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Managing editor: Justin Nash, P.O. Box 690848-7015,
Charlotte, NC 28227 jnash@acgc.us

Editor: Jefferson Vann, 5307 Nicholas Ct,
Williamsburg, VA 23188 jeffersonvann@yahoo.com

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ADVENTISM CONFRONTS MODERNITY:

A review by Thomas Loghry

In recent years, there has been a noticeable lack of published work offering any comment upon Advent Christian history and the important theological developments that have occurred over the years. Into this gap has stepped Robert J. Mayer with his book “Adventism Confronts Modernity: An Account of the Advent Christian Controversy over the Bible’s Inspiration.” Mayer’s study is thoroughly historical and poignantly contextual, as it seeks to clarify the Advent Christian debate over the Bible’s inspiration by setting it against the larger Fundamentalist-Modernist debate. Seen from another angle, he examines the Advent Christian controversy over the Bible’s inspiration as a case study of this larger debate, thus making this a helpful book for Advent Christian and non-Advent Christians alike.

In his introduction, Mayer sets out the prospective harvest one might reap from examining the Advent Christian conflict:

Studying the Advent Christian conflict over the inspiration and authority of the Bible can help us gain insight into the role and function of Scripture in a restorationist context. It helps us look at how denominations and associations of churches that combine non-creedal approaches toward Christian theology with a congregational form of church government resolve or fail to resolve important theological and organizational differences.¹

This represents the goal of Mayer’s study. To reach it, he takes the reader through the development of the Advent Christian denomination in the larger context of American Christianity

¹ Robert James Mayer and Garth Rosell, “Adventism confronts modernity: an account of the Advent Christian controversy over the Bibles inspiration”

throughout the second half of the 19th century into the first half of the 20th century, setting the stage for the 1964 Bible debate. Early on in his study, he describes the theological tension that has always confronted the Advent Christian denomination:

Identity for Advent Christians has traditionally been measured in terms of belief in a distinctive group of doctrines relating to individual and general eschatology. Paradoxically, Advent Christians have throughout their history maintained a non-creedal stance toward defining Christian doctrine. This orientation toward doctrinal definition has meant that while Advent Christians have defined their distinctiveness in terms of specific doctrines, at the same time they have allowed for a wide range of belief on issues[.]²

He plays out this tension by offering a succinct historical account of the theological origins of the denomination and the diverse voices at play in its formation. At this point, Mayer treads many of same paths earlier traveled by David Dean in his 1976 doctoral thesis, *Echoes of the Midnight Cry*.³ Like Dean, he offers an account of the immense theological impact of the rationalistic approach to theology of Miles Grant, but he offers his own original insight by drawing Grant into comparison with other theologians of the day who were in the early throes of the Fundamentalist-Modernist debate. He identifies the Common Sense philosophical approach of Thomas Reid as being the shared philosophical framework of both Grant and the Princeton Theologians, but that these latter in their attempt to bridge the Fundamentalist-Modernist divide, did not supplant Scripture to reason as Grant effectively did.⁴

Moving into the 20th century and the emergence of Advent Christian educational institutions, Mayer offers a similar cross-

² Mayer, 17-18.

³ David A. Dean “*Echoes of the Midnight Cry: The Millerite Heritage in the Apologetics of the Advent Christian Denomination, 1860-1960.*” Doctoral thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1976. Volumes I & II

⁴ Mayer, 21.

reference account of Orrin Roe Jenks and Clyde H. Hewitt of Aurora College, describing how the theological developments found at the University of Chicago had influenced them. On the Fundamentalist-Modernist spectrum, the University of Chicago was decidedly on the Modernist end of things, and thus Mayer identifies these Aurora theologians as falling toward that end of the spectrum, thus forming what could be called the Advent Christian version of “modernists.”

On the opposite end led by J.A. Nichols and Ariel Ainsworth was the New England School of Theology, which would later become Berkshire Christian College. Nichols and Ainsworth were influenced by the thought of Cornelius Van Til who was numbered among those who left Princeton to form Westminster Theological Seminary in the midst of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. Berkshire Christian College thus fell toward the fundamentalist end of the spectrum, forming the Advent Christian version of “fundamentalists.”

While Mayer does not designate these institutions in the fashion that I have done, his study lends itself to thinking in these terms, in thinking of these institutions as falling toward one end of the spectrum or the other. While this is helpful toward understanding the sources of Advent Christian theological development, it may also tempt the reader to flatten these Advent Christian theologians and to place them squarely in one camp or the other, conceiving Aurora theologians as being “liberal” and Berkshire theologians as being “conservative.” Relative to one another, this may be the case, but considered in the greater context of American Christianity, this would entirely misrepresent what is actually a significant amount of agreement between the two.

From Mayer’s account, the basic difference that appeared between Aurora and Berkshire regarding the inspiration of Scripture was their respective accounts of the extent of the authority of Scripture. This distinction came down to the difference between inspired writers and inspired words. Aurora understood Scripture to be dynamically inspired, meaning that God inspired

those who wrote the words of Scripture, but not the words themselves. This basically allowed for the appearance of historical and scientific errors, but maintained the theological/moral authority of the text. Conversely, Berkshire's understanding was that of verbal plenary inspiration, meaning that God's work of inspiration exacted upon the words themselves, such that the sorts of errors dynamic inspiration would permit could not be allowed. By this understanding, the Bible is authoritative on whatever it comments.

This is obviously not an insignificant disagreement (and thus the 1964 debate and this book), but it is nevertheless significant that both sides do agree that Scripture is the authoritative basis for Christian doctrine. While Miles Grant does splinter the authority for Christian doctrine, those like Jenks, Hewitt and Crouse do maintain Scripture's theological authority, regardless of whether one might think that they stand upon a slippery slope. As Hewitt writes in his book "Faith for Today," "No doctrine can be held as a fundamental of faith which cannot be proved by certain warranty of Scripture, and no theory can be true that is contrary to Bible statements."⁵ Reason may be beneficial, but everything must submit to Scripture. So while Hewitt did develop a "conditionalist principle," he did not believe this principle contravened Scripture but accorded harmoniously with it. Thus despite appearances, agreement on the Bible's basic authority remained between the two sides.

Mayer's account is so contextual that this overarching agreement can be lost in the midst of describing the apparent differences raging at the time. However, he succeeds in transporting the reader into the world as it was for those who lived through this controversy. He offers seldom-heard accounts of the Cleveland Conference (a meeting between Berkshire and Aurora theologians) and the controversy that hovered over the denomination's Sunday school curriculum. All of this sets the stage for the

⁵ Clarence H. Hewitt, "Faith for today" (Boston: The Warren Press, 1941). p.65

decisions made at the 1964 Montreat gathering of the Advent Christian General Conference.

Perhaps what is most significant in this study is Mayer's assessment of the decisions made in 1964. He seems to share the belief with those who were present at the time that the conversation concerning the Bible's inspiration was cut short by the decisions made and that there ought to have been lengthier discussion.⁶ Such regret might lend a word of caution to future theological discussion among Advent Christians, that an impatient desire for denominational unity should not short-circuit efforts toward theological clarity.

Consistent with the theological paradox cited earlier and seeking a resolution to the goal of his study, Mayer writes:

It was these two principles — the final authority of Scripture and the freedom of individuals to determine their Christian beliefs for themselves — came directly into conflict with each other at Montreat. No matter how vital the issue, the majority of Advent Christians was reticent to act in a way that might restrict the individual freedom of fellow Advent Christians to follow the dictates of conscience.⁷

A decision on the authority of Scripture was agreed upon, as it is now found in the Declaration of Principles when it states: "We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, being in its entirety a revelation given to man under divine inspiration and providence; that its historic statements are correct, and that it is the only divine and infallible standard of faith and practice."⁸ However, despite this agreement, it is apparent that the theological tension among Advent Christians has not been resolved. While admittedly important, one wonders just how hollow it may be to affirm the authority of Scripture without recognizing any sort of objective meaning that would command Advent

⁶ Mayer, 153.

⁷ Mayer, 163-164.

⁸ See <http://acgc.us/advent-christian-declaration-of-principles/>

Christian belief. In any case, Mayer offers a commendable route by which this tension may be worked out, which happens to also align quite nicely with the stated purposes of Advent Christian Voices. He writes,

Major theological differences continue to exist today, especially within the coalition that comprises contemporary Evangelicalism. Those differences need to be addressed, not by caricatures of opposing views and their proponents, but by the practice of sustained, patient, and constructive interaction and dialogue...This type of honest dialogue gives Christians an opportunity to practice one of the Apostle Paul's marks of Christian maturity, the ability to "speak the truth in love."⁹

With this sort of encouragement, the historical insight provided, and the vistas opened for further research into Advent Christian formation and identity, Robert Mayer's *Adventism Confronts Modernity* is a beneficial and important study for this moment in the life of the Advent Christian denomination. If this were not sweet enough, the cherry on top is the stock of resources he provides in the appendices, including the oldest versions of the Declaration of Principles that are not otherwise easily accessible.¹⁰ This author recommends you dig in!

Tom Loghry is the editor of Advent Christian Voices. He serves as assistant pastor at North Scituate Advent Christian Church and is engaged in theological studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He enjoys life with his wife Sara and son James.

⁹ Mayer, 165-166.

¹⁰ For an interesting study, compare the 1881 DOP to the 1900 DOP. In his doctoral thesis, David Dean notes the shift from including the pre-existence of the Son in the 1881 version to its absence in the 1900 version, a clear sign of the influence of Miles Grant.

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY AND SALVATION

By David Burge

I do not for a moment believe and would never say that one cannot be saved without believing in conditional immortality. I do, however, know that what you believe about Conditional immortality touches on many issues intimately related with our salvation. Conditional immortality effects how we understand Scripture, human nature, Sin and its penalty, death, the atonement, resurrection, immortality, the hope of the believer, judgment, hell, the character of God and God's final victory.

- Scripture — Do words such as “life” and “death” have their plain ordinary meaning or do they have some special “theological” meaning such as “eternal bliss” and “eternal misery”?
- Human nature — Are we mortal creatures of dust or is there some immortal “spark of divinity” inside us?
- Sin and its penalty — Are the wages of sin “death” or “eternal torment”?
- Death — Is death really death or is it just life in another place?
- The atonement — Did Christ's death pay the penalty for our sin or was he tormented in hell for our sins?
- Resurrection — Is resurrection God's making whole persons alive from death or is it putting an immortal soul back into a new body (reincarnation)?
- Immortality — Is immortality the present possession of every human being by nature, or is it a gift given to the righteous when Jesus comes again?
- The Hope of the Believer — Is the hope of the believer to

- be raised from death at the second coming to live forever in the kingdom of God or is it to go to heaven at death?
- Judgment — Are we to be judged on judgment day, or have they already been condemned and are they undergoing punishment in hell at present? If the latter is the case what is the purpose of judgment day?
 - Hell — Is hell a picture of everlasting destruction or of everlasting torment?
 - God — Is God a God of love and justice and is it just to torment someone for eternity for sins committed over a finite period of time?
 - God’s final victory — Will God ever be able to rid the universe of sin and evil or will there always be some corner of the universe (hell) where sin and evil exists in rebellion against God’s ultimate will?

I believe Scripture puts forth Salvation as the offer of “life” or “death.” We mortal creatures of dust have sinned. The wages of sin is death. Death effects the whole person. We die body and soul, not just body. Christ by his death paid the penalty for our sin. Now even if we die before Jesus comes, God will make us alive as whole persons. We will be given the gift of life in immortality when Jesus comes again. Then we will live forever in the kingdom of God. The wicked will be judged only when Jesus comes again. Hell will be a place of everlasting destruction for the unrepentant wicked. God is a God of love and justice and will not torment someone for eternity for sins committed over a finite period of time. Ultimately God’s victory will be complete. There will not be some corner of the universe (hell) where sin and evil exists in rebellion against God’s ultimate will. Eventually God will be all in all.

David Burge was a pastor in New Zealand, and served as president of the Conditional Immortality Association of New Zealand. He was a contributing editor to Afterlife website, and From Death to Life magazine until his death in 2011.

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[No doubt, readers of Henceforth will find some books or articles omitted that they expected to be here. Readers are encouraged to respond with suggested additions and/or corrections.]

SALVATION

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

The issue of personal salvation involves a number of questions. The temptation will be to narrowly define the issue so that only certain questions are studied — particularly if the student is tied to a certain theological tradition. Those with inclinations toward the Reformed or Wesleyan-Arminian tradition will be most interested in the “who” question. The Reformers emphasized that God is sovereign in the saving process, tracing salvation from its starting point in election. Arminians emphasize human free-

dom to respond to God.

In this work, while human responsibility is taught, God's sovereignty in salvation trumps it. Salvation is described as a work of all three persons of the Trinity. The Father chooses, not at all based on the foreseen worthiness of the objects of his choice, but entirely by his grace. The Son sacrificed himself on the cross to atone for the sins of the world potentially, and especially for those who will respond to his atonement in faith.¹¹ The Holy Spirit applies that atonement to the lives of believers, transforming and regenerating those who are predestined to it.¹² Equally important to the "who" question, salvation is also a "what." It is important to nail down just exactly what it means to be saved, and what it means to be unsaved. For that reason, this work delves into questions as to what a saved individual does and does not do. There are traits in a person's life that serve as indicators of salvation. These include a changed mind (repentance),¹³ a redirected mouth (testifying to the gospel)¹⁴ and a life of confidence in God and his future (faith).¹⁵ These "what" questions are not entirely separated from the "who" question. This is where the human responsibility comes in. These indications of the transformed life are also obligations for individual believers. They are also a matched set. We can portray all the confidence in the world that we are saved, but if that confidence is not accompanied by a transformed mind, and a gospel-oriented testimony and life, then our salvation is still in question.

The Choice

A good starting point to help us begin studying the "who" question of salvation is Paul's salutation in his letter to the Ephesians:

¹¹ see *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, chapter 50. The Sacrifice.

¹² see *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, chapter 51. The Regenerator.

¹³ see *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, chapter 52. The Change.

¹⁴ see *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, chapter 53. The Testimony.

¹⁵ see *An Advent Christian Systematic Theology*, chapter 54. The Life.

³ Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before him. ⁵ He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he richly poured out on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he purposed in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the right time -- to bring everything together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth in him. ¹¹ In him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will, ¹² so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to his glory. ¹³ In him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed. ¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of his glory.¹⁶

It is quite clear from this text that Paul is describing a connection between himself and the Ephesians. That connection is the fact that he is a saved individual and he is addressing saved individuals. Notice how Paul describes salvation as a blessing that all the saved have been blessed with by God the Father (3,6). That blessing originated in God's choice in the past, affects the believer's status in the present, and will lead to ultimate salvation (glorification) in the future.

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:3-14, CSB.

vs.	past	present	future
3	God has blessed us	with every spiritual blessing	

A choice that God made in the past has affected the atmosphere in which we walk today. We experience *some* of the material blessings that go along with our allegiance to the Lord. But we experience *all* of the spiritual blessings. The material blessings may come and go during this life, but the spiritual blessings are permanent. Our future will include an immeasurable supply of both material and spiritual blessings. In fact, there will be no difference between the two. Presently, our Savior warns us to place our priority on seeking God’s kingdom and his righteousness (spiritual blessings), and challenges us to trust God for the things that we need.¹⁷ He has a plan and purpose for our lives, and, for now, the spiritual blessings are all we need to accomplish that purpose.

vs.	past	present	future
4	God chose us	to be holy and blameless before him	

God’s choice was not merely a rescue from death or disaster. He had a purpose, and that purpose included our becoming like him. We are to (and will) reflect his holiness and blamelessness. Without that choice made by God in the past, humanity had no hope of ascending to God’s level. Babel taught us that we cannot build ourselves up to heaven’s height from the ground up. The work had to be done from the top down. God destroyed Babel not because he actually feared that man would reach perfection without him, but because he knew that man would ever incline himself toward that futile attempt. As long as Babel existed, God’s plan of grace would always be our second choice.

¹⁷ Matthew 6:33.

vs.	past	present	future
5	God predestined us according to the good pleasure of his will	for adoption	

Again, the choice of God in eternity past is being highlighted. No one becomes a son of God by his or her own choice. The choice is an adoption. Children may seek adoption. They may ask for it. But the parents are the ones who adopt. The child's status does not change unless the potential parent chooses to become an actual one. Paul and the Ephesians celebrated their mutual status as adopted children of God not because of their own works, but because of works done for them in eternity past.

But, along with that appreciation for the grace of adoption comes an expected change in behavior and lifestyle that reflects the new status as sons. So, Paul would challenge these same Ephesian Christians with the words: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."¹⁸ It was "through the church (that) the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."¹⁹ Paul challenged the Ephesian believers to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."²⁰ Their choices must reflect the same intent as God's saving choice. That is how they show that an adoption has taken place.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:10.

¹⁹ Ephesians 3:10.

²⁰ Ephesians 4:22–24.

vs.	past	present	future
6	God has blessed us with his glorious grace	that we might praise him for his glorious grace	

Our praise of God is a reflection on what he has done for us that we did not deserve. Grace is God’s choice in eternity past that has resulted in our worship in the present. Grace is more than just the fact that God has made salvation possible. We worship God for something that he did. His choice is the grounds for our praise. His blessing is the reason for our worship. He is the divine Chooser, and we are the human choice. He chose us. It was a choice based on his grace. So, now we praise him for that grace.

vs.	past	present	future
7	God has blessed us with his glorious grace	that we might have redemption that we might have forgiveness	

God’s sovereign choice to save us has also redeemed us from the slavery associated with sin. We are free in the present not to sin. We have also been forgiven for all our past sins. Our status has changed. The bondage which was our inheritance from Adam has been replaced because God has blessed us with grace. A slave is in no condition to demand release. A condemned man can seek forgiveness, but he has no ability to make someone forgive him.

vs.	past	present	future
11	having been predestined	In him we have obtained an inheritance	

God’s sovereign choice to save us has given us a present inheritance. We have hope for the future because of what he has done for us in the past. That hope is a present tense reality. It assures of a future even though we do not deserve one. It is not at

all evident what that inheritance will entail. Were we to get even a small glimpse of what we will be throughout eternity, it would overwhelm us. Faith takes the challenges of each day with confidence that even if there is failure today, there will eventually be eternal (permanent) victory. God has predestined it.

vs.	past	present	future
13–14	you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit	who is the guarantee of our inheritance	until we acquire possession of it

The Holy Spirit’s involvement in the lives of believers links God’s sovereign choice in the past with our eternal inheritance. His presence within us is our guarantee that the forces that war within and seek to undo our deliverance will not ultimately win. Even when we face temporary setbacks and times of fear and failure – He assures us that these are only temporary. Our guarantee is more than simply knowing that we have been chosen. Along with that election, God has also predestined us to ultimately win. Along with that predestination, he has provided a living guarantee within us, his Holy Spirit.

The *who* behind it all is God, who has chosen us of his own free will in eternity past. This was Paul’s basis for the connection he felt with the Ephesian Christians. This was the reason for Paul’s confidence that they would triumph over the problems that they faced. The more we know about who is behind our salvation, the more confident we can be. For that reason, it is helpful to review some of those key texts in scripture that affirm God’s initial choice, which the Bible calls his election.

Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? (Matthew 20:15, NET).

Jesus told a story about day laborers, hired to work in a vineyard. It is important not to abuse the stories that Jesus told by making them “walk on all fours” — that is, making them say

more than they were intended to say. So, it is important to establish that the reason Jesus told this story was to illustrate God's sovereign choice in saving people. The act of working in the vineyard was not what Jesus was emphasizing. It was the choice of the owner to decide who works, and how much each is paid. The fact that the owner chooses to pay each worker the same indicates that the payment is a result of grace, not it was deserved. So, eternal salvation is the issue.

God's sovereign choice is seen in the fact that the owner of the vineyard asks the question "Am I not permitted to do what I want with what belongs to me?" — a question that we must all consider when debating this issue of election. Often election is rejected on the grounds that it does not seem fair for God to decide who gets paid long before the work is done. But that is the picture we see here. Of course, there is also human choice involved. The workers were not coerced into their toil. Each was willing to work. But the point of Jesus' parable did not relate to that. His objective was to defend the free will of the owner, not the workers.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44, ESV).

Jesus had been explaining that he was the bread, the manna sent from heaven: he was the solution to the spiritual hunger in all of us. Yet God did not send manna to everyone, only to the Israelites. Likewise, as the new era of salvation dawns, not everyone will come to Christ and be saved. The door to salvation opens wider when Christ is revealed, but it does not open for everyone. Those who come to Christ are drawn to him by the Father. It is these who have been drawn (the elect) who will be raised up to eternal life on the last day.

To further stretch the manna analogy, the Father's drawing is like giving us an appetite for the bread of life. We might think that we have complete control over our destiny, but our control (our free will – if you will) is limited to the fact that we are free to

choose what we want. But who controls our wants? Jesus speaks here of the Father drawing us to Christ. The fact that we wanted to be saved suggests that this drawing had taken place.

So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen. ¹⁹ Well then, you might say, “Why does God blame people for not responding? Haven’t they simply done what he makes them do?” ²⁰ No, don’t say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? (Romans 9:18-21, NLT).

This text deals with another possible objection to election on the grounds that it is not fair. The issue here is the opposite of that which Jesus dealt in his story of the vineyard. It has to do with the perceived unfairness of God’s judging those who do not believe. If salvation is based on God’s electing grace, why would he punish those whom he chooses not to elect?

If Paul had merely wanted to say “You misunderstand, God chooses fairly based on the obedience he sees in our future” he could have said that. Instead, he uses this potter and clay analogy, which suggests that salvation is entirely the result of God’s electing grace. Paul argued that we are the results of God’s artistic choice. He decides which jar gets used for which purpose. The choice is entirely his.

When it comes to the issue of fairness, we seem to forget that our very existence in the first place is not fair. When our ancestors rejected God’s way in Eden, he should have destroyed our species entirely. That would have been fair, because we violated his prohibition, and the penalty was death. We deserve non-ex-

¹⁸ Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:15.

istence. But God in his grace gives us life. He also, by his grace, has chosen to redeem *some* of us through the substitutionary death of Christ.

Our real problem with election is with that word *some*. It seems entirely unfair that God would only choose *some* as recipients of his grace. There is even a significant movement within Christianity which suggests that all will eventually be saved. Rob Bell's book "Love Wins" explains how he and others can come to such a conclusion.²¹ He argues that God has to win ultimately, and that means that eventually all those suffering in hell will repent, and so all will be saved. Of course, the problem is that hell is the second death. Those thrown into the lake of fire will suffer, but even hell will end. It will be emptied not by people repenting, but by their being destroyed.

Paul's argument in Romans 9 is that God is fair in destroying and discarding those whom he chooses not to save. God is right in creating the jar destined to be used to hold garbage. His glory is not diminished because everyone does not become an eternal masterpiece. That is fair because both the decorative art and the garbage pail are creations of the same artist.

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast-- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Revelation 13:8, NIV).

The picture of the elect that presents itself in Revelation 13 is that of a book with people's names written in it. It is a registry, a divine database. There may or may not be an actual book. The point is that salvation is limited. If John saw a book with names in it, he perhaps saw your name or mine. This was thousands of years before we were born, yet the record of the saved was there – and complete at that time. It is comforting to think of one's name being written there, but what about those whose names are

²¹ Rob Bell, "LOVE WINS: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived." (Robert H. Bell, Jr. Trust, 2011).

missing. Is it unfair for God to do that? No, because those whose names are not written in the book of life will worship the beast. No one will die in hell who does not deserve death because of his or her own sins. There is fairness in God's judgment.

The Starting Point

God's sovereign choice in election is the logical starting point in discussing salvation. Yet many get so hung up on that issue that they can scarcely go any further. The Bible has so much more to say about the process of salvation. In order to understand salvation, one needs to accept the fact that by grace he has been saved, and then ask more questions. It is to these further questions that this study will now turn.

As the Messiah, Jesus came to give up his life by crucifixion in order to rescue us from Satan's grasp.²² It was necessary that Christ be put to death to accomplish salvation. The question as to why this was necessary, and just exactly how his death saves anyone belongs to the locus of soteriology, and particularly the doctrine of the atonement.

The Concept of Atonement

Some explain the concept of atonement by saying that sin separates us from God, and what Jesus did on the cross caused us to be at-one with him again. Atonement is at-one-ment. This is fairly accurate, but it fails to really answer the above questions of why and how that is true. To get to those answers, readers must look to the Old Testament.

There is a formula that is repeated almost verbatim 12 times in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. It goes something like this: "the sinner shall offer the sacrifice to the LORD, and the priest shall make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven."²³

²² See chapter 36.

²³ Leviticus 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Numbers 15:25, 28.

This formula reveals four parties involved in the practice of atonement as described in the Mosaic law:

1. First, there was *the offended party* — the Lord himself. If God could not be affected by our actions, the atonement would not be necessary. But his righteousness is deeply affected by our acts of unrighteousness.
2. Second, there was *the offending party* — the sinner. Whether those sins were deliberate or done out of ignorance was not the point. The point was that something had been done or left undone that offended God’s holiness.
3. Third, there was *the innocent sacrifice*. A highly valuable animal was killed in order to reconcile the two above parties — to make them one again. There was a price to pay to restore the relationship between the sinner and his God. There was a price for forgiveness.
4. Fourth, there was *the qualified priest*. Priests serve as mediators between the two parties. The priest has responsibilities toward both parties. He represents them. He follows the rules set by the offended party (God) that will allow him (God) to forgive the offenses. The priest does not forgive the sins, but he does make it possible for God to do so. The Mosaic law provided for means for priests to be cleansed, so that they could qualify to serve in this vital function for their brothers and sisters.

Why?

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was offered up on the cross once and for all to bear all the world’s sins.²⁴ The Mosaic ritual of atonement was an analogy pointing to this great event. It taught us that an individual’s sins are — first and foremost — committed against God himself. To really understand the need for the cross, we must look at the problem of sin from God’s perspective.

²⁴ Romans 6:10; Hebrews 9:28.

It is entirely human to speculate about other scenarios where the problem of sin could be dealt with in other manners. But those who think of such things must realize that their own concepts of fairness and justice (and even mercy and grace) are products of their limited knowledge and experience. God is the only one who is the truly offended party, so only he can decide on the proper remedy for the offense. Only he knows what can reconcile him to a sinner permanently.

The best that the theologian can do in answering “why the cross?” is to see the correlations between the analogy and the event it predicted. So, it helps to recognize these correlations.

1. *The cross was a God-thing.* It was the destiny that Jesus was born to, the destination he was driven to. The Via Dolorosa was the path that God had ordained for Jesus to take from the very beginning. Jesus said that when he would be lifted up onto the cross that it would draw all people to himself.²⁵ He could not pray for God to rescue him from that hour of trial, because it was the purpose for which he had come.²⁶

2. *Jesus took sin upon himself at the cross,* and bore the full punishment for it. Paul told the Corinthians that “for our sake (God) made (Christ) to be sin who knew no sin.”²⁷ Jesus took the place of every sinner who ever lived and suffered as our representative. When the Father looked down at his own Son on the cross he saw not the sinners, but their sacrifices.

3. The Son of God on the cross was the most precious and valuable sacrifice ever offered. If there were ever a man or woman who was completely sinless from the womb, and who lived a life exemplary beyond measure, then that person would have qualified for the cross. But humanity never produced such a saint. So, God in his grace stepped forward and provided the sacrifice himself. God became flesh,²⁸ so that he could sacrifice his own flesh.²⁹

²⁵John 12:32.

²⁶John 12:27.

²⁷2 Corinthians 5:21.

²⁸John 1:14.

²⁹John 10:18.

4. *As fully human and completely sinless, Christ also qualified to offer himself.*³⁰ He served both as sacrifice and as priest.³¹ He “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins”³² — which was himself. The offering was accepted, and need never be repeated. Christ, “by a single offering ... has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”³³

How?

Through time, people have speculated as to how Christ’s death atoned for the sins of others.³⁴ Some have even misinterpreted Scripture itself and held to ideas which fail to represent what it says about the cross.

For example, the Bible speaks of Christ’s death as a ransom paid.³⁵ Some have concluded that Christ had to die as payment to Satan to purchase back believers from the hell they deserved. This work has already shown that the only thing God owes Satan is destruction in hell.³⁶

The Bible presents Christ as the example for believers to follow.³⁷ Some have included that Christ’s death on the cross is the ultimate example that believers should follow in obedience to God’s will, no matter what. But a careful examination of all the example texts will show that nowhere is the believer called on to die in the same way that Christ did. We are take up our crosses (not his cross) and follow him.

The real message of the cross is that by dying for us, Christ did something that we needed, but that we could not do for our-

³⁰ Hebrews 7:27.

³¹ Hebrews 3:1, 14, 15; 5:5, 6, 10; 6:20; 7:3, 24, 26-28.

³² Hebrews 10:12.

³³ Hebrews 10:14.

³⁴ For a more complete treatment of false theories of the atonement, see the Moody Handbook of Theology (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1989).

³⁵ Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Peter 1:18; Revelation 5:9.

³⁶ see chapter 44.

³⁷ John 13:15; 1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 2:21.

selves. Peter says “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”³⁸ Christ’s death on the cross made our sanctification possible. It was more than an example. Without Christ’s death, no one could ever follow his example.

Substitutionary Atonement

In a very real sense, Christ took our place on the cross. Humanity rightly deserved to die, and to die horribly for sinful thoughts, rebellion against God, and as a consequence of our actions. Enter Jesus. The Prophet Isaiah explained what the cross would be 700 years before it happened. He put it this way:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned — every one — to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4–6, ESV).

God lovingly provided a solution to humanity’s sin problem by sending his only Son to suffer and die in our place. This is what theologians call substitutionary atonement. It is the only definition of atonement that matches the Old Testament examples.

In the end, both questions (why the cross? and how the cross?) cannot be fully answered. We must simply accept that this is the way that God has chosen by his grace to deal with our sin problem without destroying us. Christ became our atoning sacrifice.

Jesus, the Messiah, cooperated with the Father’s plan by giving of himself, sacrificing his life on the cross as our atoning sacrifice. Christ gave himself when enabled us to have new life.

³⁸ 1 Peter 2:24.

He also gave us his Holy Spirit to complete the work of salvation that he made possible. The Holy Spirit gives us guidance, supernatural gifts and power for ministry, and produces the fruit of righteousness in our lives.³⁹ He is the Regenerator. He applies the atonement to our lives, and produces the change that the cross made possible.

Jesus Explained Regeneration

While conversing with a Jewish religious teacher, Jesus explained what regeneration is. Nicodemus, who should have understood these things, did not have a clue.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”⁴⁰

People do not give birth to themselves. That was the nature of the rebirth process that Nicodemus could not understand. He asked “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”⁴¹ As a religious professional, Nicodemus was used to being given a command, and working out how he was going to actively obey that command. He was a “hands on” religious practitioner. He did not ask “what?” or “why?” or even “who?” He asked “how?” because he was comfortable with a religion that required him to do something.

But when Jesus said that regeneration was like a new birth, he implied that the one being born is passive in the process. No one gives birth to himself. The Holy Spirit is the active partici-

³⁹ see chapters 37-42.

⁴⁰ John 3:5-8, ESV.

⁴¹ John 3:4, ESV.

pant in the process, and the believer is the passive recipient. In natural birth, two parents come together, have sexual relations and a child is conceived as a result. The child has no say in the process of his conception. He is conceived of flesh, planned by flesh, nurtured during gestation by flesh, and when his birthday arrives — there he is: a bouncing baby flesh.

Jesus taught Nicodemus that spiritual rebirth works the same way. It is God’s Holy Spirit within the life of a believer that produces spiritual life. An unregenerate person is a degenerate. He produces only works of the flesh. They may be noble works of the flesh, or religious works of the flesh, or popular works of the flesh, but they are not God. They do not produce godliness, because God’s Holy Spirit is not there.

In true regeneration, the Holy Spirit applies the sovereign election of the Father, and the atoning sacrifice of the Son to the life of every true believer. The works that are produced are God’s works. The life within is God’s life. He blows around like a strong wind within the human lives of believers and leaves evidence of his existence among them.

Sanctification

The process by which the Holy Spirit does this is sometimes called sanctification. It is tempting to define sanctification as the results of the Holy Spirit’s blowing around – in other words, the damage caused by the storm, the evidence of God’s existence that believers produce. After all, the New Testament does encourage believers to see our bodies as a temple, and set it apart for God’s use by “cleans(ing) ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”⁴²

But the results of cooperating with the Holy Spirit within and cleaning up our lives for his use — however noble they are — are not what the Bible calls sanctification. Theologians usually divide the doctrine of sanctification into three tenses:

⁴² 2 Corinthians 7:1 ESV.

1. positional sanctification, or the change in our status or standing before God.
2. progressive sanctification, or the change in our present experience because of the Holy Spirit within.
3. perfect sanctification, or our ultimate future condition when we are glorified at Christ's return.

When seen in that light, the vast majority of the Bible's treatment of the subject concentrates on the first tense, on what is called positional sanctification. Consider these texts as examples:

- "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who *are sanctified*."⁴³
- "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those *sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."⁴⁴
- "But by His doing you are in *Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*"⁴⁵
- "*we have been sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."⁴⁶
- "Therefore, *to sanctify the people by his own blood*, Jesus also suffered outside the camp."⁴⁷

There is a process of sanctification. The New Testament refers to believers as "those who are being sanctified." The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, turning us into the people we are going to become. He's changing us. He is manifesting himself in us and through us.

Ultimate sanctification (or glorification) is our destiny. When Jesus appears, raising us from the dead, or transforming us so

⁴³ Acts 20:32, ESV.

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:2, ESV.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:30, NASB.

⁴⁶ Hebrews 10:10, ESV.

⁴⁷ Hebrews 13:12, NET.

that we will never taste death, we will be like him.⁴⁸ A transformation will have occurred. We look forward to the day when “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet ... the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”⁴⁹

So, why does the Bible mostly present sanctification as a done deal? To understand this, readers have to stop thinking of sanctification as something that happens *to us*, and see it as something that happens *from God*. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier and the Regenerator. Our problem is that (like Nicodemus) we see things too much from our perspective. But the new birth could not be best explained from the perspective of those who experience it — the ones begotten. It had to be explained from the perspective of the one who begat — the one who caused the birth to happen.

The apostle Paul understood this quite well. Here is how he described sanctification to the Romans:

For those whom (God) foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.⁵⁰

While he does not use the word “sanctified” in this text, he does use the word “glorified” — and put it in the past tense. But glorification is the future hope of the saints. We do not yet conform fully to the image of Christ, but we have been predestined to do it. It is our future destiny, not present reality.

But Paul spoke of God as having already glorified us. He skipped the process of sanctification and mentioned the event of glorification at the return of Christ and implied that both divine actions have already been accomplished. Did Paul slip in his grammar? No, he said what he meant to say. Paul understood

⁴⁸ 1 John 3:2.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:52, ESV.

⁵⁰ Romans 8:29–30 ESV.

something about God. He is not the God who was, and he is not the God who will be. God is always and eternally the “I AM.”⁵¹ He is within time and outside of time at the same time. He has already accomplished all that he ever will accomplish.

Sanctification was accomplished the very moment the Father chose us to be his own. Sanctification was accomplished the moment the blood of Jesus Christ was shed on the cross. Sanctification was accomplished the very moment the Holy Spirit moved into our lives, and separated us unto God, reserving our lives for his purposes forever. We may not feel sanctified. We usually do not think of ourselves as having already been made holy. But from God’s perspective, it is a done deal.

The Holy Spirit is inside us, indwelling, transforming and regenerating us. He is changing our lives so that we reflect our destiny as glorified saints. He assists in the battle against Satan and sin, and guides us in the process of making decisions that reflect our new status before God. We do not always accept his guidance. We often stubbornly choose to do things our own way. But the God of all time is patient. He sees us not as we are now, but as we will be. So, it does not bother him to put up with our present, unfinished brand of foolishness.

Of course, if we do rebel against the divine Resident within, there is a price to pay. We often suffer simply because we refuse to walk in the Spirit. Our flesh wrestles with our spirit, who wants to cooperate with his Spirit. When we refuse to walk according to God’s wisdom, he will graciously allow us to stumble from our own foolishness. It is all part of the process.

The evidence that the process is indeed occurring includes three things that will be addressed in the next three sections:

1. *conversion*: an immediate and ongoing change in our minds.
2. *testimony*: our attempts to communicate our faith to others.
3. *life of faith*: actions and attitudes that demonstrate that change has occurred.

⁵¹ Exodus 3:14–15.

Salvation is a miraculous work which the Father began in eternity past with our election. The Son made it possible by atoning for our sins on the cross. The Holy Spirit orchestrates its affects in our lives by applying it through a process of sanctification. That work of salvation affects an immediate and on-going change in the mind of the believer, which in turn transforms the believer's behavior. This miraculous change of mind is called repentance. After conversion, the believer's eyes are opened to the reality the Bible reveals about God, Christ, sin, Satan, the world and the church. The believer's self-awareness is forever altered.

Repentance in the Old Testament

Calling for repentance was already an Old Testament tradition long before John the Baptist. Solomon predicted a time when his nation would fall away from their God, but that the Lord would listen to them if they turned their hearts back to him and repent.⁵² His father, David, taught that God was prepared to do battle against the wicked if they refuse to repent.⁵³ The prophet Isaiah divided the people of Judah into two types: the rebels and sinners on the one hand and the repentant on the other. The latter will be redeemed, but the former will be broken together and consumed.⁵⁴ The prophet Ezekiel called on God's people to repent.⁵⁵ The prophet Jeremiah lamented the utter corruption of his people, and the fact that they refused to repent even after the LORD punished them: "You have struck them down, but they felt no anguish; you have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent."⁵⁶

The call to repent in the Old Testament was a challenge for God's people to turn back to him, to return to their first loyalty.

⁵² 1 Kings 8:47–48; 2 Chronicles 6:37–38.

⁵³ Psalm 7:8–13.

⁵⁴ Isaiah 1:27–28.

⁵⁵ Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30.

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 5:3, ESV.

It was given in a context where the people had been tempted to go after other gods, and had yielded to the temptation. Even after generations of idolatry, God's messengers continued to plead for his people to return, in spite of the fact that many who heard their words had never been truly loyal to the Lord. They pleaded for a rebellious people to reverse their rebellion. Repentance for them would be both a turning away from their sins and a turning toward the Lord.

Enter, John the Baptist

When John the Baptist comes on the scene in the early pages of the Gospels, he proclaims the same message to the same people. He tells all Israel "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."⁵⁷ He is telling a rebellious people to return to their God. But his message has even more urgency because the Lord and his kingdom are at hand. If the Lord arrives while his people are still in a state of rebellion, he will unleash his fury upon them. So, John pleads for Israel to prepare the way for the Lord, to make his paths straight. In other words, he is calling on the people of God to stop being obstacles to God's will, and to refocus on obeying his will. That is what it meant for them to repent.

The Greek word for repent is μετανοέω and repentance is μετάνοια — both words being a combination of the words for after (μετά) and mind (νοῦς). It was a concept well-suited for the particular use of John the Baptist, as he wanted to encourage his audience to rethink their situation and change their minds, which would result in a change of behavior. He was not calling on them to simply change their minds, because it was their behavior that had put them in danger.

Repentance would be the crucial first response that John was looking for. It a choice that drastically and permanently changes the believer's mind, conforming it to the truth as revealed in God's word, and allowing it to redirect energies previously dedicated to unrighteous behavior. A repentant people would be free

⁵⁷ Matthew 3:2.

to correct injustice, and make it possible for the Messiah to reign.

John chose baptism as a sign that repentance had taken place. Immersion in water for ceremonial washing was already common in John's day. Many of the Israelites had washing places in their own homes which were used to symbolize spiritual cleansing. John's ministry was a call for the entire nation to repent. The public baptism in the Jordan River was — in a sense — an agreement to be a part of a national revival movement.

When the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees came to join up for the movement, John turned them down. Their "repentance" was meaningless, since it bore no fruit.⁵⁸ When the truly repentant had asked John how they could show their sincerity, he told them to be considerate of one another, and not greedy for gain at others' expense.⁵⁹ A true change of mind was also a change of heart. When Herod and John clashed, Herod chose not to repent. His attitude was that if he did not like the message, just get rid of the messenger.

But the call to repent did not die with John the Baptist. Jesus⁶⁰ and his disciples⁶¹ called for the same thing. The book of Hebrews lists repentance as one of the foundations of the Christian life. Paul said that it leads to "salvation without regret." The chief difference between the repentance demanded by Old Testament prophets and that taught in the church is simply this: the gospel calls everyone to repent: Jew and Gentile alike. Paul said "the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent."⁶³ In fact, the apparent slowness of the fulfillment of God's promise is attributed to his desire that everyone have an opportunity to repent.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Matthew 3:7-9.

⁵⁹ Luke 3:10-14.

⁶⁰ Matthew 4:17; 11:20; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 5.

⁶¹ Mark 6:12.

⁶² 2 Corinthians 7:10

⁶³ Acts 17:30 ESV.

⁶⁴ 2 Peter 3:8.

Repentance is one of the marks of true conversion. A truly repentant person may occasionally sin, but she no longer lives in sin. Sin for her has become an embarrassing stumble in an otherwise upward climb. Her life has ceased to be a repeatedly downward spiral. Satan has not written her off. He continues to pester her with temptation, and she sometimes fails to resist it. But she belongs to Jesus.

One Choice — and Many Choices

In the book of Revelation, some of the seven churches of Asia Minor were admonished to repent.⁶⁵ While this speaks more to Christ's relationship with churches, rather than individuals, it is not wrong to conclude that the Christian life should be one of constant repentance. We should keep examining our lives, attitudes and motives, and be willing to change whenever we find the need. Repentance is one choice that will lead to many choices. It is the turning of our ships in the direction of our intended destination, and it will also require many other smaller course corrections as the journey progresses.

Repentance and Grace

It is possible to preach repentance in such a way as to deny that salvation is truly by the grace of God. This happens when repentance is explained as "getting right with God." It is difficult to explain why Jesus had to die on a cross if all God wanted was for his people to wake up and clean up their own lives. The problem with the idea of cleaning up one's own life is that we do not have the proper materials.

When Paul described salvation he concentrated on what God did for us by his grace: "For those whom *he* foreknew *he* also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those

⁶⁵ Revelation 2:16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19.

whom *he* predestined *he* also called, and those whom *he* called *he* also justified, and those whom *he* justified *he* also glorified.”⁶⁶ It was God who predestined us, called us to himself, justified us by the blood of Christ, conformed us to Christ’s image through the power of the Holy Spirit, and glorified us for eternity.

Our repentance is one of the things that God foreknew. But foreknowledge means more than simply the fact that God looked forward into our future and saw a time when we would turn to him. God’s foreknowledge extends much further into the future. He saw us in complete fulfillment of his will and desire — for millions of years. He saw us in our perfected state for eternity. The reason he saw it is that he made it happen, although from our perspective it is still happening. By his grace, in eternity past, God chose to save us completely. Everything right and proper that has ever happened to us and ever will is a direct result of that choice of grace — even our repentance. That is why the Bible speaks of God granting repentance.⁶⁷

God is sovereign in the salvation process. If he were not — say, if he only made repentance an option — we would always choose something else. The entire planet would look a dying Christ in the face and say “sorry you went to that trouble, but I’ll try my luck at saving myself.” But that is why grace is grace, and repentance is such a miracle. Each time a person responds to the gospel by repenting from his sins and putting his faith in Christ, it is the result of something God did for him in eternity past. Grace intervened.

Repentance and Works

Repentance is not a work. It is a surrender. It is not a determination to get right with God so much as a choice to give in to God. That is why there is no true repentance unless and until the sinner recognizes that he has sinned. After true repentance,

⁶⁶ Romans 8:29–30, ESV.

⁶⁷ 2 Timothy 2:25.

sins are forgiven and blotted out.⁶⁸ Repentance is not penance. In penance, the sinner concentrates on personally correcting his own faults and sins by doing good works or works of contrition to balance the scale. The religious cycle of sin, penance, absolution, sin, etc ... perpetuates the lie of works-based righteousness. True repentance is an acceptance of God's sovereign grace. Truly good works are only possible after a sincere repentance. After surrendering to God's grace as the only solution to their sin problem, true believers are then free to cooperate with the Spirit of grace. He supplants the sinful tendencies with righteous tendencies. He replaces the dysfunctional with the spiritually healthy. He replaces the holey with the holy. That is why Paul — who championed salvation by grace — encouraged his workers to commend believers for their good works.⁶⁹ Because of God's grace, we are free to produce the good works that God intended.⁷⁰

What Follows Repentance

True repentance is a change of mind that will drastically change the believer's future. How grace works in each life will be different, so no two Christians will be exactly alike. Yet there are two characteristics which will be present in each changed life: a new testimony and an altered life. These distinguishing attributes will be examined in the next two sections.

God's work of regeneration opens the mind to the reality the Bible reveals about God, Christ, sin, Satan, the world and the church. The believer's self-awareness is forever altered. This new way of thinking is called repentance. One major result of this new way of thinking is how it is reflected in the believer's testimony.

The first disciples said that Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection because they were "chosen in advance to be his witnesses" — which included preaching and testifying about Jesus.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Acts 2:38; 3:19.

⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10, 25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14.

⁷⁰ Ephesians 2:10.

⁷¹ Acts 10:41–42.

He told them “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁷² They shared their testimony and turned the world upside down with it. Most of them gave up their lives sharing that testimony. In fact, the word “witness” soon took on the predominant meaning of someone who died for their faith.⁷³

What made these believers *witnesses* was not merely the fact that they were willing to die for what they believed. They were passing on the reality of Jesus Christ. They were God’s means of testifying to the existence, work, and significance of his Son. He could have chosen to prove his existence some other way. He could have endowed places or symbols with his power. He did not. He could have written the life of Jesus on tablets of stone for people to idolize. He did not. He entrusted the good news to those who received it.

The process of passing on the most significant news in the history of the universe was not delegated to angels. Human beings were both the recipients and the messengers of this good news. Long before the New Testament was completed, ordinary people were sharing the story of Jesus and its importance to humanity. It was God’s choice to spread this good news through this method. It still is.

What They Testified To

The Bible mentions some specific details that were part of the testimony of early believers. Jesus called this testimony “the facts about me.”⁷⁴ They included ...

1. the fact that Jesus was God’s choice to judge the world.⁷⁵

⁷² Acts 1:8, ESV.

⁷³ The Greek word *martus* (μάρτυς) is one of several which took on this connotation.

⁷⁴ Acts 23:11.

⁷⁵ Acts 10:42.

2. that God's righteousness is available to all.⁷⁶
3. the good news that God saves people by grace.⁷⁷
4. that Christ had been with the Father, and appeared to humanity.⁷⁸
5. that the Father had sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.⁷⁹
6. that Jesus was the Messiah whom the Jews had waited for.⁸⁰
7. that Jesus is the King of God's kingdom, of whom the Old Testament speaks.⁸¹
8. that Christ gave himself on the cross as a ransom for all.⁸²
9. that God raised Christ from the dead, which guarantees our resurrection.⁸³
10. that Jesus is the Lord in whom we must put our faith.⁸⁴
11. that God has promised eternal life for those who are in Christ.⁸⁵

The gospel is not about us. It is not the fact that if we do something, then God is obligated to save us. The gospel is about Jesus Christ. It is the story of what he did for us. It is the glorious truth that God has a solution for humanity's failure, and invites us to accept it and experience it. It is the revelation of a divine plan, which began in eternity past, and will result in a glorious future eternity.

God's primary means of turning the world to himself is the testimony that believers communicate. His plan includes an eternal destination, and he has chosen us to get the news out, so that others can join him there. That eternal destination has often wrongly been called "heaven." It is an unfortunate choice

⁷⁶ Romans 1:16–17.

⁷⁷ Acts 20:24.

⁷⁸ 1 John 1:2.

⁷⁹ 1 John 4:14.

⁸⁰ Acts 18:5.

⁸¹ Acts 28:23.

⁸² 1 Timothy 2:6.

⁸³ 1 Corinthians 15.

⁸⁴ Acts 20:21.

⁸⁵ 1 John 5:11–13.

of words because the destination to which we aspire is not a particular location (heaven as opposed to earth) as much as it is an inheritance. God's plan is to redeem all creation. That is why the Bible speaks of a new heaven and a new earth.⁸⁶

The testimony of faith looks at all the ugliness of this present reality and chooses to trust Christ and his promises. The believer does not wish to escape earth and go to heaven, but longs for the redemption and restoration of the whole universe so that it once again can be called "very good." The goal of faith is not to escape the evil but to outlast it. The key to doing that is the resurrection of the righteous. By faith, the believer looks beyond her own death, and embraces the promise of a resurrection unto eternal life at Christ's return.

In the mean-time, the believer chooses to live in the kingdom of Christ, and occupy herself with proclaiming the good news of that kingdom's existence. It is a kingdom that is both now and later. It is a dominion of a king who is willing and able to rule in the lives of those who submit to him. But it is also a promise of a future rule of that same king over the domain of the entire universe. The testimony is a declaration of salvation both here and now and there and then. It is the good news that Jesus can cleanse and restore our broken lives and relationships today. It is also the good news that another, future life awaits those who put their faith in him, with a glorious transformation unlike anything that we can experience in the present. Gospel witnessing includes these three messages:

1. what Christ did for us on Calvary's cross,
2. what Christ can do for us today,
3. what Christ promises for eternity.

How to Witness

Jesus testified of himself by means of the spoken word, and has commanded his church to do the same. He testified by public preaching and teaching and by small group and private con-

⁸⁶ Revelation 21:1.

versation. At no point did he restrict his intentions by allowing only the professional to witness.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”⁸⁷

The first obligation to witness was upon those who observed his death and resurrection. That observation of those events, however, did not especially qualify them as witnesses. To be a witness in the New Testament sense is not to have observed something, but to testify of it. It is something you say, not something you see. A person was a witness in court not because he had seen something, but because he had been chosen to testify of what he had seen (or heard). The emphasis was always on the saying, not the seeing. Also, the reason they got into trouble with the authorities was not that they had observed Christ and his resurrection and ascension, but that they talked about those facts and used them as proof that he is alive and is Lord of all. It was not what they saw, but what they said.

We who follow after those first witnesses are just as obligated to speak about who Christ is, what he has done and what he is going to do. Jesus prayed for us when he prayed for “those who will believe in me through their word”⁸⁸ — that is, those who carry on the faith that the apostles propagated. He wants us to share that faith utilizing the same means: public speech and private conversations.

The testimonies were not limited to speeches and conversations. The gospel truth soon became incorporated in the Gospels and epistles. All media available at the time was utilized to get the good news out to those who needed it. The words of the

⁸⁷ Luke 24:45–48, ESV.

⁸⁸ John 17:20.

gospel found their way into the songs and stories and art of the witnesses. As time progressed, new media were developed. Each of these has also become a means of testifying to the truth that Jesus exists, what he has done, and what he is going to do.

Witnessing was more than an individual responsibility. Witnesses naturally gathered together to encourage one another. Associations with others who named the name of Christ became a means of testifying as well. Communities of believers witnessed to each other as a means of building one another up and promoting the act of witnessing to the lost. By being associated with other believers, witnesses showed that Christ was more than a mere ideology. Those who congregated (when possible) showed that they shared a relationship with Jesus and with each other. The church became the social network of all social networks. It became one of the visible witnesses to the work of the invisible Holy Spirit.

Before long, traditions developed in the churches that reflected the reality of what was preached in the pulpits. It became clear that some of the things that Christ had commanded his disciples were meant to be carried on by each successive generation of the church. The act of baptizing new converts as a means of confessing the reality of the new life and the hope of a resurrection was one of those traditions. The meal celebrating the new covenant initiated by Jesus with his disciples in the upper room was another.

The apostles insisted that Christ-like character was to be expected of all believers. This was to be the means of witnessing to the reality of our words. The words were to be validated and verified by our actions, attitudes and relationships. Thus, when the apostles encountered problems in their churches, they responded with strong rebuke and discipline. The words of the epistles continue to minister to us by drawing attention to our transgressions. The reason for this is that our task of witnessing to the reality of the gospel is just as pertinent today. The first mission is still the foremost mission. Anything that we do that subverts that mission must be corrected.

Distorted Testimony

Not only should we watch our lives to make sure that they are reflecting what we testify, we should also constantly watch what we are saying. Our witnessing needs to be a careful balance between two extremes. We can distort the gospel by making too much of it. That is, we can pack so much content into our presentation of the good news that we overwhelm those we are trying to reach. We need to develop the skill of saying the words that people need to hear about Christ, and just those words.

On the other hand, if we say too little, we run the risk of presenting a message other than that “once for all delivered to the saints.”⁸⁹ A message that is too simple runs the risk of leading people to a faith that is too simple. A truncated gospel leaves too much out. It makes a person religious without being devoted to Jesus. Also, it becomes a self-perpetuating mistake. Whole communities have been encouraged to come to Jesus without repenting from their sins. A gospel without true repentance is not the gospel at all. While that may be a way of gaining popularity with the world, it is also a way of making the church irrelevant.

The true good news is good news because it takes into account the bad news of sin, failure, and depravity. For the church to be a reliable and faithful witness to Christ, she must share the reality of Christ’s rescue along with the backdrop of humanity’s failure and sin. But we must remember that we are witnesses, not judges. We have to be honest about our own failures and problems, and share the reality of our own struggles. Then, those who struggle with the same things will know how Christ helps. If we are not honest, the world will get a wrong idea about what Christianity is. A witness to hypocrisy only breeds more hypocrisy.

Those who truly seek to share the good news are going to have to adjust their methods to meet the current culture. Tried and true methods of the past will have to be surrendered when it be-

⁸⁹ Jude 3.

comes obvious that they are no longer practical or effective. New methods will have to be developed which scratch where today's society itches. Care must be taken to ensure that vital content is not lost in the process. This is all part of the process of witnessing wisely.

The most effective means of verifying and validating one's testimony is the subject of the next section. The life lived in faith makes the gospel real to the believer, and confirms his testimony.

A truly saved person has both repented of his past sins and trusted Christ for his present and future life. This converted person will live a life of faith that reflects his new commitments. The Bible gives us both examples and descriptions of that life. John wrote that "all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure."⁹⁰ It is a life that aspires to the purity of Jesus.

Anyone attempting to live a life of sinlessness will immediately encounter obstacles in doing so. We have been changed, and we no longer want to sin, but sin and the sinful nature is still with us. As a result, we will constantly find ourselves conflicted, as Paul was in Romans 7:

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do the good, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want! ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer me doing it but sin that lives in me. ²¹ So, I find the law that when I want to do good, evil is present with me. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inner being. ²³ But I see a different law in my members waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.⁹¹

The bad news about the Christian life is that all of us are going to live with this kind of struggle going on inside. Even great Christians like Paul admitted to the inability to be completely what he

⁹⁰ 1 John 3:3, NLT.

⁹¹ Romans 7:18-23, NET.

wanted to be. Yet, Paul also knew the good news of the Christian life, and he went on to explain that good news in Romans 8:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.⁹²

The good news is not that Jesus has already changed our nature so that we are no longer tempted to sin. It is that Jesus has already paid the price for our sins, so that they no longer separate us from God. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is free to work with and within us to actually accomplish righteous acts, as we surrender to him. We are in a temporary state in which the laws of two dominions apply to us. The law of sin and death is still at work, so we will fail at times. But the law of the Spirit of new life in Christ Jesus is also at work, so we can actually please God as well. Both freedom and bondage are possible, depending on who we choose to surrender to.

A Forgiven Life

A person living this life reflects a confidence that his sins have been forgiven, and God will never forsake him. Paul told the Colossian Christians that “you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.”⁹³ As a result of this new status, they were free to forgive others who offended them. He said “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and pa-

⁹² Romans 8:1–4, NET.

⁹³ Colossians 2:13, ESV.

tience,¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.⁹⁴ A forgiven life is a forgiving life. Instead of seeking revenge, or passing judgment on someone else who wrongs them, people who live the forgiving life remember that they too have been forgiven, and follow Christ's example and forgive. A negative example of this reality is found in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything."²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe."²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you."³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Colossians 3:12–13, ESV.

⁹⁵ Matthew 18:23–35, ESV.

Jesus' story reveals some helpful parallels in the subject matter of sanctification. First, the grace by which the master forgives the servant is the result of the master's choice. Second, it is unmerited by the servant. Third, the servant's choice to not forgive his fellow servant for the lesser debt was wrong. Now, notice this: if the servant had not been forgiven by his master, he would have been under no obligation to be lenient on his debtor. But, since he had been forgiven a great debt, he was not under obligation because of grace to forgive the lesser debts. Since he had been saved, he was now expected to imitate the kindness and generosity of his savior.

The forgiven life implies more to us than the mere fact that we should forgive others. It also means that we can live outside of the condemnation that our debt had put on us. Having been forgiven, we are free to live and love as never before. Thus, we can express our love for others because we are no longer under the bondage of self-condemnation. An example of this aspect of the forgiven life is found in the Gospels:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table.³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."⁴¹ "A cer-

⁷⁸ Genesis 3:1.

⁷⁹ Genesis 2:17.

⁸⁰ Genesis 3:2-3.

tain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.⁴² When they could not pay, he canceled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”⁴³ Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he canceled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven— for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”⁹⁶

Simon’s concept of life was minimalistic. He gave only to the extent that he perceived others deserved it. He felt only what he perceived was appropriate. This sinful woman, however, had been set free. Her encounter with Jesus removed the bondage that had inhibited her life. It was not the gift that Jesus was impressed with. He knew this woman’s heart. She gave not in order to be forgiven, but because she knew forgiveness already. The love she showed Jesus was not the means of her reconciliation, but the method she used to proclaim it. It is the same for Christians as they live the forgiven life. We love, not in order to be forgiven, but because we have been forgiven.

An Obedient Life

A person living this life submits to the lordship of Christ, obeying his commands. The commands of Christ are important to him because he has a relationship with the commander. Jesus gave numerous commands to his disciples, which can be summarized as follows:

⁹⁶ Luke 7:36–47, ESV.

1. Invest your life in eternity. Seek PERMANENCE, don't get sidetracked with the things that are only temporary.
2. Put God first. Make DEVOTION to him your reason for living.
3. Be what you claim to be. Let your GENUINENESS declare to others the veracity of your testimony.
4. Rely on God to do what you cannot do. TRUST him to provide for the needs which are beyond your capability.
5. Keep in contact with God. Make PRAYER the link between your life on earth and your Master in heaven.
6. Learn, proclaim and keep God's Word. Let his TRUTH guide your mind.
7. Be used by God to fulfill his will. Let his POWER flow through you as a conduit.
8. Live in expectancy of Christ's second coming. Let his ADVENT be the focus of your actions.⁹⁷

An Eternal Life

The eternal life we have in Christ is real but not yet actual. It is a promise. Christ promises to raise us to immortality at his second coming. But one of the keys to living the sanctified life is living out that promise, putting less emphasis on the things that are temporary, and more on those that are permanent. Our present needs are real, but they have less importance because of the future in which all our needs are going to be met. Therefore, we can forego meeting some needs for a time, and concentrate on meeting other peoples' needs.

Knowing that we were created to have an eternal relationship with God allows us to make the kind of decisions that put him first. We see our devotional life as a necessity, and thus are not likely to put it aside when things get busy. Nothing is more important when seen from the standpoint of eternity — not even

⁹⁷For more on these commands, see <http://commandsofchrist.wordpress.com/>.

other people. The one relationship which we are going to have forever is our relationship with God.

Someday we will be able to look back on all the deeds that we have done in this age and see them for what they really were. Everything done out of false motives and for wrong reasons will be clearly exposed. The Christian seeks to live in such a way that his genuineness will never be called into question. It is not just a matter of appearances. The Christian knows that he has only one life. He does not have a public life and a private life. His entire life is public before the one who matters. God sees all. The Christian does what is right in order to be honest to God.

This life will put us to test. All of the famous biblical saints were tested as they sought to live out the life given them. The same will be true for anyone who dares to proclaim Christ. Suffering will be the rule rather than the exception. The trust involved in living the Christian life in spite of suffering is a testimony to the reality of the faith.

The Christian life is lived on the knees. Through prayer we keep the link between our temporary present, and our eternal hope. Every Christian who tries to live the Christian life without regular, sustained prayer knows how difficult it can be. Those with genuine faith all know that prayer is essential. Prayer does not change things. God changes things. But God keeps us safe in the transition by sustaining us in prayer.

The Christian life is a biblical life. God has sent us a text message, and we rely upon it. We look for answers in his words and keep looking because we trust him. The Bible is not an object that we venerate, but a subject we investigate. We look to his word because we want him. His truth guides us.

The Christian life takes advantage of power that the world does not know. We have the advantage of being able to see beyond the laws of nature, and gain access to another set of laws altogether. We can trust our mustard seed prayers to do what all the nuclear bombs cannot. We have access to the power that God had when he said 'let there be light' and when Jesus said 'little child, arise.' That is power.

The Christian life is also lived with the awareness that even if we fail, we will eventually win. We are free to take enormous risks, because we know we are on the winning team. The eternal life we are living has a king who is coming soon. The things we endure for him are worth it, because he is returning. Nothing is going to prevent his keeping his promises.

A Community Life

In systematic theology, having first dealt with the reality of the saved person as an individual, we then naturally progress to study the saved as a whole: the church. Who and what the church is and what the church does, is always important because Christ died not only for me, he died for all of the redeemed. The life that we live in Christ is not just an individual life. It is part of a greater whole.

ASSEMBLY, BODY AND BRIDE
(Looking ahead to issue XLIV/2)

by Rev. Jefferson Vann

- The theme for the next issue will be Ecclesiology, looking at the doctrines of the church.
- If you find anything written on ecclesiology, feel free to review it, pro and/or con.
- Letters to the editor are welcomed.
- Reviews of Advent Christian or conditionalist writings are always welcomed.
- Any biblical or theological papers (regardless of topic) are also encouraged.

PLEASE SUBMIT ALL LETTERS, ARTICLES OR REVIEWS
BY EMAIL TO jeffersonvann@yahoo.com AND SPECIFY
WHICH ISSUE THE ARTICLE IS INTENDED FOR OR
WHICH ARTICLE THE LETTER IS RESPONDING TO.