

JUSTIFICATION  
AND  
*Regeneration*

Second Edition

JUSTIFICATION  
AND  
*Regeneration*

Charles Leiter

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# Contents

## JUSTIFICATION AND REGENERATION

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## FOREWORD

There seems to be a great abyss separating the biblical theologian and the Christian in the pew. While the theologian is able to climb the Everest of God's truth and be transformed by the vision, he often communicates the vision in a language that is beyond us. Thus, we are left at the mercy of popular Christian literature that is often nothing more than quaint stories, pragmatism, and baptized psychology.

The Church in contemporary America does not need more strategies, steps, or keys to the Christian life. The Church needs truth, and more specifically, the great foundational truths of historical Christianity. In this work, Pastor Charles Leiter has done a great service to the Church in that he has taken two of the greatest doctrines of Scripture and two of the greatest miracles in the Christian life and explained them in simple language without loss of content.

As I read through the manuscript of this book I was amazed at its simplicity and scope. The great doctrines of justification and regeneration can only properly be considered in the context of the other great doctrines of the faith—the holy and righteous character of God, human depravity, propitiation, repentance, faith, and sanctification, to name only a few. Pastor Leiter has not only given us a balanced view of each of these doctrines, but has also demonstrated how they intertwine to form the foundation of the Christian life.

Of particular interest to me was the setting forth of a proper view of regeneration. In modern day evangelism, this precious doctrine has been reduced to nothing more than a human decision to raise one's hand, walk an aisle, or pray a "sinner's prayer." As a result, the majority of Americans believe that they have been "born again" (i.e., regenerated) even though their thoughts, words, and deeds are a continual contradiction to the nature and will of God. Pastor Leiter demonstrates that regeneration is the supernatural work of God whereby the sinner's dead, depraved heart of stone is replaced with a new heart that is both willing and able to respond to God in love and obedience. Secondly, Pastor Leiter deals with Romans 6 & 7 in a logical and consistent manner, which he then

communicates to the reader with profound simplicity. Our brother's views concerning these two great chapters have been a source of great strength, comfort, and joy for me down through the years of my own pilgrimage.

I have read this book many times before its going to press. I have greatly benefited from its teaching and heartily recommend its contents. May the Spirit of God illuminate your heart and mind that you may not only understand the Scriptures explained herein, but that they might become a reality in your life.

Paul David Washer

## PREFACE

*“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:3-7*

Two great miracles stand at the very heart and center of the gospel. The first is *justification*, whereby condemned criminals are made right in the eyes of a holy and righteous Judge. The second is *regeneration*, whereby malicious, enslaved, and hateful sinners are transformed into lovers of God and man. Either directly or indirectly, these two miracles appear everywhere in the New Testament. They are absolutely foundational to a proper understanding of both the *gospel* and the *Christian life*. Yet, even among genuine believers, there is much confusion and ignorance regarding these precious and soul-liberating truths.

The pages that follow are an attempt to set forth in clear Biblical light the nature and characteristics of justification and regeneration. To do this, we must first consider in Chapter 1 why it is that all men stand in such desperate need of these two divine acts. This will involve a discussion of both the objective guilt and the internal corruption caused by sin.

Because all men are guilty and corrupted by sin, there is a great moral dilemma standing in the way of man’s salvation: How can a righteous God justify unrighteous sinners without becoming unjust Himself? Chapter 2 examines this dilemma and the method by which divine wisdom has solved it through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Chapter 3, the nature and characteristics of justification are then explored in light of seven truths about justification that are set forth in Scripture.

The Bible has a great deal to say about regeneration. In an attempt to get a clear view of what regeneration is, we will examine nine Biblical descriptions of this great miracle in Chapters 4-13. Each description views the same glorious reality from a different angle, while illuminating different facets of it.

In Chapter 14, both justification and regeneration are considered in terms of the larger categories of “law and grace” set forth in the New Testament. And finally, in the concluding chapter, both are considered as part of the even greater, over-arching reality of our being “in Christ.” Christianity *is* Christ. *Every* spiritual blessing is found “in Him”—including all the blessings of justification and regeneration—and *no* spiritual blessing exists apart from Him.

Throughout this book, many important Scriptures have been assigned to footnotes, and these are placed at the bottom of each page for easy reference.

Charles Leiter

# Sin

## Man's Ultimate Problem

For a proper understanding of both justification and regeneration, we must begin where the Bible does, and that is with *sin*. All sin flows from man's perverse desire to put himself in the place of God—to be the center and measure of all things and to “know” for himself what is good and what is evil.<sup>1</sup> According to Titus 3:3-7, men in their natural state are “foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved to various lusts.” Their lives are characterized by “malice, envy, and hate.” Far from recognizing this state of affairs, lost men imagine themselves to be “basically good,” unless God in mercy reveals to them the true condition of their blackened hearts. *Sin is the ultimate and only problem of humanity*. It is *my* ultimate and only problem and *your* ultimate and only problem.

### A Biblical View of Sin

The Bible has a lot to say about sin. If we are to rightly understand sin's true nature, we must let the light of this Biblical revelation illumine our darkened minds and soften our calloused hearts. Just think of it! According to the Bible, sin is—

#### *Absolutely Universal*

Sin is absolutely universal in the human race. “*All* of us like sheep have gone astray; *each* of us has turned to *his own way*.”<sup>2</sup> “There is *none* righteous, not even *one*; there is *none* who understands, there is *none* who seeks for God. *All* have turned aside, *together* they have become useless; there is *none* who does good, there is not even *one*.”<sup>3</sup> You and I may not have met each other, but of one thing we can be certain even before our introduction—both of us are sinners. Every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth, no matter how old or how young, is a sinner. Even small children, when allowed to go their own way, are capable of the most exquisite cruelties to animals and to one another.

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:4-5   <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:6   <sup>3</sup> Romans 3:10-12

Race and nationality likewise offer no immunity from sin; the most cultured of nations are just as capable of genocide as the most barbaric. The gas chambers of the “civilized” are merely sophisticated forms of the machetes wielded by the “uncivilized.”

Neither is there any such thing as a “noble savage” or “happy heathen.” In the words of one former missionary, “I went to the mission field to keep a bad God from sending good men to hell. When I arrived, I discovered that they were monsters of iniquity.” The question is not whether men have had an opportunity to “accept Jesus.” The question is whether they have had an opportunity to mistreat the missionary and reject his message—for, apart from the special working of the Holy Spirit, that is what they will surely do.<sup>1</sup>

*Sin is universal in the human race.*

### *All-pervasive*

Not only is sin universal; it is all-pervasive. Every aspect of the human personality and of human existence is affected by it:

The *mind* is blinded. “The god of this world has *blinded the minds* of the unbelieving so that they might not see...”<sup>2</sup>

The *will* is corrupted and incapacitated. “The wickedness of man was great on the earth, and...*every intent* of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”<sup>3</sup> “You *will not* come to Me that you might have life.”<sup>4</sup> “No one *can* come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”<sup>5</sup>

The *emotions* are disturbed and perverted. Some hearts smolder with constant anger and hatred; others are tormented day and night by senseless fears. Multitudes laugh at things that ought to make them weep, while others burst into tears for no apparent reason. Such are the deep and all-pervasive disturbances to the human personality caused, either directly or indirectly, by sin.

### *Irrational*

Sin is irrational. Many a priceless birthright has been bartered for one bowl of soup;<sup>6</sup> many a marriage and family thrown away for one night of illicit pleasure. For the temporary thrills of illegal drug use, the highest powers of the human brain are routinely

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:1-6 <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4 <sup>3</sup> Genesis 6:5 <sup>4</sup> John 5:40 <sup>5</sup> John 6:44  
<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:16

and permanently destroyed. A moment's reflection on the sins of our own past is enough to confirm that *none of them makes any sense*. Such was the insanity of the prodigal son's actions that his repentance involved nothing less than “coming to his senses.”<sup>1</sup>

*There is no wise sin.*

### *Deceitful*

Sin is deceitful. The Bible speaks of being “hardened by the *deceitfulness* of sin.”<sup>2</sup> As with all deception, the victim is unaware of his deceived state. At the very time he thinks that he is “rich, and has become wealthy, and has need of nothing,” he is in reality “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”!<sup>3</sup> He “professes himself to be wise,” but is actually a “fool.”<sup>4</sup>

### *Hardening*

One of the most fearful things about sin is its power to harden the one who practices it.<sup>5</sup> The deeper a man goes in sin, the less sin bothers him. According to the Bible, man's very conscience becomes “seared as with a branding iron.”<sup>6</sup> Every sinner finds himself now committing sins that he *once* despised, and the sins that he *now* despises, he will someday find himself committing. It should shock us to remember that Adolph Hitler was once a little boy playing with toys just like other little boys. Man knows the beginning of sin, but no man has ever known the end of sin.

### *Enslaving*

Sin enslaves those who practice it. “Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”<sup>7</sup> None can free himself or escape from sin's bondage. Sin “reigns” over the sinner and rides on his back like a tyrant until it eventually brings him down to the pit of destruction and death.<sup>8</sup> If you are not a Christian, you have a chain around your neck far worse than any physical chain. You may be able to quit one sin, but another sin will immediately take its place—often the sin of pride or self-righteousness for what you imagine you have accomplished in reforming yourself. Sin is enslaving.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 15:17 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 3:13 <sup>3</sup> Revelation 3:17 <sup>4</sup> Romans 1:22 <sup>5</sup> Hebrews 3:13  
<sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 4:2 <sup>7</sup> John 8:34 <sup>8</sup> Romans 5:21

### *Debasing*

Sin sinks the highest and noblest of men and women to the depths of shame and degradation. The young man who once wore a fine suit and sat in a leather office chair now lies unshaven in his own vomit as a result of sin. The young girl who was once clean and beautiful and innocent is now cheap and sensual and dirty—again, because of sin. Men and women made in the image of God, created to dream immortal dreams and to think the long thoughts of eternity, are reduced by sin to groveling in the muck like pigs for a piece of bread. Sin turned angels into demons<sup>1</sup>; it turns men into “unreasoning animals.”<sup>2</sup> Sin is debasing.

### *Defiling*

Finally, sin is defiling.<sup>3</sup> Sin is not a trifle; sin is not “cute”; sin is not funny. Sin is exceedingly *wicked and perverse*; it is “*utterly sinful*.”<sup>4</sup> *All sin is twisted and ugly and vile*. We should be shocked at how wicked men are and how callous we have become to that wickedness. We are *used* to it! The first baby ever born grew up to murder his own brother.<sup>5</sup> And human history ever since has been one long stream of constant warfare, lust, hate, torture, rape, perversion, abuse, and brutality. It is a blessed thing that we do not know in detail the sins that were committed just last night in our own town or city. Such knowledge would be too defiling to bear.

Yet, we must face the fact that the world is not the way it is because it has a few bad people like Hitler; the world is the way it is because it is made up of multitudes of people just like us! There is *deep wickedness* in each of us. Sometimes God will use something seemingly “little” to show us this wickedness. For Augustine, it was not so much his immoral lifestyle, but the wanton stealing of pears from a neighbor’s tree in his youth—not for hunger, but for sport—that revealed to him the utter depravity of his own heart. Sin, just for the delight of doing evil, without reason and without reward, flows from within the human heart and defiles us all.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 25:41 <sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 1:10 <sup>3</sup> Mark 7:20-23 <sup>4</sup> Romans 7:13

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 4:8

## The Two Sides of Man’s Sin Problem

Sin is the ultimate and only problem of humanity. But this “sin problem” has two distinct aspects—one internal and the other external.

### *The Internal Problem—A Bad Heart*

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, man *himself* is corrupt and vile. “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”<sup>1</sup> This is the condition of every human heart, apart from Christ. If a motion picture of even our past thoughts, let alone our past actions, were to be played on a large screen before our family and acquaintances, every one of us would run from the room in shame. Every non-Christian is—in his person—more repulsive to a holy God than he can ever begin to imagine.

But man’s problem with sin is even deeper than this. Suppose that by some miracle, the sinner could become a new person and never sin again for the rest of his life. *He would still most certainly go to hell*. The routine murderer who sincerely decides never to murder again must still pay for his past crimes. In other words, man’s problem with sin has another dimension besides the internal. Man not only has a *bad heart*; he also has a *bad record* in the eyes of God’s law.

### *The External Problem—A Bad Record*

Every sinner is a fugitive from justice. Regardless of the present condition of his heart, he has *objective guilt*, outside himself, in the eyes of God’s law. He may not have any “*guilt feelings*,” but he *stands* “*guilty*” or “*condemned*,” nevertheless. All his *past crimes* cry out for their penalty to be paid and justice to be satisfied. This cry is anchored in the very character and being of God, in His attribute of *justice* or *equity*.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:20-23

It is because of the sense of equity or justice that God has written deep within the human heart that we feel immediate moral outrage when the perpetrator of a crime is allowed to go unpunished. *Why* is it wrong for the rapist-murderer to receive only a ten-dollar fine? We cannot *prove* that he deserves more, but we *know* that he does. This inescapable knowledge within us is something more foundational and certain than any theoretical “proof.” It is something absolutely basic to the human constitution—a reflection of God’s very nature.

Much could be said about God’s attribute of justice, especially in this day when the very concept of justice seems to be almost lost in society at large. There are three basic reasons why a crime should be punished: First, for the satisfaction of justice (i.e., because crimes *deserve* to be punished and *ought* to be punished); second, for the good of society (i.e., for the prevention of further crime); and third, for the good of the offender (i.e., to cause him to change his ways). Of these three, the satisfaction of justice is primary and foundational to the other two. If the punishment for a crime is not itself *just* and *deserved*, it will neither deter future crime nor reform the offender.

In our day, the primary and foundational reason for punishment—the satisfaction of justice—has been almost completely suppressed and denied. Only the second and third reasons remain, and these have been reversed in importance. The “reform” of the offender is now primary, and prisons are no longer called prisons, but “correctional facilities.” Even those who still believe that crime must be punished for the good of society maintain that murderers should be sentenced, not because they have murdered, but only in order to prevent future murders. Such a philosophy is wicked and false, and is based on the lie that men and women are not truly responsible for their actions.

It is not difficult to understand how this state of affairs has come about. Because men want to be God themselves,<sup>1</sup> they hate the thought of a sovereign Lawgiver to whom they must give an account. They seek to suppress the inescapable knowledge of God that is around and within them,<sup>2</sup> and say instead that there is no God.<sup>3</sup> This denial of God’s existence makes it easier for them to

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:4-5 <sup>2</sup> Romans 1:18f. <sup>3</sup> Psalm 10:4; 14:1; 53:1

pretend that there is no such thing as right and wrong. Instead of being guilty sinners, men and women are viewed as helpless victims of their circumstances. In such a setting, punishment in order to satisfy justice becomes unthinkable. Man is free to do as he pleases and answers to no one.

But no matter how much men may try to suppress it, there is still an indelible knowledge in the human heart that *right* and *wrong* are real,<sup>1</sup> that men are *responsible* for their wrongdoing, and that sin *deserves* to be punished.<sup>2</sup> Deep down, all men know that the scales of justice *must* be balanced at last.<sup>3</sup> If you are not a Christian and are reading these lines, the scales of justice are very *unbalanced* in your life even now, and you can be *certain*—on the basis of God’s very being and just character—that if you continue in your present condition, He will never rest or relent *until you are in hell*. The whole moral fabric of the universe would collapse if He *did not* put you in hell.

It is in this context that the Bible speaks of the “wrath of God.” God’s wrath is not a temporary loss of self-control or a selfish fit of emotion. It is His holy, white-hot hatred of sin, the reaction and revulsion of His holy nature against all that is evil. God’s wrath is tied in directly with His justice. It has to do with His righteous determination to punish every sin, to balance the scales of justice, and to make every wrong right. That is why the wrath of God “abides on” every unbeliever.<sup>4</sup> The more men persist in sin, the more they are “storing up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”<sup>5</sup> God’s wrath *will* eventually be “poured out”; He is a righteous judge and *will not* allow sin to go unpunished forever.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 2:14-16 <sup>2</sup> Romans 1:32 <sup>3</sup> Acts 28:4 <sup>4</sup> John 3:36 <sup>5</sup> Romans 2:5

# Can A Man Be Right Before God?

It is here that we encounter the greatest single obstacle to human salvation imaginable: *How can an absolutely just and righteous Judge ever justify (declare righteous) an absolutely guilty and condemned criminal?* How can any human being escape the damnation of hell? We are told by God Himself that “He who *justifies the wicked*, and he who *condemns the righteous*, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Suppose a father comes home to find his family murdered. After an agonizing chase, he is able to apprehend the murderer. When the criminal finally appears before the judge, he is found to be unquestionably guilty of the crime. But when the time of sentencing comes, the judge makes the following declaration: “This man has committed a horrible crime, but I am a very loving judge and choose to declare him not guilty. In fact, I declare him to be righteous in the sight of the law!” Such a judge would rightly be considered as great a criminal as the offender! He has “justified the wicked” and is “an abomination to the Lord.”

But if this is true even of human justice, how much more is it true of God’s justice? How can the defiled and guilty sons of Adam ever hope to stand before God, the righteous Judge of the universe? How can God ever “justify the ungodly” without becoming an abomination to Himself? “He who says to the wicked, ‘You are righteous,’ peoples will curse him, nations will abhor him.”<sup>2</sup> How can God say to sinners like us, “You are righteous,” without violating His own character? How can God ever save us from *Himself* and His own righteousness and justice?

This dilemma has created untold misery for every guilt-sensitive soul. It was a terrible problem for the patriarch Job. “How can a man be *in the right* before God? If one wished to dispute with Him, he could not answer Him once in a thousand times.”<sup>3</sup> “What is man, that he should be pure, or he who is born of a woman, that he should be *righteous*? Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones,

<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 17:15   <sup>2</sup> Proverbs 24:24   <sup>3</sup> Job 9:2-3

and the heavens are not pure in His sight; how much less one who is detestable and corrupt, man, who drinks iniquity like water!”<sup>1</sup> “How then can a *man* be just with *God*? Or how can he be clean who is born of woman? If even the moon has no brightness, and the stars are not pure in His sight, how much less man, that maggot, and the son of man, that worm!”<sup>2</sup>

No one feels the force of this dilemma more than the repentant sinner. He knows that he *deserves* to go to hell. In the realm of human government, criminals have often actually turned themselves over to the authorities for justice to be done, rather than live with their unbearable sense of guilt any longer! Repentant sinners know that they *deserve* to be punished, and that it would not be *right* for them not to be. They know that God *cannot* just “sweep their sins under the rug” and forget about them. Hence, the cry of their hearts is, “How can a just God ever smile upon *me*? How can this *burden of guilt* be removed? How can God pronounce a *blessing* upon *me*? How can a man like *me* be *in the right* before God!”

## Imputation

There is only one answer to this dilemma. Someone has to *pay* for the sinner’s sins. Justice must be satisfied. Either it will be satisfied by the sinner’s own suffering forever in hell, or it must be satisfied by someone else on the sinner’s behalf.

Wonder of wonders! That “Someone” has come! The Lord Jesus Christ “*bore our sins* in His body on the cross.”<sup>3</sup> “Surely *our* griefs He Himself bore, and *our* sorrows He carried. He was pierced through for *our* transgressions; He was crushed for *our* iniquities. The chastening for *our* well-being fell upon Him, and by *His* scourging we are healed.”<sup>4</sup>

How does this great transaction take place? To understand it, we have to consider the little word “impute.” It is variously translated “reckon,” “count,” “consider,” and “impute.” We can get a feel for what it means by looking at a passage in Paul’s letter to Philemon regarding the return of his slave, Onesimus: “If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.”<sup>5</sup> Here Paul instructs Philemon to “charge to his account” [lit.

“impute”] any debt that Onesimus might owe Philemon. This was not really Paul’s debt, but Paul willingly *took it as his debt*, and it was charged to his account!

Now, this very same word and its associates are used with regard to *sin*. For example, the Bible says that “sin is not *imputed* (“charged to our account”) when there is no law.”<sup>1</sup> Again, in Romans 4, Paul says, “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits (“imputes”) righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account (“impute”).’”<sup>2</sup> Glorious transaction! Our sins are *not* imputed to *us*, because they *have* been imputed to *Christ*, and *accepting them as if they were His own debt*, He has paid them in full!

We see the very same reality in the Old Testament concept of “bearing sin.” On the great Day of Atonement, two goats were sacrificed—one shed its blood to atone for sins,<sup>3</sup> and the other (live) goat bore these sins away to a solitary place<sup>4</sup>: “Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the Lord fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat.”<sup>5</sup> Here God uses two goats to teach us one truth concerning the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the one hand, He *dies for our sins*, and on the other hand—as a result of that death—He *effectually carries our sins away* from the presence of God.

Notice the glorious reality of imputation presented here! “Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall *lay them on the head* of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. The goat shall *bear on itself all their iniquities* to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.”<sup>6</sup> The question for each of us to ask ourselves is this:

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:13 <sup>2</sup> Romans 4:5-8 <sup>3</sup> Leviticus 16:16 <sup>4</sup> Leviticus 16:22

<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 16:9-10 <sup>6</sup> Leviticus 16:21-22

<sup>1</sup> Job 15:14-16 <sup>2</sup> Job 25:4-6 <sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:24 <sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:4-5 <sup>5</sup> Philemon 17-18

“Have I ever laid the hand of faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ and given my sins to Him to carry into a solitary land?”

*Not all the blood of beasts,  
On Jewish altars slain,  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heavenly Lamb,  
Takes all our sins away,  
A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they.*

*My faith would lay her hand  
On that dear head of Thine,  
While like a penitent I stand,  
And there confess my sin.*

Isaac Watts

A substitute has died in our place! “All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. But the Lord has caused *the iniquity of us all* to fall on Him.”<sup>1</sup> That is how a just God can *justify* lifelong criminals in His heavenly courtroom. He opens our ledger and sees that our debt has been imputed to His beloved Son. Moreover, He sees that the debt has actually been *paid in full* by Him. Hallelujah! God, in His great love,<sup>2</sup> has made a way to save us from Himself and His own justice! He has done so by giving His only begotten Son to die in our place.

## The Heart of the Gospel

These realities are at the very heart of the gospel. They are expounded by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:21-26, a somewhat complex passage that is made clear once we understand the meaning of imputation discussed above:

*“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all*

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:6 <sup>2</sup> John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10

*those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*

Here Paul declares that Christ died to pay our sin debt so that God could “justify” sinners and at the same time remain “just” Himself. Throughout the Old Testament, sins were merely “passed over,” the payment of their guilt being rolled forward year after year until the Lamb should come whose death could truly take them away.<sup>1</sup> All during this time, it appeared that God was being unrighteous, since He justified men (like Abraham and David) without justice being truly satisfied. Therefore it was necessary that Christ should die “publicly,” openly demonstrating God’s righteousness for all to see, by making full satisfaction for sin on the cross. In this sense, Christ died, not only to justify men, but to justify God! His death on the cross vindicated and demonstrated the absolute justice of God in justifying His people. As a “propitiation” (i.e., a wrath-removing sacrifice) for our sins, Christ turns away God’s judicial wrath from us. We are “justified as a gift” (justification is absolutely *free* to us), “through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (justification is very *costly* to God). We are justified by receiving the “gift of righteousness,”<sup>2</sup> “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

Are you still carrying the burden of sin and guilt? Are you still under the wrath of God? “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”<sup>4</sup> There is a “fountain for sin and impurity.”<sup>5</sup> “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son cleanses us from all sin.”<sup>6</sup> No matter how great your sins may be, they are nothing compared to the infinite worth of Christ’s blood!<sup>7</sup> “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”<sup>8</sup> Come to Him! He invites and

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 9:15 <sup>2</sup> Romans 5:17 <sup>3</sup> Romans 3:22 <sup>4</sup> John 1:29 <sup>5</sup> Zechariah 13:1  
<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:7 <sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:18-19; Acts 20:28 <sup>8</sup> Romans 5:20

## JUSTIFICATION AND REGENERATION

commands you to come; you need not fear that you are being presumptuous by coming: “And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”<sup>1</sup> Come to Him! *Take* the water of life! Cast your sins upon Him and trust Him as your sin-bearer. “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 22:17; Matthew 11:28 <sup>2</sup> Acts 16:31

# Justification

## Its Characteristics

*“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”*  
Isaiah 53:4-6

We have seen that man’s greatest problem is *sin*. But that sin problem has two aspects: The first is internal—man has a bad heart. The second is external—man has a bad record. To say this another way: For every non-Christian, sin both *defiles* him (this has to do with *who he is*) and *condemns* him (this has to do with *what he has done*). On the one hand, sin’s *power* is reigning within him; on the other hand, sin’s *penalty* is crying out for his death. And even if he were not *helpless* to free himself from sin’s power, he would still be *hopeless* because of sin’s penalty. It is only when a man comes to see these terrible realities that the name “Jesus” means something to him. “You shall call His name *Jesus* [“Jehovah is salvation”], for it is He who will *save* His people from their sins.”<sup>1</sup> The Lord Jesus Christ saves His people *from* their sins—both the *penalty* of their sins and the *power* of their sins. He does the former in justification and the latter in regeneration.

In Chapter Two we began to consider justification: How can a man be “in the right” before God? This is the dilemma that has tormented men down through history. It caused Martin Luther to crawl on his knees up the steps of the so-called *Scala Sancta* in Rome, and induced monks to wear hair shirts embedded with fishhooks in an attempt to pay for their sins. To this day, it causes natives of the South Sea Islands to sacrifice chickens and sprinkle

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:21

their blood to the gods. In more “civilized” countries, many settle for “going to church” or some other form of “good deeds” to placate their guilty consciences. And everywhere men try to “justify” themselves by rationalizing or excusing their evil actions.

*How can a man be right with God?* There is only one answer: A man can be right with God *only* through the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ on his behalf. “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross.”<sup>1</sup> “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”<sup>2</sup> Christ alone can make us right with God.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, we will consider seven truths that are taught in the Scriptures regarding this great theme.

### Justification is Based on the Blood of Jesus

“Much more then, having now been *justified by His blood*, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”<sup>4</sup> “The *blood of Jesus* His Son cleanses us from all sin.”<sup>5</sup> What does it mean that justification is based on the blood of Jesus? It means that justification proceeds on the basis of a ransom paid; it proceeds on the basis of the satisfaction of justice. In other words, when God “justifies” a person, He is *not* looking at the person himself. Rather, He is looking at the *blood of Christ*. We are “justified by His blood”! God does not justify a man on the basis of anything in the man. In particular, it is not because the man is—in any way, shape, or form—*godly* that God justifies him. We are specifically told in Romans 4:5 that God “justifies the ungodly”! These are truly amazing and wonderful words. Do you feel unworthy of being justified? You are! Everything about you cries out instead for your damnation. Apart from the blood and righteousness of Christ, you have no hope.

There is nothing in man that causes God to justify him, *including his repentance and faith*. Repentance does not pay for sin. A criminal’s remorse for his crimes does not satisfy the just demands of the law. Neither does *faith* pay for sin! Only the blood of Jesus can pay for sin! Justification is based on the *blood of Christ*.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 2:24 <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21 <sup>3</sup> John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Acts 4:12  
<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:9 <sup>5</sup> 1 John 1:7

*Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save and Thou alone.*  
Augustus Toplady

This explains why a person can have a very weak faith and still be justified. Imagine two bridges crossing a chasm: One is very weak and untrustworthy; the other is very strong. A man may have a very *strong* faith in the *weak* bridge and confidently step out onto it. His strong faith will not keep him from plunging to his death. On the other hand, a man may have a very *weak* faith in the *strong* bridge and only barely manage with fear and trembling to venture forth upon it. *The bridge will hold him securely*, regardless of his weak faith. All that is necessary is for him to have enough faith to get him onto the bridge! When someone told Hudson Taylor that he must be a man of great faith, he replied, “No, I am a man of very little faith in a very great God.”

When the Death Angel passed through Egypt on the night of the Passover, God was looking for only one thing—the blood on the doorposts. “When I see *the blood*, I will pass over you.”<sup>1</sup> Those inside the house might have been full of fear and trembling, but it made no difference as long as the blood had been applied.

In his autobiography *Seen and Heard*, itinerant Scottish evangelist James McKendrick tells of the glorious conversion of George Mayes, known for miles around as the most outrageous sinner in his district. When McKendrick returned some time later to the area where Mayes lived, however, he found him in a troubled state of soul. “*I don’t seem to feel as I did*,” George lamented. “George,” said McKendrick, “if you had a shilling in your pocket and felt wonderfully happy, would the shilling be worth fifteen pence because you felt happy?” “*No*,” said George. “Well, how much would it be worth?” “*Just twelve pence*,” he answered. “And suppose, if you were miserable and had a shilling in your pocket, would it only be worth nine pence because you were miserable?”

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 12:13

Again George responded, “No.” “How much then?” asked McKendrick. “*Just twelve pence,*” said George. “Well, do you see your joy does not add to the value of the shilling, nor your misery take from its value, and that it is worth twelve pence no matter how you feel?” “*Yes, that is what I believe,*” George replied. “Then tell me—is it your happy feelings or the blood of Christ that puts your sins away?” “*Oh, it is the blood of Christ,*” George responded. “Then, don’t you see that when you are happy you are not more safe, and when unhappy you are not less safe? It is the blood of Christ that puts your sins away, and makes you safe, and keeps you safe all the year round,” McKendrick concluded. To this we can only say, “Hallelujah!”

*I hear the words of love,  
I gaze upon the blood,  
I see the mighty sacrifice,  
And I have peace with God.*

*'Tis everlasting peace!  
Sure as Jehovah’s name;  
'Tis stable as his steadfast throne,  
For evermore the same.*

*The clouds may go and come,  
And storms may sweep my sky—  
This blood-sealed friendship changes not;  
The cross is ever nigh.*

Horatius Bonar

Christian, are you looking *inside* for confidence? You will never have it! Even the massive anchors of ocean vessels will do no good if they are cast inside the hold. They must be cast outside of the ship! Cast your anchor on Jesus Christ! Put all your trust in Him! His righteousness alone is your confidence and your hope.

## To Justify Means to “Declare Righteous”

“To justify” means “to declare righteous”; it does not mean “to make righteous.” When God justifies us, He *declares* that something

is true about us “on the outside” (i.e., “objectively”); He declares that we are righteous (“right”) in the sight of His law. Justification does not make us good on the inside. (God *does* make us good on the inside, but that has to do with regeneration—the new man is “*created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*”<sup>1</sup>) Justification, by contrast, is a *statement* (a declaration) about our standing in the eyes of God’s law.

The fact that justification is a declaration concerning our standing is made clear by the fact that the opposite of “justify” is “condemn”: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?”<sup>2</sup> When a judge “condemns” a man, he does not change what the man is on the inside, but instead “brings a charge against him.” He declares him to be *guilty* in the eyes of the law. Likewise, when a judge “justifies” a man, he does not change what the man is on the inside, but declares him to be *right* in the eyes of the law.

## Justification has no Degrees or Gradations

A man is either 100% righteous, or he is condemned. If a murderer is charged with seven counts of murder and only convicted of one, he’s still a condemned man! Reader, if you have even *one sin* that you have to pay for yourself, you will be in hell forever! For the Christian, there is *no* condemnation. *None* whatsoever! “There is therefore now *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> If you belong to Christ, you are *100% justified* in Him; there is *zero* condemnation for you. And the righteousness that you have in the sight of God’s law is not just a good one; it’s the very righteousness of Christ; it’s the “righteousness of God!” “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”<sup>4</sup>

Justification has no degrees! O, Christian, lay hold of this truth! The devil will try to get you to think that you are at least *just a little bit* condemned in the sight of God’s law. You are not! Wonder of wonders! The apostle Paul knew God better than we do, but he was not *one bit* more justified than we are! Not even the *Lord Jesus*

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:24 <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:33-34 <sup>3</sup> Romans 8:1 <sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21

*Himself* was more justified than we are, for His very righteousness is ours! Our justification is *perfect and absolute*.

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress;  
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,  
With joy shall I lift up my head!*

*This spotless robe the same appears,  
When ruined nature sinks in years;  
No age can change its glorious hue,  
The robe of Christ is ever new.*

Nicholas von Zinzendorf

## Justification is More than Pardon

In many governments the president or governor has the power to *pardon* criminals. This is known as “executive clemency.” Presidents have been known to pardon former Presidents, and state governors have been known to pardon all the criminals on death row as their last act in office. Some questions arise: “When these men were pardoned, *were their crimes paid for?*” The answer is, No! “*Was the threatened sentence of the law carried out?*” Again, No! “*Was justice satisfied?*” No! All these negatives flow from the fact that pardon does not proceed on the basis of a payment for sin. Pardon lets the criminal “off the hook,” so to speak. The sentence of the law is never carried out. *Pardon is an act of authority by a governor.*

By contrast, *justification is a declaration by a judge*, and it proceeds on the basis of justice. Christian, when God justifies you, He does not “let you off the hook” with your sins still hanging in midair. He does not *pretend* that your sins have been paid for. Rather, He *sees* that your sins *really have* been paid for by Christ, and He makes a *declaration* based on that fact. He makes a declaration about the way things *really are*. If this were not true, there is no way that any believer could lift up his head. Think of Carol Everett, a former abortion mill operator responsible for tens of thousands of deaths. Think of David Berkowitz, the former “Son of Sam” serial killer, now a believer in Christ. Think of yourself!

The only way a repentant sinner can *hold up his head* is for him to know that his sins have actually been paid for! If he thought that

he had only been “let off the hook,” the repentant sinner would rather satisfy justice in hell than live with the guilt of his past crimes. Beloved Christian, you may have some terrible memories in your sinful past, but you can be certain of this: those sins are not still hanging in midair. *They’ve come down...* on the Lord Jesus Christ!<sup>1</sup> And He has *actually* paid for them! He *bore* your sins in His own body on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

## Justification is both Positive and Negative

Justification is both positive and negative. We see this truth clearly set forth in Romans 4:6-8:

*“Just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.’”*

First of all, there is a *negative* side to justification: God “does not impute” our sins to us. Our sins have been “covered,” and He does not “take them into account.” (v.7-8) God can do this only because our sin debt was imputed to Christ and paid for by Him. We learn from the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ that sin can (in some ways) rightly be compared to a monetary debt: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”<sup>3</sup> Each of us owes a *very* great debt to the justice of God. How great is this debt? In Matthew chapter eighteen, Jesus tells a parable comparing our debt toward God to that of a man who owed ten thousand talents to his king. This is equivalent to *164,000 years* of work for a common laborer, without taking off any Sundays or holidays! Our debt to God’s justice is truly *very* great, but Christ pays that debt for His people on the cross. This takes us back to zero; we owe no debts, but at the same time, we have no money in the bank.

But there is also a *positive* side to justification: God places His “blessing” upon us by “crediting righteousness” to us. (v.6) In other words, Christ not only pays our debt; He also puts a vast fortune in the bank for us. By His perfect obedience as a man, He works

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 53:6 <sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:24 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:12

out a positive righteousness in the eyes of God which is laid to our account. Christ took His place as the “last Adam”<sup>1</sup> and succeeded precisely where the first Adam failed: “For as through the one man’s *disobedience* the many were made sinners, even so through the *obedience* of the One the many will be made righteous.”<sup>2</sup>

To understand the meaning of this, we must remember that the Law has both a positive and negative side. On the one hand, the law threatens that “the soul who sins will die.”<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, the law promises that “he that *does* those things shall *live* by them.”<sup>4</sup> This promise of “life” had a *temporal* application to the Jews—as long as they obeyed the outward precepts of the Law of Moses, they would “live” in the land that God had given them. But the promise also has a deeper meaning—it has to do with, not only “life in the land,” but *eternal* life. The Lord Jesus made this clear on more than one occasion: “And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit *eternal life*?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?’ And he answered and said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; *do this, and you will live.*’”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, when the “rich young ruler” asked Jesus, “What good thing shall I *do* that I may *obtain* eternal life?” His reply was, “If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”<sup>6</sup> This means that those who perfectly keep the law can *earn* or *merit* eternal life by working out their own righteousness in the eyes of the law.<sup>7</sup> “For Moses writes that the man who *practices* the righteousness which is based on law shall *live* by that righteousness.”<sup>8</sup> Only one person in human history has ever done this; all others have failed miserably. The Lord Jesus Christ alone has “fulfilled all righteousness.”<sup>9</sup> He not only paid for our sins; He lived a life of perfect righteousness which is credited to us, and having received the “gift” of His *righteousness*, we are entitled to *life*!<sup>10</sup> Not only did the curse due *us* fall on Him, but the blessing due *Him* fell on us.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:45 <sup>2</sup> Romans 5:19 <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 18:4 <sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:12; Leviticus 18:4

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:25-28 (Compare Leviticus 18:4) <sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:16-17 <sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:9

<sup>8</sup> Romans 10:5 <sup>9</sup> Matthew 3:15 <sup>10</sup> Romans 5:17

Paul expresses both the positive and negative results of justification in Romans 5:1-2: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, *we have peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ...and *we exult in hope of the glory of God.*” The first result of justification is negative: We are no longer under a curse. *We have peace with God*—not just peace from our side, but peace from God’s side. When a criminal drops his handgun and surrenders, the policeman pursuing him does not do the same. He keeps his weapon trained upon the guilty party until he is safely incarcerated and justice is eventually satisfied. Only then does he put down his weapon. The glory of justification is that *God* is no longer our enemy—the demands of justice have been met, our sins have been paid for, and God has now “put down His gun” with respect to us. *He* is at peace with us!

The second result of justification is positive: *We can exult right now in hope* (confident expectation) *of the glory of God* (heaven). Not only are we no longer under a curse; we *have* eternal life—right now. Eternal life is not something we *may* have some day, but a present possession. “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has* eternal life, and *does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*”<sup>1</sup> Glory to God! The blessing *earned* by Christ has been *given* to us.

## Justification is Once for All

“*Having been* justified by faith, we have peace with God.”<sup>2</sup> Justification is a once-for-all, past completed event with results that last forever. A man is not first justified, then condemned, then justified all over again. Justification is once for all time. This means that *justification puts us in a new standing, status, or position with God.* “*Having been justified...*we have obtained our introduction by faith *into this grace in which we stand.*”<sup>3</sup> Christians have an entirely new standing, and that standing is *in grace*.

The wonder of *once-for-all justification* and our new standing in grace may be illustrated as follows: Suppose a Christian husband gets up in the morning and is somewhat unkind to his wife, but does not realize his sin until later in the day. When he realizes what

<sup>1</sup> John 5:24 <sup>2</sup> Romans 5:1 <sup>3</sup> Romans 5:1-2

he has done, he asks God's forgiveness and his wife's forgiveness. His earlier action was truly a *sin*, though he was not fully conscious of it at the time. Now suppose further that this man had died before realizing and confessing his sin. Would he have gone to hell? Certainly not! His first words of confession upon realizing his sin show that his standing with God all along has been one of *sonship*: "Father, forgive me for my unkindness." Many agree with this analysis, but few have stopped to realize what it means. It means that the Christian *remains in a justified state*, even during the time that elapses between committing a sin and confessing that sin! In other words, the *sin is not imputed* to him during the time between its commission and its confession.

The case can be made even more strongly: Suppose this same Christian husband gets up in the morning, has an argument with his wife, and *knows* that he has been unkind to her. Instead of confessing his sin, he goes off to work in a huff. All morning he is miserable. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, he bows his head and asks God's forgiveness, then calls his wife and asks her forgiveness. Suppose this man had died before confessing his sin. Would he have gone to hell? Again, the answer is "Certainly not!" After all, why was he miserable all morning, if not for the fact that he *remained a child of God* with a renewed heart *throughout* the time of his rebellion?

To say this, is just to say that the true Christian *remains in a justified state* at all times. Why? Because he has a whole new standing with God. The Christian is no longer a criminal under the wrath of God; he is a son under the care of a loving Father.<sup>1</sup> As it is with any loving father, God sometimes has to chasten His children, but *chastening* is altogether different than judicial *punishment*. Strictly speaking, punishment is suffering inflicted for the satisfaction of justice. Chastening, on the other hand, is suffering inflicted for the good of the offender. There is a vast difference between the two!

*Justification is once for all.* If this were not true, we would all lose our salvation every time we committed even one sin, and we would be exposed to eternal condemnation until we came to the point of confessing that sin and being justified (and converted) all over again! This is not the nature of justification, or of the Christian life.

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 4:4-7

The once-for-all nature of justification is clearly illustrated by the writer to the Hebrews:

*"For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."*<sup>1</sup>

Notice the argument put forward here: "We know the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins, because they were offered over and over every year." Someone might respond by saying, "What does that prove? They had to be offered every year because new sins were committed every year. Each year's sins brought new condemnation." But according to Hebrews, such a response betrays a misunderstanding of the true nature of justification. When the worshiper has "once been cleansed," there is no more "consciousness of sins." When the blood of Christ is applied, we are "perfected for all time"! "For by one offering He has *perfected for all time* those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us...saying, '*their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*'"<sup>2</sup> In other words, the New Covenant promise that God will "remember our sins no more" means that *the whole category of "sins" is gone forever from God's sight*, as far as the law and satisfaction of justice are concerned. Believers have been "made perfect" as to their consciences<sup>3</sup> and are no longer to have "consciousness of sin"<sup>4</sup> with regard to the wrath of God! In this sense, there is "no more reminder of sin"<sup>5</sup> in the New Covenant. "Now where there is *forgiveness* of these things, there is *no longer any offering* for sin."<sup>6</sup> "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all.*"<sup>7</sup>

What does all this mean in daily life? It means that, as a Christian, I can get up in the morning and know that I am *accepted*

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:1-4 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 10:14-17 <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 9:9, 13-14 <sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:1-2  
<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 10:3 <sup>6</sup> Hebrews 10:18 <sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:10

in Christ. God *delights* in me as His child, and the guilt of my sins is gone forever. If I commit a sin, I am “conscious” of my sin as a *child*, not as a *convicted felon*, and I confess my sin to God as a son confesses to his Father, not as a criminal confesses to a judge. I come with *confidence* into the holy place *by the blood of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”<sup>2</sup>

### Justification is Received by Faith

“Having been justified *by faith*, we have peace with God.”<sup>3</sup> The blood of Christ is the *ground* of justification, but faith is the *instrument* or channel by which we receive the “gift of righteousness.”<sup>4</sup> “*What must I do to be saved? Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved.*”<sup>5</sup>

What is faith? Faith is not some *force* or *power* that we wield that reaches out and accomplishes things. Neither does anyone “turn his faith loose,” though some false teachers exhort us to do so. Faith is just the opposite of such misconceptions. Justifying faith is not “doing” something; rather, it is *giving up on doing anything* and simply falling on the mercy of God. This is illustrated in the testimony of one sister who went through a great struggle before finding rest in Christ. Aware of her lost condition and trying to do everything she could to keep herself from going to hell, she found herself losing ground: “I felt as if I were hanging on the edge of a precipice by my fingertips. Below me was hell. I didn’t want to go to hell and had worked myself to exhaustion trying to keep from going to hell. Finally, I could hold on no longer. *I let go and fell...right into the loving arms of Jesus.*” That’s faith!

Notice also, we are not saved by *faith in general*; we’re saved by *faith in Christ*. Some people trust in a past “decision,” but a “decision” will not pay for our sins! Some trust in baptism, a past emotional experience, or even their supposed “faith.” One elderly man who gave no evidence of true conversion, when asked if he was ever bothered by the thought of eternity, answered, “No, I’m

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:19-22 <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:33-35 <sup>3</sup> Romans 5:1 <sup>4</sup> Romans 5:17

<sup>5</sup> Acts 16:30-31

not bothered at all, because the Bible says if you have faith you’ll be saved, and *I have plenty of faith.*” In what was this man trusting? Not in Christ or His blood, but in his own “faith.” The trust of a Christian is entirely different. If suddenly the floor were to drop out from under all of us at this moment, every true Christian would cry out “Lord Jesus!” None would cry out “My faith!”

Faith is the eye that cannot look at itself. Faith is occupied with its object, and that object is the Lord Jesus Christ. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever *believes* may in Him have eternal life.”<sup>1</sup> Here Jesus tells us that the serpent on the pole was actually a foreshadowing of Himself on the cross. How were people saved in relation to the serpent? “Everyone who is bitten, *when he looks at it, he shall live.*”<sup>2</sup> What is it to believe? To believe is to “look”! Look and live! Fix all your trust on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

*‘Look and live,’ my brother, live,*

*Look to Jesus now and live!*

*’Tis recorded in His Word, Hallelujah!*

*It is only that you ‘look and live.’*

W. A. Ogden

<sup>1</sup> John 3:14-15 <sup>2</sup> Numbers 21:8

# Regeneration

## All Things New

We have seen that sin is the ultimate and only problem of humanity, and that man's problem with sin has two aspects, one internal and the other external: Not only does every fallen son of Adam have a *bad heart*; he also has a *bad record* in the eyes of God's law. Sin both *defiles* him and *condemns* him; its *power* rules within him, and its *penalty* rests upon him. Man is both *helpless* and *hopeless*—his plight is truly *impossible*. Into this situation of darkness and despair a great light has shone.<sup>1</sup> *Jesus* has come. He can and will *save His people*<sup>2</sup> from both the penalty and power of their sins. He does the former in *justification*; He does the latter in *regeneration*.

In the second and third chapters we have considered the great Bible doctrine of justification. We will now take up the subject of regeneration. Justification takes place in *heaven*, in the courtroom of God. Regeneration, on the other hand, takes place on *earth*, in the heart of man. Justification is a *declaration* by a Judge; regeneration is an *act of creation* by an omnipotent Creator.

### A Parable from the University

At every college and university, students study hard to get an "A" at the end of the course. When I was a student, I did the same thing. But I had one class that was different. It was a senior level course taken only by physics and chemistry majors, and there were only four or five students in the class. The first day of lectures, our teacher surprised us with the following announcement: "You don't have to worry about your grade in this course—you all have an 'A.' Now we can just settle down and enjoy the material."

Now, this is exactly what God does in justification. God gives us an "A" at the beginning of the Christian life! We do not labor to merit eternal life at the end of our course; we *have* eternal life.<sup>3</sup> We exult *right now* that in just a few more heartbeats, we will be in heaven!<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:16   <sup>2</sup> Matthew 1:21   <sup>3</sup> John 5:24   <sup>4</sup> Romans 5:2

Lost religious men have two basic responses to this doctrine. On the one hand, the *legalist* hates it. This self-righteous Pharisee only does “good works” because he is trying to get an “A” at the end of his life. If he could, he would *like* to live in sin, and he resents the fact that he does not get to. His objection is: “If God gives men eternal life at the beginning of the Christian life, what will keep them from continuing in sin? If He gives men an ‘A’ at the beginning of the course, no one will study the material.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the *lawless* religious man *likes* the doctrine of justification by faith. “Well, I’ve already got my ‘A’! Now I can throw my book in the trash, ignore the teacher, and go do my own thing.” Such men “turn the *grace* of God into *licentiousness*.”<sup>2</sup> They view “free grace” as a “license to sin.” In this day of “easy-believism,” churches across the nation are filled with just such unconverted people—lost men who like to think of themselves as “carnal Christians.”

What is wrong with the reasoning of both the legalist and the libertine? Does God give us an “A” at the beginning of our course, just to make it possible for us to skip class and still get a top grade? Does He pay for the criminal’s crimes *legally* in justification, just so that criminal can *continue* to murder, rape, and pillage, only now with immunity from punishment? Absolutely not! What does God do? *At the very same time that He gives us an “A” at the beginning of our course, He also changes us on the inside so that we will love to study the material!* In other words, when God justifies a man, He also regenerates him. Regeneration is inseparable from justification, and justification *never* occurs without it. And this is Paul’s answer, both to the Jewish legalists who claimed that his teaching would lead men to “continue in sin,” and to the libertines who wanted to use his teaching as an opportunity for licentiousness: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! *How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*”<sup>3</sup> According to Paul, every Christian has undergone a radical transformation that makes it impossible for him to continue in sin. This transformation takes place in regeneration. True “grace” always “instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.”<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:1 <sup>2</sup> Jude 4 <sup>3</sup> Romans 6:1-2 <sup>4</sup> Titus 2:11-12

invariable mark of any man who has found genuine peace with God is that he immediately begins a lifelong quest to know and follow the God he now loves.<sup>1</sup> (The man with false peace, on the other hand, turns back to his own selfish interests as soon as he feels safe from the danger of hell.) The true Christian will never use grace as a “license to sin”; *he already sins more than he wants to!*

Christians do good works, then, not because they are seeking to merit an “A” from God, but because they have been given new hearts that love to “study the material.” This provokes some searching questions: Do I read the Bible and pray because I *have* to? Do I feel cheated that I cannot pursue sin like the rest of the world? Is there anything in me that just *loves* God for who He is and *loves* goodness for what it is? Is there any *delight* in the things of God? The answers to such questions will tell us much about the state of our souls.

## Biblical Representations of Regeneration

The Bible has a great deal to say about regeneration. In the following pages we will examine nine Biblical representations of this great miracle. (Two others are summarized briefly in Appendix A.) Each views the same glorious reality from a different angle, while illuminating different facets of it. As we consider the various Scriptural depictions of regeneration, it is important for us to bear in mind that the invisible realm they describe is just as much a reality as the visible and temporal world that we see with our physical eyes. In fact, the invisible world may be said to be even *more real* than the visible world, since the things of the spiritual realm are permanent and eternal.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:10 <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18

## A New Creation

What is regeneration? According to the Bible, it is a *new creation*. When God regenerates a man, it is a miracle of the same order as when He created the universe!<sup>1</sup> In fact, *morally speaking*, it is a much greater miracle. Regeneration is a *creative* act of God.

### Every Christian is a New Creature

*“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God...”* 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

We see here that the Christian is described as a *new creature*. In other words, when God makes a Christian, He makes something new, *out of nothing*, that did not exist before! Moreover, regeneration *always* involves this creative miracle—“if *any* man,” *anywhere*, is in Christ, he is a new creature. There are *no* exceptions; if a man is not a new creature, He is not “in Christ”! This is not just a pleasant picture, but a *reality*: “The old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” “The old order has gone, and a new order has already begun.” (NEB) *Everything* is new for the Christian; he sees the world in a whole new light—even the gravel by the roadside and the beer cans in the ditches!

*Heaven above is softer blue,  
Earth around is sweeter green;  
Something lives in every hue  
Christless eyes have never seen.*

G. Wade Robinson

We have no part in bringing this miracle to pass. (A thing cannot create itself!) God does it all! “All these things are from God.” (v.18) What a mighty work this is! The Bible refers to it as a “creation” again and again.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6

## Created for Good Works

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* Ephesians 2:8-10

It is highly significant that when Paul thinks about salvation, our being “saved by grace through faith,” he thinks in terms of a creative work of God. Christians are specifically said to be God’s “created workmanship”! If our concept of salvation is just that a man “makes a decision”—steps out of the line of those on the way to hell and into the line of those on the way to heaven—we’ve got a very defective view of salvation. Christians have been “created in Christ Jesus”!

What is the nature of this creative work? First of all, it is “in Christ Jesus.” That is, it takes place in the sphere of *union with Christ*. This parallels what Paul has said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creature.” Secondly, it is “for good works.” The purpose of this creative work is to insure that good works will be its outcome. These works have been “prepared beforehand” for us to walk in, and all Christians do walk in them, because as new creatures they have been specially designed, crafted, and created by God to do so!

## The Church is a New Creation

*“That in Himself He might make [lit. “create”] the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.”* Ephesians 2:15

From this important passage, we learn that Paul uses the language of “creation” to describe the existence, not just of individual Christians, but of the church as a whole. The church is not an organization; it is a *created* organism—a living thing and a “new” thing. Christ has taken two totally divergent groups (Jew and Gentile) and “in Himself” *created* the two into “one new man”—the “body of Christ.” This living body is indwelt by a single spirit—the Holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup> and shares a common life—the very life of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 <sup>2</sup> John 15:4-5

Both the church as a whole (the entire body of Christ) and the church in its local manifestations (individual bodies of believers) are miraculous creations of God. No man can “start a church”; God must do the impossible and make *something* out of *nothing* for a church to exist. He does this by “creating” a number of individual Christians, made *one* by virtue of their common life.

*The Church’s one foundation  
is Jesus Christ her Lord:  
She is His new creation,  
by Spirit and the Word.  
From heaven He came and sought her,  
to be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her,  
and for her life He died.*

Samuel J. Stone

## Created in Righteousness and Holiness

*“That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*

*Ephesians 4:22-24*

According to Paul, not only is the church as a whole “one new man,” but each individual Christian is also a new man. The important thing to notice at this point is that this new man is again spoken of as having been *created*. What is he like? He has been created “in the likeness of God...in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” These are the characteristics of this “new creature”! Such descriptions should give us a feel for how *real* this creative work is: The new man has been created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness! Paul’s language here is not the language of poetic imagery, but the language of concrete reality! A parallel description of this creative work is found in Colossians 3:9-11:

*“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being*

*renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”*

We find again in this passage that the new self [lit. “man”] has been “created” *in God’s image*. Therefore, as those who “have put on the new man,” Christians are “*holy and beloved*” (v.12) in the sight of God. In answer to the question, “Who am I?” every Christian should respond, “I am a new creature, created in righteousness and holiness, holy and beloved in the sight of God.”

## Nothing Else Matters

*“For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”*  
*Galatians 6:15*

From all that has been said in the paragraphs above, it is not surprising that Paul considers the new creation to be of utmost importance. *Nothing matters except this creative work of God!* Neither circumcision, nor baptism, nor any other external human action or religious rite is “anything” if the new creation is absent. On the other hand, if God *has* made us new creatures, the *absence* of circumcision (“uncircumcision”) or baptism or any other religious rite is not “anything” either! The *only* thing that matters for any of us is this: “Am I a new creature, or am I still the same person that I have always been?” If I am the same person that I have always been, then I am *not* a Christian, and no amount of church attendance, liturgy, religious ceremony, “going forward at the invitation,” or “accepting Jesus” means *anything*. What is regeneration? It is a new creation! In short, it is a miracle, not a “decision,” or any kind of human act whatsoever.

## A New Man

*“That...He might create the two into one new man...”*

*Ephesians 2:15*

*“That...you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”*

*Ephesians 4:22-24*

*“Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old man with its evil practices, and have put on the new man who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.”*

*Colossians 3:9-11*

As we saw in Chapter Five, each of the passages quoted above is very significant in describing regeneration as a creative act of God. But another facet of regeneration is also made clear in these verses: Regeneration is the creation of *a new man*.

Not only is the church as a whole “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15), but each individual Christian is also a new man! It is very important to realize that in Paul’s view the Christian is not *both* an “old man” and a “new man.” Nor does he have a new man “living inside” of him. Nor does he have *both* an old man and a new man living inside of him. The Christian *is* a new man.

One popular illustration of Christian experience speaks of the believer as having both a “black dog” and a “white dog” living within. These dogs are continually fighting with each other, and “the one that we feed the most is the one that wins.” Such a view may be sincere, but it is based on a very defective theology. The Christian does not merely *have* something new within him that he never had before; he *is* someone who he never was before. The Christian *is* a new man.

## “It is not I!”

This is well illustrated by an account that is told concerning Augustine of Hippo, who before his conversion had followed an ungodly lifestyle. After his conversion, he was seen by one of his old girlfriends, who called out to get his attention, “Augustine, Augustine, it is I.” “Yes,” replied Augustine gravely, “*but it is not I!*” This should be the confession of every Christian.

At conversion, every Christian takes on a new identity. Saul becomes Paul; Simon becomes Peter. One of the first challenges a new believer faces upon returning to his family and former acquaintances is that everyone insists upon calling him by his old name: “Hello, Simon.” The new convert must then take a stand on the miracle that has transpired in his life and explain, “I no longer love the things I once loved; I no longer do the things I once did. I am no longer Simon; I am Peter. I have become a new man!”

## Be Who You Are

The Christian *is* a new man. That is his essential identity. And because he *is* a new man, he is called upon to *live* like a new man. Since the old man has already been “laid aside” and the new man “put on,”<sup>1</sup> he is exhorted to *believe* this fact (to be “renewed in the spirit of his mind”<sup>2</sup>) and to *live* accordingly by “laying aside the old man” (i.e., his *deeds*—“your former manner of life”<sup>3</sup>) and by putting on (in practice) “the new man, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”<sup>4</sup> This is the New Testament method of teaching growth in grace: “*Realize who you really are, and then be who you are.*” The call to believers is not, “Try to be who you are not,” as many Christians suppose, but rather, “Be who you are!”

Christian, it matters a great deal how you view yourself as a believer. If you are convinced that you are still essentially *evil* now that you have become a Christian, then you have ahead of you the lifelong prospect of vainly *striving to be something that you are not* as you attempt to live the Christian life. On the other hand, if you are convinced that in the very core of your being you are *both good and evil*, then evil still has a legitimate place in your heart and life. In your innermost being, you *really do* want evil, and to say “Yes” to

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:9-10 <sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:23 <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 4:22 <sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:22, 24

it is, in some real sense, to say “Yes” to your deepest desires. Neither of these views is Biblical. The essential truth about every Christian is that he is a new man. At the very center of his being he has been “created in righteousness and holiness.”<sup>1</sup> When he says “No” to sin, he is saying “Yes” to his true self.

## The Flesh

The *ultimate* reality for every Christian is that he is a new man, but it is not the *only* reality. Though the Christian has become a new person in his innermost being, he has not yet been *totally* redeemed. Sin still tries to “reign” in his “mortal body.”<sup>2</sup> This more superficial aspect of the Christian’s personality is referred to in the New Testament as “the flesh,” and will be discussed in later chapters. Suffice it to say at this point that the flesh does not represent who the Christian “really is,” and that the power of the flesh to rule over the Christian has been broken.<sup>3</sup> When our mortal bodies are finally “redeemed,”<sup>4</sup> every trace of sin’s remnants will be gone forever, and we will at last perfectly “become who we really are.”

## A New Identity

The truth of the Christian’s new identity, in spite of the remnants of remaining sin, has been illustrated in terms of a newly purchased factory. Suppose that a poison gas factory is bought by an oxygen company for the purpose of producing life-giving oxygen. As soon as the ownership of the factory passes into new hands, its identity changes. The new owners place a sign in front, “Oxygen Factory.” In the president’s office, a new director sits at the desk. The old president and new president do not share the office, struggling with one another to control the company. The old president is gone. In fact, the old *factory* is gone. An oxygen factory has taken its place, even though it may take a while before all the old equipment can be switched over to fully function in its new capacity!

At the moment of regeneration, every Christian is made radically “new” at the very center of his being. God places a sign in front of his life, “Saint.”<sup>5</sup> It is only a matter of time before this essential and central transformation works itself out in every facet

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:24 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:12 <sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:16; Romans 6:6-7 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:23  
<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:3

of the believer's experience. An incident from the life of New York City gang member, Nicky Cruz, illustrates the wonder of this miracle. Notorious for his lust for blood and violence, Nicky's life was suddenly touched by God. Standing in front of his mirror a few hours after his conversion—his revolver and knife still in his possession— Nicky looked at himself and said, "So Nicky's going to be an angel now!" So it is with every Christian! Once the "new man" has been created, it is only a matter of time before the "guns and knives" of sin that are still attached to our lives must inevitably fall away. Hallelujah!

# A New Heart

Whereas justification is an *authoritative declaration* by a Righteous Judge, regeneration is a *powerful creative act* by an Almighty Creator. This creative act is described in the Bible in terms of different realities, each of which brings out different facets of what regeneration is. We have already noted that regeneration is portrayed in Scripture as both *a new creation* and *a new man*. It is also described in a third way; it is described as the giving of *a new heart*.

## The Promise of a New Heart

*“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances...so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness... Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. I am not doing this for your sake,’ declares the Lord God...”* Ezekiel 36:25-32

One of the most wonderful promises of the gospel is the promise of “a new heart and a new spirit.” (v.26) This is something that God “gives” (v.26), and He gives it to every Christian. In Genesis 6:5, we are told that “the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and...every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Again, it is said that “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”<sup>1</sup> In another place we are told that “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?”<sup>2</sup> *Such things are not true of the heart of a Christian!*

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 8:21    <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 17:9

The Christian has been given a new heart. He has become “pure in heart,”<sup>1</sup> “an Israelite *indeed*, in whom is *no guile*.”<sup>2</sup> Such statements cannot be made about those whose hearts are “more deceitful than all else and desperately sick”! Lest any should suppose that the believer has *both* an old heart and a new heart, God specifically says, “*I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*” (v.26) Instead of a hard, cold, unfeeling heart, the Christian is given a soft, warm, living heart that is sensitive to the things of God.

### *All Christians Live Changed Lives*

In connection with this giving of a new heart, God also promises to “put His Spirit within us” and to “cause us to walk in His statutes.” (v.27) The certain result of this inner working of the Holy Spirit is that every Christian “will be careful to observe God’s ordinances (commandments).” (v.27) This means that it is *absolutely impossible* to have a new heart and yet continue to live in sin.

In our day it is not uncommon to hear statements like this: “*That person is a Christian, but he’s lived his life in disobedience to God.*” Impossible! “I will put My Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and you *will* be careful to observe My ordinances.”

“*That person has been a Christian for many years, but he’s never grown.*” Unthinkable! “I will cleanse you from *all* your filthiness and from *all* your idols...I will save you from *all* your uncleanness.” When God “begins a good work in us,”<sup>3</sup> He will never rest until *every* idol comes down and all filthiness is cleansed from our lives! He is determined to “be our God,” and He will share us with no other!

### *Promises, Not Exhortations!*

It is very important to realize that the statements of Ezekiel 36 are *promises* as to what *God will* do, not *exhortations* as to what *Christians ought* to do. These promises are unconditional and *always* fulfilled in *every* believer. God secures these results, not man. Notice again what God promises to do in these verses:

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:8 <sup>2</sup> John 1:47 <sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:6

- “*I will* sprinkle clean water on you, and you *will* be clean.”
- “*I will* cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”
- “*I will* give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.”
- “*I will* remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”
- “*I will* put My Spirit within you and *cause* you to walk in My statutes, and you *will* be careful to observe My ordinances...”
- “*I will* be your God.”
- “*I will* save you from all your uncleanness.”

In response to such “precious and magnificent promises,”<sup>1</sup> every Christian should lift shouts of praise to God.

## The New Covenant

“*Behold, days are coming,*’ declares the Lord, ‘*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,*’ declares the Lord. ‘*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,*’ declares the Lord, ‘*I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,*’ declares the Lord, ‘*for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*”’

*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

These glorious promises are quoted in the New Testament regarding the “New Covenant” of which every Christian is a partaker.<sup>2</sup> Notice that *justification* is one of the blessings promised

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:4 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 8:8-12

in the New Covenant: “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (v.34) But promised right along with justification and inseparably tied to it is *regeneration*: “I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it.” (v.33) Justification and regeneration are forever bound together in the New Covenant. All those who would use their supposed justification as an occasion to continue in sin only prove that they are not partakers of the New Covenant. Once again we see that God never gives someone an “A” at the beginning of his Christian life without simultaneously giving him a love for the material!

### *Internal Righteousness*

Under the Old Covenant, the law was written outside of men on tablets of stone.<sup>1</sup> This is always the relationship between law and the unregenerate man. Law comes to him “from the outside” and imposes standards on him that he hates.<sup>2</sup> Law tells him what he ought to do, but gives him neither the *desire* nor the *power* to do it. At best, law can only give an external righteousness, like that which the scribes and Pharisees had. Jesus said that they were like cups that had been cleaned only on the outside—“whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside...are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the New Covenant promises an *internal* righteousness: “I will put My law *within* them, and *on their heart* I will write it.” On reflection, it becomes clear that this is the same promise as the one given in Ezekiel 36:26, the promise of a new heart that *loves* and *wants to obey* God. How different true Christianity is from the external religion of all Pharisees! The true Christian follows God because he has a new heart, one with the essence of God’s law—love to God and man<sup>4</sup>—written on it!<sup>5</sup>

### Three Great Certainties

*“And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for the good of their children after them.*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:7 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 23:25-28 <sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:35-40  
<sup>5</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:9

*And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”*  
Jeremiah 32:38-41

In these verses God again speaks of the “everlasting covenant”<sup>1</sup> that He will make with His people. The promises of this covenant are glorious beyond words. Much could be said about each of them, but notice these in particular:

- “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good.”
- “I will not turn away from them, to do them good.”
- “I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.”

### *All Christians Have One Heart*

All Christians have one heart. This is made absolutely certain by the fact that God *promises* this heart *as a gift*: “I will *give* them one heart.” Christians are not told that they *ought* to have one heart; they are promised one heart as a free gift.

All Christians have the same heart! All of them “worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”<sup>2</sup> All of them love the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>3</sup> and all of them love other Christians.<sup>4</sup> This “one heart” explains why two Christians can meet for the first time on a plane or bus and experience more real fellowship with each other in thirty minutes than they can with their lost family members in a lifetime.

### *All Christians Have One Way*

All Christians have one way. Again, this is a promise of God. We are not told that all Christians *ought* to have the same way; we are told that one way will be given to them. (v.39) All Christians are moving in the same direction—upward and Godward. Some are

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 32:40; Hebrews 13:20 <sup>2</sup> Philippians 3:3 <sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 16:22  
<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:14-15

moving more quickly than others, and all experience temporary setbacks. But in the general course of their lives, all are traveling the same path and headed toward the same goal.

*This means that anyone who travels a different path that leads in a different direction is simply not a Christian.* “The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a *liar* [not a “carnal Christian”!], and the truth is not in him.”<sup>1</sup>

### *All Christians Persevere in Holiness*

All Christians persevere in holiness until the end. Notice once more the promises of Jeremiah 32. Not only has God promised not to turn away from us (“I will not turn away from them, to do them good”); He has also promised to do a work in our hearts that insures we will not turn away from Him (“I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me”)! Again, this is a *promise*, and it is something that *God* does. Into the hearts of all Christians He puts an ongoing, holy fear of Himself that secures their abiding faithfulness to Him!

This is true Biblical security, and it is much different than the flippant “once saved, always saved” that is often taught in our day. Security is not a matter of “getting saved,” then living a life of sin and still going to heaven. Neither is it a matter of being thrown into a locked room at conversion and not being let out, no matter how much we pound on the door wanting to escape. There are no *external* restraints preventing a Christian from returning to his former life: “And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, *they would have had opportunity to return*. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one.”<sup>2</sup> Do you *want* to go back to the world? You are quite free to do so—*no one will stop you!* But if you are a Christian, to go back is not your desire. How *could* it be, since you have been given a heart that loves and fears God?

The security of the believer thus flows from the very nature of the New Covenant. The great “fault” of the Old Covenant was that the people “did not continue” in it.<sup>3</sup> The New Covenant was established specifically to remedy this situation. It does so by

God’s putting His law *inside* of us.<sup>1</sup> In the New Covenant, God puts within our hearts a love for Him that causes us to cleave to Him and to heed His warnings.

At the time of the Passover, the children of Israel were warned that none of them should go outside the door of his house until morning, but rather stay under the shelter of the blood. What would have happened if they had ignored this warning? They would have surely perished! But the fact is, they did *not* ignore the warning! They were afraid to go outside, so they all stayed in their houses until morning, *and none of them perished*. So it is with every Christian. Praise the Lord!

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:4 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:15-16 <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 8:7-9

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 8:10

# A New Birth

According to the Bible, every Christian is a walking miracle! He is a *new man* with a *new heart*. In short, he is nothing less than a whole *new creation*! But the “newness” of regeneration does not stop there. Regeneration is also a *new birth*.

## New Birth

*“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”*  
*John 3:3-8*

In this portion of Scripture, we find some of the most wonderful and instructive words ever spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is here we learn that to become a Christian is actually to be “born” a second time! By describing regeneration in these terms, our Lord draws attention to several important aspects of it.

## The New Birth is Radical

Nothing could be more far-reaching or have greater implications for us personally than our own begetting and birth! When we are begotten and born, we *begin to exist and to live* in the natural realm, and nothing is ever the same for us again—*forever!* So it is in the spiritual realm: When we are “born again,” we begin to exist and to live in the spiritual world, and for all eternity *nothing will ever be the same for us again!* Hallelujah!

To be “born again” is to begin to exist. In short, the new birth is not something added on to our lives; it *is* life! We begin to live! To say it another way, to be born again is not to *get something* we did not have before; it is to *become someone* we never were before. The new birth is at the very root of our existence as Christians.

## The New Birth is a Real Birth

The new birth is not *like* a birth; it *is* a birth! Notice our Lord’s words in v.6: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” The new birth is a real birth. Just as something fleshly is born in physical birth, so something spiritual is born in spiritual birth! “That which is born...*is* spirit.”

In this birth, it is *God* who fathers us; we are “begotten of God.” “No one who is *born of God* practices sin, because *His seed abides in him*; and he cannot sin, because he is *born of God.*”<sup>1</sup> John tells us that God’s “seed” [Gk. *sperma*] remains in those who have been born of God. In the words of Peter, we have “become partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>2</sup> Such terminology is so explicit that we would not dare to use it except that it is the direct teaching of the Word of God.

The reality of the new birth has tremendous implications: First of all, it shows us why a true Christian does not live in sin. John tells us in the verse quoted above that a Christian “cannot sin.” (See Appendix B.) The reason a Christian cannot sin is traced back to his new birth and the divine nature residing within him: “No one who is born of God practices sin, *because His seed abides in him*; and he cannot sin, *because he is born of God.*” The Christian has God’s nature in him and therefore *cannot stand* to live the way he used to live. Any true believer who tries to return to his old ways will ultimately find himself unable to do so. Sin is *against his nature*; he hates it.

Secondly, we learn from the reality of the new birth how every true Christian should view (i.e., think about) himself. The Christian is no longer a sinner,<sup>3</sup> but a saint.<sup>4</sup> Again, this does not mean that the Christian never sins, or that sin is not enticing to his flesh, but that his true nature—what he really is deep inside—loves God and holiness. That this is actually the case is made obvious by the fact

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 3:9 <sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:4 <sup>3</sup> Luke 6:32-34 <sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:3

that every true Christian feels miserable and grieved when he does sin. *Why* does he feel miserable? Precisely because his true nature is to love holiness!

Beloved saint! Do not let the devil tell you that you are worthless and vile as a Christian. You are a *child of God*—“holy and beloved”<sup>1</sup> in His sight! His very nature (“seed”) is within you, and you bear the family likeness! The new birth is a real birth.

## The New Birth is Sovereign

The new birth depends ultimately on God’s will, not man’s will. All who are born again are “born not of blood, *nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man*, but of God.”<sup>2</sup> The Lord Jesus makes this clear in v.8: “The wind [Gk. *pneuma*: wind, Spirit, breath] blows *where it wishes.*”

The wind blows where it wishes! No man directs it or controls it or stops it from blowing. Even so the Spirit of God blows where He wishes. This means that the most unlikely person can be saved. Neither the hardest heart nor the most stubborn will can stop the wind from blowing. If there was one person that the early church *knew* would not be converted, it was Saul of Tarsus. But the things that are impossible with men are possible with God!<sup>3</sup> One gust of the Spirit of God and the man who was formerly “breathing threats and murder”<sup>4</sup> against believers is now a meek and humble disciple of Christ, asking, “What shall I do, Lord?”<sup>5</sup>

The new birth is *always* a sovereign work of God: “so is *every-one* who is born of the Spirit.” Why is it that I am a Christian and my neighbor is not? There are only two possibilities: Either the explanation lies in *man* (“I was more responsive; I was not so hard-hearted; I sought God of my own initiative”), or the explanation lies in *God* (“He chose to ‘blow’ by His Spirit, softening my hardened heart and making me responsive to His call”). The Bible makes it very clear that the latter alternative is the correct one: “It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”<sup>6</sup> In our natural state, “there is none who seeks for God.”<sup>7</sup> “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:12 <sup>2</sup> John 1:13 <sup>3</sup> Luke 18:27 <sup>4</sup> Acts 9:1 <sup>5</sup> Acts 22:10

<sup>6</sup> Romans 9:16 <sup>7</sup> Romans 3:11

transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.”<sup>1</sup> As with Ezekiel’s “valley of dry bones,” God has “caused *breath* to enter us that we might come to life.”<sup>2</sup>

The only reason that any of us is a Christian is that the Wind of God sovereignly blew in our hearts. I had no idea when I awoke on the day of my conversion that by bedtime I would be a new creature in Christ Jesus! I was not “seeking God”; God was not in my thoughts; there was “no fear of God before my eyes.”<sup>3</sup> But by the end of the day a miracle had transpired, and I went to bed that night filled with the peace that “surpasses all comprehension,”<sup>4</sup> and the joy that is “inexpressible and full of glory.”<sup>5</sup> The wind blows where it wishes! Hallelujah!

## The New Birth is Known

The working of the Holy Spirit in regeneration is always known: “The wind blows where it wishes *and you hear the sound of it.*” (v.8) Wind always has *movement, life, energy, sound.* This movement may come in the form of a powerful gale that levels everything in its path, or it may come in the form of a gentle breeze that causes one leaf to sway back and forth on a limb, but *always* there is movement. *If there is no movement, there is no wind.*

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither I nor you:  
But when the leaves hang trembling  
The wind is passing through.*

*Who has seen the wind?  
Neither you nor I:  
But when the trees bow down their heads  
The wind is passing by.*

Christina Rossetti

So it is with the Spirit of God. *The movement of God’s Spirit is evident by the effects it produces.* Sometimes the Holy Spirit comes as a mighty gale sweeping three thousand into the kingdom in a

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:4-5 <sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-10 <sup>3</sup> Romans 3:18 <sup>4</sup> Philippians 4:7

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 1:8

single day.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes He comes as a gentle breeze opening the heart of one person to respond to the gospel.<sup>2</sup> But the moving of God’s Spirit is *always* known: “so is *everyone* who is born of the Spirit.” The effects of divine activity are *visible* in the life of every true Christian.

## The New Birth is Mysterious

The new birth is mysterious: “*You...do not know* where it comes from and where it is going.” (v.8) Again, this element of mystery is *invariable* in the new birth: “so is *everyone* who is born of the Spirit”!

This is a very wonderful thing: We “do not know” who might be next! The Holy Spirit is a Person, and we cannot predict how He is going to work. He may save one soul, or He may save three thousand. Those who market the gospel by “telephone evangelism” claim to be able to predict within a tenth of a percent how many “decisions for Christ” will be obtained. Such predictability proves only one thing: These “converts” are nothing more than the products of applied psychology; they are *not* the work of the Spirit of God! The new birth is mysterious!

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:37-41 <sup>2</sup> Acts 16:14

## A New Nature

*“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.”*

*Matthew 7:15-20*

According to these verses, regeneration is not only a *new birth*, but also the giving of a *new nature*. It is significant that the word “nature” is never used in this passage, though the concept is everywhere. This is because our “nature” is not something that we “have,” but a description of *who we are*. The proper concept of a “nature” is thus seen in our Lord’s words concerning the two *kinds* of trees—good trees and bad trees. These simple words are filled with glorious instruction concerning the realities of regeneration. Four major and far reaching truths are immediately evident here:

### There are Only Two Kinds of Trees

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, a tree is either “good” or “bad.” Every man is either a “thorn bush” or a “grapevine,” a “fig” or a “thistle.” There is no “halfway” group—half fig and half thistle. Neither do we find in these verses any kind of “composite” tree. For a tree to have “two natures” at the same time is no more possible than for a tree to be *both* a thorn bush and a grapevine at the same time! Every man is either one or the other.

### Trees Bear Fruit According to Their Nature

“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” (v.17) In other words, the kind of fruit *flows* from the kind (“nature”) of tree. Grapevines produce grapes; thistles produce thistles. Notice the absoluteness of our Lord’s statement:

“Every good tree produces good fruit.” Beloved reader, *let no one deceive you with empty words<sup>1</sup> and do not deceive yourself* into thinking that “some good trees bear *bad* fruit.” According to the Lord Jesus Christ it *never* happens! Though the Christian sins and stumbles in many ways,<sup>2</sup> his life is inevitably characterized by good fruit,<sup>3</sup> not by “thorns and thistles.”<sup>4</sup> Lest there should be any doubt about this, the Lord states it even more emphatically and specifically in v.18: “A good tree *cannot* produce bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree produce good fruit.”

Just as a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, so we learn from the latter half of v.18 that it is not possible for an unregenerate man to produce *good* fruit. Apples can be tied on to a thorn bush externally, but they cannot be *produced* by the thorn bush. They cannot *flow out naturally* from what the thorn bush is in its essence. In v.19 we are told the fate of *every* tree that does not produce good fruit: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

### The Fruit of a Tree Reveals its Nature

The fruit of a tree does not *make* the tree what it is; it *reveals* what the tree is. The Lord Jesus sets forth this general principle in His warning about false prophets, “You will know *them* by their *fruits*.” (v.16) He then proceeds to teach about “good trees” and “bad trees” and concludes by repeating this great truth in v.20: “So then, you will know *them* by their *fruits*.”

The fruit of a tree does not *make* the tree what it is: No one becomes a grapevine by trying to produce grapes! Only a miracle from God can change us into what we are not! On the contrary, the fruit of a tree *reveals* what the tree is: The *production of grapes* is the *evidence* that this miracle from God has *already* taken place.

This principle is well illustrated by our Lord’s words to the Jews in John 8:47: “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.” Notice again that the fruit of a tree does not make it what it is, but instead reveals what it is. Many think that it is our response to “the words of God” that makes us to be “of God.” Jesus says the opposite. It is *because* we are “of God” that we respond properly to “the words

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 5:5-6 <sup>2</sup> James 3:2 <sup>3</sup> John 15:16 <sup>4</sup> Hebrews 6:8

of God.” The same truth is seen in John 10:26-27: “But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Once more our Lord makes it clear that men do not become sheep by believing, as many suppose, but they believe because they are sheep! Glorious miracle! Regeneration is the *giving* of a new nature!

### Bad Trees Can Be Known

Contrary to much popular opinion, it *is* possible to distinguish between true and false believers. The Lord Jesus Christ gives us this assurance twice in the verses quoted above: “You *will* know them.” (v.16) “So then, you *will* know them.” (v.20) To the question, “*How* will we know them?” our Lord’s answer is simple and unequivocal: “By their fruits.”

This does not mean that we can walk into a Christian gathering and in five minutes know who all the true believers are. Many times those who appear for a while to be strong and genuine later fall away. Likewise, those whose conversions at first appear to be very weak and questionable are often found twenty years later sturdy and strong and still walking with God. Time must test the genuineness of every profession of faith. Nevertheless, the fact still stands that sooner or later—and many times sooner—the actual state of a false professor of Christ will become known: “But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became *evident* also.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the first verses to be quoted in any discussion about true conversion is, “Do not judge lest you be judged.” (Matthew 7:1) Seldom does the person quoting this verse realize that it was spoken by the Lord only a few verses before His statements about knowing men by their fruits. (v.16) The commandment not to “judge” thus *cannot* be a commandment not to “discern.” In fact, our Lord warns us in v.6, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine.” How are we to know who these “dogs” and “swine” are, if we don’t “judge” in the sense of discerning? In fact, the Lord Jesus *commands* us to judge, though not “according to appearance,” but “with righteous judgment.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:26 <sup>2</sup> John 7:24

## Good Trees are Representative of Good Men

*“Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.”*

*Matthew 12:33-35*

In these verses the four major truths of Matthew 7:15-20 are repeated by the Lord Jesus using slightly different terminology. In addition, a fifth major truth that is implicit in Matthew 7 finds its full expression here: According to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is theologically proper to speak of some men as “good” and some men as “evil.”

Christian, do you think of yourself as a “good man”? It is true, of course, that *apart from Christ* none of us has *any* goodness whatsoever. In that sense, “No one is good except God alone.”<sup>1</sup> But, beloved, *we are not apart from Christ!* The Bible describes Barnabas as “*a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.*”<sup>2</sup> And Paul speaks of the Roman Christians as “full of goodness.”<sup>3</sup> If our theology allows no place for such language, it is not a Biblical theology. God has done a miracle in the heart of every Christian! *Regeneration is the giving of a new (good!) nature.*

<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:18   <sup>2</sup> Acts 11:24   <sup>3</sup> Romans 15:14

## Crucifixion & Resurrection

*“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”*  
Romans 6:1-7

*“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”*  
Galatians 2:20

Many have read these verses and have tried to “imagine” themselves being crucified on the cross two thousand years ago. Others speak of “positional” truth—a sort of shadowy realm of make-believe where things that are not *really* true are true “positionally.” It is only when we come to see that these verses are referring to the *concrete reality* of what takes place in regeneration that they will have any real meaning for us.

It is true that every benefit the believer receives was *purchased* two thousand years ago on Calvary, when Jesus died and rose again as our representative. But these benefits become ours in reality and experience only as we are *united with Christ* in regeneration. That Paul is speaking of regeneration in Romans 6 is made clear by his referring to believers as “those alive from the dead” (v.13) and as those who now “walk in newness of life.” (v.4) The same can be said concerning Galatians 2:20. It was at the time of Paul’s

*regeneration* that the old Saul “no longer lived” and Christ began to “live in” the new Paul.

Notice that according to Romans 6:2-7, *all* believers have been crucified, buried, and raised up with Christ by virtue of their union with Him. Crucifixion with Christ takes place at the time of our regeneration. It is not an advanced state of spirituality to be sought after, but a completed reality to be counted upon. (v.6) Every true Christian can say with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

## Crucifixion & Resurrection

What is regeneration? It is the *new birth* of a *new man* who is a *new creation* with a *new heart* and a *new nature!* But it is more: *It is the crucifixion, death, and burial of our old self* (the person we once were in Adam) *and the raising up of our new self* (the person we now are in Christ) *to “walk in newness of life.”*

Christian, what does it mean that your “old man” was crucified, died, and was buried? It means that the old “you”—the person you once were—is gone forever. You will never be that person again. Most of you who read these lines never knew the old Charles Leiter, and I’m thankful that you never will, because that person is dead and gone forever! Glory to God! The Christian is a new man. Through his union with the risen Christ he is “alive from the dead,”<sup>1</sup> and because he is *alive*, he is now able to *walk* in newness of life!

Contrary to what is often taught, the Bible never represents our old man as still alive—whether kicking and struggling on the cross or hiding somewhere within us. The old man is dead, buried, and gone forever. “*I* (my old self, the person I once was) *have been crucified* with Christ; *and it is no longer I who live.*”

In light of these facts, the question immediately arises: “If all this is true, why do I still have so many problems with sin?” The Bible answers this question, not in terms of the “old man” who is gone forever, but in terms of the “flesh” which is still present with us. The Christian has an on-going battle with sin because there is one aspect of his personality that has not yet been redeemed—the

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:13

flesh. *The flesh is the unredeemed physical body viewed as the place where sin still tries to assert itself.* Sin still tries to “reign” in the Christian’s “mortal body.”<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament refers to the flesh as “our body of sin,”<sup>2</sup> “the body of this death,”<sup>3</sup> and our “mortal body.”<sup>4</sup> In this context, sins (*all* sins, even “mental” sins) can actually be spoken of as “deeds of the body”<sup>5</sup> and Christians are exhorted to “mortify” (put to death) “the members of their earthly body”!<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that the body itself is sinful. Paul makes the amazing statement in 1 Corinthians 6 that the body is “for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.”<sup>7</sup> This is the exact opposite of the Greek idea that the body is the “prison house of the soul.” Nevertheless, the Bible does clearly represent the unredeemed mortal body as the place where sin still tries to reign.

As Christians, we are still waiting for the *redemption of our bodies*<sup>8</sup> at the coming of the Lord. When this takes place, we will be *completely* delivered from *all* sin. But in the meantime, there are two extremely important truths that we need to grasp.

## A New Identity

The first of these is that *we have a new identity.* As Christians, we are alive from the dead, raised up to walk in newness of life. That is who we really are, and who we *will be* ten thousand years from now! The flesh is *not* who we really are. It is only a *superficial* (surface) and *temporary* aspect of our total personality, and it is already doomed to pass away. In a short time our bodies will be redeemed and the hindrances of the flesh will be gone forever.

The fact that we are “alive from the dead” is usually a *felt reality* at the time of our conversion. As time goes on, though, and we begin to realize how much evil is still resident in our flesh and how great our failures are as Christians, it is common for us to begin to lose this sense of “newness.” Nothing is then bad enough for us to say about ourselves—we are “vile,” “wretched,” “miserable.” In such a state it is, of course, utterly impossible for us to “present ourselves unto God” with any degree of joy or confidence: “Lord, I joyfully

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:12 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:6 <sup>3</sup> Romans 7:24 <sup>4</sup> Romans 6:12 <sup>5</sup> Romans 8:13

<sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:5; Romans 6:13 <sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:13 <sup>8</sup> Romans 8:23

present myself unto You—wretched, vile mass of corruption that I am—to serve You with gladness and confidence today.” Never! We can never present ourselves joyfully to God as long as we have such a concept of ourselves. *But this is not Paul’s view of any Christian!* Instead, Paul exhorts us to “present ourselves to God *as those alive from the dead*, and our members as instruments of righteousness to God.”<sup>1</sup> Christian, you are just as “new” today and just as much “alive from the dead” as you were on the day of your conversion! The wickedness of your flesh is almost beyond description, but the flesh is not who you really are, and in a very short time it will trouble you no more! Confess your sins to God, receive His forgiveness and cleansing, then *present yourself to Him—joyfully and confidently—right now*, to serve Him in the “newness of life” that is yours in Christ!

## A New Power

The second truth that we must realize is that *we have a new power*. Not only does the Christian have a new identity, he also has a new ability to break with sin. Even though our “mortal bodies” have not yet been redeemed, and sin still tries to “reign” in them, *we do not need to allow it to do so: “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts.”*<sup>2</sup> We do not have to “let” sin reign in our mortal bodies!

This assurance of victory is repeated throughout the New Testament: In Galatians 5, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is far more powerful than the flesh. Though the flesh “sets its desire against the Spirit,”<sup>3</sup> we are *promised* that as we “walk by the Spirit,” we “*will not* carry out the desire of the flesh.”<sup>4</sup>

Again, Christians are assured in Romans 8 that they have the power “by the Spirit” to “kill” sin: “If *by the Spirit* you are *putting to death the deeds of the body*, you will live.”<sup>5</sup> And Romans 6 proclaims the same truth repeatedly. For example, in v.6 we learn that through the death of our old self, the power of the flesh to rule over us has been broken: “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, *that our body of sin* (the flesh) *might be done away with* [lit. “rendered powerless”], *that we should no longer*

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:13 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:12 <sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:17 <sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:16 <sup>5</sup> Romans 8:13

*be slaves to sin.*” And in v.14 we are assured that “sin *shall not* be master over us, for we are not under law, but under grace.”

## Embracing the Truth

Christians have both a new identity and a new power. These are *facts*, whether we believe them or not. Believing them does not make them true, and not believing them does not make them false. Reality is not changed by our faulty perception of it. What *is* changed is our *experience* of that reality. According to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing and believing *the truth* is absolutely vital to our freedom from slavery to sin. “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”<sup>1</sup> “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”<sup>2</sup> In light of these statements, it is highly significant that Paul spends the first *five and a half chapters* of his epistle to the Romans laying a foundation of *truth*, and that Romans 6:11 is literally the first time in the entire letter that he instructs his hearers to *do* anything! When this first exhortation finally does come, it centers around believing and embracing *the truth*: “Consider (conclude, reckon) yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> To “reckon” is not to *pretend* something is true when we know it is not; to reckon is to *accept reality for what it is*.

The necessity of our realizing and believing the truth in order to progress in grace is a central theme in Paul’s letters: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed *by the renewing of your mind*.”<sup>4</sup> It is only as our minds are renewed—as we are enabled to see reality for what it is—that we can “prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>5</sup> Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 4 when he urges us to “*be renewed in the spirit of our minds*, and to put on the new self.” (v.23-24) When a Christian gives in to sin, it is *always* the result of his failure to believe and act on the truth!

Again, the New Testament method of teaching growth in grace is, first: Realize who you are!<sup>6</sup> (i.e., believe and embrace the truth), and second: Be who you are!<sup>7</sup> (i.e., actively refuse

<sup>1</sup> John 8:31-32 <sup>2</sup> John 17:17 <sup>3</sup> Romans 6:11 <sup>4</sup> Romans 12:2 <sup>5</sup> Romans 12:2  
<sup>6</sup> Romans 6:11 <sup>7</sup> Romans 6:12-13

sin and deliberately give yourself to righteousness). Beloved Christian, you do not need to live a life of misery and defeat! You do not need to walk about day by day with a conscience that is continually defiled by known sin. Ask God to open your eyes to the truth!<sup>1</sup> Embrace by faith the reality of who you really are. Then, take a stand on what God has done for you in Christ. “Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”<sup>2</sup> “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”<sup>3</sup> Be who you are!

## A Defeated Foe

Beloved Christian, sin’s days are numbered in your life! The ax has already been laid to the root of your sin. Like a tree that has been cut off at ground level, its leaves may still appear green for a while, but the fact is that *its life is over*. It is only a matter of time until every leaf withers and falls to the ground!

Sin is a defeated foe. The war against sin has already been won. Like the pockets of resistance that sometimes continue to struggle on in ignorance *after the treaty of surrender has already been signed*, so sin continues to fight on in our lives *with no hope of ultimate victory*. Though the believer’s conflict with sin may at times be fierce, the final outcome of the battle is assured.

For the Christian, sin is but an early summer snow. Such snows fall occasionally even in the warmer climates, but they are only the death throes of a winter that is past. In a day or two they are melted and gone, and *they have no power to stop the inexorable advance of summer*. Christian, sin does not stand a chance in your life! You can fight against it with the confident knowledge that summer, not winter, is approaching! The remnants of sin that you still face are just the *vestiges of what you once were*; they are not an expression of *who you are now*, and they will soon pass away forever!

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:17-18   <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:13   <sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:16

# A Change of Realms

## From Flesh to Spirit

Thus far we have considered six Scriptural representations of regeneration, each of which has given us further insight into the nature of this great miracle. What is regeneration? It is a new creation, a new man, a new heart, a new birth, a new nature. It is a crucifixion of our old self and a resurrection of our new self. But regeneration is more. It is an exchange of realms:

### Flesh vs. Spirit

*“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”*  
*Romans 8:5-9*

It is clear from these verses that regeneration involves *a change of realms*. Unregenerate men are spoken of as “those who are in the flesh”; regenerate men are “not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.” (It is tragic that the NIV replaces the words “in the flesh” in v.8-9 with the words “controlled by the sinful nature.” Here Biblical translation has given way to theological fancy.)

Christians are those who are no longer “in the flesh”; they now reside permanently in the realm of the Spirit. Sometimes Christians will say when they have acted impulsively or perhaps lost their temper, “I got in the flesh.” In reality, however, the Christian can no more temporarily “get in the flesh” than he can temporarily “become unregenerate”!

What does Paul mean when he says that the unregenerate man is “in the flesh” and the Christian is no longer “in the flesh, but in the Spirit”? The answer could be stated like this: The natural (unregenerate) man resides in the *realm* or *sphere* of the fleshly. The flesh is the source and context of his whole life. He knows nothing of life in the Holy Spirit; he lives entirely on the fleshly plane. He inhabits the realm of glands and physical appetites, of cars and computers, of sports and entertainment, of cosmetics and appearance. “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”<sup>1</sup> “Whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”<sup>2</sup>

The unregenerate man may have “religion,” but it, too, is fleshly. Paul tells us of a time when he knew Christ “according to the flesh.”<sup>3</sup> This is the Christ of popular religious imagination, ever changing with the times. (In our day He is often a pale, insipid religious figure who lived long ago and went around carrying lambs.) Paul no longer knows Christ in this way, however. In fact, he no longer knows any man “according to the flesh.” Why not? The answer is given in the very next verse—Paul has passed into a different realm! “Therefore *from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh*; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, *yet now we know Him thus no longer*. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; *the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*.”<sup>4</sup>

This contrast between the two realms of “flesh” and “Spirit” underlies our Lord’s words to the Samaritan woman in John 4: “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when *neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem*, shall you worship the Father...*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*.”<sup>5</sup> Usually we take these words to mean that *people can worship God anywhere—either in this mountain or in Jerusalem*. This is certainly true. But Jesus does not say “either...or”; He says “neither...nor!” In other words, God cannot be worshiped in *this* realm at all; He is accessible only “in the Spirit.” “God is spirit, and those who

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:3 <sup>2</sup> Philippians 3:19 <sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16 <sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16-17  
<sup>5</sup> John 4:21-24

worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” “We are the true circumcision, who *worship in the Spirit of God* and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in *the flesh*.”<sup>1</sup> “For through Him [Christ] we both have our access *in one Spirit* to the Father.”<sup>2</sup> Christians are “in the Spirit.” They are able to “*see Him who is invisible*”<sup>3</sup> and to “*look...at the things which are not seen*”<sup>4</sup>

## Only Two Realms

The first lesson that we should learn from Romans 8:5-9 is that *Paul thinks in terms of only two realms*. A man is either “in the flesh” or “in the Spirit”; he is either unregenerate or regenerate. There is no “half and half” third realm. A man is either “fleshly” (a non-Christian) or he is “spiritual” (alive in the realm of the Holy Spirit—a Christian). This same dichotomy is seen in 1 Corinthians 2:14-16: “But *a natural man* does not accept the things of the *Spirit of God*; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are *spiritually* appraised. But *he who is spiritual* appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man... We have the mind of Christ.” Here again there are only two types of men—the “natural” man (unregenerate) and the “spiritual” man (regenerate).

This fact takes us a long way toward a proper understanding of what Paul says in the next four verses: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to *spiritual men*, but as to *men of flesh*, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still *fleshly*. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not *fleshly*, and are you not *walking like mere men*? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ *are you not mere men*?”<sup>5</sup> (The NIV wrongly translates the term “fleshly” in these verses as “worldly.”)

What is Paul saying here? He is saying that the Corinthian believers are (in some ways) *acting like lost men*. “I could not speak to you like Christians; I had to speak to you like ‘men of flesh.’ You’re acting like *mere men*. You need to have your minds renewed to realize who you really are.” It is possible for a Christian to act at times like a lost man, especially when he is still a “babe in Christ,”

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:3 <sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:18 <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 11:27 <sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18  
<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

but this is a far cry from saying that a true Christian can live *his entire life* like a lost man! Contrary to much popular teaching, Paul is *not* setting forth here some *permanent third category* of men—the so-called “carnal Christian”—a sort of “heavenly devil,” who lives his life with “Christ in the heart” and “self on the throne”! A Christian can at times act like a lost man, but when he does, he is acting out of character with who he really is, and he cannot maintain the façade for long.

## Each Realm Has Its Own Mind

The second lesson that we should learn from Romans 8:5-9 is that *each of the two realms is characterized by a certain type of “mind.”* “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> Notice that Paul is not making an *exhortation* here. (He is not saying what “ought to” be.) He is simply *stating a fact*: Those who are “according to the flesh,” mind the things of the flesh; those who are “according to the Spirit,” mind the things of the Spirit. This is just *the reality of the situation*.

This means that if anyone claims to be a Christian, but does not “mind the things of the Spirit,” he is deceived. The Christian is alive in a new realm. He is “in the Spirit.” His source and sphere of life is the Holy Spirit, and he is just “naturally” inclined toward “the things of the Spirit”! When he gets out of bed in the morning, when he is given a few minutes to relax at work, when he has some leisure time, his mind gravitates toward the things of God.

## Each Mind Has Its Own Outcome

The third lesson that we should learn from Romans 8:5-9 is that *each type of mind leads to its own outcome—either death or life*: “The mind set on the flesh [lit. “mind of the flesh”] is *death*.”<sup>2</sup> Death is its ultimate characteristic and end, regardless of how pleasant things may appear at its beginning. Think of it! *Everything* in the fleshly realm, even the “best” things, will eventually leave us with nothing but *emptiness, decay, and corruption*—death! Why? Because God is the source of true *life*, and He is left out of the picture.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:5 <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:6

Not only is God left out of the picture, but “the mind of the flesh” is actually “*hostile toward God*,” for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for *it is not even able to do so*.<sup>1</sup> There is a deep-seated *hatred* for God and His law in the heart of every lost man. It is for this reason that “those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God.”<sup>2</sup>

In the *religious* lost man this enmity is often well hidden, but under the right circumstances it will lash out viciously. Here we need only to think of the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees when they encountered Goodness Incarnate: “Crucify Him! We will not have this man to reign over us!”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps many even of these religious leaders were shocked by their own actions and the vehement hatred that they found welling up in their hearts toward the Son of God.

The mind of the flesh is death, but, by contrast, “the mind of the Spirit is *life and peace*.”<sup>4</sup> What a blessed thing this is! All things that are good, all things that are lovely—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”—belong to and flow from the realm of the Spirit!

## Walking in the New Realm

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”*  
Galatians 5:16-25

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:7 <sup>2</sup> Romans 8:8 <sup>3</sup> Luke 19:14 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:6 (Gk.)

In these verses from Galatians 5, the two realms of “flesh” and “Spirit” are sharply contrasted. Paul makes it clear that those who practice “the deeds of the flesh...shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” On the other hand, “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” They have made a definitive break with the old realm and life of sin through repentance and faith in Christ. The Christian is now promised victory over the flesh as he “walks in the Spirit”: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”

Of special significance for our present study, however, is v.25: “If we *live by* [or “in”] the Spirit, let us also *walk by* [or “in”] the Spirit.” Notice again what we have already seen in Romans 8: The Christian is one who is “in the Spirit”! He lives in the *realm* of the Spirit, and his *source of life* is the Spirit! “Now,” says Paul, “*realize* where you are, and *walk* there!—*live it out* in practice.” “If you *live* in the Spirit, then *walk* in the Spirit.”

There are two (and only two) realms, and as Christians we are *alive* in the realm of the Spirit. Because we are now *alive* in this new realm, we are, for the first time, able to *walk* by the power of the Spirit available to us in the place where we now are. This walk “in the Spirit” involves obeying the Spirit’s promptings when we sense in our hearts that He is “grieved” by something we are about to do: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”<sup>1</sup> When the Spirit is grieved, we must *stop* immediately! On the other hand, to “walk in the Spirit” also involves obeying the Spirit’s promptings when He urges us to do something positive—to speak up for God, or witness, or pray: “Do not quench the Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> It is as we “walk in the Spirit” that we experience the good and lovely “fruit of the Spirit” discussed above.

## The Two Realms in Romans 7 & 8

The concept of regeneration as a change of realms between the flesh and the Spirit is of great significance for our understanding of many other Scriptures. In particular, it is foundational to a proper understanding of Romans 7. Notice that Paul introduces his whole discussion in Romans 7:7-25 by referring to the “two realms” in v.5-6: “For *while we were in the flesh*, the sinful passions, which were

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:30 <sup>2</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:19

aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. *But now* we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, *so that we serve in newness of the Spirit* and not in oldness of the letter.”

Here again, Paul thinks in terms of two and only two groups. Those who are “in the flesh” (unregenerate) are characterized by “sinful passions...at work in the members of their bodies to bear fruit for death.” These sinful passions are “aroused by the Law.” Christians, on the other hand, are characterized by “release” from “bondage” to the Law and by service “in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” It is not difficult to discover which of these two groups the “man of Romans 7” belongs to! He is “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.”<sup>1</sup> The Law is “arousing” all sorts of sinful passions in him.<sup>2</sup> He is a “prisoner” to “the law of sin which is in his members.”<sup>3</sup> He is a “wretched man,” seeking someone to “set him free” from “the body of this death.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he never makes mention of the Holy Spirit even once in the entire passage! Clearly this man is not “in the Spirit,” but “in the flesh.” For a Christian to turn to Romans 7 for comfort when he is “defeated” is therefore inexcusable, even though at times he may feel as if he “belongs” there! (See Appendix C.)

It is very significant that as soon as Paul has concluded his consideration of *Law*, *sin*, and *flesh* in Romans 7:7-25, he immediately summarizes everything once more in terms of the “two realms”: “There is therefore now no condemnation for *those who are in Christ Jesus*. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was *through the flesh*, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, *in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*.”<sup>5</sup> Again, these verses are simply an expanded restatement of Paul’s earlier introduction to this section in Romans 7:5-6. Notice that in v. 4 Christians are described as those who “do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” As we saw earlier in connection with v.5, this is not

<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:14 <sup>2</sup> Romans 7:7-14 <sup>3</sup> Romans 7:23 <sup>4</sup> Romans 7:24

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:1-4

an *exhortation*, but a *statement of fact*. It is not a description of certain advanced Christians, but of the general walk of all Christians.<sup>1</sup> The verses that follow this summary (8:5-14) continue Paul's discussion of "flesh" and "Spirit" and have already been considered above.

<sup>1</sup> See also Romans 8:14.

# A Change of Realms

## From Earth to Heaven

We have seen that regeneration is an exchange of realms: the Christian is one who is no longer “in the flesh,” but “in the Spirit.” But these are not the only realms exchanged in regeneration. The eighth representation of regeneration that we will consider has to do with the Christian’s translation from the *earthly sphere* into the *heavenly sphere*.

*“If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?”*  
Colossians 2:20-22

*“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead [lit. “put to death the members which are upon the earth”!] to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”*  
Colossians 3:1-10

According to Colossians 2:20-22, Christians are no longer “living in the world”! They have “died” to that realm and have

passed into a different realm. This world of temporary and material things (“things destined to perish with the using”) is no longer the sphere of their life. What *is* the sphere of their life? The answer is given in the verses that follow (3:1-10): “*You have been raised up with Christ; ...you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God; ...Christ...is our life.*”

The Christian is one who has “died,” and his life is “hidden with Christ in God.” He lives in the heavenly realm. When the sphere of his life was still this earth, he walked according to this earthly realm. “In them you also once *walked*, when you were *living* in them.”<sup>1</sup> But now the sphere of his life is heavenly, and he is exhorted to realize that fact and to “set his mind” on “things above.”

Beloved Christian, you belong to the heavenly places! You are no longer a part of this world. You have been “crucified to the world” and the world to you!<sup>2</sup> Only your *mortal body*, which has not yet been redeemed, is still “down here” in this earthly realm. That is why Paul exhorts us to “put to death *the members which are upon the earth*!”<sup>3</sup> “Present your *bodies* a living and holy sacrifice... do not be *conformed to this world* (“age”), but be transformed *by the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>4</sup>

## Not of This World

*“You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.”*  
John 8:23

In these words to the Jews, our Lord again speaks of the earthly and heavenly realms. As we would expect, He speaks of Himself as belonging to the heavenly sphere. What we do *not* expect is what He says a few chapters later about all Christians:

*“The world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world... They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”*  
John 17:14, 16

Christians are not of the world *even as* Christ is not of the world! As partakers of His heavenly life, they belong to a different

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:7 <sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:14 <sup>3</sup> Colossians 3:5 (Gk.) <sup>4</sup> Romans 12:1-2

realm. They have been “born from above” and are part of a new order. They despise the things that the world “highly esteems”<sup>1</sup> and cherish the things that the world despises. The stone which “the builders” rejected as being worthless is *precious* and foundational to them.<sup>2</sup> Their motives and actions are an enigma to the world. They gaze on things that are unseen<sup>3</sup> and pattern their lives according to invisible realities. They understand the “hidden wisdom” which is “foolishness”<sup>4</sup> to the world. They “have the mind of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> “For this reason the world does not know them, because it did not know Him.”<sup>6</sup>

In light of these realities, it is little wonder that the world hates Christians. “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but *because you are not of the world*, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”<sup>7</sup>

## Citizens of Heaven

*“...whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

*Philippians 3:19-20*

In sharp contrast with those whose god is the flesh and whose minds are fixed on earthly things, Christians are already citizens of heaven. They live and move in the heavenly kingdom, and their minds are set on things above.<sup>8</sup> Their hearts are in heaven, from which they eagerly await the return of their Savior and King.

*“Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present [earthly] Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.”*

*Galatians 4:25-26*

*“For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched... but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living*

<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:15; Psalm 15:4 <sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:4, 7 <sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, 14 <sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16 <sup>6</sup> 1 John 3:1 <sup>7</sup> John 15:19

<sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:1-2

*God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.” Hebrews 12:18, 22-23*

We see again in these verses that Christians are the freeborn citizens of “the Jerusalem above.” They have come, not to a mountain that may be physically touched, but to an invisible and heavenly one—Mount Zion, the “city of the great King.”<sup>1</sup> They are right now a part of the “heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God,” along with all those who have already died and gone before them to heaven. This is the “city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”<sup>2</sup> Because their hearts are fixed upon this permanent heavenly Jerusalem, Christians are willing to forsake the security of all temporal earthly establishments and to go to Christ “outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” “For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.”<sup>3</sup>

*“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them...’” Revelation 21:2-3*

*“... ‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” Revelation 21:9-11*

Who is the “holy city, new Jerusalem”? None other than “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”! *This city, the bride, now resides in heaven*, but in the consummation will “come down out of heaven from God.” God Himself will then forever “dwell among” His people and “the glory of God” will forever rest upon them.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 2:6-8; 48:1-2; 87:5; 110:1-2 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 11:10, 16 <sup>3</sup> Hebrews 13:12-14

Oh, the blessedness of being, even now, a part of this heavenly city, the bride, the wife of the Lamb!

*Glorious things of thee are spoken  
Zion, city of our God;  
He whose word cannot be broken  
Formed thee for His own abode.  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
What can shake thy sure repose?  
With salvation’s walls surrounded,  
Thou mayest smile on all thy foes.*

*See! The streams of living waters,  
Springing from eternal love,  
Well supply Thy sons and daughters,  
And all fear of want remove.  
Who can faint while such a river  
Ever flows their thirst to assuage?  
Grace which, like the Lord, the Giver,  
Never fails from age to age.*

*Savior, if of Zion’s city  
I, through grace, a member am,  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in Thy Name.  
Fading is the worldling’s pleasure,  
All his boasted pomp and show;  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None but Zion’s children know.*

John Newton

## Seated with Christ

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places [lit. “heavenlies”] in Christ.” Ephesians 1:3*

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been*

*saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:4-6*

Because we are “in Christ” and are partakers of His resurrection life, we find ourselves seated with Him in the heavenly places. In Him we possess “*every* spiritual blessing” and are lacking in *nothing*; we have been granted “*everything* pertaining to life and godliness.”<sup>1</sup> Christians have no need for “something more” in addition to Christ; their great need is to see and enter into the reality of what they already have in Him. It is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit to bring this to pass.<sup>2</sup> Paul therefore prays for the Ephesians that the “eyes of their heart may be enlightened” by the Holy Spirit, so that they may “know...the surpassing greatness of God’s power” toward them as believers.<sup>3</sup> This is the very same power that raised Christ from the dead, and “seated Him at God’s right hand *in the heavenly places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.”<sup>4</sup>

## Keep Looking Down

From all of these verses, it is clear that believers have their sphere and source of life in the heavenlies. They are no longer of this world. They no longer live here,<sup>5</sup> but in heaven.<sup>6</sup> In our day-to-day experience, it makes a great deal of difference whether we view ourselves as “down here” in this world—like a diver on the ocean floor with a little life-line connecting him to the surface far above (heaven), or whether we view ourselves as “seated in heaven”—*looking down* on the affairs of this life! It makes a great deal of difference whether our motto is “Keep Looking Up” (“to the realm where you do not yet belong”) or “Keep Looking Down” (“from the realm where you already are, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”)!

In practical terms, this means that Christians are not laboring to *achieve* a life that they do not yet have or to *obtain* a victory that has not yet been won. They are *participants* in the very life of Christ and in the victory that *He* has *already* won. Christian, you are a partaker

of the resurrection life of Christ, and He has already *defeated* and *broken the power* of the sin that you are facing right now—by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension! As a participant in His life, your calling is not to try to achieve something for yourself that He has not achieved, but to *believe* what He has already done for you and to *walk* in it. In this way you will be enabled to fight “the good fight of *faith*”<sup>1</sup> instead of the miserable struggle of unbelief!

The same is true of our battle against the powers of darkness. We constantly need to be reminded of the fact that *Satan has already been defeated by Christ on the cross*,<sup>2</sup> and that “in Christ” we are seated “far above”<sup>3</sup> all the hosts of evil. We should read Ephesians 6:12 in the light of this present reality: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the [defeated] rulers, against the [dethroned] powers, against the [subjugated] world forces of this darkness, against the [vanquished] spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” As we humbly “submit ourselves to God and resist the devil,” we have the *promise* that even this roaring lion will “flee” before God’s otherwise defenseless sheep!<sup>4</sup> Glory to God!

<sup>1</sup> 2 Peter 1:3 <sup>2</sup> John 14:16, 20, 26; 16:12-14 <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:15-19

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:19-21 <sup>5</sup> Colossians 2:20 <sup>6</sup> Colossians 3:3

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 6:12 <sup>2</sup> Colossians 2:15; John 12:31 <sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:20-21

<sup>4</sup> James 4:7

# A Change of Realms

## From Sin to Righteousness

Regeneration is an exchange of realms. The ninth and final representation of regeneration that we will consider has to do with the Christian's passage from a state of *slavery to sin* to a state of *slavery to righteousness*. Because of this exchange, every Christian can truly confess, "I used to be a slave to sin, but I am not any longer! I am a slave to righteousness!"

*"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with [lit. "rendered powerless"], that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Romans 6:6*

*"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace." Romans 6:14*

*"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:16-23*

## Only Two Masters

In keeping with all that we have seen thus far, it should come as no surprise that in these passages there are two, and only two, masters set forth as possible slave owners. On the one hand there is Sin, and on the other hand there is Righteousness. These two slave owners are diametrically opposed to each other. The difference between them is not a little thing. It is the difference between what is filthy and what is pure, what is honorable and what is shameful, what is noble and what is base. In short, it is the difference between life and death, between heaven and hell, and between God and the devil. Since these two masters are so completely antagonistic to each other, it is utterly impossible to serve both of them at the same time. “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to one, and despise the other.”<sup>1</sup>

## All Men Are Slaves

It may come as a shock to realize that according to these verses *all men are slaves*. There are absolutely no exceptions. Both the writer and reader of these lines are most certainly slaves. We are, at this very moment, either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. There is no place of neutrality or “middle ground” between these two extremes. No one in the whole world is “free” in the sense of having no master at all. The question is not whether or not we will have a master. The only question is whether we will have a good master who blesses us with life and peace or an evil master who curses us with death and destruction.

Satan came to Eve with the perverse suggestion that God could not be trusted. When Eve decided to test his hypothesis by becoming a “neutral investigator,” she discovered through bitter experience that *there is no place of neutrality between God and the devil*. To step out from under the authority of God is to immediately place ourselves under the dominion of the wicked one—the “thief” who “comes *only* to steal, and kill, and destroy.”<sup>2</sup> Like the railroad locomotive that fulfills its reason for existing and finds true freedom *only by remaining within the constraint of the rails*, so man fulfills his

<sup>1</sup> Luke 16:13 <sup>2</sup> John 10:10

reason for existing and finds true freedom only by remaining in submission to his Creator.

## Slaves to Sin

The verses quoted above make it very clear that before our regeneration every one of us was a “slave to sin.” (v.6, 17, 20) What does it mean to be “a slave to sin”? It means to live under the dominating power of sin. Sin rules and “reigns”<sup>1</sup> over its subjects, demanding their obedience. They cannot *not* obey it! Illustrations of this slavery abound from both the Bible and church history: Before his conversion, evangelist Mel Trotter was a helpless drunkard. Coming home after a ten-day drinking bout, he found his two year old son dead in his wife’s arms. In the depths of remorse—convinced that by his absence he had murdered his only son—Trotter vowed with tears never to drink again. *But less than two hours after his child’s funeral he returned home blind drunk once more!* Such is the nature of slavery to sin.

But it is not only the drunkard or the drug addict who is a slave of sin. *All* men outside of Christ are in sin’s bondage. Even the “good moral person” who has no apparent vices is a slave to sin. This is obvious from the fact that he does not believe in and worship the living God. *Why* does he not bow down before his Creator in love and adoration? Simply because his master won’t let him! Sin has a stranglehold on his life and will not allow him to do that which is sane, reasonable, and right. “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Our Lord makes it very clear in John 8:31-36 that no slave of sin will be in heaven: “If you abide in My word, then you are *truly* disciples of Mine, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you *free*.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, “You shall become free”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘*Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever.* If

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:21 <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4

therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.” No slave of sin will remain in the Son’s house forever, but *freedom* is the birthright of all who are “truly” the Lord’s disciples!

## Slaves to Righteousness

At the time of regeneration every Christian ceases to be a slave to sin and becomes a slave of righteousness: “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” (v.17-18) Notice that in these verses Christians are not said to be “*free* from sin”; they are said to have been “*freed* from sin.” Paul is speaking here, not about sinless perfection, but about emancipation from one master (sin) and enslavement to another master (righteousness).

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, this change of ownership takes place when One who is “stronger than the strong man” (Christ) attacks the “strong man” (Satan) and takes possession of his goods: “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied, and distributes his plunder.”<sup>1</sup> Glorious transaction—to be set free from the dominion of Satan by the Lord Jesus Christ and to become His grateful love-slave forever!

All Christians are slaves of righteousness. What does it mean to be “a slave to righteousness”? It means to live under the dominating power of righteousness. Righteousness rules and reigns over Christians, demanding their obedience. Again, examples abound both in the Bible and in church history. Jeremiah found himself inwardly *compelled* to preach God’s message, in spite of the reproach that it brought upon him: “Because for me the word of the Lord has resulted in reproach and derision all day long. *But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.*”<sup>2</sup> Countless times down through the centuries Christians have felt themselves so constrained by

<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:21-22 <sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 20:8-9

righteousness that they have been unable even to sleep until they witnessed to a lost friend or helped someone in a time of special need. They have joyfully given themselves to be burned at the stake or torn by wild beasts because they were “controlled” by the love of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Because of their slavery to righteousness, Christians have repeatedly found themselves *unable* to keep from humbling themselves and asking forgiveness when they have wronged another. The story is told of an awakening in the British Isles under the ministry of W. P. Nicholson when multitudes of rough dock workers were converted. So many stolen goods were returned by these men that the warehouses were filled to capacity and a company order had to be given, “Please don’t bring back any more stolen goods!” Such is the slavery of the Christian to righteousness, and *what a blessed freedom it is!* The wonder of regeneration—an exchange of slavery to sin for slavery to righteousness!

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14

# A Change of Realms

## From Law to Grace

*“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.”* *Romans 6:14*

*“For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ...”* *Galatians 2:19-20*

We have seen in the preceding chapters that regeneration is described in the Bible in terms of a “change of realms”—from flesh to Spirit, from earth to heaven, and from slavery to sin to slavery to righteousness. But the Bible speaks of another change of realms—from being “under law” to being “under grace.” Since this change of realms encompasses both justification and regeneration, it is vital that certain aspects of it be considered in any discussion of these two great miracles.

In the verses quoted above, Paul tells us that Christians are “not under law” and have “died to the Law.” In other passages he tells us that Christians have been “released from the Law,”<sup>1</sup> and are no longer “bound”<sup>2</sup> by the law, but have been “set free” by Christ from the law’s “yoke of slavery.”<sup>3</sup> The lost man’s relationship to God is one of law; for the Christian this is not the case. He dwells in a state of glorious “liberty” and “freedom.”<sup>4</sup>

What does it mean that Christians are “under grace”? And what does it mean that they are “not under law” and “dead to law”? Does it mean that it is no longer wrong for Christians to steal, commit adultery, or otherwise continue in sin? Paul’s answer is a resounding, “May it never be!”<sup>5</sup> What exactly, then, does freedom from the law entail? Having considered the nature and characteristics of justification and regeneration, we are now in a position to give several answers to this question. The answers are very wonderful and far-reaching in their implications.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:6 <sup>2</sup> Romans 7:6 <sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:1 <sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:1, 13  
<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:14-15

## The Curse

In what sense are Christians free from the law? The first answer to this question is that Christians are free from the curse of the law. All lost people live under a curse: “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’”<sup>1</sup> No matter how well things may seem to be going in his life, the non-Christian lives continually under the curse of God. Though his children may be healthy, his garden thriving, and his flowers blooming beautifully, the wrath of God “abides” upon him at all times.<sup>2</sup> One day he will hear the awful words, “Depart from Me, *accursed* ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.”<sup>3</sup>

The Christian, on the other hand, has been redeemed from the curse of the law: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree...’”<sup>4</sup> Glory to God! If you are a Christian, you are no longer under the curse! There is not the *least* bit of curse remaining upon you, for “there is *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the curse will never come upon you again, for your sins are gone forever!<sup>6</sup>

*Free from the law, oh, happy condition,  
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission.  
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,  
Grace hath redeemed us, once for all.*

*Once for all, oh, sinner receive it,  
Once for all, oh, brother believe it;  
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,  
Christ hath redeemed us, once for all!*

Philip P. Bliss

## Blessing and Favor

Not only are Christians free from the curse of the law; they are free from the crushing burden of having to keep the law *as a means*

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:10 <sup>2</sup> John 3:36 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:41 <sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:13  
<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:1 <sup>6</sup> Hebrews 8:12

*of obtaining righteousness and life.* As seen in previous chapters, the law holds out the promise of life and blessing to those who establish their own righteousness by keeping it.<sup>1</sup> “Do this and you will *live*,” is the principle of law. Under the law, men exhaust themselves (and fail miserably) trying to merit the favor of God and get an “A” at the end of their course.

For the Christian, everything is different. He already has his “A”; he already has eternal life; he already has the smile and favor of God—all because of the work of Christ on his behalf! God delights in him and rejoices over him like a groom rejoices over his bride: “And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.”<sup>2</sup> “In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: ‘Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy!’”<sup>3</sup> Knowing as we do how sinful and unworthy of God’s delight we still are, it is difficult for us to believe that He could really feel this way about us. But He does! He not only loves us; He loves us beyond our ability to comprehend—His love “surpasses knowledge!”<sup>4</sup>

The Christian is free from the law as a requirement for obtaining life. Christ has not only redeemed him from the curse of the law; He has also obtained for him all the blessings of life and righteousness. “Christ redeemed us from the *curse* of the Law...in order that in Christ Jesus the *blessing* of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”<sup>5</sup> This means that instead of living under a curse, the Christian now lives under the perpetual blessing of God. Though his children may have sickness, his garden be blasted from drought, and his flowers wilted, he lives continually under God’s smile. This state of blessedness flows from his justification: “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would *justify* the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations shall be *blessed* in you.’ So then those who are of faith are *blessed* with Abraham, the believer.”<sup>6</sup> “Just as David also speaks of the *blessing* upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:12; Luke 10:25-28; Philippians 3:9; Romans 10:5 <sup>2</sup> Isaiah 62:5  
<sup>3</sup> Zephaniah 3:16-17 <sup>4</sup> Ephesians 3:19 <sup>5</sup> Galatians 3:13-14 <sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:8-9

works: ‘*Blessed* are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. *Blessed* is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.’”<sup>1</sup> It is infinitely better to waste away in a prison cell under the blessing of God, than to live in a palace under His curse! “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are *blessed* of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”<sup>2</sup>

Are you a Christian? Then the blessing of God rests upon you in ways too wonderful to imagine! “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man—all that God has prepared for those who love Him!”<sup>3</sup> “Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!”<sup>4</sup>

## External Rules

As we have seen in the sections above, some aspects of the Christian’s “freedom from the law” have to do with *justification*. He is free from the curse of the law, and he is free from the law as a means of obtaining life. But another aspect of the Christian’s freedom from law is a direct result of *regeneration*: The Christian is free from law as *an external rule that contradicts his real nature and desires*. This freedom comes to him through the miracle of a new heart.

To understand what this means, we need only to consider the condition of every unbeliever: The law imposes itself upon him from the outside and contradicts his true desires, keeping him in a state of continual bondage and frustration. It forbids the things that he loves and commands the things that he hates. When he reaches out his hand to steal, the law says, “You shall not steal.” When he looks on a woman to lust for her, the law says, “You shall not commit adultery.” The lost man’s condition is thus summed up by the words of one popular bumper sticker, “Everything I like is either illegal, immoral, or fattening.” The law constrains and restrains the unregenerate man by fear and by threats, and he *hates* it: “The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 4:6-8 <sup>2</sup> Matthew 25:34 <sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9 <sup>4</sup> Psalm 23:6  
<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:7

Every Christian has been freed from this state of bondage. For him the law is no longer an external rule that contradicts his true nature and desires. Rather, the law is internal; it has been “written on his heart” in the miracle of regeneration.<sup>1</sup> He is constrained by love, not law.<sup>2</sup> That which flows out of his innermost being conforms to the law and fulfills it automatically, for “love is the fulfillment of the law.”<sup>3</sup> A Christian *being who he really is* will never have to worry about coming into conflict with God’s law! “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; *against such things there is no law.*”<sup>4</sup> “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”<sup>5</sup>

In keeping with this reality, Paul says that “*law is not made for a righteous man*, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.”<sup>6</sup> The righteous man has no need for such external restrictions, since he is restrained by his own holy nature. Even the commands and exhortations of the New Testament are necessary only because believers have not yet completely “become who they are.” Since we are yet in this “mortal body” and subject to the “deceitfulness of sin”<sup>7</sup> and the “schemes of the devil,”<sup>8</sup> we still need guideposts to help us sort out right and wrong. However, as we grow in grace, our minds are progressively “renewed,” and “because of practice, our senses are trained to discern good and evil.”<sup>9</sup> In this way, we are enabled more and more to “prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>10</sup>

The Christian is not “under” law; he is (to use Paul’s actual terminology) “in-lawed to Christ.”<sup>11</sup> If all men were Christians there would be no need for locks on houses or signs in stores forbidding shoplifting. And this state of affairs will become a reality in heaven, where everyone will experience absolute liberty

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 8:10 <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14 <sup>3</sup> Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14  
<sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:22-23 <sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:18 <sup>6</sup> 1 Timothy 1:8-10 <sup>7</sup> Hebrews 3:13  
<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 6:11 <sup>9</sup> Hebrews 5:14 <sup>10</sup> Romans 12:2 <sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:21 (Gk. “*ennomos Christou*”)

to do as he pleases! There will be no signs in heaven saying, “You shall not murder” or “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart”—there will be no need for them!

## Supply and Demand

All Christians have died to the Law. They are “not under the law, but under grace.” To examine the meaning of these terms more fully would take us beyond the scope of this book, but perhaps one further aspect of our “death to law” should be mentioned. Christians have died to the law in that *they no longer live in the realm of “demand,” but in the realm of “supply.”* They are “under” grace, not law, as a dominating power, and they live in the realm where grace “reigns.”<sup>1</sup> In this realm *nothing* depends ultimately on man; *everything* depends on God. Every desire for goodness and every act of obedience is graciously worked in the believer by God! “For it is God who is at work in you, *both to will and to work* for His good pleasure.”<sup>2</sup>

In the realm where grace reigns, God undertakes to work in me *in spite of my weaknesses and failings* until I am perfectly conformed to the image of Christ. Though *I* may be shocked by my failures as a Christian, *God* isn’t! He already knew all my sins and weaknesses before He ever set His love on me, and He actually controls and directs my failures for my own good—in order to expose my weaknesses and to deliver me from them. (Luke 22:31-32) In the New Covenant, God mercifully determines to “cleanse us from *all* our filthiness and from *all* our idols,”<sup>3</sup> and He will never rest or relent until that work is finally accomplished! Hallelujah!

*Safe in Thy sanctifying grace,  
Almighty to restore—  
Borne onward—sin and death behind,  
And love and life before—  
O, let my soul abound in hope,  
And praise Thee more and more!*  
A. L. Waring

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:21   <sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:13   <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 36:25

# A Change of Realms

## From Adam to Christ

*“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”*  
1 Corinthians 1:30-31

In the preceding chapters we have considered something of the wonders of both justification and regeneration. It should be clear by this point that both of these mighty acts truly are at the very heart and center of the gospel. What “good news” could be more glorious than the proclamation of restored fellowship with God—that the most *hopelessly condemned* can stand unashamed in God’s presence, clothed in the very righteousness of Christ, and that the most *loathsome and vile* can become totally new creatures in Him?

But as wonderful as they are, both justification and regeneration are only part of a greater over-arching reality—the reality of our being “in Christ.” As Christians we can say that we are justified, that we have perfect righteousness, that we are new creatures, that we are seated in heavenly places, and that we are blessed in all the other ways that we have considered in the preceding pages, *or we can simply say that we are “in Christ”!* For to be *in Christ* is to possess every spiritual blessing imaginable<sup>1</sup>—including justification and regeneration, and every other “good and perfect gift.”<sup>2</sup> (See Appendix D.)

### Justified in Christ

All the blessings of justification are ours in Christ. In Christ we have perfect righteousness—the very righteousness of God: “That I...may be found *in Him*, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but...the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”<sup>3</sup> “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1:3   <sup>2</sup> James 1:17   <sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:8-9

God *in Him*.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, it can be said that we are “justified *in Christ*.”<sup>2</sup> *In Christ* we have “the forgiveness of sins,”<sup>3</sup> and “there is...no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.”<sup>4</sup>

## New Creatures in Christ

Just as all the blessings of justification are ours in Christ, even so all the blessings of regeneration are ours in Him: “Therefore if any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”<sup>5</sup> “We are His workmanship, created *in Christ Jesus* for good works.”<sup>6</sup> We have been “sanctified *in Christ Jesus*,”<sup>7</sup> “*in Him* we have been made complete,”<sup>8</sup> and we are seated “with Him in the heavenly places, *in Christ Jesus*.”<sup>9</sup>

## A Dependent Life

From these verses it should be evident that justification and regeneration are not blessings that we possess *in ourselves*, independent from God. God does not make us new creatures in such a way that we ourselves become positive sources of righteousness, able to produce life on our own apart from Him. Rather, we are new creatures *in Christ Jesus*. Apart from Christ we are nothing *and can do nothing*.<sup>10</sup> All that we are and have, we have only in Him. Thus, the Christian life is a totally dependent life. This is our Lord’s teaching in John 15: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As *the branch cannot bear fruit of itself*, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.”<sup>11</sup> We are not “adequate *in ourselves* to consider *anything* as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”<sup>12</sup>

*Emptied that Thou shouldst fill me,  
A clean vessel in Thy hand;  
With no power but as Thou givest,  
Graciously with each command.*

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21 <sup>2</sup> Galatians 2:17 <sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:14 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17 <sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:10 <sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2 <sup>8</sup> Colossians 2:10

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:6 <sup>10</sup> John 15:5 <sup>11</sup> John 15:4-5 <sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:5-6

*Channels only, blessed Master,  
But with all Thy wondrous power,  
Flowing through us, Thou canst use us  
Every day and every hour.*

Mary Maxwell

## “In Adam” vs. “In Christ”

This brings us to consider a final “change of realms” that is more fundamental and profound and comprehensive than any other—the change of realms from being “in Adam” to being “in Christ.” According to the Bible, all of human history can be summed up in terms of two men: Adam and Christ. All other men are “in” either one or the other of these two men. Those who are in Adam die; those who are in Christ live forever.

*“For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:21-23*

*“So also it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:45-49*

*“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come...For by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For*

*as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."*  
Romans 5:14, 17-19

Notice that in these verses Adam is said to be a "type" of Christ, and Christ is said to be "the last Adam." Adam was the first man, the head of the natural human race. Through his fall, sin and death entered mankind and humanity was ruined. Christ has come as "the last Adam" to start a new human race and to be the head of a new humanity. Just as Adam represented and is vitally united to all those who are in him, so Christ represented and is vitally united to all who are in Him. Those who are in Adam partake of all that was true of Adam; those who are in Christ partake of all that is true of Christ.

## The Characteristics of the Two Realms

The change of realms between Adam and Christ is the most fundamental and comprehensive change that any man can undergo. It includes every other change of realms that the Bible associates with conversion, including all those discussed in previous chapters. Notice again the two realms and all that is comprehended under each of them:

In Adam	In Christ
Sin (Rom. 5:12, 19)	Righteousness (Rom. 5:18, 19)
Condemnation (Rom. 5:18)	Justification (Rom. 5:18)
Death (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:22)	Life (Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22)
Flesh (Rom. 8:9; 7:5)	Spirit (Rom. 8:9)
The World (Col. 2:20)	The Heavens (Col. 3:1-3)
Law (Rom. 6:14)	Grace (Rom. 6:14)
Curse (Gal. 3:10)	Blessing (Gal. 3:14, 8-9)
Bondage (Rom. 7:6)	Liberty (Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:17)
Sin Reigns (Rom. 5:21)	Grace Reigns (Rom. 5:21)
"Under" Sin (Rom. 3:9; 7:14)	"Under" Grace (Rom. 6:14)
Slaves to Sin (Rom. 6:17)	Slaves to Righteousness (Rom. 6:18)
Death Reigns (Rom. 5:17)	We Reign in Life (Rom. 5:17)
Darkness (Acts 26:18)	Light (1 Thes. 5:4-5)
Dominion of Satan (Acts 26:18)	Kingdom of God (Col. 1:12-13)

## Christians Have "Died To" the Old Realm

*"Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."* Romans 6:9-11

Once we have understood how comprehensive the "two realms" of Adam and Christ are, we are in a position to understand Paul's meaning when he speaks of Christians as having "died to" various things. In Romans 6:11 Paul calls upon Christians to believe and count upon the fact that they have "died to" *sin*. Similar terminology is used concerning the Christian's relationship to *Law*: "For through the Law *I died to the Law*, that I might live to God."<sup>1</sup> The Christian's relationship to the *world* is also spoken of in terms of crucifixion and death: "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, *through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."<sup>2</sup> Notice that our death to the world is tied in with both the "new creation" and our "crucifixion" with Christ.

What does Paul mean when he says that Christians have "died to" sin, Law, and the world? Certainly he does *not* mean that we have "died to" these things in the sense that we are no longer affected by them. This is obvious from the fact that Paul exhorts us not to "let sin reign in our mortal bodies." Such exhortations would be unnecessary if Christians were not still being affected by sin. Romans 6:11 does not mean "*Pretend* that you are no longer affected by sin, even though you *know* that you are"! Rather, the key to understanding the meaning of our "death to sin" is found in v.10, which speaks of the experience of Christ Himself: "*For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*"

Notice that according to Paul even Christ Himself "died to sin"! In what sense did Christ "die to sin" when He died? Was He ever "alive" to it? And in what sense does Christ now "live to God" since His resurrection? Was He ever *not* "alive to God"? The

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 2:19; Romans 7:4; Colossians 2:20-21 <sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:14-15

answer is clear: When Christ died on the cross, He “died to sin” *in that He passed out of its realm*, and He now “lives to God” *in that He passed into the heavenly realm* at the time of His resurrection and ascension! “Even so,” Paul says in v.11, Christians have “died to sin” by passing out of its realm, and are “alive to God” by passing into His realm! They have left one realm and entered into another. When Paul says that we have “died to sin,” he is referring to something that has *really* happened! The Christian has not died to sin in the sense that he is no longer affected by it, but he *has* died to sin in the sense that he no longer lives under sin’s reign. In the crucifixion and death of our old man, we pass out of the realm of flesh, out of the realm of the world, out of the realm of the Law, and out of the realm of sin and death.

Christian, you actually *have* “died to sin,” in that you have passed out of its realm. Sin no longer “reigns” over you; it no longer “fits” you; it no longer “is” you; you are no longer its slave! As it was with the wicked man in Psalm 37, so it is for the Christian when his “old man” dies: “Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there.”<sup>1</sup> The “wicked man” that we once were “is no more.” He is “no longer found” in “his place,” and those who have come to expect his presence there are “surprised” by his absence: “For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. *And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you.*”<sup>2</sup> How this unexpected change came about is explained in the preceding verses: “...*he who has suffered in the flesh [i.e., died] has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.*”<sup>3</sup>

Christian, your death to sin is a reality! Therefore, *count upon the fact* that you are dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!

## The Certainty of Life in Christ

Perhaps it is fitting to end this study by considering once again the unspeakably bright future that lies ahead for all true

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 37:10 <sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 4:3-4 <sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 4:1-2

believers. Every Christian should draw great comfort from the fact that he is now “in Christ” and united to Christ. After all, each of us has experienced firsthand the real and devastating results of our union with Adam! Our union with Adam effectually secured sin, condemnation, and death for each of us. “Sin reigns”<sup>1</sup> and “death reigns”<sup>2</sup> over all the fallen sons of Adam, riding them down to the pit of hell and destruction.

But if union with Adam is this powerful in securing death, *how much more* powerful is union with Christ in securing life! This is Paul’s argument in Romans 5. He repeatedly speaks of the work of Christ as “much more” effectual than the work of Adam: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, *much more* those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup> “Where sin increased, *grace abounded all the more*, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>4</sup> Sin is a terrible tyrant that reigns with such power over those who are in Adam that death for them is inevitable. But sin no longer reigns over the Christian. Grace reigns over the Christian, and it reigns with such inexorable might that nothing can stand in its way. Christian, you may be ever so weak and sinful, you may have every reason in yourself to despair that you will ever reach heaven, but “grace reigns” in your life and it will never rest or relent until every sin is conquered and you are perfectly conformed to the image of Christ! Hallelujah! Grace “reigns” effectually “through righteousness” all the way “to eternal life”!

*Now let my soul arise,  
And tread the tempter down;  
My Captain leads me forth  
To conquest and a crown:  
The feeblest saint shall win the day,  
Though death and hell obstruct the way.*

*Should all the hosts of death,  
And powers of hell unknown,*

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:21 <sup>2</sup> Romans 5:14 <sup>3</sup> Romans 5:17, 15 <sup>4</sup> Romans 5:20-21

*Put their most dreadful forms  
Of rage and mischief on,  
I shall be safe, for Christ displays  
Superior power, and guardian grace.*  
Isaac Watts



Keep Looking Down!

*“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God!”*

# Regeneration

## A Summary

At the time of our union with Christ, all of the following became true of us:

**1. New Creation—a) old things passed away, and b) we became new creatures.**

- 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 *new creature*
- Galatians 6:15 (cf. v.14) *a new creation*
- Ephesians 2:10 His *workmanship, created*, in Christ Jesus
- Ephesians 2:15 in Himself might *create* the two into one *new man*—one body (v.16)
- Ephesians 4:24 the *new man*, which according to God has been *created*, therefore...; for we are *members of one another* (v.25)
- Colossians 3:10 the *new man* who is being renewed according to the image of the One who *created* him
- Cf. also, all verses with word “new”—e.g. Titus 3:5 “renewing”

**2. New Birth—we have been “born again”; a *real* birth takes place in the spiritual realm.**

- John 3:6 *that which is born is spirit*
- 2 Peter 1:4 partakers of the *divine nature*
- 1 John 3:9 *born of God*, His *seed* remains, and we cannot sin *because born*
- Hebrews 2:11 one Father (really!), *therefore brethren*
- 1 John 3:1 “such we *are*. For this reason...”

**3. New Heart—a) our stony heart was removed, and b) we were given a “heart of flesh.”**

- Ezekiel 36:22-32 “*new heart*,” “*new spirit*,” “I will put *My Spirit* within you”
- Jeremiah 31:33-34 “*within them*,” “*on their heart*”

- Jeremiah 32:38-41 *I will give them one heart and one way; I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.*
- Hebrews 8:10 I will *put...into...*
- 2 Corinthians 3:1-3 with the *Spirit of the living God*, not on tablets of stone, but *on tablets of human hearts*

#### 4. Spiritual Circumcision—our heart was circumcised by the Spirit.

- Romans 2:28-29 circumcision of the *heart* by the *Spirit*
- Colossians 2:10-11 in Him made complete; *in Him, were circumcised* with a circumcision made *without hands* in the “*putting off*” of the *body of the flesh* by the *circumcision of Christ*; (v.13) were dead in the “*uncircumcision of our flesh*” (the physical condition of all Gentiles)
- Ephesians 2:11 the “so-called” circumcision, made in the flesh “by human hands” (There is an allusion and contrast here to the true circumcision of Christians.)
- Philippians 3:3 the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit, and put no confidence in the flesh
- Acts 7:51 uncircumcised in *heart* and *ears*; ...always resisting the Holy Spirit
- Deuteronomy 30:6 the Lord will *circumcise your heart to love...*

#### 5. New Nature—transformed from thorn bushes to fig trees!

- Matthew 12:33-37 “Either *make the tree good*, and its *fruit* good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is *known by its fruit.*”
- Matthew 7:15-20 (esp. v.18 “cannot”)

#### 6. New Man—a) we have put off the old man, and b) we have put on the new man. (Adam vs. Christ)

- Colossians 3:8-11 *since you put off* the old man *with its practices*, and *have put on* the new man who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him, in which there is *no Jew and Greek...*but *Christ is all*, and *in all*

- Ephesians 2:10, 14-16 that *in Himself* might create the two into *one new man* and reconcile them both in *one body* to God
  - Galatians 3:27-28 for *all* of you who were baptized into Jesus Christ *have put on Christ...*there is *neither Jew nor Greek...*for you are *all one in Christ*
  - Romans 13:13-14 not in sensuality, strife and jealousy, but *put on* the *Lord Jesus Christ* and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts
  - Ephesians 4:22-25 in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside *the old man*, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and be *renewed in the spirit of your mind*, and put on *the new man*, which according to God *has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* Therefore, speak truth, for we are *members of one another.*
- #### 7. Crucifixion and Resurrection—a) our “old man” was crucified, “we” died, we were buried, and b) we were raised up to newness of life, and ascended to heavenly places, having become partakers of Christ’s life and power through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

##### Crucified:

- Romans 6:6 our old man was crucified with Him
- Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live
- Galatians 6:14 “I have been crucified to the world through the cross of Christ.”

##### Died:

- Romans 6:2 we who died
- Romans 6:7 he who has died
- Romans 6:8 we have died with Christ
- Romans 7:4 you were made to die to the Law
- Romans 7:6 have been released, having died to that by which we were bound
- Galatians 2:19 I died to the Law
- Galatians 2:20 I no longer live

- Colossians 2:20 you have died with Christ
- Colossians 3:3 you have died
- 2 Timothy 2:11 for if we died with Him
- 2 Corinthians 5:14 therefore all died

## Buried:

- Romans 6:4 buried with Him
- Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him by baptism

## Resurrected and ascended:

- Romans 6:4 as Christ was raised, so we too might walk in newness of life
- Romans 6:5 likeness of His resurrection
- Romans 6:8 also live with Him
- Romans 6:11 alive to God in Christ Jesus
- Romans 6:13 those who are alive from the dead
- Ephesians 2:5-6 made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenlies; cf. 5:14!
- Galatians 2:19 that I might live to God
- Galatians 5:25 we *live* by the Spirit
- Colossians 2:12 were also raised up with Him, through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead
- Colossians 3:1-3 have been raised up *with Christ*, keep seeking the things *above, where Christ is*, seated *at the right hand of God*, for you have died and *your life is hidden with Christ in God*
- 2 Corinthians 5:15 that they *who live* should live for Him who died and *rose again* on their behalf

## Partakers of His life and power:

- John 4:14 *in him* a well of water *springing up to eternal life*
- John 6:57 “*As...I live because of the Father, so...he also shall live because of Me.*”
- John 15:4-5 *Abide in Me, and I in you. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself.*
- 2 Corinthians 4:11 that the *life of Jesus* also may be *manifested* in our *mortal flesh*
- Galatians 2:20 “It is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me.*”

- Ephesians 3:16, 20 strengthened with power *through His Spirit in the inner man; exceeding abundantly* beyond all that we ask or think, *according to the power that works within us*
- Colossians 3:4 Christ, *who is our life*
- Philippians 1:19, 21 the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; “*to live is Christ*”
- Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”
- Many others!

**8. Flesh/Spirit—a) we are no longer “in the flesh,” but b) we are “in the Spirit.”**

- Romans 7:5 when we *were...*
- Romans 8:5-9 those who are *according to the flesh*; “the *mind of the flesh* is death”; those who are *in the flesh* cannot please God—however, you are *not* in the flesh but *in the Spirit*, if indeed the Spirit of God *dwells in you*
- 1 Corinthians 2:10-3:4 natural, fleshly, “according to man”; “mere men” contrasted with “spiritual” and “mind of Christ” (i.e., were acting like lost men)
- 2 Corinthians 5:16 from now on we recognize no man *according to the flesh*; even though...have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now *we know Him thus no longer*; new creature, *old things passed away*; (i.e., We no longer view anything from the fleshly perspective, because we’re *no longer living there!*)
- Galatians 5:25 *live* by the Spirit (Notice the flesh/Spirit contrast in preceding verses.)

**9. World/Heavenlies—a) we were translated from the earthly sphere, and b) we were placed in the heavenly sphere.**

- Colossians 2:20 “as though living in the world”!
- Colossians 3:1-3 “things above” contrasted with “things on the earth”
- Philippians 3:19b-20 “earthly things” contrasted with “in heaven”; we are citizens *now*
- Ephesians 2:6 “seated with Him,” “in the heavenlies,” “in Christ”
- Ephesians 1:3 “in the heavenlies,” “in Christ”

- Galatians 4:25-26 “present Jerusalem” vs. “Jerusalem above”
- Hebrews 12:22 *have* come to “the heavenly Jerusalem” vs. “mount that may be touched”
- Galatians 6:14 crucified to the world!
- John 17:14, 16 not of the world, *even as* Christ not of the world! Cf. John 8:23, 1 John 4:4-6

#### 10. Darkness/Light—a) we were taken out of the realm of “darkness,” and b) we were placed in the realm of “light.”

- Ephesians 5:7-14 *you were* formerly *darkness*, but now *you are light* in the Lord; walk as *children of light*; deeds of darkness; awake *sleepers*, and arise from the *dead*, and Christ will *shine* on you.
- Colossians 1:12-13 *qualified* to share in inheritance of the *saints in light*, for...delivered us from the *authority* (domain) of *darkness*, and *transferred* us to the *kingdom* of His beloved Son
- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 you are *not in darkness*; you are all *sons of light* and *sons of day*; we are *not of night nor of darkness*; since we are of day *let us be sober*...
- Romans 13:11-14 *awaken from sleep*; the *day* is at hand, *let us therefore lay aside* the deeds of darkness and *put on* the armor of light; let us walk properly *as in the day*
- 1 John 2:7-11 the darkness is *passing away*, and the true light is *already shining*; “in the light” vs. “in the darkness”; “darkness has blinded his eyes”!
- Acts 26:18 to turn from *darkness* to *light* and from the dominion of *Satan* to *God*
- 1 Peter 2:9 *called out of darkness into* His marvelous light
- Cf. also Matthew 4:16, 5:14-16; Luke 1:79!, 11:33-36, 16:8, 22:53; John 1:5 (“the darkness”= men!), 3:19-21, 8:12, 12:35-36, 12:46; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, 6:14; 1 John 1:5-7

#### 11. Slaves to God—a) we were released from our slavery to sin, and b) we became slaves to righteousness.

- Romans 6:6-7 *no longer* slaves to sin
- Romans 6:14 sin *shall not* be master over you
- Romans 6:16-23 *were* slaves of sin; *having been freed* from sin, became *slaves of righteousness*; *freed from sin* and *enslaved to God*

- John 8:31-36 slave of sin; *slave does not remain in the house forever*; free *indeed*
- Note implications for proper interpretation of Romans 7, where Paul speaks of a man who is “sold into bondage to sin” (v.14), “a prisoner to the law of sin” (v.23), “serving” the law of sin (v.25), and still needing to be “set free” from the body of death (v.24).

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#### In the death of the old and the resurrection of the new, we:

- died to sin and are alive to God. Romans 6:1-14; 1 Peter 2:24 (cf. 1 Peter 4:1-2)
- died to law and are alive to God. Romans 7:4-6; Galatians 2:19; Colossians 2:20-22; Galatians 6:12-15
- died to self and are alive to God. 2 Corinthians 5:15 (cf. v.14-17)
- died to the world (as the sphere of law and sin) and are alive to God:
  - ♦ Colossians 2:20 (the world as the sphere of law—see v.16-17, 20-23)
  - ♦ Colossians 3:3 (the world as the sphere of sin—see v.2, 5f.)
  - ♦ Galatians 6:14 (the world as the sphere of law—see v.12-15 and 4:3)

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#### As we begin to believe (i.e., “reckon,” count upon the fact—Romans 6:11) that we are new creatures alive in the heavenly sphere, the “spirit of our mind” is progressively “renewed” (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 1:9), and we are enabled more and more to see, think, and act from the heavenly perspective:

- Since we already “have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16; Romans 8:6), we are now able to “let” His mind rule in us (Philippians 2:5) and to “arm ourselves” with His mind (1 Peter 4:1-2). cf. Philippians 3:15 (v.13-15)
- Since we have already been crucified, we are enabled now by

faith to “take up our cross and deny *self*” (Luke 9:23)—*truly*, not just self-righteous “self-denial.”

- Since we *live* by the Spirit, we can now *walk* by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Contrast Colossians 3:7.
- Since the old man has already been put off and the new man put on (Colossians 3:9-10), we are exhorted to *live* accordingly by “putting off the old man” (i.e., his deeds) (Ephesians 4:22), by “putting aside anger...and putting on a heart of compassion...” (Colossians 3:8, 12), and by “putting on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8).
- Note: Some authorities maintain that the infinitives of Ephesians 4:22, 24 are not imperatives, but “infinitives of result” and should be translated as “...you *have laid aside* the old man... and *have put on* the new man...” (See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 214-18.) This would make v.22 & 24 to be *statements of fact* (as in Colossians 3:9-10) and v.25-32 to be the *exhortations* based on those statements of fact.
- Since we have already “clothed ourselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:27); we are now able in practice to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).
- Since we *are* children of light, we are to *walk* as children of light (Ephesians 5:7-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:4-10).
- Since we *are* slaves of righteousness, we can now refuse to let sin “*reign*” and can *present* our members as slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:12, 19).
- Cf. also James 3:10-12; Isaiah 52:1-2; Isaiah 60:1-5; Proverbs 31:4; etc.

6:12, 13, 19; Romans 7:5, 14, 18, 23, 24, 25; Romans 8:3, 10-13 (Note: sin = “the deeds of the body”!); Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:5f. (Note: v.5 *lit.* “Put to death the members which are upon the earth”!); Galatians 5:19f.

- “Realm”: the region or sphere in which something rules, “reigns,” or prevails; same as “kingdom” (Colossians 1:13b). See also “domain” (Colossians 1:13a) and “dominion” (Acts 26:18): authority, jurisdiction.

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### Summary of terms:

- The “old man”: our old self, who we were in Adam, our unregenerate self
- The “new man”: who we are in Christ, the new creature, our true identity as Christians
- The “body of sin”: the “flesh”; the unredeemed physical body viewed as the realm where sin still tries to reign. Cf. Romans

## “Cannot Sin”

John tells us in 1 John 3:4-9 that Christians “do not” and “cannot” sin. What does he mean by such statements? Numerous answers have been given to this question over the centuries, but here we will consider only two of these.

**1. One popular explanation of these verses is that *the Christian’s new nature cannot sin.*** “God’s seed” (which is perfect) “remains” in the Christian, and it never desires or commits *even a single act of sin*. While there is much truth in this view, it nevertheless faces formidable objections.

First of all, John does not say that the Christian’s *new nature* cannot sin; he says that the Christian *himself* cannot sin: “God’s seed abides in him; and *he cannot sin*, because he is born of God.” (1 John 3:9) The “he” who “cannot sin” is clearly the Christian *as a total person*—the same person who is said to have been “born of God” in the last part of the verse.

Secondly, the proposal that a Christian’s “new nature” does not sin is actually a meaningless statement. Only a *person* is capable of sinning or not sinning; an abstract nature cannot will or act at all. As we have seen in Chapter Nine, a “nature” is not something that we “have” separate from our persons; it is a description of *who we really are* in our innermost being.

Thirdly, “doing sin” is contrasted in v.7-8 with “doing righteousness.” Surely John is thinking here, not of a *single act* of righteousness, but of the *practice* of righteousness. So, likewise, when he speaks in this passage of the impossibility of Christians “doing sin,” he must have in mind, not a single act of sin, but the *practice* of sin.

Fourthly, John is concerned here to show that the *actual actions* of Christians are diametrically opposite to the actions of the unregenerate. He is talking about Christians *actually not sinning*, not just Christians “sinning and hating it” or Christians “sinning, but not sinning from their new nature.” Such teaching would play into the hands of the very heretics John is opposing.

**2. The best explanation of these verses is that the "sin" which a believer "does not" and "cannot" do is *habitual or persistent sin*.** John is literally saying that the Christian does not "do sin." That is, the Christian does not "practice" sin. On the contrary, the Christian "practices righteousness": "Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous." (1 John 3:7)

Why does the Christian find himself unable to "practice sin"? The answer is given in v.9: "No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." All Christians have a new nature (God's seed) as their essential identity. This new nature (which is perfect) asserts itself against all evil, effectually preventing the believer from living in sin. On the contrary, righteousness is the main characteristic of his life. The Christian's walk is not perfect, however, because he still has the flesh to contend with throughout this lifetime. When his mortal body is redeemed, then the new life already present in him will be manifested in its fullness, and his actions will perfectly correspond to the desires of his renewed heart.

This understanding of John's words is the only one that gives full weight to the present tenses of the verbs involved and is reflected in the best modern translations of 1 John 3:4-9.

NASB:

*"Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."*

ESV:

*"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to*

*take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God."*

## Romans 7

To attempt to deal with the controversies surrounding Romans 7 would take an entire book. Only a few guidelines for its interpretation can be suggested here:

**1. Romans 7 flows directly from Romans 6, continuing and expanding upon the themes that are introduced there.** According to Romans 6, Christians have “died to sin”<sup>1</sup> by virtue of their union with Christ and have therefore been “freed”<sup>2</sup> from it, so that sin no longer has “dominion”<sup>3</sup> over them. The result of this death to sin is “service”<sup>4</sup> to God that brings forth “fruit”<sup>5</sup> unto sanctification. Paul repeats this pattern of triumph in Romans 7: Christians have “died to law”<sup>6</sup> by virtue of their union with Christ and have therefore been “freed”<sup>7</sup> from it, so that law no longer has “dominion”<sup>8</sup> over them. The result of this death to law is “service”<sup>9</sup> to God that brings forth “fruit”<sup>10</sup> unto God. In short, Paul has been “soaring” in Romans 6, and he *continues* to soar in Romans 7!

The real purpose of Romans 7 is to explain and expand upon Paul’s statement in 6:14: “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.” According to this verse, our deliverance from the dominion of sin is a direct result of the fact that we are no longer “under the law.” The first question to be answered is, “How has it come to pass that Christians are no longer ‘under the law’?” Paul answers this question in 7:1-4. Christians have passed out of the realm of law, having died to it by virtue of their union with Christ. The second question to be answered is, “Why is freedom from law *necessary* in order to secure our deliverance from the reign of sin?” Or, conversely, “Why is freedom from sin’s reign *impossible* for all who are still under law?” Paul answers this question in 7:5-25. All who are still “under law” are also still “in the flesh.” (v.5) But law actually stirs up and *strengthens* sin’s dominion over those who are in the flesh, leaving them in a state of bondage and death. (v.5, 7-25)

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:2, 11 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:7, 18, 22 <sup>3</sup> Romans 6:14 (Gk. “dominion,” “rule”) <sup>4</sup> Romans 6:22 <sup>5</sup> Romans 6:21-22 (Gk. “fruit”) <sup>6</sup> Romans 7:4 <sup>7</sup> Romans 7:6, 2-3 <sup>8</sup> Romans 7:1 (Gk. “dominion,” as in 6:14) <sup>9</sup> Romans 7:6 <sup>10</sup> Romans 7:4

**2. It is absolutely vital to realize that Paul thinks in terms of two and only two groups—those who are “under law” (“in the flesh”) and those who are “under grace” (“in the Spirit”).** (pp. 96-98) The characteristics of these two groups are summarized both *before* (7:5-6) and *after* (8:1-4) Paul’s discussion in Romans 7:7-25. This means that in v.14-25, Paul is *not* describing a “carnal Christian” who has not yet “passed into Romans 8,” as the “deeper life” view of Romans 7 would tell us. *All* Christians are “in” Romans 8, just as all Christians are “in” Romans 6 and “in” Romans 7:6.

**3. Paul has already described in detail the state of every Christian in Romans 6 and in Romans 7:1-6. We cannot ignore this description when we come to the last half of Romans 7.** According to Romans 6 and Romans 7:1-6, all Christians have been “freed from sin” and have become “slaves of righteousness.”<sup>1</sup> “Sin shall not be master over” Christians, for they are “not under law, but under grace.”<sup>2</sup> Christians have been “joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that they might bear fruit for God.”<sup>3</sup> They are “alive from the dead.”<sup>4</sup> They are no longer “in the flesh.”<sup>5</sup> They “serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”<sup>6</sup>

The view that Romans 7:14-25 is a description of “the Christian at his best, even of Paul at the time of writing” thus flies directly in the face of everything Paul has said up to this point. How can we read Romans 6 and 7:1-6 and still contend that all true Christians are actually “*of flesh, sold into bondage to sin*”<sup>7</sup>!

It is highly significant that this view of Romans 7 has led to the “wretched man” concept of the Christian life, where “wretchedness” and spirituality are almost equated, and the more holy we become, the more “wretched” we are. In the words of one writer: “This moan, ‘O wretched man that I am,’ expresses the normal experience of the Christian, and any Christian who does not so moan is in an abnormal and unhealthy state spiritually. The man who does not utter this cry daily is either so out of communion with Christ, or so ignorant of the teaching of Scripture, or so deceived about his actual condition, that he knows not the corruptions of his own heart and the abject failure of his own life.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:18 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:14 <sup>3</sup> Romans 7:4 <sup>4</sup> Romans 6:13 <sup>5</sup> Romans 7:5

<sup>6</sup> Romans 7:6 <sup>7</sup> Romans 7:14 <sup>8</sup> A. W. Pink, “The Christian in Romans 7”

“The one who is truly in communion with Christ, will...emit this groan...daily and hourly.”<sup>1</sup>

It is true that in this day of glib “easy-believism” and shallow repentance multitudes of professing “Christians” desperately need a revelation of their own inner depravity and corruption. In the case of many, this would lead to bitter weeping<sup>2</sup> and genuine conversion. But any true child of God who has traveled very far on the pilgrim pathway already knows quite a bit about his own wretchedness and vileness apart from the transforming power of Christ. Instead of praying that God would give us “such a view of [our] own depravity and unworthiness that [we] may indeed grovel in the dust before Him,”<sup>3</sup> would it not be more Scriptural to ask God for such a view of *Christ’s resurrection life in us*<sup>4</sup> and *our new nature in Him*<sup>5</sup> that we might soar in the heavenlies and joyfully serve Him in newness of life?

Some theologians have tried to escape this “wretched Christian” view of Romans 7 by saying that even though Paul is speaking here of his own present experience as a believer, he is merely describing the fact that “no Christian is as holy as he wants to be.” Romans 7, according to this view, teaches only that “the Christian’s reach always exceeds his grasp” and that during this lifetime the Christian “cannot arrive at perfection.” All these statements are undoubtedly true, but they do not do justice to the degree of failure and misery evident in this passage. Paul is clearly describing here (to use his own words) a state of “wretchedness,”<sup>6</sup> a state of “bondage,”<sup>7</sup> and a state of *inability*<sup>8</sup> to “do good.” In other words, the man of Romans 7 is not just battling with sin but utterly defeated by it, in stark contrast with Paul’s description of all true Christians in Romans 6 and Romans 7:1-6.

**4. Romans 6 & 7 are structured around four questions and their corresponding answers.** At the end of Romans 5, Paul makes two shocking statements that require defense and clarification. The first is that “the Law came in that the transgression might increase,” and the second is that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” (v.20) Paul expects these statements to be misunderstood and distorted by others, so he sets out to clarify and defend them

<sup>1</sup> Pink <sup>2</sup> Zechariah 12:10 <sup>3</sup> Pink <sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:18-23; Ephesians 3:14-21

<sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:9-13 <sup>6</sup> Romans 7:24 <sup>7</sup> Romans 7:14, 23-24 <sup>8</sup> Romans 7:18-19

in chapters six and seven. He does this in terms of four questions and their corresponding answers. (6:1; 6:15; 7:7; 7:13) Each of these question-answer sections follows a very specific pattern. First, Paul poses the anticipated misunderstanding or distortion of his position. He then follows with a strong denial (“May it never be!”) and a brief summary answer to the misunderstanding. This brief answer is then clarified and expounded in the verses that follow. This pattern is invariable throughout Romans 6-7:

Romans 6:1—Question: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?” Strong denial: “May it never be!” Brief answer: “How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” Fuller explanation of brief answer: v.3-14.

Romans 6:15—Question: “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Strong denial: “May it never be!” Brief answer: “Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey...?” Fuller explanation of brief answer: v.17-23.

Romans 7:7—Question: “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin?” Strong denial: “May it never be!” Brief answer: “On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” Fuller explanation of brief answer: v.8-12.

Romans 7:13—Question: “Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me?” Strong denial: “May it never be!” Brief answer: “Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” Fuller explanation of brief answer: v.14-25.

This is the setting of v.14-25! Verse 14 does not begin a new and entirely unrelated theme, as some have supposed. The subject being dealt with in this section is not “the immature Christian’s failure to walk in the Spirit” or “the mature Christian’s continuing struggle with remaining sin.” Rather, the subject here is “the goodness of the Law, in spite of its effects upon those who are in the flesh.” In this connection, it is very significant that v.14 begins with the word “for” and is immediately followed (twice!) by the word “for” in v.15.

**5. Romans 7:14-25 flows from and is a continuation of Paul’s discussion in v.7-13 of the “man to whom the commandment has come.”** In v.5 Paul describes the condition of those who are “in the flesh” and “under law”: “For while we were in the *flesh*, the *sinful* passions, which were aroused by the *Law*, were at work in the *members of our body* to bear fruit for death.” The key words here are “Law,” “sin,” and “flesh.” *These three words from v.5 will form the heart of Paul’s discussion throughout the rest of the chapter.*

In v.7-12 Paul begins to explain his statement in v.5 by reference to his own experience prior to conversion. There was a time when Paul lived in a state of complacent self-satisfaction: “I was once alive.” (v.9) He thought he was doing fine in keeping the Law: “As to the righteousness which is in the Law...found blameless.”<sup>1</sup>

But then a major turning point came in Paul’s life. By the working of God’s Spirit, “the commandment came” to him. He began to realize how deep and exacting the Law’s requirements really are and how impossible it was for him to fulfill those requirements. “Sin became alive,” and Paul “died” under the terrible conviction of his sinfulness. (How long this went on, we do not know, but we do know that before he ever met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, it was already “hard” for Paul to “kick against the goads.”<sup>2</sup>) The Law, which promised *life*, thus resulted in *death* for Paul, not through any fault of its own, but because of the utter sinfulness of sin.

Up to this point in his discussion (v.13), Paul has described only the relationship between “*Law*” and “*sin*,” showing how the Law actually stirs up sin and leads to death. But he has not yet explained *why* Law should produce such effects. This he can do only by a discussion of “*the flesh*”!

*This is the setting of Romans 7:14-25!* Verse 14 begins with the word “for” and *continues* and *advances* Paul’s discussion of “Law, sin, and flesh” by dramatically describing in the present tense the *place* of sin’s reign—“the flesh”: “*For* we know that *the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh*, sold into bondage to sin.” (Notice that the transition to the present tense takes place quite naturally since Paul could hardly say, “We know that the Law *was* spiritual.”) Paul then continues in the present tense until the end of the chapter,

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 3:6 <sup>2</sup> Acts 26:14

giving a firsthand account of the “bondage to sin” experienced by those who are “in the flesh.” He does this from the vantage point of one who has now become a Christian and can see clearly the nature of the conflict that was formerly taking place in his life. For this reason the terminology that Paul uses in these verses shows much Christian influence, though it is descriptive of his pre-Christian state.

Remember again Paul’s controlling statement: “For while we were *in the flesh*, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were *at work in the members of our body* to bear fruit for death.” “Flesh” is controlled by “sin,” and *in the presence of Law* the sinful passions of the flesh will always culminate in “death.” The fact that “flesh” is Paul’s emphasis throughout this section is clear from the terminology that he uses: “of flesh, sold into bondage to sin,”<sup>1</sup> “a law in the members of my body,”<sup>2</sup> and “the law of sin which is in my members.”<sup>3</sup> This bondage to “sin in the members” leads to the desperate cry, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from *the body* of this death (margin: “this body of death”)?”<sup>4</sup>

Paul’s answer to this cry is given in v.25, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” and more fully in 8:1-4, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* For what *the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh*, God did...in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, *who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*”

Notice Paul’s summary here of what he has just said at length in 7:14-25: “...what the *Law* could not do, weak as it was *through the flesh*...”! And notice again his description of those who are Christians: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *has set you free* from the law of sin and of death...that the requirement of the Law might be *fulfilled* in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”! The man of Romans 7 cries, “Who will set me free?” The Christian replies, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *has set me free.*”

Isaac Watts sums up Paul’s teaching in Romans 7 in a hymn entitled “Conviction of Sin by the Law—Romans 7:8, 9, 14-24”:

<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:14 <sup>2</sup> Romans 7:23 <sup>3</sup> Romans 7:23 <sup>4</sup> Romans 7:24

*Lord, how secure my conscience was,  
And felt no inward dread!  
I was alive without the law,  
And thought my sins were dead.*

*My hopes of heav’n were firm and bright;  
But, since the precept came  
With a convincing pow’r and light,  
I find how vile I am.*

*My guilt appear’d but small before  
Till terribly I saw  
How perfect, holy, just, and pure,  
Was thine eternal law.*

*Then felt my soul the heavy load;  
My sins reviv’d again;  
I had provok’d a dreadful God,  
And all my hopes were slain.*

*I’m like a helpless captive, sold  
Under the pow’r of sin:  
I cannot do the good I would,  
Nor keep my conscience clean.*

*My God! I cry with every breath  
For some kind pow’r to save;  
To break the yoke of sin and death,  
And thus redeem the slave.*

### Three Final Observations

In closing, three things should be noted:

**1. In spite of superficial resemblances, Galatians 5:16-25 is *not parallel with Romans 7.*** Romans 7:14-25 describes the struggle and defeat of a man who is still “in the flesh” and “under the Law.” The Holy Spirit is notably absent from the language and thought of this man. In fact, the Holy Spirit is not mentioned anywhere in the entire passage.

Galatians 5:16-25, on the other hand, describes the inevitable conflict that the *Holy Spirit* has with the *flesh* in the life of a true

believer. A note of victory is sounded throughout this passage: The Christian is “not under the Law.”<sup>1</sup> He has already definitively “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” through repentance and faith in Christ.<sup>2</sup> The power of the Spirit in his life effectually prevents him from following the natural inclinations of his flesh—he cannot do “as he pleases.”<sup>3</sup> Since he *lives* “in the Spirit,” he is able now to “*walk* in the Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> And as he “walks in the Spirit,” he is assured that he “*will not* carry out the desire of the flesh.”<sup>5</sup> These verses are not a statement of “wretchedness,” but an assurance of victory!

The real parallel to Galatians 5:16-25 is Romans 8:12-14, where “flesh” and “Spirit” are similarly contrasted: “So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” According to these verses, the Christian is under no obligation to live according to the flesh. He is able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to “put to death the deeds of the body.” In fact, being thus “led by the Spirit” is one of the distinguishing characteristics of all who are truly “sons of God”! Notice the parallel here between being “led by the Spirit” (Romans 8:14) and “walking in the Spirit” (Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16).

**2. The man described in Romans 7:7-25 is not the typical lost “man on the street,” who knows nothing of the spirituality or real desirability of the law.** The man in Romans 7:7-25 is the man to whom “the commandment has come.” He makes statements that the typical unbeliever would never make. The state of misery that he is experiencing *eventuates in his coming to Christ*: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”<sup>6</sup> From this it is evident that this man is being “taught by God” and is “hearing and learning from the Father.”<sup>7</sup> *Everyone* who has thus “heard and learned from the Father” *comes to Christ*.<sup>8</sup>

**3. There is no doubt that every true Christian has felt at times as if he were “in the middle” of Romans 7.** Even the truly *righteous* man “falls seven times”!<sup>9</sup> Christian experience always

involves excruciating defeat as part of the process of learning to “walk in the Spirit.” Like Peter, we often have to learn by bitter failure the insufficiency of our own resolve.<sup>1</sup> The question before us, however, is not, “What do Christians often experience?” but, “What is Paul teaching in Romans 7?”

(Those interested in reading further on this subject are referred to: Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, Appendix F, 1127-32; Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Law: Its Functions and Limits*; and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 126-30.)

<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:18 <sup>2</sup> Galatians 5:24 <sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:17 <sup>4</sup> Galatians 5:25

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:16 <sup>6</sup> Romans 7:25 <sup>7</sup> John 6:45 <sup>8</sup> John 6:45 <sup>9</sup> Proverbs 24:16

<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:31-34

# All Blessings in Christ

**It was “in Christ Jesus” that God’s purpose and grace were granted to us from all eternity:**

- 2 Timothy 1:9 “who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to *His own purpose and grace* which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”
- Ephesians 1:4-6 “just as *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us *in the Beloved*.”
- Ephesians 1:9-10 “He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to *His kind intention which He purposed in Him*, with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, *the summing up of all things in Christ*, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.”

**In Christ the purposes and promises of God are all fulfilled:**

- Ephesians 3:11 “This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out *in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:19 “For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is *yes in Him*.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:20 “For *as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes*; wherefore also by Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.”
- Ephesians 3:6 “to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of *the promise in Christ Jesus* through the gospel.”
- 2 Timothy 1:1 “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to *the promise of life in Christ Jesus*...”

**Union with Christ takes place at conversion:**

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”
- Romans 16:7 “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, *who also were in Christ before me.*”
- 1 Peter 5:14 “Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are *in Christ.*”
- 1 John 2:5 “but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are *in Him.*”
- 1 John 3:24 “And the one who keeps His commandments *abides in Him, and He in him.* And we know by this that *He abides in us*, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”
- 1 John 4:13 “By this we know that *we abide in Him and He in us*, because He has given us of His Spirit.”
- 1 John 4:15 “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, *God abides in him, and he in God.*”
- Romans 16:3 “Greet Prisca and Aquila, *my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.*”
- Romans 16:9 “Greet Urbanus, our *fellow worker in Christ*, and Stachys my beloved.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:2 “I know *a man in Christ* who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.”
- Galatians 1:22 “And I was still unknown by sight to the *churches of Judea which were in Christ.*”

**In Christ our spiritual blindness is removed:**

- 2 Corinthians 3:14 “But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because *it is removed in Christ.*”

**In Christ we are new creatures, alive in a new realm.**

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore *if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature*; the old things passed away...new things have come.”

- Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus* for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
- Colossians 2:11 “and *in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands*, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

**In Christ we have redemption:**

- Romans 3:24 “being justified as a gift by His grace through the *redemption* which is *in Christ Jesus*”
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 “But *by His doing you are in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and *redemption.*”
- Ephesians 1:7 “*In Him* we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”
- Colossians 1:14 “*in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”

**In Christ we are reconciled to God:**

- 2 Corinthians 5:19 “namely, that God was *in Christ* reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

**In Christ we have been brought near:**

- Ephesians 2:13 “But now *in Christ Jesus* you who formerly were far off *have been brought near* by the blood of Christ.”

**In Christ we have forgiveness:**

- Ephesians 4:32 “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God *in Christ* also has *forgiven you.*”
- Colossians 1:14 “*in whom* we have redemption, *the forgiveness of sins*”

**In Christ we have righteousness:**

- 1 Corinthians 1:30 “But by His doing you are *in Christ Jesus*,

who became to us wisdom from God, and *righteousness* and sanctification, and redemption.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God *in Him*.”
- Philippians 3:9 “and may be found *in Him*, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith”

#### **In Christ we are justified:**

- Galatians 2:17 “But if, while seeking to be *justified in Christ*, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!”

#### **In Christ we have no condemnation:**

- Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.”

#### **In Christ we have freedom from the law of sin and death:**

- Romans 8:2 “For the law of the Spirit of life *in Christ Jesus* has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

#### **In Christ we have liberty:**

- Galatians 2:4 “But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out *our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus*, in order to bring us into bondage.”

#### **In Christ religious ceremonies mean nothing:**

- Galatians 5:6 “For *in Christ Jesus* neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.”

#### **In Christ we have spiritual circumcision:**

- Colossians 2:11 “and *in Him* you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

#### **In Christ we are sanctified:**

- 1 Corinthians 1:2 “to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been *sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints* by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours”
- 1 Corinthians 1:30 “But by His doing you are *in Christ Jesus*, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and *sanctification*, and redemption.”
- Philippians 1:1 “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the *saints in Christ Jesus* who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons...”
- Philippians 4:21 “Greet every *saint in Christ Jesus*. The brethren who are with me greet you.”

#### **In Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God:**

- Romans 6:11 “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God *in Christ Jesus*.”

#### **In Christ we have been made complete:**

- Colossians 2:10 “and *in Him* you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority.”
- Colossians 1:28 “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete *in Christ*.”

#### **In Christ we have boldness and confident access:**

- Ephesians 3:12 “*in whom* we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him”

#### **In Christ we have salvation:**

- 2 Timothy 2:10 “For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain *the salvation* which is *in Christ Jesus* and with it eternal glory.”

#### **In Christ we have an inheritance:**

- Ephesians 1:10-11 “*In Him also we have obtained an inheritance*,

having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.”

#### **In Christ is God’s eternal glory:**

- 1 Peter 5:10 “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to *His eternal glory in Christ*, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

#### **In Christ we were sealed with the Holy Spirit:**

- Ephesians 1:13 “*In Him*, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, *you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise*”

#### **In Christ we have resurrection power:**

- Ephesians 1:19-20 “and what is the surpassing greatness of His *power toward us* who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, *which He brought about in Christ*, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”

#### **In Christ we have spiritual gifts:**

- 1 Corinthians 1:5 “that in everything you were enriched *in Him*, in all speech and all knowledge”

#### **In Christ we have every blessing:**

- Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places *in Christ*.”
- Galatians 3:14 “in order that *in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles*, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”

#### **In Christ are found the love, grace, and peace of God:**

- Romans 8:39 “nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the *love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*”

- 1 Corinthians 1:4 “I thank my God always concerning you, for the *grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus*.”
- Ephesians 1:6 “to the praise of the glory of *His grace*, which He freely bestowed on us *in the Beloved*”
- Ephesians 2:7 “in order that in the ages to come He might show *the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*”
- 2 Timothy 2:1 “You therefore, my son, be strong in *the grace* that is *in Christ Jesus*.”
- Philippians 4:7 “And the *peace of God*, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds *in Christ Jesus*.”

#### **In Christ we are in the heavenly places:**

- Ephesians 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*.”
- Ephesians 2:6 “and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him *in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus*”

#### **In Christ there are riches in glory:**

- Philippians 4:19 “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His *riches in glory in Christ Jesus*.”

#### **In Christ all things hold together:**

- Colossians 1:17 “And He is before all things, and *in Him all things hold together*.”

#### **In Christ we have life; Christ is our life:**

- John 3:15 “that whoever believes may *in Him have eternal life*”
- Romans 6:11 “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but *alive to God in Christ Jesus*.”
- Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is *eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*.”
- Romans 8:2 “For the law of *the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”
- 1 Corinthians 15:22 “*...in Christ all shall be made alive*”

- Colossians 3:3-4 “For you have died and your *life is hidden with Christ in God*. When Christ, *who is our life*, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”
- John 6:56 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood *abides in Me, and I in him*.”
- John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who *abides in Me, and I in him*, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.”
- Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but *Christ lives in me*; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

**Those who are in Christ have put on Christ:**

- Galatians 3:27-28 “For all of you who were baptized *into Christ* have clothed yourselves with (lit. “put on”) Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one *in Christ Jesus*.”
- Colossians 3:9-11 “Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have “put on” the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but *Christ is all, and in all*.”

**In Christ we are one:**

- John 17:21-23 “that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, *that they also may be in Us*; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; *I in them, and Thou in Me*, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.”
- Romans 12:5 “so we, who are many, are *one body in Christ*, and individually members one of another.”
- Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for *you are all one in Christ Jesus*.”

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **How does the teaching of this book relate to the idea of “sinless perfection”?**

According to the Bible, “there is no man who does not sin.”<sup>1</sup> “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.”<sup>2</sup> “For we *all* stumble in *many* ways.”<sup>3</sup> In keeping with this reality, the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray *daily*, “Forgive us our sins.”<sup>4</sup>

We can understand immediately why this is so, just by considering *one* of the two great commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your mind, and with *all* your strength.”<sup>5</sup> Which of us could say that we have ever loved God for even one hour as He deserves to be loved? In order to do this, we would have to love Him *just as perfectly as Christ Himself does*. But none of us has ever done this, not even when we were *praying* or *worshiping!* Even our prayers and praises fall immeasurably short of the perfect faith, love, fervency, and devotion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Another way of saying this is that even our prayers and praises are *sinful*, to the degree that they “miss the mark” of the total perfection of Christ. For this reason, it is only “through Jesus Christ” and His atoning death on our behalf that our prayers and other “spiritual sacrifices” are “acceptable to God.”<sup>6</sup> We cannot even “thank God” except “through Jesus Christ”!<sup>7</sup> According to the Bible, even unwitting sins are still *sins*<sup>8</sup> and must be paid for by the blood of atonement.

Every Christian who has been rightly instructed by the Word and Spirit of God feels something of how terribly he daily misses the mark of loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He could easily spend all his time exploring and reviewing the ways that he has failed God during the course of a single day. *This is not, however, the focus of the Bible itself.* We find, instead, an emphasis

<sup>1</sup> 2 Chronicles 6:36 <sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:20 <sup>3</sup> James 3:2 <sup>4</sup> Luke 11:4 <sup>5</sup> Mark 12:30  
<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 2:5 <sup>7</sup> Romans 1:8 <sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:3-4; Leviticus 5:17-19;  
Numbers 15:22-25; Psalm 19:12-14

in the Bible on the wonderful and mighty work of grace that God has done in His children. For example, the Lord Jesus speaks of Nathanael as “an Israelite indeed, in whom is *no guile*”!<sup>1</sup> He speaks of the Christian as one who has “*an honest and good heart*”<sup>2</sup> and refers to him as a “*good man*,” who “out of *the good treasure of his heart* brings forth *what is good*.”<sup>3</sup> He speaks of the disciples, in spite of all their failings, as those “who have *stood by Him* in His trials”<sup>4</sup> and “have *kept God’s word*”!<sup>5</sup>

Paul, likewise, when recounting the story of Abraham, passes over Abraham’s stumblings and characterizes him as a man who “did not waver in unbelief.”<sup>6</sup> He is “convinced” that the Roman believers are “*full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able* also to admonish one another.”<sup>7</sup> He describes all Christians as “*holy and beloved*”<sup>8</sup> and says that they “*have crucified the flesh* with its passions and desires.”<sup>9</sup> Examples like these could be multiplied.

Every Christian should follow this emphasis of the Bible. Realizing how far short he daily falls of perfection, the Christian should, nevertheless, fix his heart and mind on the wonderful things that God has done for him in Christ. This is the attitude of faith. In ourselves, we are “nothing”<sup>10</sup> and “can do nothing,”<sup>11</sup> but in Christ, we “can do all things”!<sup>12</sup> The opposing mindset, by contrast, has been well illustrated by a fellow pastor:

Imagine visitors arriving at a man’s home. When they begin to comment on the many changes and improvements that have taken place in his house, he hangs his head in shame and says, “Oh, but there’s something I need to show you.” He then goes to the kitchen and drags out the garbage can. (Every house has one!) He and his guests then spend the evening examining in detail the contents of the garbage can, groaning over the vileness and repulsiveness of each item. They do this while sitting in a newly remodeled living room, but they are so engrossed in their task that they are completely unaware of their surroundings!

<sup>1</sup> John 1:47 <sup>2</sup> Luke 8:15 <sup>3</sup> Luke 6:45 <sup>4</sup> Luke 22:28 <sup>5</sup> John 17:6  
<sup>6</sup> Romans 4:20 <sup>7</sup> Romans 15:14 <sup>8</sup> Colossians 3:12 <sup>9</sup> Galatians 5:24  
<sup>10</sup> Galatians 6:3 <sup>11</sup> John 15:5 <sup>12</sup> Philippians 4:13

This is not a *Biblical* approach to the Christian life! Christians do, indeed, “stumble in many ways,” but according to the Bible, God *delights* in His children and their faltering expressions of love to Him. He “exults” and “rejoices” over them with “shouts of joy”!<sup>1</sup> He sees them as His beautiful “bride,”<sup>2</sup> and their offerings and lives are a “fragrant aroma”<sup>3</sup> to Him.

• **What is the difference between constantly falling short of the perfection of Christ and constantly being defeated by known sin?**

To say that Christians constantly fall short of the perfection of Christ, is quite a different thing than to say that Christians *have to be defeated by known sin*. It is just such *obvious* and *known* sin that John has in mind in 1 John 2:1, when he says, “My little children, I am writing these things to you *that you may not sin*. And *if anyone sins*, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” By using the word “if,” John makes it clear that Christians *do not* have to knowingly yield to sin. Paul has the same thing in mind when he exhorts us not to “let sin reign in our mortal bodies that we should obey its lusts.” *Christians do not have to let sin reign in their mortal bodies!* When confronted with obvious sin, the believer has the ability “by the Spirit” to “put to death the deeds of the body.”<sup>4</sup> As he walks in the Spirit, he *will not* fulfill the lusts of the flesh.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Paul declares with certainty that sin *shall not* be master over any Christian, for he is not under law, but under grace.<sup>6</sup> Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from *every* lawless deed and *purify* for Himself a people *for His own possession, zealous for good deeds*.”<sup>7</sup>

No Christian is perfect in this lifetime—far from it! But every Christian has the power in Christ to break with known sin and to live a life of “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zephaniah 3:17 <sup>2</sup> Song of Solomon 4:1f; Ephesians 5:25 <sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:18;  
 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:13 <sup>5</sup> Galatians 5:16 <sup>6</sup> Romans 6:14  
<sup>7</sup> Titus 2:14 <sup>8</sup> Romans 14:17

- **Some people say that Romans 7:14-25 simply portrays the Christian's ongoing battle with sin—that the Christian life is basically a life of victory, but that Christians are deeply grieved by those failings and shortcomings that still remain in their lives. How would you respond to this view?**

I am in general agreement with such people regarding the nature of the Christian life. The Christian life *is* basically a life of victory, and Christians *are* deeply grieved by those failings and shortcomings that still remain in their lives! Not everyone who takes Romans 7:14-25 as referring to the Christian has a “wretched man” or “defeatist” view of the Christian life, and we should not assume that they do. My difference with such people is basically a difference over the interpretation (and possible abuse) of one passage of Scripture, not necessarily a difference over the nature of the Christian life itself.

It is a matter of fact, however, that *multitudes* of people *do* abuse Romans 7 and turn to it for “comfort” when they are miserable and defeated by sin: “After all, even the Apostle Paul couldn’t get victory, so why should I expect anything different?” Even those who believe that the Christian life is basically a life of triumph are subtly tempted with the thought that “this one sin” may be the one that they, *like Paul*, will never be able to overcome.

In light of this abuse of Romans 7, I would emphasize once more that the theme of Romans 7 is *not* “indwelling sin in the believer,” but “the goodness of the law in spite of its effects upon those who are in the flesh.” Romans 7 has to do with the fact that the Law, though “spiritual” and “good,” was “weak through the flesh.”<sup>1</sup> It portrays in detail the reality that “while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.”<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted (in light of the answer given previously regarding “sinless perfection”) that in Romans 7:14-25 Paul is clearly speaking, *not* of the holiest Christian’s continual failure to measure up to the perfection of Christ, as some have supposed, but of *conscious defeat by known sin*. This is evident from the fact that the man portrayed in these verses consciously wills to do good,

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:3 <sup>2</sup> Romans 7:5

but instead “practices” what he *knows* to be “evil,”<sup>1</sup> “doing the very thing he hates.”<sup>2</sup> This defeat by known sin is described as consistent, not occasional, and *nothing* is said of any ability this man might have through the power of the Holy Spirit to mortify sin. By contrast, we as Christians can daily praise God that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death”!<sup>3</sup> We have been “released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.”<sup>4</sup>

- **What about Galatians 5:17? Isn't it saying the same thing as Romans 7?**

Galatians 5:17 (“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”) is not an assurance of *defeat*, but an assurance of *victory*. Paul begins in v.16 with the promise that if we “walk by the Spirit,” we “will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” He then explains in v.17 why this is so: The Holy Spirit, whose character is in direct contradiction to the flesh, sets Himself against it and opposes it, *effectually preventing us from living selfishly or following the dictates of the flesh*. After contrasting the “deeds of the flesh” with the “fruit of the Spirit” in v.19-23, Paul then assures us once again in v.24 that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

A quotation from commentator Albert Barnes may be helpful at this point:

There is no reason for interpreting this, moreover, as seems always to be the case, of the overpowering tendency in the mind to evil, as if it taught that the Christian was desirous of doing good, but *could not*, on account of his indwelling corruption. So far as the language of Paul or the fact is concerned, it may be understood of just the opposite, and may mean, that such are the restraints and influences of

<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:19 <sup>2</sup> Romans 7:15 <sup>3</sup> Romans 8:2 <sup>4</sup> Romans 7:6

the Holy Spirit on the heart, that the Christian *does not* the evil which he otherwise would...

He (Paul) is exhorting them (Galatians 5:16) to walk in the Spirit, and assures them that thus they would not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. To encourage them to this, he reminds them that there were contrary principles in their minds, the influences of the Spirit of God, and a carnal and downward tendency of the flesh. These are contrary one to the other; and such are, in fact, the influences of the Spirit on the mind, that the Christian does not do the things which he otherwise would.<sup>1</sup>

- **Aren't you being overly literal in your understanding of the various passages that describe regeneration?**

It is obvious that when the Bible speaks, for example, of “God’s seed”<sup>2</sup> remaining in us and of our having become “partakers of the divine nature,”<sup>3</sup> these terms are not to be understood in any carnal sense. Nor do they imply any diminishing of the absolute gulf between the infinite Creator and His finite creation. Nevertheless, we must constantly bear in mind that *the Holy Spirit deliberately chose these terms* precisely because they do accurately convey to us the truth about invisible reality. We dare not, in the name of theological sophistication, “explain away” such terms to the point that they are emptied of any real meaning. The Christian *really is* “born of God.” He *really is* a “new creation” with a “new heart,” “alive from the dead” and “seated in the heavenly places”!

- **If the Christian is a new man and the body itself is not sinful, where does sin in the believer come from?**

The Bible does not give us a detailed description of the psychology of man or of the workings of human personality. Rather, it gives us a *functional or practical description*. This description leaves many metaphysical questions unanswered, but it is more than sufficient to give us a firm foundation for living the Christian life.

<sup>1</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*, Galatians 5:17

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 3:9 <sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 1:4

The basic facts are clear:

1. The *deepest* and *ultimate* truth about the Christian is that he is a new man. This is his *essential identity*. The new man represents who he “really” *is* at the present time and who he *will be* a thousand years from now.

2. The new man is not the *only* truth about the Christian. There is *one aspect of his personality* that has not yet been redeemed—his “mortal body.” According to the Bible, the Christian’s continuing struggle with sin arises from this fact. Sin still tries to reign in his mortal body.<sup>1</sup>

This unredeemed mortal body, viewed as the place where sin still tries to reign, is referred to in the Bible as “the flesh.” Scripture speaks repeatedly of the “members” of the body (hands, feet, eyes, etc.) as the place where sin asserts itself.<sup>2</sup> The Bible even refers to sins as “deeds of the body”!<sup>3</sup> We know that when a Christian sins, it is not his body alone that sins, but the Christian himself as a total person. Nevertheless, the Bible makes it clear that once the body has been redeemed, sin will no longer be a problem for the believer.<sup>4</sup>

*The flesh is one aspect of the Christian’s total personality, but it is not the ultimate truth about him.* It does not represent who he really is or what he really loves. The “deeds of the body” grieve him and fly in the face of all that is most precious to him.

3. *The Christian does not need to be defeated by the flesh.* As his mind is “renewed”<sup>5</sup> by believing the facts concerning who he really is, and as he learns to “walk in the Spirit,” he will be enabled more and more to “put to death the deeds of the body.”

- **What is the practical difference between the teaching that a Christian has two natures and the teaching that the Christian is a new man having the flesh to contend with?**

The basic difference is one of *identity*: *Who am I really? What is the ultimate truth about me?* If, in the deepest core of my being,

<sup>1</sup> Romans 6:12-13 <sup>2</sup> Romans 6:13, 19; 7:5, 23; Colossians 3:5; James 3:6; 4:1

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:13 <sup>4</sup> Romans 8:23 <sup>5</sup> Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23

evil is still an expression of who I *really am* and what I *really love*, then sanctification becomes a process of trying to *deny reality* and become someone other than who I really am.

If, on the other hand, I am a new man still having the flesh to contend with, every time I say “no” to sin, I am saying “yes” to who I really am and what I really love. Sanctification is then a process of *embracing reality*, of *believing what is true* and of *becoming in practice* more and more the person who I truly am.<sup>1</sup>

- **When Jesus says in Mark 7:21-22 that “from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness,” is He speaking of Christians as well as non-Christians?**

Since the Lord is referring here to *definite acts* which “proceed out” (v.20) of men and defile them, including literal “fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,” and “deeds of coveting and wickedness,” it is clear that He is describing lost humanity in general, not Christians.

Christians, by contrast, are referred to by the Lord as those with “*an honest and good heart.*”<sup>2</sup> According to Jesus, the Christian is a “good man who out of his good treasure brings forth what is good.”

“Either make *the tree good, and its fruit good*; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills *the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:9-10 <sup>2</sup> Luke 8:15 <sup>3</sup> Matthew 12:33-35

- **What about Matthew 7:11? In what sense are Christians “evil”?**

When Jesus says to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:34 (quoted above), “You brood of vipers, how can *you, being evil*, speak what is good?” it is clear that He is using the word “evil” to refer to the non-Christian—“the evil man” who out of his “evil treasure brings forth what is evil”—in contrast with the Christian, “the good man” who “out of his good treasure brings forth what is good.”

In Matthew 7:11, on the other hand, Jesus is teaching His disciples about prayer. It is obvious, therefore, that when He says to them, “If *you* then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him,” He is *not* saying that they are “evil men” in the same sense that the unconverted Pharisees are. Nevertheless, *in comparison with “their Father who is in heaven,”* they are indeed “evil.” As we saw earlier in this appendix, even true Christians fall immeasurably short of God’s perfect goodness. When compared to Him, “*No one is good except God alone.*”<sup>1</sup>

- **Don’t Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:25-28 refer to Israel, not the church?**

Many prophecies in the Old Testament regarding a renewed or restored “Israel” are seen in the New Testament to have their *ultimate* fulfillment in the church. The “new covenant” is one of them. God says in Jeremiah 31 that He will make a new covenant “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” The writer to the Hebrews makes it clear that this promise is fulfilled, not in the physical “house of Israel and house of Judah” as such, but in the church.<sup>2</sup> Every *Christian*, whether Jew or Gentile, is a partaker of the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Any future mercies of God to the Jews will result in their being grafted into the church alongside believing Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

Ezekiel 36 is likewise spoken in the context of several “new covenant” promises. For example, Ezekiel 34:23-25 speaks of the

<sup>1</sup> Mark 10:18 <sup>2</sup> Hebrews 8 <sup>3</sup> Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25

<sup>4</sup> Romans 11:11-24

coming of the Messiah and the “covenant of peace” that God will then make with His people, and Ezekiel 37:24-28 speaks of this “covenant of peace” as “an everlasting covenant.” (See Hebrews 13:20.)

Far from viewing the Old Testament promises to Israel as not applying to the church, Paul tells the Gentile believers at Ephesus that though they once were “excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers to the covenants of promise*,” they have now been made partakers (along with believing Jews) of *those very promises*, having been “brought near by the blood of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> *Both Jew and Gentile* have been made into “one new man”—the church. “For He Himself is our peace, *who made both groups into one*, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...that in Himself He might *make the two into one new man*, thus establishing peace, and might *reconcile them both in one body to God* through the cross...” Paul goes so far as to say that the Gentiles are “no longer strangers and aliens, but...are fellow citizens with the saints [Jewish believers], and are of God’s household.”

This view of the Old Testament promises is also put forth by Peter, who speaks of *the church*, not Israel, as the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament desire<sup>2</sup> for a “holy nation”: “But you are *a chosen race*, a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; *for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God*; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2:11-22   <sup>2</sup> Exodus 19:5-6   <sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10

## **About the Author**

Charles Leiter resides with his wife Mona and two of his children in Kirksville, Missouri, where he has pastored since 1974. The Lord has used him as a teacher in His service for the true help and benefit of many Christians. In addition to his pastoral labors, Mr. Leiter has also spent time ministering in conferences overseas and throughout the country. You may learn more about his ministry and the church he co-pastors by visiting online at [www.lakeroadchapel.org](http://www.lakeroadchapel.org)

## **A Word from the Publisher**

It is our great aim to see the praises of our God upon the lips of His people. Since its inception, Granted Ministries has sought to further the influence of those whom God has wonderfully used for our own personal growth in the faith. Under God, Charles Leiter has had a profound impact upon all of us involved with Granted Ministries. And more specifically, the contents of this book (unfolding with such great clarity the essential truths of justification and regeneration) have proved to be a tremendous blessing to many. We trust our efforts to make this book more widely available will be a service to the body of Christ. We believe it is the truest need of the church that she would more completely and deeply know her blessed God. In this effort we join our Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). We encourage you to visit us online at [www.grantedministries.org](http://www.grantedministries.org) and avail yourself of what is there.

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As with all of the resources that we make available, this book is offered to any who believe they can benefit from it, whether they can pay for it or not. There is a cost for the book, but we do not want this to be an obstacle to anyone. If you cannot afford to purchase a copy, or if you can only afford a portion of the price, we ask that you write and give us the opportunity to serve God by providing for His people. Our only stipulation is that you not request the book unless you are certain to read it within six months. We do not want to generously enlarge your library, but to generously enlarge your spiritual condition.

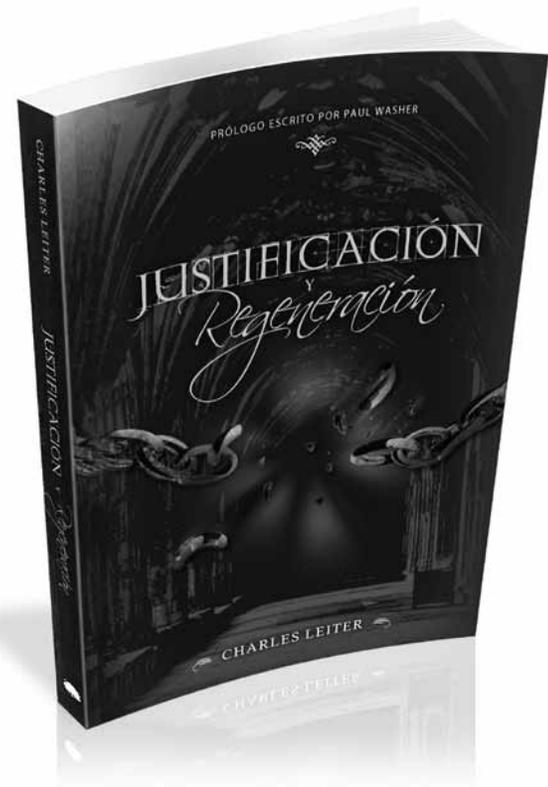
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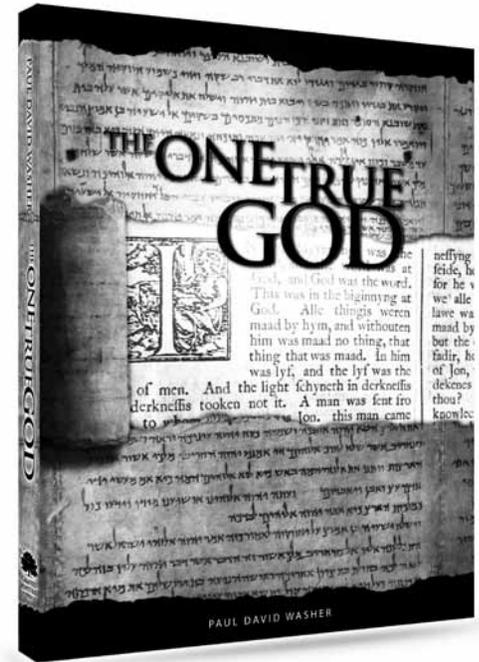
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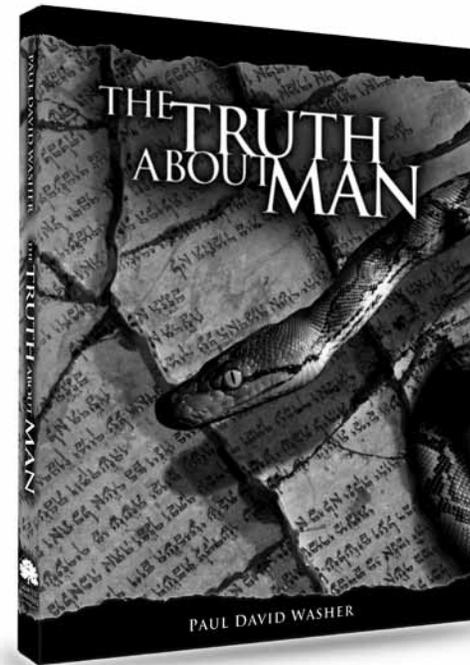
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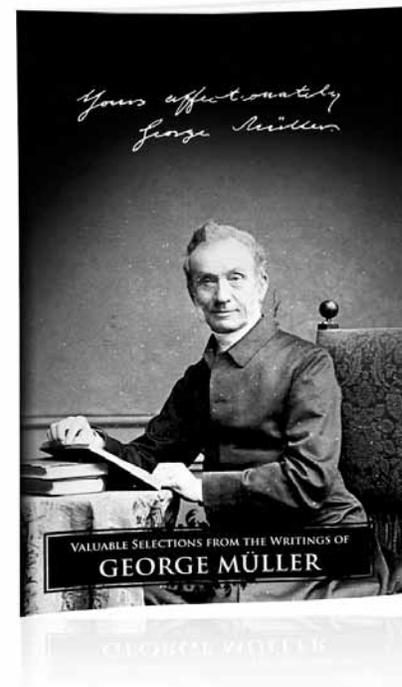
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