICH HE HAS PREPARED BEFORE-HAND FOR GLORY—EVEN US WHOM HE HAS CALLED, NOT FROM THE JEWS ONLY BUT ALSO FROM THE GENTILES?”

Isaiah 42:8 tells us that God will share His inherent divine glory with no creature, and we have seen that His refusal to share His glory is particularly evident in His work of salvation. The context of Isaiah 42:8 makes that clear, for verses 1–7 speak of God’s work of redemption, His freeing of captives and giving sight to the spiritually blind. God alone will receive the glory in our salvation, for salvation is a manifestation of His glory. His omnipotence, His mercy, His love, and His holiness are in a sense all summed up in His glory, and all these attributes are on display in His work of salvation.

Today’s passage helps us understand this point more deeply. In presenting the doctrine of divine predestination, Paul explains that God redeems some sinners and hardens others in order to put on full display “the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22–23). Our Lord’s chief end is to reveal and magnify His own glory, and God’s glory is seen in both His mercy and His justice. First, with respect to the elect, God shows His glory through His mercy. By saving us from sin and death, our Creator reveals Himself as our Savior, and He is glorified for His saving work. And because we are redeemed solely on account of His kindness and not for anything in us, the credit and glory for salvation go only to Him, not to us. His power, His mercy—these and other divine attributes are shown to us when He saves us.

But Romans 9:22–24 also demonstrates that God’s patience with the reprobate, those whom He has not chosen for salvation, also shows us the riches of the divine glory. How is this possible? In the first instance, God’s treatment of the “vessels of wrath” shows us divine glory because this treatment manifests His justice. The elect will see the Lord justly condemn the impenitent, and so they will more clearly see His attributes of justice and righteousness, thereby receiving a fuller revelation of His character and thus His glory.

Second, the contrast between the Lord’s dealing with the elect

and His dealing with the reprobate shows the riches of divine glory by giving a fuller picture of divine mercy. When we understand that we deserve salvation no more than the reprobate do, we will be in awe that God has redeemed us. John Calvin comments: “The greatness of divine mercy towards the elect is hereby more clearly made known; for how do they differ from [the reprobate] except that they are delivered by the Lord from the same gulf of destruction? And this by no merit of their own, but through his gratuitous kindness.”

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Exodus
15:2; Psalm
106:47;
Luke 2:25-
32; 2 Tim-
othy 2:10

APPLICATION

When we take our salvation for granted, we take God’s glory for granted, and His mercy is obscured. But when we seek to understand the depth of our sin and the sheer mercy of God, we will gain a better glimpse of the glory of the Lord. Meditate on the riches of God’s grace today so that you will see more clearly the riches of God’s glory.

DAY 83

GOD’S GLORY IN JUDGMENT

ISAIAH 66:15-24 “I KNOW THEIR WORKS AND THEIR THOUGHTS, AND THE TIME IS COMING TO GATHER ALL NATIONS AND TONGUES. AND THEY SHALL COME AND SHALL SEE MY GLORY” (V. 18).

We can describe how people know the one true God in three basic ways. First, all people know Him as Creator. He has made the world from nothing, and He reveals Himself in the world such that all people have at least some awareness of His attributes and hence some knowledge that He is the Lord of glory (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:18–32). Second, those who trust in Christ alone for salvation know the one true God as Savior. They, as undeserving sinners, know His mercy in redeeming them, and through that knowledge have a better understanding of His glory (Rom. 9:22–24). Finally, impenitent sinners know God not as Savior

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but only as Judge. Try as they might to deny it, they know their sin and that a day of judgment is coming (Rom. 2:1–16). And on that day of judgment, today's passage tells us, all people will see God's glory manifested in His final judgment on wickedness.

Isaiah proclaims the coming day on which the "LORD [will] enter into judgment . . . with all flesh" (Isa. 66:15–16). On that day, nothing will escape God's sight, for He knows the "works" and "thoughts" of all people (v. 18). And on that day, mere ritual observance or outward religiosity will save no one, for God will bring an end to the wicked, both those who make an outward show of faith and those who reject His covenant outright (v. 17).

Yet that will not be a grim day for all people. For those who know Christ, it will be a day of salvation, as God has already pronounced judgment on His people: He has declared them righteous on account of the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom. 5:1–2; 2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, many nations will come to God in Christ and be received as priests unto Him, as those who have been granted the right to be in His holy presence unafraid. All others, those who are not in Christ by faith alone, will at that point receive judgment, and it will be a judgment of condemnation (Isa. 66:18–24).

On that day, God will manifest His glory. All nations will see it (v. 18), and it will be heralded by all (v. 19). For the Creator gets glory not only in creating and saving people but also in executing His righteous judgment. That day of judgment will magnify the Lord's glory, for we will see His attribute of righteousness on full display, and every mouth will be stopped and unable to protest divine injustice, for it will be plainly evident under God's law that there is not injustice at all in our Lord (Rom. 3:19). God will show His glory in the end.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah
66:15–
24; Eze-
kiel 39;
Matthew
25:31–46;
Revelation
16:4–7

APPLICATION

God's glory will be shown on the last day when He executes final judgment. On that day, the whole world will see His righteousness as everything is set right and the wicked get the justice they deserve. Let us give glory to God for His justice and pray that the day on which that justice is fully revealed comes quickly.

DAY 84

CHRIST THE GLORY OF GOD

HEBREWS 1:3 “HE IS THE RADIANCE OF THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE EXACT IMPRINT OF HIS NATURE, AND HE UPHOLDS THE UNIVERSE BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER. AFTER MAKING PURIFICATION FOR SINS, HE SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH.”

Divine glory, we have seen, is often depicted as a blazing light that we will fully see on the final day (Rev. 21:23).

It is at the moment largely veiled to us, for we do not yet see God face-to-face. Note, however, that we have said that this glory is largely veiled to us, not completely veiled. It is possible for us now, by faith, to see something of the glory of God.

That is one of the implications of today's passage, which tells us that Christ “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). If we want to know what God is like, we must look to Christ, for Christ is God incarnate (Phil. 2:5–11). Divine patience, divine love, divine wrath, divine holiness—we get the fullest picture of these in Jesus.

But, we might ask, how can this also be true of the glory of God? After all, did not the Son of God veil His glory when He took on human flesh? If we are talking about the revelation of divine glory as blindingly pure light, then the answer is yes. Apart from Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration, no one who saw Christ during His earthly ministry saw the light of divine glory (Matt. 17:1–2). Yet while Jesus veiled the light of His glory, He did exercise other divine attributes such as His sovereignty over creation when He calmed the storm (Mark 4:35–41). Since we have also seen that God's glory is in one sense the summation of His attributes, anytime Jesus exercised divine attributes, people saw something of the divine glory.

What about those of us who live today, two thousand years after the earthly ministry of Christ? Do we see the divine glory? No, we do not see the fullness of divine glory, and we will not see it until we meet God face-to-face and all the light of His beauty

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Micah 5:2;
2 Corinthians
4:6;
1 Peter
4:13;
2 Peter
1:16-18

and majesty is evident to us. However, since Christ is the radiance of the divine glory (Heb. 1:3), it is possible for us to catch a glimpse of this glory, not with our physical eyes but with our spiritual eyes—with the eyes of faith. As we read Scripture and believe what it says about Jesus and His exercise of His divine attributes and prerogatives, we are, by faith, getting a look at the divine glory. To know Christ by faith is to know God Himself, and to know God is to know something of His divine nature, including His glory. John Calvin comments, “God is truly and really known in Christ; for he is not his obscure or shadowy image, but his impress which resembles him, as money the impress of the die with which it is stamped.”

APPLICATION

Today, we see something of God’s glory by faith as we trust in Jesus. One day we will see this glory in its fullest sense, insofar as we are able as creatures to see His glory, for on that day we will view Christ by sight and not merely by faith. But that does not mean we get no true glimpse of God’s glory now as we look to Christ. And as we grow in our knowledge of Christ, we will also grow in our longing to see the fullness of the divine glory.

DAY 85

THE CHURCH AS THE GLORY OF GOD

JOHN 17:22 “THE GLORY THAT YOU HAVE GIVEN ME I HAVE GIVEN TO THEM, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE EVEN AS WE ARE ONE.”

Christ, according to His divine nature, “is the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb. 1:3). Being fully God (John 1:1), our Savior’s divine nature possesses all the divine attributes, including the attribute of glory. And given that divine glory can be spoken of, in one sense, as the summation of all God’s attributes, every point at which Christ exercised His divine attributes during His ministry gives us at least a glimpse, by faith, of divine glory.

However, Christ is the glory of God not only according to His divine nature, for in some sense He is the glory of God according to His human nature as well. Consider today's passage, for example. Jesus speaks of a glory given to Him by the Father that He then shares with believers (John 17:22). Obviously, Jesus cannot be speaking of the inherent divine glory, for only God can possess that glory. No, Jesus is talking about something bestowed on His human nature, which can then be shared with His people because we also possess a human nature. This glory is not identical to the inherent divine glory, but it is so closely related to it that the glory given to us in Christ can also be called God's glory. John Calvin comments, "Christ is not only the lively image of God, in so far as he is the eternal Word of God, but even on his human nature, which he has in common with us, the likeness of the glory of the Father has been engraved, so as to form his members to the resemblance of it."

Ultimately, the kind of glory of which we speak is a derived glory, one that is not inherent to humanity but was stamped on all people originally as part of our being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26). This glory was marred in the fall, and it is being restored to its fullness in those who are united to Christ by faith alone (2 Cor. 3:18). The church, then, can be called the glory of God in the sense that God is renewing our image by sharing with us the glory He has given to Christ. As the church fulfills its mission, unbelievers can look at the church and say "God is at work there" (see John 13:34–35). The church reflects the divine glory, and as we grow in Christlikeness, we point others to God, the source of all glory. This must be at least part of what Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:14–16 when He calls us the light of the world. As we love one another and enjoy God's presence in our midst, our light shines before others, and they are directed to the Lord in heaven.

APPLICATION

John Calvin writes, "No one ought to be reckoned among the disciples of Christ, unless we perceive the glory of God impressed on him, as with a seal, by the likeness of Christ." Do you want to

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Isaiah
46:13;
John 5:30–
47; 1 Cor-
inthians
11:7;
2 Peter
1:3–4

V

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know if you are Christ's disciple? Look to your life and whether you are growing in Christlikeness. Though we are never perfected in this life, we slowly become more like Christ as we die more and more to sin and live more and more to righteousness.

DAY 86

ASCRIBING GLORY TO GOD

1 CHRONICLES 16:28-34 "ASCRIBE TO THE LORD THE GLORY DUE HIS NAME; BRING AN OFFERING AND COME BEFORE HIM!" (V. 29).

Matthew 5:48 records Jesus as saying that we "must be perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect." In this verse, we learn that God demands perfect righteousness from us, and since we cannot render such righteousness (Rom. 3:9–20), Christ's words ultimately drive us to Him for our justification, for the gift of His perfect righteousness imputed to us.

We miss something, however, if we think Matthew 5:48 is only about us. It is also about God, for we are told that our "heavenly Father is perfect." In the context of Matthew 5, the text is primarily about divine righteousness and love, demonstrating that nothing can make God more righteous or loving since He is perfect, and one cannot improve on perfection. But we may extend this to all the divine attributes. Job 37:16, for example, tells us that God is "perfect in knowledge." He cannot learn anything, for He already knows everything. God cannot grow in any of His attributes, including His glory.

So, as we have seen, we cannot add to the divine glory. We cannot increase the inherent glory of His being. As today's passage states, however, we can ascribe glory to God (1 Chron. 16:28–29). This involves honoring the name of the Lord and treating Him with the reverence He is owed. In so doing, we are also making His glory known to the world. We do not ascribe glory to God for His sake, since He has possessed glory for all eternity, but we do it for our sake and for the sake of the world.

Today's passage goes on to explain several ways that we can ascribe glory to God. We do so by bringing Him offerings (v. 29), not of animals as under the old covenant, but of ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2), which testifies that He has made us and has lordship over us. We also ascribe glory to the Lord in our worship and fear of Him (1 Chron. 16:29–30). Worship is rendered to that which we believe is greater than we are, and by worshipping the one true God, we acknowledge His unsurpassed greatness, and the nations are thereby directed to His great glory. We ascribe glory to God by thanking Him for His goodness, and people are thereby reminded that He is the source of all good things (v. 34; James 1:16–17).

Finally, we ascribe glory to the Lord by proclaiming His sovereignty and living like we mean it—that is, by following His royal law (1 Chron. 16:31). The Lord shows His glory in people who are committed to His rule and reign.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Psalm 29;
Isaiah
24:14–15;
Jeremiah
13:16;
Romans
4:20

APPLICATION

We design worship not for unbelievers but for the glory of God and the edification of His people. However, reverent worship in which we ascribe glory to God will be a testimony to unbelievers of the glory of God. By seeking to worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth according to His Word, we are proclaiming Him to the nations. Our acceptance and participation only in worship that is holy and reverent is a powerful testimony to our neighbors.

DAY 87

THE COMING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S GLORY

HABAKKUK 2:14 “THE EARTH WILL BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA.”

No one will be able to stand before God on the final day and say: “I was never aware of You. You failed to show Yourself to me.” Scripture makes it very clear that the

V

DAY 86 & 87

Lord has revealed His power and His divine nature, at least partly, in the creation (Rom. 1:18–20). He has even revealed His glory. As David wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1).

So, on some level, all human beings know that there is a glorious God in heaven to whom they owe worship and thanksgiving. From the unreached person in the remotest corner of the globe to the person who has heard the gospel many times, everyone has some awareness of the existence and nature of God.

And yet, there is coming a greater revelation of the glory of God throughout the world. In one sense, the glory of God is already known across the globe, but in another, “the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” has not yet covered the world. This is what we learn from Habakkuk 2:14, which predicts a day when the knowledge of God’s glory will fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.”

In the original context of today’s passage, Habakkuk is referring to the destruction of Babylon and the rescue of the Israelites from the Babylonian exile. The judgment of the enemies of God’s people and their redemption from bondage would mark a further revelation of the divine glory—the nations would see the Lord as the all-powerful Savior of His people. But this prophecy must cover more than just the physical return from exile of the old covenant people, for Isaiah 40–66 broadens the rescue from exile to finally include a new heavens and earth, brought about ultimately by the work of the Messiah who atones for the sin of His people. In that work of judgment of sin and salvation of God’s children, the world will see an aspect of divine glory that is not revealed in nature—they will see His glory as Savior.

John Calvin comments on today’s passage, “The power, grace, and truth of God are made known through the world, when he delivers his people and restrains the ungodly.” The divine glory will be fully manifest on the final day, but even now the knowledge of the glory of God continues to spread over the earth. As the church serves her calling as the herald of the King, making disciples of all nations, we bring to them the knowledge of God’s glory in salvation (Matt. 28:18–20). And all those who receive this knowledge in faith today, trusting in Christ alone for redemption, glorify God as Savior.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Numbers
14:20–24;
Jeremiah
23:24;
Matthew
24:14;
Romans
8:18–25

APPLICATION

In the time between Christ's first and second advents, the Lord is spreading the knowledge of His glory through the work of the church to disciple all peoples. We are engaged in the greatest work possible and are used by God to fulfill prophecy when we seek to take the knowledge of God's glory in the gospel to all peoples.

DAY 88

SEEING GOD AS HE IS

1 JOHN 3:2 "BELOVED, WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN NOW, AND WHAT WE WILL BE HAS NOT YET APPEARED; BUT WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, BECAUSE WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS."

The Protestant Reformers were well known for their emphasis on faith. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Reformation leaders taught without compromise that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, and that God must grant us faith. For all their emphasis on faith, however, they were also aware that our need for faith is temporary. They understood that faith pertains to that which we cannot see (Heb. 11:1), and so they knew that when the invisible finally becomes visible to us, faith will pass away.

We are talking about what theologians call the "beatific vision," the direct vision of God that we will enjoy for all eternity. That believers will see the Lord not with faith but with their own eyes is our greatest hope, and it is taught in passages such as 1 John 3:2. One day, we will be like God, insofar as that is possible for creatures. We do not know fully what that means, but certainly it includes the idea of moral perfection. Being like Him, we will be able to endure His all-consuming glory, which today we cannot bear because of remaining sin. In fact, today's passage suggests that our being like the Lord will somehow result from our seeing Him as He is.

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Do we long to see God? We are blessed to live in a day that offers us many comforts, and we should be grateful to the Lord for the many things that make our lives much easier than the lives of those who lived even one hundred years ago. But if we are honest with ourselves, we also live in a day of many distractions, many enticements that promise to be more satisfying than God Himself. Yet Scripture tells us that there is nothing more beautiful, nothing more satisfying, than God Himself. We taste this now in our salvation as we find Christ to satisfy our longings for forgiveness, for meaning, for reconciliation with God. Imagine, then, how much greater our satisfaction will be when we see the beauty of divine glory face-to-face. We can hardly anticipate what that will be like, but it will entail a delight of such magnitude that our suffering cannot even be compared to it (Rom. 8:18).

Luther's comments on Galatians that help us understand the beatific vision give us a fitting conclusion to our study. "In the life to come we shall no more have need of faith (1 Corinthians 13:12). For then we shall not see darkly through a mirror (as we do now), but we shall see face-to-face. There shall be a most glorious brightness of the eternal Majesty, in which we shall see God even as He is. There shall be a true and perfect knowledge and love of God."

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Job 19:25-27; Matthew 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Hebrews 12:14

APPLICATION

What could possibly be better than seeing God face-to-face? Since He is the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful, to see the Lord face-to-face is to see goodness itself, truth itself, and beauty itself. No longer will we need to be content with created things that only reflect these attributes, but we will see the very attributes themselves. Let us yearn for that day when our faith shall become sight.

DAY 89

SHARING IN CHRIST'S GLORY

ROMANS 8:11 "IF THE SPIRIT OF HIM WHO RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD DWELLS IN YOU, HE WHO RAISED CHRIST

JESUS FROM THE DEAD WILL ALSO GIVE LIFE TO YOUR MORTAL BODIES THROUGH HIS SPIRIT WHO DWELLS IN YOU."

Death was not an original part of God's creation; rather, it came into the created order when Adam fell into sin (Rom. 5:12). It is the last enemy of God's people that will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). Having already been defeated through the resurrection of Christ, it will be destroyed on the last day when Christ comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Man brought sin into the world, and death was conquered by a man—the God-man Christ Jesus (Rom. 5:13–21). He brings life to His people, both new spiritual life and the new physical life that our bodies will enjoy at the resurrection. A connection exists between Christ's resurrection and ours. As Paul says in today's passage, the very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will do the same for our mortal bodies (8:11). There is a continuity between the resurrection of Jesus and ours. He is the firstfruits; we are the harvest (1 Cor. 15:20–23). His resurrection was the guarantee of our own resurrection. In fact, we have already been raised with Christ in principle; we wait only for the experience of physical resurrection (Rom. 6:1–5). But the resurrection of God's people unto new, embodied, glorified life is as good as done, having been secured by Christ's resurrection in glory.

Since we will be united with Christ "in a resurrection like his" (v. 5), our resurrection will likely be similar to His. When we look at the postresurrection accounts of Jesus, we see that there was both continuity and discontinuity between what He was like before death and what He was like after His death and resurrection. Jesus' postresurrection body was enough like His preresurrection body that Mary Magdalene finally recognized Him when He appeared to her, but His postresurrection body was also different enough from His preresurrection body that she could not recognize Him at first (John 20:11–18). Perhaps something like that will be true of our resurrection bodies as well.

Paul explains this for us in 1 Corinthians 15:42–57, where he tells us that the natural body sown in death will be raised as a spiritual body. He does not mean a nonphysical body, for spiritual is

V

DAY 88 & 89

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Isaiah 25;
Matthew
23:23-33;
John 11:25;
Colossians
1:18

not set in opposition to the physical in this text. A spiritual body, instead, is one that has been permeated with the Holy Spirit and granted immortality. The new bodies that we will receive at the resurrection will be forever guarded from death by the power and love of God. We will be imperishable, and all the weaknesses introduced by sin will be no more.

APPLICATION

People may claim that death is just part of the natural order, but their endeavors to delay or even prevent their own deaths prove otherwise. Sinners are looking to escape death, but the only way to do so is through resurrection unto eternal life, which is available only in Christ. The hatred of death is a point of contact with the unbeliever that we can use as a springboard to declare the promise of resurrection in the gospel.

DAY 90

THE GLORIOUS RETURN OF CHRIST

ACTS 1:6-11 “MEN OF GALILEE, WHY DO YOU STAND LOOKING INTO HEAVEN? THIS JESUS, WHO WAS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU SAW HIM GO INTO HEAVEN” (V. 11).

Eschatology, the category of systematic theology under which we study the last things, continues to be the subject of much discussion and debate in our day. Much of the discussion is related to such topics as the timing of the millennium, the identity of the Antichrist, the place of the modern state of Israel in prophecy, and other subjects. These arguments might lead us to think that there is no consensus on eschatological matters in the Christian church. However, that would be a wrong conclusion. As evident in the ecumenical creeds such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, believers from many different theological traditions agree on core eschatological elements. One of these areas of agreement concerns the return of Christ in glory.

When examining the Bible's teaching on the return of Christ to consummate His kingdom, we must take care to study only those passages that actually deal with the subject. We say this because some of the texts often referenced on the final return of our Savior may not address it. For example, it is likely that most, if not all, of the Olivet Discourse recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 20 has to do with Jesus' judgment on Jerusalem for rejecting Him, which occurred in the Roman destruction of the city and its temple in AD 70. Those texts, therefore, are not the best places to go, at least at first, when we are studying the final return of Christ.

One of the clearest texts on the subject at hand is Acts 1:6–11, which describes the ascension of Christ. This passage gives us three important facts about the second advent. First, the return of Christ will be personal. The angels note that “this Jesus” will return (v. 11). The very same person whom the disciples saw depart that day will come back.

Second, the return of Christ will be visible. Jesus, the angels say, “will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (v. 11). The disciples saw the incarnate Jesus ascend into heaven, so if He is coming in the same manner to consummate His kingdom, we will actually see the God-man in the flesh at the time of His final advent.

Finally, the return of Christ will be in glory. We read in verse 9 that a cloud took Jesus out of their sight. That is significant because in the Old Testament, God's glorious presence often appeared as a cloud (for example, Ex. 40:34). When Jesus comes back to bring the new heaven and earth, He will come in the glory of God.

FOR
FURTHER
STUDY

Daniel
7:13–14;
Nahum 1:3;
1 Thess.
4:13–18;
Revelation
1:7

APPLICATION

We do not know exactly when Jesus will return, but we do know that it could be at any moment. Every breath we take could possibly be the last one we breathe before Jesus returns. Knowing the imminence of Christ's return should spur us to serve the church and engage, as we are able, in the work of making disciples. We do not want to be found idle when Jesus comes back (Matt. 25).

V

DAY 89 & 90

ABOUT LIGONIER

Ligonier Ministries is an international Christian discipleship organization founded by Dr. R.C. Sproul in 1971 to proclaim, teach, and defend the holiness of God in all its fullness to as many people as possible. Dr. Sproul dedicated his life to helping people grow in their knowledge of God and His holiness, and our desire is to support the church of Jesus Christ by helping Christians know what they believe, why they believe it, how to live it, and how to share it.

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