

## In Defense of the Gospel (1)

### Introduction:

I thought that we would benefit from considering an essential truth respecting our relationship with God, even the gospel message itself, “the good news” that God grants us salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. It is my hope that you hear nothing new today, that each of you are fully informed about these matters, that this is review and thus reinforcing for you, rather than new news to you.

The nature and content of the gospel is an essential, foundational matter for us. It is the gospel that separates us from sin and the fallen world about us and brings us into relationship with our God through His Son. It is through the gospel that God has chosen to save His people. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

But even though the gospel is foundational and central to what it is to become a true Christian, we know that the content of the gospel is not understood or believed by all that would claim to be Christian. Often times “the gospel” that is “believed” is not the gospel set forth in the Holy Scriptures. Another gospel rather than the true gospel is often assumed to be biblical by well-intentioned church attenders. There is a need, therefore, to defend the true gospel quite frequently, and on occasion, there is need to recover and restore the gospel to the people of God.

The need to reform or even to recover the message of the gospel was brought forward in an important article published in 1959. The fairly new Banner of Truth Trust issued the reprint of **John Owen’s** work, “*The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*”, originally published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this work Owen advocated and defended the doctrine of the limited atonement of Jesus Christ. A young **J. I. Packer** wrote the introduction to this reprint, which itself became a classic treatise that received wide notice. Packer did not believe that Owen’s book would be widely desired or read, but he did think that there were some, who had a revived interest in theology and biblical studies, that would read and benefit from it. It was to these potential readers that Packer wrote these words, “*It is to those who share this readiness that Owen’s treatise is now offered, in the belief that it will help us in one of the most urgent tasks facing evangelical Christendom today*”-- then here it is-- “*the recovery of the gospel.*”

Packer had declared his opinion that *the biblical gospel had been lost*. He wrote,

“This is a complex phenomenon, to which many factors have contributed; but, if we go to the root of the matter, we shall find that these perplexities are all ultimately due to our having lost our grip on the biblical gospel. Without realizing it, we have during the past century bartered that gospel for a substitute product which, though it looks similar enough in points of detail, is as a whole a decidedly different thing. Hence our troubles; for the substitute product does not answer the ends for which the authentic gospel has in past days proved itself so mighty.”

Packer went on to say that the biblical gospel had been corrupted, for it was no longer a message that made men “God-centered in their thoughts and God-fearing in their hearts”, but it had been corrupted in order to be “too exclusively concerned to be ‘helpful’ to man. The new gospel was primarily concerned “to bring peace, comfort, happiness, satisfaction - and too little concerned to glorify God.” The new gospel failed “to produce deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, a spirit of worship, a concern for the church”, because this is not primarily what it is trying to do. One way of stating the difference between it and the old gospel is to say that it is too exclusively concerned to be ‘helpful’ to man. He wrote:

The old gospel was ‘helpful’, too - more so, indeed, than is the new - but (so to speak) incidentally, for its first concern was always to give glory to God. It was always and essentially a proclamation of divine sovereignty in mercy and judgment, a summons to bow down and worship the mighty Lord on whom man depends for all good, both in nature and in grace. Its center of reference was unambiguously God. But in the new gospel the center of reference is man.

In those days of the late 50’s the gospel of sovereign grace was not widely held or heard across our land. But things began to change. Due to the grace of God, the message of salvation by God’s sovereign grace was revived and was again heard across the evangelical landscape. The Lord has blessed the cause of reformed theology and practice across this land and throughout the world. There are now numerous churches all across our land proclaiming a God-glorifying, Christ-centered, sovereign grace message of salvation. And we rejoice in what God has done.

But the need remains for the church to be reforming, conforming its doctrine and practice to the Holy Scriptures. And the reason is not due to a perceived need for a new or different message to an ever-changing world, but because the ever-changing, fallen world is always leads to decay, defection, and departure from the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. And so, it would do us well to affirm certain truths respecting the nature and content of the gospel of our salvation.

Let us begin by reading the entire first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the churches of Galatia:

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), <sup>2</sup>and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

<sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup>to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>6</sup>I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup>which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup>But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup>As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

<sup>10</sup>For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

<sup>11</sup>But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup>For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

<sup>13</sup>For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup>And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

<sup>15</sup>But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, <sup>16</sup>to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, <sup>17</sup>nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup>Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup>But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. <sup>20</sup>(Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

<sup>21</sup>Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” <sup>24</sup>And they glorified God in me.

The apostle had established a number of local churches in the region of Galatia on his first missionary journey. But after Paul had left that area, these churches had been subjected to false teachers

respecting the nature and content of the gospel. These errant teachers are commonly called “Judaizers”, who taught that if Gentiles were to be saved from their sin, not only would they need to embrace Jesus Christ in faith as their Lord and Savior, but they must in addition keep the Law of Moses as a covenant of works. They taught that salvation was obtained through the combination of faith and one’s own works of the law.

But the apostle strongly repudiated these teachers and their teaching. He advocated that the gospel he had proclaimed to them was not in accordance to their teaching. Further, Paul declared that his message of the gospel was the one true gospel that God had entrusted him to proclaim and teach, apart from which no one would be saved in the Day of Judgment.

Paul first set forth the nature of salvation in his opening greeting to these Christians. In **verses 3** through **5** we read, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup>to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” Paul declared that at the heart of our relationship with God is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as an atonement for our sins. God atoned for our sins through the death of His Son in order that He would deliver us from “this present evil age.” The idea is that this whole world is lying under God’s judgment. His wrath is upon it and He will pour out His wrath upon this evil world when the Day of Judgment arrives. But God purposed to save His people from out of this present evil age, that is, so that we are not partakers of their sins or of the judgment that will come upon them.

But then the apostle identified the serious problem regarding their faith for which he was writing. **Verses 6** and **7** read,

<sup>6</sup>I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup>which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Paul identifies the serious nature of their problem. They were turning away from God Himself unto a different gospel. Notice, to not be right on the gospel results in not being in a right relationship with God. They were embracing a “different gospel” than what he had proclaimed to them, for it had been through his gospel that God had called them “in the grace of Christ.”

They had heard and turned unto “a different gospel”, which was in reality no gospel, for there is only one true gospel of Jesus Christ. These false teachers had perverted, or twisted the gospel. While they still claimed that they taught the gospel, they had perverted it to such an extent that it was no longer the gospel. These teachers were not helping these Christians in the churches of Galatia, they were *troubling* them.

Paul then declared that these Christians were not to tolerate these false teachers and their doctrines. They were to see them as they were, heretics who deserved the damnation of God for promoting the error of their teaching.

By the way, here we have affirmed before us the ground on which Christian fellowship may be extended. There are many who say that any and all who claim to be Christian should be acknowledged and treated as such. If they are Trinitarian in their understanding of the nature of God, if they believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for sinners, they should be embraced and treated as brethren. The apostle Paul was not that broad in his understanding. God makes it clear to us through Paul’s hand that the content of the gospel is the dividing line between true Christians and all others who promote a different way of salvation. These false teachers proclaimed Jesus Christ for who He was, the Son of God who died on the cross for sinners. What they were saying was that what Jesus Christ did was insufficient and ineffectual in saving sinners. In addition to what Jesus Christ did, so “believers” must purpose to live according to the Mosaic Law as a way of salvation in order to be saved on the Day of Judgment. Paul told these Christians in these churches that these false teachers and their doctrines must be recognized and repudiated. To fail to do so, but to embrace their teaching, was to depart from God.

Paul stood firm against these corrupters of the gospel. For him to fail to do so would mean that he was a man pleaser rather than one who pleases God. Verse 10 reads, “Do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” He reasoned that there was no real option for him. He must and would stand for the truth of the gospel.

In order to give weight to his argument, the apostle wrote of the divine origin of his gospel message. Jesus Christ Himself had communicated the content of the gospel to the apostle. **Verses 11 and 12** read,

<sup>11</sup>But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. <sup>12</sup>For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul is probably referring to events after his conversion on the road to Damascus. The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul and spoke with him. The risen Lord Jesus gave Paul the content of the message of the gospel. Even the Lord’s apostles had not contributed to the substance of his message. It came from the Lord directly and personally. But Paul reasons further, his gospel must be true because it was in conflict with the message that he had formerly proclaimed. How else can you explain Paul’s own change of message? It was indeed the Lord Himself who had come to him and set before him the truths of the gospel.

Now the apostle had expressed wonder that the Christians in these churches had so quickly and apparently with little resistance departed from the truth of the gospel, embracing a false gospel. He wrote, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.” This reveals what we may describe as the rather fragile nature of the content of gospel. The gospel, as important as it is, can be tampered with and corrupted quite easily by those opposed to the truth of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It suggests to us also the need that churches have, and certainly pastors have, to preserve and protect the gospel from corruption. Paul described his ministry once in this way:

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will: <sup>16</sup>the former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; <sup>17</sup>but the latter out of love, ***knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.*** (Phil. 1:15-17)

Paul was in prison for the faith. He was not distraught because of this, for he had seen how the Lord was propagating the gospel through his “chains.” He wrote of some who were attempting to aggravate his condemnation before Roman authorities. They knew that if they brought up the nature and content of the gospel that Paul preached, that he would be under personal constraint to speak up, thereby incurring judgment upon himself. Or so they thought. But this did not deter him or discourage him. Rather, he saw it as the means by which the Lord would make known more fully and widely this gospel, to which he had been appointed to defend.

There is always the need and there will always be the opportunity to defend the gospel, for its corruption is sought by many, its conception is misunderstood by many, and its truth has been obscured before many. The gospel must be taught, retaught, reinforced, and defended, for if left alone, it can be easily corrupted.

We might begin by asking the question, “In what ways may the gospel be corrupted?” I would suggest three ways that are commonly evidenced among “evangelicals.”

### **I. The gospel may be perverted by corrupting the nature of grace**

The grace of God in bringing salvation is at the heart of the gospel. The meaning of grace is essential. The meaning of grace must be understood and affirmed. The meaning of grace must be defended against that which threatens it. The meaning of God’s grace must be earnestly guarded because

of its *importance* to the gospel message of salvation. But the meaning of grace must also be defended because *it is the object of repeated and serious threats* of false teachers. Grace was corrupted in the first century. Grace was corrupted down through church history. The true meaning of grace is corrupted in many places today that claim to teach the way of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Generally speaking the corruption of grace takes one of two forms. In other words there are two major dangers to the meaning of grace. All heresies respecting the grace of God, will fall into one of these two kinds of errors. We spoke about this quite recently when we were in our study of Colossians. We then identified the two great threats to the biblical doctrine of God's grace. These are the errors of *legalism* and *licentiousness*. Both of these are dealt with in great detail in the New Testament.

### 1. When grace is corrupted by legalism.

What is legalism according to the Scriptures? It is the heresy that says that in order for a person to gain salvation, *he must earn his way by the merit of his own righteousness*, by his own works. No one will be saved by trusting in his good works for salvation. Paul made this clear in **Galatians 2:16**,

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; *for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*

And so, *legalism is present when good works are viewed as meritorious for the obtaining or retaining of God's favor.* When people believe God accepts them because of something they are doing or have done, or will do, they are legalists. They believe that through their own effort they move God to be favorable to them. These ones do not have salvation. God tells us that He justifies us in His sight through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Any person who believes that he will be justified in the Day of God's Judgment because he has kept the Ten Commandments, or the Golden Rule, or any other rules that others or he himself has devised, will be sorely surprised when he stands before God. No man can save himself from God's wrath. It must be of God's grace, wholly of grace.

The Jews who did not believe on Jesus were legalists. The reason that they did not believe on Jesus Christ, is because they trusted in themselves that they were righteous. They were legalists. Paul described them in **Romans 10:1-3ff.**

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

These Jews were guilty of legalism. They did not believe in grace. But recognize that their error is the common error of most religions of the world. All religion apart from biblical Christianity, sets down methods or laws or principles of living whereby people may establish their own righteousness. They need to be warned: they have not submitted to the only righteousness that can save their souls from hell, the righteousness that God grants as a gift to those who believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Now, the Jews that did not believe in Jesus were legalists, but there are those who say that they believe in Jesus who are also legalists. *Legalism is also present when people add additional requirements to faith in Jesus Christ in order to be forgiven of sins and accepted by God.* Whereas the Jews, who refused to believe on Jesus, were legalists because they thought that they were righteous apart from Him, this second form of legalism occurs among those who claim to have faith in Jesus, but they do not believe that faith alone is sufficient to bring them into a right relationship with God. They say that a sinner becomes right with God through faith in Christ *plus something else*. For one to say: "It is my faith in Christ *along with* the merit of my baptism, or the merit my repentance, or obedience, or it is Christ and my sincerity that renders me accepted by God." This man is guilty of legalism.

The teachings of salvation by grace and salvation by works are incompatible with one another. There can be no mixture of the two. Any effort to do so results in grace no longer being present, but works only, which cannot save. Again, Paul wrote of this in **Romans 11:6f**,

Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

Paul addressed this form of legalism in **Galatians 5:2f**:

Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.

Paul was correcting an error that was being perpetrated among the churches in the region of Galatia. Paul had begun the churches based on the promise of the gospel that God would forgive their sins and bring them into a right relationship with Himself through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Some said, “Yes, you must believe on Jesus, but you must also observe the laws of Judaism in order to be saved. It was Christ plus something that was believed to be the grounds of God accepting sinners. Paul said, “If you add anything to Christ, you lose the benefit that Christ brings to His people. Salvation is in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.

Legalism is addressed and corrected chiefly in the book of Romans and the book of Galatians. Legalism was a common problem in the churches of the New Testament era. Legalism has remained a threat to grace throughout the church age. Legalism characterizes whole denominations today. Often when bringing people to understand the gospel of the grace of God, this error of legalism must be addressed and corrected in the ones whom we are attempting to reach for Jesus Christ. A person cannot be saved until he abandons all trust in himself or his own ability to please God apart from Christ alone, and he comes to trust in Jesus Christ alone as His Lord and Savior.

## **2. When grace is corrupted by licentiousness.**

The second threat to the biblical teaching regarding grace is the error of licentiousness. The Epistle of Jude addressed this second danger to grace. Paul corrected the first, the problem of legalism. Jude corrected the problem of licentiousness (as also did James).

What is licentiousness? It is the idea that one may be a Christian and yet live in sin with impunity. It goes like this:

“Because I am saved by God’s grace toward me and not by my works, I may be a Christian and live sinfully and still be assured of my salvation.”

This perversion of grace says that you can be a Christian and live any way you please irrespective of the will of God. Again, it is reasoned,

“After all, God does not deal with me according to my sins, He deals with me according to grace; therefore, it doesn’t matter how I live, I will still be saved.”

This is a perverted view of grace. The true grace of God is no license to continue a self-willed, self-directed, self-indulgent lifestyle. The Scriptures make it clear the outcome of this kind of life will result in damnation.

We see in Jude 4 that this perversion of the meaning of grace denies the mastery of Jesus Christ. The ones who teach this kind of grace and live in this manner are marked out for God's condemnation. There are people who believe themselves to be saved by grace who will die in their sins.

Where legalism is a denial of true *grace*, licentiousness is a denial of *human responsibility*. The Bible teaches that although salvation is by God's grace alone, apart from any merit in anything we do, nevertheless, we have great responsibility before God to live out our life of faith. If we fail or refuse to live our faith, our faith is not true saving faith. We will die in our sins. Our good works that are born of faith are evidence that we have saving faith. No works present? There is no faith present. **James 2:14ff**

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe -- and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

James was correcting what Jude was addressing: the error of licentiousness.

What are the underlying causes of licentious grace? Just as legalism has been a problem to the churches since the first century, so has licentiousness. At various time in church history it has been worse than others, but this heresy has an enduring nature. Wherever grace is taught, there will be some who have fallen into some form of this error.

When we consider the causes of this error, several come to the forefront. We could describe the common problem that arises in all the forms of licentious grace is a misunderstanding of the nature of the law of God and how it relates to salvation and the life of the believer. Licentious grace is a denial of any role of the law of God in a believer's life. Licentious grace, therefore, is the error of *antinomianism*. We have described this before, but it would do us well to repeat it here.

Some Christians wrongly believe that we are not under law in any way whatsoever. This is a common error among many, even the majority of Bible-believing Christians today. They wrongly believe that because Christ died for us that we are no longer to look to or be governed by the moral law of God. Some can live as Christians believing this error and still do somewhat well in the Christian life. They do not show regard to the law, but in their becoming born again, the Spirit has put His law on their hearts. They keep the righteousness of the law although they do not do so by direct design. They do so by the Holy Spirit working through the new nature He has given them, without a purposeful intention on their part to live by the rule of God's law. But it does, nevertheless, have a negative impact on the way they make decisions, view themselves and their relationship with Jesus Christ, and it effects how they do evangelism and training in discipleship.

There are others, however, that maintain this error who do not fair as well. By not seeing that Jesus Christ rules over them according to God's moral law, they are lax in their moral understanding and practice. They lack a moral compass. They do not have a moral voice in their families or among their friends and acquaintances. Some have taken the position so far that they say there is no law whatsoever as far as God is concerned, only love and forgiveness. They excuse sin in themselves and others. In time they may indulge in sin to excess. They permit or excuse sin in others assuming it does really matter in the end, for "we are not under the law." As a consequence, they get themselves into all manner of error and sin. They justify their sinful behavior by saying that we are not under law, but under grace. They believe that as long as they believe in Christ, they may live in sin without consequences.

*Antinomianism* describes people who say they believe in grace, but that they are "against law" or "lawless." Antinomianism describes a view of life that one can have Jesus as Savior but not as Lord.

Antinomianism, or lawlessness, is the spirit of the world. Antinomianism is in the church; it is present when people claim to be saved but choose to live in violation of God's commandments. Licentious grace is antinomianism.

May the Lord always enable us to maintain and defend the biblical doctrine of grace in our salvation.

## II. The gospel may be perverted by redefining the nature of salvation.

When the Bible speaks of grace in salvation, it is describing the manifestation of the goodness of God in which God bestows His undeserved favor upon those who are deserving of His wrath. God makes it clear that all human beings, apart from the Lord Jesus, are sinners who deserve only His wrath. With no claims, no ability, and no desire to seek God or come to Him, God of His free grace bestows good on sinners in that He brings them forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ. And so, in spite of the fact that we are sinners, God saves us through Jesus Christ. Grace is free, in that God alone chooses to bestow or withhold His grace. God is sovereign in that He chooses who it will be that will be the object of His grace. For those ones, God overcomes all obstacles through His grace to bring those guilty sinners into relationship with Himself.

But it is a very lamentable thing that the gospel has been corrupted in the minds of many because the nature and meaning of salvation has been stripped of its biblical content. Rather than proclaiming the salvation that the Bible teaches, *salvation is commonly reduced to the forgiveness of sins only*. The gospel that claims to bring about that truncated salvation, has been reduced solely to a presentation of how to have one's sins forgiven. In doing so, the gospel has been perverted in the minds of many professing Christians.

It is very important, therefore, to understand and affirm the nature of salvation taught in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible teaches that God saves us by His grace. God must save us from four effects of sin in our lives. Of His own free will God delivers us by His grace from *(1) the penalty of sin, (2) the alienation of sin (3) the power of sin, and ultimately from (4) the presence of sin*. Let us consider each of these briefly.

**1. Of His own free grace God delivers us by His grace from the penalty of sin.** The *need* to be saved from the penalty of sin is due to the fact of God's just wrath upon sinners for the fact that they are sinners, who are guilty before a holy and just God. They are guilty before God because of *the sinful nature* they possess, because they are a part of *the guilty and condemned human race*, and they are *guilty for having individually transgressed His laws*. Human beings are born into this world unrighteous in God's sight. They aggravate their guilt through all of their sinful deeds they perform. They are guilty and have no means to clear themselves. They will remain in that guilty state of condemnation unless God removes the punishment that their guilt deserves. This God does, of course, through His grace, in which He sent forth His Son, the Lord Jesus, to live for and to die for those whom He purposed to save. Jesus Christ bore the penalty of sin for all true believers. In this way God is able to remove the guilt of believers, His justice having been fully satisfied through the death of His Son. Those who were unrighteous, upon believing the gospel, God no longer regards as unrighteous, but treats them as fully righteous in His sight. Their right standing before God is not based upon their works of righteousness or upon any payment for sin that they offered, but it is based upon the works of righteousness of their substitute Jesus Christ, and based upon His death as an atonement or payment for their sin. This is what the Bible calls **justification**. When a sinner believes the gospel, God begins immediately and forever to regard that believer as justified, or righteous in His sight. God grants the believing sinner the free gift of righteousness that is his through faith. God bestows this gift of His righteousness by His grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. No consideration of a sinner's works come into play. We read of this in many places, but we might simply consider Romans 5:1f, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this



grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” God saves us from the penalty of our sin through His act of justification that is by His grace through faith alone.

**2. Of His own free grace God delivers us by His grace from the *alienation of sin*.** The Bible speaks of how sin resulted in mankind’s estrangement from God. As unrepentant and unbelieving sinners, God regarded us not as His children, but as His enemies. We are born sinners who are without God, separate from Him, and opposed to Him. Moreover, God is opposed to us and has cast us from His presence. In salvation, God removes this alienation and causes us to be adopted into His family as His children. This is God’s grace in *adoption*. We are not physically born as children of God, but rather children of the devil. But God as soon as God justifies the believing sinner that we described a few minutes ago, He also confers this grace of adoption. God regards justified sinners as His children. As it has been described elsewhere,

Justification is the basic blessing on which adoption is founded; adoption is the crowning blessing for which justification clears the way. Adopted status belongs to all who receive Christ (John 1:12). In and through Christ God loves His adopted children as He loves His only begotten Son, and will share with them the glory that is Christ’s now (Rom. 8:17, 38, 39). Believers are under God’s fatherly care and discipline (Matt. 6:26; Heb. 12:5-11). They are to pray to God as their own Father in heaven (Matt. 6:5-13), imitate His virtues (Matt. 5:44-48; 6:12, 14, 15; 18:21-35; Eph. 4:32-5:2), and trust His Fatherly love (Matt. 6:25-34), thus expressing the filial instinct that the Holy Spirit has implanted in them (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6). (From the Reformation Study Bible Theological note, “Adoption”)

Whereas our justification resulted in a new standing or state before God, our adoption speaks of a new relationship with God as our Father. This brings us into the glorious place where we are heirs of all that God has promised that His children would one day inherit. Moreover, it enables believers to know that they have an intimate relationship with God for they are no longer estranged from Him, but they are very dear to Him and He has bound Himself to love them and preserve them. Only true believers in Jesus Christ may rightly call upon God, “Father.” We will read **Galatians 4:4ff** to see what we have said is so:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

**3. Of His own free grace God delivers us by His grace from the *power of sin*.** What kind of salvation would we have if God delivered us from the penalty of sin but we were not delivered from the power of sin? We were saved in order that we might freely and fully live before Him. Salvation is not only deliverance from God’s penalty, escaping His wrath upon us. *Salvation releases us from the dominion of sin so that we might live before Him freely and willingly.*

That we might see that this is an important aspect to salvation, let us turn to Luke 1 and read the words of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Now these words are couched in the language of the Old Testament hope of salvation, but they clearly reveal that the aim of salvation was that we might be able to live before God in holiness. We read in **Luke 1:68ff**:

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,  
For He has visited and redeemed His people,  
And has raised up a horn of *salvation* for us  
In the house of His servant David,

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,  
 Who have been since world began,  
 That we should be *saved from our enemies*  
 And from the hand of all who hate us,  
 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers  
 And to remember His holy covenant,  
 The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:  
 To grant us that we,  
*Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,*  
*Might serve Him without fear.*  
*In holiness and righteousness before Him*  
*All the days of our life.”*

We are familiar with the expression, “He is his own worst enemy.” That is a true statement of everyone, particularly for those who do not possess God’s salvation. How can we live for God when our sinful nature governs us by this principle, “I will that I will be the center of my life and I will do first what pleases me, not what pleases God?” This power of sin that controls the heart, mind, emotions, and will of every sinner must be conquered and subdued. We will not and cannot even believe the gospel as long as this power reigns in our lives. God delivers us, saves us from this power in His gracious work of salvation. How does God effect salvation from the power of sin? It is through God’s work of grace in us that the Bible calls our *sanctification*. The following is taken from an insert that we read not that long ago:

According to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 35), sanctification is “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” It is a continuing change worked by God in us, freeing us from sinful habits and forming in us Christ-like affections, dispositions, and virtues. It does not mean that sin is instantly eradicated, but it is also more than a counteraction, in which sin is merely restrained or repressed without being progressively destroyed. Sanctification is a real transformation, not just the appearance of one.

God begins the work of grace of sanctification in His through the initial grace of *regeneration*. Regeneration is the beginning work of sanctification. What is regeneration? It is that work of God in which He creates new life in a dead sinner. It is what the Scriptures refer to as being *born again*. It is a work wholly of grace. No man can cause himself to be born again. No works you can do can change your heart. No fasting, praying, serving, bowing, giving, sacrificing, suffering, promising, walking, talking, confessing, will bring about the breaking of the power of sin in your life. It takes a sovereign and free work of God’s grace to break the power of sin. Salvation is not you giving your heart to Jesus. That fallen depraved wicked heart is the worst possible thing that you could offer him. No, salvation is not you giving your heart to Jesus, salvation comes when He gives a new heart to you!

To see this in Scripture let us turn to the Old Testament promise of God’s salvation in **Ezekiel 36:24ff**. This was a prophecy which declared God’s intention to bring salvation to a remnant of Jews after He had brought them back from Exile. This took place when God brought salvation to them through Jesus Christ. This takes place every time a sinner is brought to salvation by His grace.

<sup>24</sup>For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. <sup>26</sup>*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* <sup>27</sup>*I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.* <sup>28</sup>Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I

will be your God. <sup>29</sup>I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup>And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup>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. <sup>32</sup>Not for your sake do I do *this*,” says the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!”

And so, our sanctification began with our regeneration, when He implanted within us a dissatisfaction with our sinful condition, a desire to know and seek Him, and willingness and ability to believe on Him. As a result of His work of regeneration we believed His promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. He justified us when we first believed the gospel. He adopted us when we first believed. And He has continued and will continue this work of sanctification in our lives making us more like His Son Jesus Christ until either Christ returns or He takes us home through death to be with Him.

Our justification resulted in a new *standing* before God. We are no longer condemned, but justified, righteous in His sight. It did nothing with respect to changing our nature, only our status before God. Our *adoption* resulted in a new relationship with God. It was God’s work of *sanctification in us*, initially with our regeneration, that resulted in a new heart and a new way of living before God. Sanctification does not promise us that we will not struggle with sin in this life; in fact, it assures us that we will. It is because God has placed in us the desire not to be governed by sin but to be governed by His will and by our Lord Jesus Christ, that we do struggle with sin. But we may be assured that God will continue this work in us until the day that He takes us to be with Him. Just as Paul could write, we can say, “*Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*”

Sanctification is all of grace. It has to do with our works, but it is not because of any merit of our works that He sanctifies us. It is a work of grace in us whereby we might do the works of Him who called us to salvation.

**4. Of His own free grace God delivers us by His grace from the *presence* of sin.** This occurs due to His grace of *glorification*, when God raises us from the dead and gives us new glorious bodies fitted to live before Him in holiness for eternity. One day the work of sanctification will be complete. We will be delivered from sin fully and finally. God promises that everyone that He saves will one day be glorified. In fact, it is such a sure thing that our glorification is described as if it has already occurred. Paul wrote in Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Everything that we have described is the result of God’s free *grace*. *God bestows His undeserved favor upon those who are deserving of His wrath*, not because of their works, but because He sovereignly and freely determined to do so.

The reason that understanding this full meaning of salvation is that the gospel that we proclaim must speak to this full need that we have. If we present the gospel as providing only the forgiveness of sins, we have not addressed our full need of salvation. People will respond to that “gospel” for they desire the forgiveness of sins--all people have this desire. But to be forgiven of sins and to be delivered from the love, power, and presence of sin, is not something all people desire. The gospel we proclaim should speak to this full need of our salvation.

When we affirm the biblical nature of salvation that God brings us through the gospel of Jesus Christ, it helps us to assess better the content of “the gospel” that we proclaim through which we are seeking to bring salvation to our hearers.

We will continue here next Lord’s Day, Lord willing.

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“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus,  
after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.  
To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Pet. 5:10-11)

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