

Know Your Faith: An Exposition of the Christian Worldview

Volume 4 – Plan Part 1: Faith

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Introduction

Forward to the Series Know Your Faith

The series *Know Your Faith: An Exposition of the Christian Worldview* is a detailed examination of apologetics, hermeneutics, and theology reflecting an Evangelical-Pentecostal/Charismatic perspective. The present emphasis in the Church on practical Christian living, which is certainly necessary, has at the same time created a void in the hearts and minds of believers for understanding the foundations of their faith, that is, what they believe and why. This lack of solid grounding in Christian truth can unfortunately lead to shallowness of commitment, lack of perseverance in trials, and vulnerability to false teachings and “every wind of doctrine” that passes through the Church. This series is intended to provide believers with a deeper understanding of the basis for their beliefs.

These volumes were first released in the Russian language under the title *Слово о Боге: Евангельское богословие для восточных христиан* (*A Word about God: Evangelical Theology for Eastern Christians*), with over 10,000 copies of the individual volumes presently in circulation, and multiple times more downloads of individual topics from the series (www.russiantheologicalresources.com).

Let us highlight some special features of these books that may distinguish them from other attempts to systematize Christian truth. First, this series gives special attention to the biblical teaching of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a spiritual experience distinct from and subsequent to conversion and to the full range of spiritual gifts available to the Church today.

Second, the author has attempted to avoid a confessional theology approach, but instead to employ a biblical theology one. In the former approach, biblical material is gathered to support positions already defined by a confessional or denominational group. In the latter, a theme is traced chronologically from the beginning of the Bible to the end, allowing the Bible speak for itself. This also enables the reader to see how the theme under study developed over time as God revealed more of His truth. In addition, material from the intertestamental period and the views of the Early Church are at times included in the investigation to demonstrate how post-prophetic Israel and post-apostolic Christianity understood God’s revelation in Scripture.

Third, this series describes and evaluates not only the Western (Catholic/Protestant) views on doctrinal questions, but the Eastern Orthodox understanding as well. The author of this series lived and taught for 20 years in the countries of the former Soviet Union and is well versed in the special theological nuances of Eastern Christianity. Rarely do we find a resource where an objective evaluation of Eastern Orthodoxy is included in a systematic theology format.

Fourth, these books defend the Arminian view of predestination, which the author feels best represents the total biblical picture. Although this is not the only systematic theology text that holds this position, it is one of the few that does. We treat the topic with some depth, devoting three chapters of volume 3 to this issue.

Fifth, in volume 4, we utilize the theme “union with Christ” as an organizing center for discussing God’s salvation plan. We will discover that all the benefits of salvation are directly related to and entirely dependent upon the fact that God has placed us “in Christ.” One of the primary goals of this series is to re-establish the preeminence and priority of the long-neglected biblical concept of union with Christ as the all-inclusive principle for understanding and appropriating God’s grace in salvation.

Finally, in distinction from other treatments of systematic theology, we employ here an integrated approach of apologetics, hermeneutics, and theology. We do this in order to present not only individual discussions of theological topics, but also a total Christian worldview, beginning with God’s existence, continuing with His revelation and nature, and concluding with an exposition of His plan expounded under the rubric: faith, hope, and love. The order and content of these five volumes progressively unfolds the Christian worldview:

- Volume 1 – Existence: Does God exist? If so, who is He?
- Volume 2 – Revelation: How does God make Himself known?
- Volume 3 – Nature: What is God like?
- Volumes 4-5 – Plan: What is God’s goal for humanity?

The material in volumes 4 and 5 is organized according to the apostle Paul’s famous maxim: “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13). The section on “faith” details God’s plan of salvation and how to obtain it. The section on “hope” describes our future after death and at the end of time. “Love” concerns questions of practical Christian living, both individually and corporately in the context of the Church.

We express our heartfelt appreciation for the following tools used extensively in this series:

- Logos Bible Software (<https://www.logos.com>)
- New American Standard Bible: 1995 update. – LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.
- Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece. – Eds. Aland K., Aland B., Karavidopoulos J., Martini C. M., Metzger B. M. – 28 revidierte Auflage. – Stuttgart: Deutsche.
- Bibelgesellschaft. Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology. – Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 2001.
- Wikipedia.org

A final word of thanks to the editor of the Russian version of this series, Sergey Podnyuk, for his careful review of the text and his support in general, to my wife, Nancy, for her assistance and support, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Truth about whom we humbly seek to write.

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About the Author

Dr. Thomas Wespetal was born in 1957 in the city of Racine, Wisconsin (USA). He received Christ at age 17 and the following year followed Him in water baptism. In that same year, he experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, after which he began attending Pentecostal and Charismatic fellowships.

Dr. Wespetal studied medicine at Oral Roberts University, earning an M.D. degree. He practiced medicine for several years before answering God's call to the full-time ministry of the Word. He subsequently studied at the Assemblies of God Seminary, receiving a Master in Biblical Languages.

Dr. Wespetal completed his theological education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, earning a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology. His doctoral dissertation was on the topic of God's purpose in martyrdom. In 2008, in connection with his dissertation work, Dr. Wespetal participated in the Consultation of the World Evangelical Alliance in Bad Urach, Germany, on Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom, which subsequently published a summary of his dissertation.

Dr. Wespetal is an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God and served as pastor for four years before devoting himself to teaching ministry. From 1995 to 2022, he taught theology, apologetics, hermeneutics, and biblical languages in the republics of the former Soviet Union, residing in Russia and Ukraine.

Introduction to Volume 4

In previous volumes of this series, we discussed God's existence, His revelation in Holy Scripture, and His essential nature. God is not static, though, but He acts. He has a plan for all humanity and each individual separately. We dedicate this volume to the discovery of that plan.

In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul condenses God's plan into three words: faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13). As we will unfold in the following pages, these three terms outline well God's intention for the human race.

Volume 5 will unpack the concepts of "hope" and "love," known also as "eschatology" and "practical Christian living." This volume investigates "faith." In standard systematic texts, the topics covered here are the doctrines of humanity, evil spirits, sin, salvation, and the Church (in a theoretical sense).

We entitle part 1 of this book "Loss of Faith," i.e., how humanity, which was created "very good" by God, fell into sin through unbelief. Part 2 reveals the "Object of Faith," that is, to whom our faith is directed – the Lord Jesus Christ. In part 3, we highlight the "Result of Faith" – the acquisition of salvation.

According to God's Word, the Lord created humans according to His image and likeness, as the crowning glory of His creative work. He made people as physical, spiritual, and social beings. Correspondingly, we will examine the human condition in all three of these dimensions. After discussing various theories, we will affirm the following truths: (1) human life begins at conception, (2) the terms "image" and "likeness" are synonyms, (3) the human soul is transmitted from parents to child, (3) God's order for marriage consists of a bisexual union and lifelong commitment under the headship of the husband, and (5) asceticism is an unacceptable lifestyle. We will also devote attention to other aspects of a person's social life, such as the biblical view of family, friendship, culture, and society.

Our chapter on Satan and demons will describe the fall of the great cherub, who became Satan and led a large contingent of angels in rebellion against the Lord. These fallen angels, now known as demons, participate in various deceptive and destructive activities in our world. We will outline these demonic activities.

As a result of the devil's enticement, the first humans, Adam and Eve, sinned against God and incurred guilt before the Lord. Additionally, their human nature was corrupted and became sinful, while their bodies became subject to death. Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants the consequences of their transgression, that is, guilt, depravity, and death, which we now call "original sin." Two chapters are devoted to the biblical doctrine of sin.

However, God did not leave humanity in this tragic state, but sent a Savior – His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In some unexplainable way, God joined all humanity with Christ so that His saving work would be effective for all who believe in Him. Accordingly, we will investigate in detail the believer's union with Christ, which is the mechanism by which God communicates all the blessings of salvation.

With Christ as their representative before God, believers in Him are afforded forgiveness of sins through His sacrifice of Calvary, justification before God, and adoption into His family. Through faith-participation in His death, believers also enjoy liberation from the power of sin (i.e. sanctification) and physical healing. In addition, union with Christ in His death also includes participation in His sufferings, that is, afflictions issuing from Christian faith and living. Jesus' resurrection provides believers with new life in the Spirit and in the age to come – physical resurrection.

Having been exalted to heaven, the Lord Jesus offers to believers participation in His supernatural ministry and in His authority over the devil and his works. Pentecostals and Charismatics accept the biblical testimony of an empowering experience after conversion that enables believers to fully participate in Christ's power and authority, namely the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

We must also not omit the corporate aspect of our union with Christ. Union with Christ includes union with others also in union with Him, that is, the Church. This volume will investigate the more theoretical/doctrinal side of the Church, while the next volume will deal more with practical life in the Body.

There exists a rival understanding of salvation and Christian living called “deification.” In chapter 7, we will demonstrate that this approach introduces serious distortions into the biblical teaching on our union with Christ and on the doctrine of salvation in general.

Finally, we will defend the position that we obtain salvation primarily through faith in our Savior Jesus Christ. Repentance prepares a convert to turn to Christ for salvation, but faith appropriates Christ’s redemptive grace. Sacraments communicate no saving grace, but rather represent or symbolize the salvation received by faith. In particular, the Lord’s Supper is not literally the body and blood of Jesus, but rather symbolizes them.

In connection with receiving salvation, the questions arise of the fate of infants and people far from the gospel, since both groups are unable either to hear or understand the gospel. We support the idea that God extends salvation unilaterally to infants who die before the age of accountability, and that God will judge those who have never heard the gospel on the basis of their response to what they do know of Him.

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Part 1. Loss of Faith: The Creation and Fall of Humanity

Chapter 1: Humanity, part 1

The study of humanity is the study of the pinnacle of God's creative genius. No other creature compares with the human being. The psalmist rightly proclaims, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14). This applies to every aspect of the human person. God endowed us not only with a marvelous physical body, able to accomplish an abundance of tasks, but also even more wonderful internal qualities, like the ability to think, express emotion, make decisions, and fellowship with our Maker and one another.

The Bible testifies of the interplay between the inner and outer aspects of the human person (Prov 14:30; 17:22), as well as the fact that the inner condition of the person determines to a great degree the overall wellbeing of the individual (Prov 15:13, 15; 18:15). In addition, there exists a third aspect of human existence – interaction between people, or the social side of life.

In this present chapter, we will investigate the features of the inner person, including the topics of the beginning of human life and the idea of God's image in people. We will devote attention in the next chapter to the marvels of the human body and interrelationships between persons.

A. The Beginning of Human Life

One of the most stupendous miracles of nature is the birth of a new child. However, in our day many of the unborn never experience life on earth because of the widespread practice of abortion. The key issue here is the answer to the question whether life begins at conception or later.

In this work, we defend the position that life begins at conception. This thesis finds support both from medical data and biblical truths. We will deal primarily with the biblical side of the question, but will also briefly survey the medical evidence.

From the world of medicine, we learn that when the female ovum and the male sperm combine, a new entity, the zygote, appears, which possesses a different genetic makeup than either the father or the mother. This means that a new, unique individual has been conceived. This is confirmed by the formation of antibodies in the mother against the fetus – the mother's body recognizes an "alien" object in the uterus. We also note

that from a very early stage, the fetus shows many clearly human features and its heart begins to beat – evidences that a new person has appeared.¹

From the biblical perspective, we note several key passages of Scripture in support of our position. In Psalm 139:13-14, we read, “You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.” In this text, we observe David using the personal pronouns “my” and “me” to refer to his condition as a fetus – he was already a distinct person while still in his mother’s womb. David is not merely expressing himself in accordance with his ancient cultural worldview on the topic, but is writing inerrant Scripture inspired by the Spirit.

Luke 1:36 is also significant for our discussion: “And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age.” Note that Elizabeth conceived a *son*. The fetus was already considered a full-fledged member of the family. Again, this verse does not simply reflect the cultural worldview of the time, but these words were spoken by an angel from heaven.

In Jeremiah 1:5, personal pronouns are again used in reference to a fetus: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Here the one speaking is not a human expressing a cultural view, or even an angel from heaven, but the Lord Himself. Paul was also called from his mother’s womb (Gal 1:15). A person can have a divine calling even before birth.

In Luke 1:41-44, we see that at Mary’s greeting to Elizabeth the child in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. This shows that even before birth, a child can possess spiritual sensibilities, which is another sign of genuine personality. Additionally, unlike our previous examples, here no one is expressing an opinion about the status of the fetus, but the text is describing an objective historical event.

On the other hand, we must take into consideration the passage in Exodus 21:22-24:

If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges {decide}. But if there is {any further} injury, then you shall appoint {as a penalty} life for life...

Some translations interpret this event as a miscarriage, which would imply that fetus is of less value than the woman, since the punishment is less severe. An examination of the original text will prove helpful here. The phrase “gives birth prematurely” translates the Hebrew יָצְאוּ יְלֵדֶיהָ (*yatseu yeladeiha*). In nearly all other instances where this phrase is used, it refers to the birth of a normal, living child (Gen 25:26; 38:28-30; Job 3:11; 10:18; Jer 1:5; 20:18). In addition, the Hebrew language has a specific term for a miscarriage – שֶׁחַל (*shehal*, see Gen 31:38; Ex 23:26; Hos 9:14; Job 21:10). Therefore, we conclude that a premature birth, not a miscarriage, is in view. We also note that the one “injured” during the struggle is not specified. The word “injury” could refer either to the mother, or to her premature child. Consequently, the punishment would be the same regardless of who suffered the injury.

This passage, then, does not lower the status of a fetus in comparison to an adult person. Also important to note is that the injury in this text was unintentional, while abortions are intentional acts of violence. Therefore, one cannot use this text in support of the practice of abortion. We do need to clarify that in one instance (Num 12:12) the Hebrew verb יָצָא (*yatsa*), featured in our Exodus passage, does indicate a miscarriage. However, unlike the other examples cited above, the context of Numbers 12 makes clear that a miscarriage is meant. Therefore, this exceptional case does not challenge our interpretation of Exodus 21.

¹Munyon T. The Creation of the Universe and Humankind // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 272-273.

Comparing the biblical teaching with other opinions expressed in antiquity, we discover the following. In the Code of Hammurabi, one who unintentionally causes a miscarriage will pay a fine. On the other hand, according to the laws of Middle Assyria, the offender could be executed if the fetus dies. The Hebrew philosopher Philo of Alexandria expressed the view that if the fetus was not already “formed,” that is, had a human appearance, the offender was fined. If the fetus appeared human, the offender was executed.² Curiously, the Septuagint translation of Exodus 21 corresponds to Philo’s view. Nonetheless, our views are not based on human opinions, but on the revealed Word of God.

B. The Inner Person

1. Terms to Describe the Inner Person

In investigating the inner person, it will prove helpful to acquaint ourselves with the various terms used to describe aspects of it, such as “spirit,” “soul,” “heart,” “will,” “mind,” and “conscience.”³ The Greek New Testament text contributes two other metaphorical designations: “kidneys” and “bowels.”⁴

The Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) is widely distributed throughout the Old Testament and is typically translated “soul.” However, it often connotes a living being in totality. In addition, it can refer to various aspects or functions of the inner person, such as thought, feeling, desire, volition, or life’s essence.

The Hebrew word לֵב (*levav*), i.e., “heart,” possesses a wide spectrum of meaning. It can refer not only metaphorically to the “heart,” but also to the mind, soul, spirit, or conscience. In brief, it relates to the essence of a person, that is, to the life source of the inner person.

The term רוּחַ (*ruach*) is the conventional word for “spirit,” but can also designate the “mind” or “heart.” This aspect of the inner person facilitates fellowship with God.

The Greek term ψυχή (*psuche*), which is usually translated “soul,” can apply to the person as a whole with emphasis on the principle of life within an individual. Louw and Nida comment that this is “the essence of life in terms of thinking, willing, and feeling.”⁵

The word νοῦς (*nous*) for the most part relates to a person’s intellectual faculties and is correspondingly translated “mind.” Louw and Nida describe it as “the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding.”⁶

The Greek term καρδία (*cardia*) is “heart.” In its biblical use, this is the center of human initiative and motivation. Louw and Nida view it as “the causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts.”⁷

Similar to the word νοῦς (*nous*), the Greek term φρήν (*phren*) accents a person’s intellectual powers. Correspondingly, Louw and Nida describe it as “the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, often with the implication of being wise and provident.”⁸

Many are already familiar with the Greek word for “spirit,” i.e., πνεῦμα (*pneuma*). Similar to its Hebrew equivalent רוּחַ (*ruach*), this word features the spiritual aspect of one’s personality. According to Louw and Nida, it relates to “the non-material, psychological faculty which is potentially sensitive and responsive to God.”⁹

²Philo, *The Special Laws III*, 19.108-109.

³Louw J. P., Nida E. A. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989; Swanson J. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. – Logos Research Systems, 2001. – V. 1. – P. 320.

⁴Munyon, p. 265-266.

⁵Louw, Nida, v. 1, p. 320.

⁶Ibid., v. 1, p. 323-324.

⁷Ibid., v. 1, p. 320.

⁸Ibid., v. 1, p. 324.

⁹Ibid., v. 1, p. 322.

A term that has no real English equivalent is σπλάγχνον (*splangnon*). It literally means “bowels” or “intestines,” but metaphorically can connote “the psychological faculty of desire, intent, and feeling.”¹⁰

The Hebrew כִּלְיָה (*kilyah*) literally refers to kidneys, but metaphorically also connotes the human psyche. In Jeremiah 12:2, it translates “heart.” The corresponding Greek term for “kidneys,” i.e., νεφρός (*nephros*), is also used metaphorically. In Revelation 2:23, it is translated “minds.”¹¹

The term θέλημα (*thelema*) concerns the psychological aspect of persons that defines their intentions and directions. It is conventionally translated “will.”

The idea of “conscience” is expressed by the Greek term συνείδησις (*suneidesis*). In Romans 2:15, Paul speaks of it as “work of the Law written in their hearts.” The Greeks originally employed συνείδησις (*suneidesis*) in the sense of self-consciousness. Subsequently, it obtained the sense of reflection on one’s life. The Roman philosopher Seneca further developed the term to denote an evaluation of the correctness of one’s actions and future choices.

Interestingly, there is no word “conscience” in the Old Testament. The idea is present, but the term “heart” is used instead. In the first century A.D., however, Philo of Alexandria conjoined the Old Testament idea of “conscience” with the Greek term συνείδησις (*suneidesis*).

2. The Structure of the Inner Person

As we have just seen, there are an abundance of terms, both in Hebrew and Greek, to describe the inner workings of a person. At the same time, we desire to discover the overlying structure of the inner person to better grasp and understand our condition. Several options are conventionally proposed.

According to monism, people consist of only one element – the body. There are no other components to the human organism. Dichotomy proposes two elements – the body and the soul. Thus, the terms “spirit” and “soul” are thought synonymous. All other terms relating to the inner person simply describe its various aspects or functions. The third theory, trichotomy, posits that the human spirit and soul are different components in the tripartite human organism.

a. Monism

The theory “monism” claims that a person possesses only a material element – the physical body. The functions commonly ascribed to the inner person are merely expressions of the human brain. In support of this theory, its proponents note that if the brain is damaged, the individual appears to lose many of the functions of the “inner person.” This observation is thought to prove that the brain is the source of these psychological functions. Monists also appeal to the philosophical school “empiricism,” which asserts that all that exists is what the five senses can perceive. Since the “soul” is imperceptible to the senses, one may challenge its existence.

Evidence is gleaned from the Scriptures as well. The Old Testament, for example, places emphasis on the unity of the human person. The individual is seen as a unity and not fragmented into body, soul, and spirit. In fact, the Hebrew word for body, גִּיּוּיָה (*giviyyah*), occurs rarely in the biblical text. Instead, we usually encounter the term בָּשָׂר (*basar*), which has a wide spectrum of meaning. It can refer to the body, the flesh, and even the individual in totality.

Also significant is that the Old Testament does not speak of the resurrection of the *body*, but of the *person*. Adherents also note that the Hebrew term שְׁאוֹל (*sheol*), which is usually understood as the place of departed spirits, can also simply refer to the grave. Therefore, after death a person’s soul does not descend into שְׁאוֹל (*sheol*), but the body is simply lowered into the grave (לִשְׁאוֹל).

¹⁰Ibid., v. 1, p. 323.

¹¹Also see Munyon, p. 265-266.

In addition, it is not uncommon for the Bible to speak of an unconscious existence after death.¹²

- For there is no mention of You in death; in Sheol who will give You thanks? (Ps 6:5).
- For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your faithfulness (Isa 38:18).
- For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten (Ecc 9:5; also see Ps 39:13; 88:10-12; 115:17; 145:4; Job 14:12-14; Ecc 9:6, 10).

Defenders of monism readily acknowledge that the New Testament does indeed teach that humans possess an immaterial part of their nature and speaks of an afterlife. Yet, they respond that New Testament authors were heavily influenced by Greek philosophy and, consequently, introduced a new conception of human nature that was foreign to the original Old Testament view.

We may appeal, nonetheless, to the New Testament witness in refutation of monism, which unambiguously teaches the existence of the immaterial soul in distinction from the body.¹³ Paul even testified to have left his body for a time (2 Cor 12:2).

Monism's claim that the New Testament is inferior in truth-value to the Old Testament is misguided. According to the principle of "progressive revelation," which we employed in our discussion of the biblical canon and biblical interpretation in chapters 3 and 7 of volume 2, God progressively reveals more of His truth in the course of biblical history. Therefore, we would expect the New Testament to provide us with a more precise depiction of human nature than the Old Testament does.

It is true that the Hebrew word for "body" is seldom used. However, the lack of a specific term for an object does not mean that the given culture has no conception of that object. For example, the Russian language has no common word for "hand." The Russian term *рука* applies to everything from the shoulder down. Nonetheless, Russian speakers have a definite conception of "hand" in distinction from the arm. Similarly, the infrequent usage of a specific word for "body" in Hebrew does not prove that in Hebrew culture the body was not distinguished from the soul.

We must also address the instances where Scripture seems to teach an unconscious existence after death. First, we may assume that the issue is not the end of one's existence *per se*, but rather the end of one's earthly activity. We also argue that many of these passages are taken from the book of Ecclesiastes, to which we apply a special approach to interpretation. The goal of this book is to describe the author's search for life's meaning. Consequently, in many cases the author is writing from the perspective of his experience or observation of life. Some of his statements, then, will reflect this earthly perspective. Yet, in the end he comes to a proper conclusion: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, {is:} fear God and keep His commandments, because this {applies to} every person" (Ecc 12:13).

b. Trichotomism

According to the theory of trichotomism, a person consists of three elements: spirit, soul, and body. The spirit enables fellowship with the Lord. Some (but not all) defenders of trichotomism claim that when people are born again, their spirit becomes perfect. Some also assert that the spirit of an unbeliever is either dead or non-existent.

¹²Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 488; Horton S. *The Last Things* // Horton S. M. *Systematic Theology*. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 688-689.

¹³See Lk 16:19-31; 23:43; Matt 10:28; Acts 7:59; Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8; Rev 6:9; 20:4.

Some early Church Fathers held to trichotomism, namely Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. The Eastern Orthodox Church also accepts this theory. Since the 19th century, it has been gaining acceptance among Protestants as well.¹⁴

Several biblical passages are cited in support:

- Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete... (1 Thes 5:23).
- For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit... (Heb 4:12).
- But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God... But he who is spiritual appraises all things (1 Cor 2:14-15).
- For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful (1 Cor 14:14).
- ...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual {body} (1 Cor 15:44).
- That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (Jn 3:6).

Paul often concludes his epistles with a benediction such as “The Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim 4:22; cf. Phil 4:23; Philemon 25; Gal 6:18). It seems that believers fellowship with the Lord through their spirits. The human spirit is also the “lamp of the Lord” (Prov 20:27).

Supports of trichotomism also voice the following argument from logic. It is thought that plants possess only one component: the body. Animals possess two: a body and a soul. Only humans have the full complement of three: body, soul, and spirit. They also note three usages of the Hebrew verb *בָּרָא* (*bara*), i.e., “create,” in Genesis chapter 1: when God created the inanimate world (v. 1), when He created animals (v. 21), and when He made humans (v. 27).¹⁵ Could this indicate a tripartite structure in human beings?

Trichotomists acknowledge that at times Scripture uses the terms “soul” and “spirit” interchangeably (see below). They respond, however, that such passages are not written with the intent to teach anthropology. On the other hand, verses like 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12, which speak specifically of a tripartite human nature, have this goal in mind. In addition, they argue that since Scripture commands us to keep our thoughts and emotions under control, then there must be a separate, higher aspect of our nature that these commands are addressed to (i.e., the spirit), since thoughts and emotions (features of the soul) cannot regulate themselves.¹⁶

A strong supporter of trichotomism among Protestants, Kenneth Hagin, appears to derive his understanding of anthropology from E. W. Kenyon.¹⁷ Echoing Kenyon, Hagin made famous the formula that man is a spirit, has a soul, and lives in a body. He equates the human spirit with the “heart.” He also holds that 2 Corinthians 5:17 refers to the new birth of the human spirit: “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” The reborn human spirit possesses God’s nature: “The life of God has been imparted into our spirits! The nature of God is in our spirits.”¹⁸ Our sinful nature, though, is associated with our physical bodies. For Hagin, progress in sanctification occurs when our souls side with our spirits to oppose the “flesh,” i.e., the body’s tendency to sin.

¹⁴Зубков О. Дихотомия и трихотомия // Студенческий реферат. Евангельская теологическая семинария. – Киев, 2005.

¹⁵Noted in Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 94.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 92-94.

¹⁷Hagin K. E. Demons and How to Deal with Them. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1987. – P. 4-9; Hejzlar P. Two Paradigms for Divine Healing. – London: Brill, 2010. – P. 187-195.

¹⁸Hagin K. Led by the Spirit, p. 44-45, taken from Hejzlar, p. 190.

As mentioned, Hagin borrows many elements of his teaching on human nature from E. W. Kenyon, who also taught that the spirit is the essence of a person. All spiritual strength comes forth from the spirit. Even Jesus manifested His supernatural powers from His human spirit.¹⁹

However, this theory encounters certain difficulties. First, beside the terms “spirit,” “soul,” and “body,” the Bible employs other terms in relation to the inner person: heart, mind, conscience, and will. Proponents of trichotomism must account for these terms in their system. In addition, Jesus spoke of four components of the human organism: heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:30). Moreover, the Bible clearly uses the terms “soul” and “spirit” synonymously, which better corresponds to the theory of dichotomism (see below).

The Bible does not teach that the human spirit becomes perfect at the new birth. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul urges believers to cleanse their spirits “from all defilement.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23 teaches that God’s work of sanctification concerns body, soul, and spirit. 2 Corinthians 5:17 does not say that believers are new creatures “in their spirits,” but “in Christ.” The “new creation” is who we are in Christ by faith, and this new life in Him is progressively worked out in our experience both in our outer and inner person.

c. Dichotomism

We conclude with the theory “dichotomism.” According to this view, humans possess two component parts – body and soul. The terms “soul” and “spirit” are synonyms. Dichotomism has traditionally been the prominent view among Catholics and Protestants from the fourth century.

Several biblical passages support a bipartite view of humans, consisting of two elements: spirit and body:²⁰

- For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit... (1 Cor 5:3).
- ...to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved (1 Cor 5:5).
- ...the body without {the} spirit is dead (Jam 2:26).
- The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit (1 Cor 7:34).
- Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it (Ecc 12:7).

Sometimes this dichotomy is expressed not by “spirit and body,” but by “soul and body” or “inner man/outer man”:

- Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:28).
- Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers (3 Jn 2).
- Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16).

Such verses leave the impression that persons consist of two elements and that the terms “soul” and “spirit” are interchangeable. Also significant is the observation that a disembodied person is described either as a “spirit” (Heb 12:23; 1 Pet 3:19; Lk 23:46; Ecc 12:7; Jn 19:30; Acts 7:59), or a “soul” (Rev 6:9; 20:4; Gen 35:18; 1 Kin 17:21; Lk 12:20), but never both in combination.²¹

¹⁹Hejzlar, p. 188-195.

²⁰Thiessen, p. 225-226.

²¹Зубков.

The following texts show that “spirit” and “soul” are used in poetic parallelism, indicating that they refer to the same object:

- Now My soul has become troubled (Jn 12:27) // When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit (Jn 13:21).
- Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” (Lk 1:46-47).
- At night my soul longs for You, indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently (Isa 26:9).

Supporters of dichotomism also cite Genesis 2:7, where God breathed into Adam the singular “breath of life.” This implies that the inner person is a unity, not a dichotomy. Some may object that the Hebrew word “life” in this passage stands in the plural. Nonetheless, in Hebrew the word for “life,” i.e., חַיִּים (*hayim*), is never found in the singular, but always in the plural.²²

It is also interesting to note that at times character traits that are typically associated with the soul are ascribed to the spirit, and vice versa. For example, we would more likely associate sin with the soul than the spirit. Yet, 2 Corinthians 7:1 urges us to “cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.” Moreover, emotion is more naturally associated with soul than spirit. In John 13:21 and Proverbs 17:22, though, the spirit is the emotive force. Furthermore, one would expect to seek God with one’s spirit. Yet, many passages speak of the soul seeking God (Ps 25:1; 42:1-2; 62:1; 103:1; 146:1; Lk 1:46). Jesus taught His disciples to love God not with their spirits, but with their souls (Mk 12:30).²³ Such examples show that “soul” and “spirit” are synonymous elements in the human constitution.

A proposal for combining the various terms describing the inner person into a dichotomistic format may look something like this. The term “soul” can refer to the entire inner person in all its aspects. The “heart” is the seat of motivation and energizes the inner person. The Greek terms “bowels” and “kidneys” describe the inner person’s capacity for compassion. Moreover, the “will” is the inner person making decisions. “Spirit” is the inner person in fellowship with the Lord. The “mind” is the intellectual capabilities of the inner self. “Conscience” is the inner person’s capacity for self-evaluation.

Millard Erickson suggests a variant of dichotomism, which he calls “conditional unity.” Although he recognizes two elements in the human constitution, at the same time he accentuates the tight relationship between those elements and the inherent unity of the human person. In Erickson’s words, “We might think of a human as a unitary compound of a material and an immaterial element.”²⁴ Russian Orthodox theologian Ilarion also stresses the unity of the person: “Only the combination of soul and body constitutes a genuine personality-hypostasis. The soul alone or the body by itself does not qualify as such.”²⁵

How do adherents of dichotomism interpret the biblical texts that enumerate three components of the human constitution? They understand the triad “spirit,” “soul,” and “body” in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 as simply denoting the “whole person.” The goal of the passage is not to delineate the elements of human nature, but simply to express God’s desire to sanctify the entire person.

Concerning Hebrews 4:12, dichotomists note that the Word of God penetrates “as far as the division of soul and spirit.” This may imply that the soul and spirit are not, in fact, divisible.²⁶ Dickason comments, “The idea is that the Word of God penetrates the deepest recesses of a man’s being,” which are related to the “thoughts and intents of the heart.”²⁷ Commenting on Jesus’ description of the new birth in John 3:5, “that

²²Whitaker R., Brown F., Driver S., Briggs C. A. The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oak Harbor WA: Logos Research, 1997. – P. 310-312.

²³Dickason C. F. Demon Possession and the Christian. – Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. – P. 136.

²⁴Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 556.

²⁵Иларион А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихома, 1996. – P. 70. Author’s translation.

²⁶Thiessen, p. 227.

²⁷Dickason, p. 137.

which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” Dickason concludes that the Lord is not talking about what part of a person is regenerated, but rather about “the nature of the birth,” that it is spiritual in nature.²⁸

When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:14, “If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful,” he is indicating that various aspects of the inner person can be occupied with various actions. For example, a person’s intellect (mind) can struggle against conscience, or suppress emotion. Concerning 1 Corinthians 15:44, supporters of dichotomism explain that this passage is not describing the make up of the inner person, but rather the condition of the glorified body. Finally, dichotomists regard 1 Corinthians 2:14-15 as a description not of the composition of the inner person, but the spiritual condition of the individual as a whole.

3. The Origin of the Inner Person

Next, we will examine the question of the inner person’s origin. In particular, does it originate in the individual’s parents, or does it come directly from the Lord? Three positions are worth our consideration: the theories of preexistence, creationism, and traducianism.²⁹

a. The Theory of Preexistence

The theory of preexistence dates back to the Church Father Origen of the third century, who taught that persons’ souls were created before their physical conception and existed in heaven during that prenatal time. Somehow, these souls sinned against God and, as a consequence of their transgression, were cast down to the earth and became incarnate in human bodies. Physical birth as a human, therefore, is a punishment from God.

In refutation, we note that such an understanding of human origins finds no support in the Bible. Furthermore, this theory advances a negative view of the human body, which God created “very good.” We also consider that according to Scripture, humanity’s fall into sin began not as disembodied souls in heaven, but with Adam and Eve in the Garden.

b. The Theory of Creationism

“Creationism” teaches that the human soul/spirit comes directly from God as a special creation. We can name the Roman Catholic Church and John Calvin among its supporters. The following Scripture passages claim a heavenly origin for the human soul/spirit:

- For You formed my inward parts (Ps 139:13).
- Thus says God Yahweh... who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it (Isa 42:5).
- Thus declares the LORD who... forms the spirit of man within him (Zech 12:1).
- ...shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? (Heb 12:9).
- O God, God of the spirits of all flesh... (Num 16:22).
- ...the spirit will return to God who gave it (Ecc 12:7).
- For the spirit would grow faint before Me, and the breath {of those whom} I have made (Isa 57:16).

Also notable is that in the book of Job, both Job and Elihu claim that the human spirit is the breath of the Lord (Job 27:3; 32:8) that returns to Him after death (Job 34:14-15). In addition, Psalm 33:15 asserts that God “fashions the hearts” of all the inhabitants of the earth.

²⁸Ibid., p. 138.

²⁹Discussion from Munyon, p. 272ff.

On the other hand, this theory leads to the conclusion that if God gives the spirit directly, then He is communicating it to people in a sinful condition. We know that the entire human constitution is tainted by sin, including the inner person. Does this make God the source of sin?

c. The Theory of Traducianism

The theory of traducianism asserts that an individual's spirit/soul derives from the parents and is communicated by them. Among adherents of this position, we can name Tertullian, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and Martin Luther. According to this understanding, God does not communicate to the newly conceived a fallen spirit/soul. Sin is inherited completely from the parents. Psalm 51:5 is cited in support, where David claims, "In sin my mother conceived me."

Exponents of this view offer the following explanation of the verses cited above in support of creationism. They appeal to the principle of the mediated creation of the soul. We note that the Bible claims that God creates a person's body (Ps 139:13-14, Jer 1:5), yet we know that the body actually comes from the parents. Therefore, we conclude that these verses imply that God creates bodies in a mediated fashion, by means of the instrumentality of the parents. The conclusion follows that God does the same for the soul/spirit of the individual. God does indeed form it, but again in a mediated fashion through the instrumentality of the parents.

Certain arguments support traducianism. First, in Genesis 2:7 God breathed into Adam the breath of life, which may indicate God's direct creation of the soul. Yet, no other text speaks of God doing this for another individual. Adherents conclude, then, that in all other cases the soul/spirit is communicated by the parents.³⁰

Moreover, Seth was born in "the likeness" of his father Adam (Gen 5:3). One may assume that Adam's "likeness" includes not only his physical makeup, but his inner constitution as well. Finally, it is written of Levi that, in a sense, he existed in the "loins of Abraham" before his birth (Heb 7:9-10). This may indirectly imply that the potential for the entire person, not just the body, lies in the parents.

Some may object, though, that the soul/spirit, being immaterial, cannot be communicated from one person to another. In addition, if Jesus received His human soul from Mary, how could He be conceived without sin? In answer to the second objection, the fact that the Spirit "overshadowed" Mary may explain why a sinful nature was not communicated to her offspring, Jesus.

4. The Question of Human Freedom

The nature of human freedom is usually understood as either compatibilistic, or non-compatibilistic. According to the first view, people always make decisions based on their desires and motives. The most desired option among alternatives always becomes the preferred choice. When desires conflict, the strongest one will prevail and determine the course of action. Desires and motives, in turn, are determined by the character of the individual. They arise from the heart, that is, the essence or character of that person. Finally, it is assumed that character is formed by external factors, such as a person's upbringing, culture, education, culture, etc. Since God is able to determine all these factors, a person's character is ultimately formed by Him. So then, if behavior depends on desire, desire on character, and character on God's arrangement of one's circumstance, then people are not free in the fullest sense. Their freedom is determined by external factors.

The rival conception of human freedom is non-compatibilistic freedom. Here it is claimed that people, as self-conscious beings, are able to make decisions independent of their internal desires or external factors – even contrary to them.

³⁰However, in the vision of Ezekiel 37:8-10, the *ruach* (i.e., spirit or breath) of God animates the dry bones. Nonetheless, one might respond that this text is not intending to teach the origin of the soul, but symbolically represents the restoration of Israel.

C. God's Image in Humans

The Bible declares that God created people in His own image and likeness. Because humans bear God's image, they occupy a higher status among God's creation (Ps 8:4-6; 115:16). Because of his origin from God, Adam was considered a "son of God" (Lk 3:38).

Over time, theologians have probed into the question as to what God's image actually is. In what way are we like God? Genesis 1:26 will be a good starting point for our inquiry: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" In our subsequent discussion, we will defend the position that "image" and "likeness" serve as synonyms. This will distinguish our view from that which was held by many Church Fathers and continues to be in vogue among Catholic and Eastern Orthodox believers.³¹ They feel that "image" refers to some natural quality of people, while "likeness" concerns a person's moral quality.³²

1. Biblical Survey

a. Synonymy of Terms

In defense of the synonymy of "image" and "likeness," we appeal, first of all, to the well-recognized biblical phenomenon of "poetic parallelism." In Hebrew poetry, we encounter three basic types of this structure. The first is called "synonymous parallelism." This is when adjacent lines in the text communicate the same basic thought, but express it in different words.³³ The following is an example:

He ties {his} foal to the vine,
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine.
He washes his garments in wine,
and his robes in the blood of grapes (Gen 49:11).

The words "vine" and "choice vine" are identical in meaning, as are "foal" and "donkey's colt." The same is true in the next pair: "garments" equals "robes," and "wine" equals "blood of grapes." In this light, one can easily see the same phenomenon in Genesis 1:26 between the words "image" and "likeness." The verse has a definite poetic coloring.

We also point out instances where people are said to be created in God's "image" without mention of His "likeness."³⁴ Note Genesis 1:26-27:

26. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."
27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Verse 26 contains both terms, while verse 27 has only "image." The word "image" alone communicates the entire meaning.

We also observe cases where Genesis 1:26 is quoted without the word "image":

³¹Clendenin, however, claims that not all Orthodox theologians make this distinction. See Clendenin D. B. Partakers Of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine Of Theosis / Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. 1994. Vol. 37. P. 364.

³²Иларион А. Таинство веры. – <http://hilarion.ru/works/bookpage/russian/dogmatics>. – P. 33-34; Fairbairn D. Partakers of the Divine Nature. – P. 45-46

³³Fairbairn, p. 45-46

³⁴Ibid.

- With it we bless {our} Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God (Jam 3:9).
- This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God (Gen 5:1).

Again, both synonyms are not necessary, since either one of them is adequate to express the entire concept.

The following verses are of special interest, since they associate a person's moral character not with the term "likeness," as one might expect, but with the term "image," which is supposed to refer to a natural quality common to all persons.

- For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29).
- But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- ...and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col 3:10).

This observation contradicts the patristic view, but is totally consistent with the view that "image" and "likeness" are synonyms.

The opposite is also true. We observe a case where "likeness" refers not to moral qualities, but to natural characteristics: "With it we bless {our} Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God" (Jam 3:9). James 3:9 applies to all persons, not only to the righteous. Therefore, in using the term "likeness," James is speaking of some natural characteristics common to all people.

Finally, we note that in Genesis 5:3 Seth shared the image and likeness of his father Adam: "When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of {a son} in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth" (Gen 5:3). It is unlikely that in this text the term "likeness" refers to Seth's moral behavior. It simply reflects the natural qualities he received from his father Adam as a synonym to "image."

Having demonstrated that "image" and "likeness" serve as synonyms, we may proceed to define them more precisely. Since they are interchangeable, for convenience sake we may at times utilize the phrase "image-likeness" to refer to this concept.

The Old Testament speaks of God's image-likeness in humans as natural, non-moral qualities and abilities (see Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6). In the New Testament, we see the same – God's image-likeness in a natural sense (see 1 Cor 11:7 and Jam 3:9). However, in the New Testament either one of these terms can refer to a person's moral character as well (see Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). As we mentioned before, unlike the patristic view, the Bible teaches that "image" does not always refer to natural qualities, and "likeness" is not always associated with moral behavior. Either term could apply to either trait.

1 Corinthians 15:49 reflects still another meaning for "image." It associates that term with the character of the new, glorious body that believers are to inherit. Finally, in two instances Christ is the "image of God" (see 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). He is, in fact, the perfect reflection of the Father, being Himself God in the flesh.

Formally, then, we have two types of God's image-likeness in people: the natural image-likeness, and the moral image-likeness. However, for convenience sake, in our subsequent discussion we will abbreviate these designations and speak of God's moral image *or* likeness, and His natural image *or* likeness in people, understanding that the other term is implied in these designations.

b. The Moral Image of God

The idea of God's moral image (or likeness) is rather straightforward. It applies to behavior that reflects God's holiness and character. We may cite key passages that refer to this feature that God shares with humanity:

- ...being transformed into the same image from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18).
- ...renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Col 3:10).
- He also predestined {to become} conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29).

c. The Natural Image of God

The natural image of God in people is more debated. The leading views are the substantive, the relational, and the functional views.³⁵

The substantive view states that God's natural image consists of certain elements of the human constitution. Suggestions include: intellect, spirituality, volition, language, self-consciousness, or creativity. Grudem proposes that we include all of the above in our conception of God's natural image. We are similar to God in all these ways.³⁶

More precisely, Grudem employs the following classifications for these shared attributes: *moral aspects*, such as conscience and holiness; *spiritual aspects*, such as spirit, spirituality and immortality; *intellectual aspects*, such as reason, language, emotions, and creativity; *relative aspects*, such as relationships and mastery over creation; and *physical aspects*, such as communication, perception, and productivity.³⁷

The second major theory of God's natural image is the relational view.³⁸ According to this view, God's natural image consists of relationships between people or with the Lord. We note in Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-3 that after mention of God's image, we read that God created people as male and female. It is assumed that the mention of the different genders gives definition to God's image. In other words, God's natural image consists in those relationships themselves. This view was particularly championed by Emil Brunner and Karl Barth.

Barth supports his view by referring to the life of Jesus Christ, who was God's image in the highest and purest sense. Barth notes that Jesus was a highly relational person. He conducted His entire life in fellowship with others. Therefore, Barth is convinced that God's image is found in personal relationships.

Brunner divides the idea of God's image into two parts. A person has both a "formal image" and a "material image." The formal image consists of reason and volition – qualities preserved after the Fall. The material image, which consists of fellowship and personal relationship with God, was lost after the Fall.

Other arguments support this view as well. Since God is love, one might expect that His image would find expression in personal relationships. It is also thought that in John chapter 17, when Jesus prays for unity among His disciples, He is, in fact, praying for God's image to be restored in them.³⁹

On the other hand, this theory creates certain complications. First, if someone lacks meaningful personal relationships with others, has he or she forfeited God's image? This is unlikely, since according to Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9, all people bear God's image. One must also admit that the biblical support for this option is not substantial. It may reflect modern existential philosophy more than biblical revelation. It is preferable to conclude that God's image in people does not consist in personal relationships themselves, but instead supplies those qualities that make personal relationships possible.⁴⁰

The third main position is the functional view. Here, God's image in humans consists in their administration of God's creation. In other words, God's image is in operation when humanity is exercising its ruling powers

³⁵See Erickson, p. 520.

³⁶Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 446-449.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Erickson, p. 523ff.

³⁹Noted in Boyd, p. 82-83.

⁴⁰Ibid.

over the planet. Adherents of the functional view note that in Genesis 1:26, after mention of God making humans in His image and likeness, the text speaks of humanity's sovereignty over the Earth. Thus, God's image is defined as dominion. Psalm 8:6-8 confirms that God gave humans dominion over the natural world. In addition, a believer's likeness to Christ is thought to include participation in His reign.⁴¹

In evaluation of this third option, we note that although Psalm 8 does show humanity's God-given dominion over the world, this feature is not associated with God's "image." Therefore, one cannot appeal to Psalm 8 in support. In addition, the structure of Genesis 1:26 does not necessarily reflect parallelism, where the second half of the verse ("dominion") serves to define the first half ("image"). We could be dealing here with sequence, where God's image does not consist in dominion, but rather enables humans to rule.⁴²

In summary: (1) the substantive view claims that God's image in humanity consists in certain natural qualities, (2) the relational view asserts that it is found in personal relationships, and (3) the functional view – in dominion over the Earth. The most reasonable solution appears to be to embrace the substantive view with the qualification that the qualities with which God has endowed humans (reason, will, language, etc.) enables them to fulfill the functions specified in the other views: personal relationships and dominion over the Earth.

Erickson and Mueller concur. Erickson writes, "The image refers to the elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfillment of human destiny. The image is the powers of personality that make humans, like God, beings capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting, and of willing freely."⁴³ In Mueller's words, "Man's dominion over the creatures... was an immediate result of his possession of the divine image."⁴⁴ In addition, of the three options discussed above, the substantive view enjoys greatest acceptance in church history. Additionally, we see value in ascribing God's image not to what a person does, but to what a person is.⁴⁵

In conclusion, it is important to mention that both Old and New Testaments teach that all people possess God's image. This means that all individuals – men and women, old and young, people from all ethnic backgrounds and positions in society – all bear God's image and are therefore worthy of respect. Comparing himself with a poor man, Job writes, "Did not He who made me in the womb make him, and the same one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15). Munyon makes the follow apt comment: "All human beings of both sexes, in all races, economic classes, and age-groups, equally bear the image of God and therefore are all equally valuable in God's sight."⁴⁶

d. The Effect of the Fall

Up to now, we have discussed God's image-likeness as it existed before the Fall. Yet, without doubt, humanity's failure in the Garden has a definite effect on God's image bearers. As Solomon the wise once wrote, "God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices" (Ecc 7:29).

Concerning God's natural image-likeness, that is, features such as reason, volition, creativity, etc., they continue to function in fallen humanity. Nonetheless, sin has corrupted these aspects of the human constitution and they no longer function at the same level as the Lord intended them. The moral image-likeness has been lost. People in their fallen condition no longer walk in God's ways, but transgress His laws. Yet, the moral image-likeness can be restored in Christ.

2. Historical Survey

⁴¹Boyd, p. 81.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Erickson, p. 532.

⁴⁴Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 208.

⁴⁵Boyd, p. 77-78.

⁴⁶Munyon, p. 276.

We will attempt a brief survey of various views on God's image in the course of church history.⁴⁷ Irenaeus advanced the idea, later adopted by Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, that God's image differs from His likeness. God's "image" is present in all persons, but His "likeness" is a person's spiritual potential. Irenaeus also referred to Christ as God's image,⁴⁸ yet no one can fully attain to the image of Christ, but only approximate it.

Clement of Alexandria gave pride of place to reason as the highest expression of God's image in people,⁴⁹ but he also made mention of physical reproduction in this regard.⁵⁰ Along with Irenaeus, he considered God's likeness to be the progressive attainment of God's grace by the believer. Gregory Palamas likewise extolled reason as the chief quality people share with the Lord. He writes, "For that which is in the image resides not in the body but in the intellect, which is the highest aspect of human nature. If there was something else still higher, that which is in the image would reside in that."⁵¹

Gregory of Nyssa believed that God's image is multi-factorial,⁵² but the most prominent features are reason and volition.⁵³ John of Damascus and Basil the Great gave priority to the human will. Unlike many others, Cyril of Alexandria equated God's image with His likeness, and connected them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Under the Spirit's influence, human reason "was entirely and continually in the divine vision."⁵⁴ God's image is also associated with incorruptibility and immortality. However, Cyril felt that these features, along with the gift of the Spirit, were lost as a result of the Fall.

3. Other Confessional Views

a. Corresponding to Evangelical Faith

The Evangelical view, delineated in the preceding sections, has much in common with the Lutheran view. Lutherans agree that "image" and "likeness" are synonyms, describing the self-same feature(s). They also affirm that the natural image-likeness is compromised by sin, and that the moral image-likeness is lost to fallen humanity.

Lutheran theology adds one other feature. It considers that God's natural image-likeness consists not only in reason and volition, but also in their proper orientation. This means that when God placed His image in humans, He gave them along with it a natural disposition to use it for good. This differs from the opinion of some evangelical thinkers that God initially created people morally neutral, without any inherent tendency to virtue.⁵⁵

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, taught three aspects of God's image in humans: natural, political, and moral. The natural aspect includes free will, emotions, and immortality. The political aspect encompasses the ability and authority to manage the Earth. The moral aspect concerns holiness, righteousness and intellectual abilities. The Fall affected all these spheres of human nature, yet a remnant of the natural and political image remains. God's image is fully restored only in the hereafter.⁵⁶

⁴⁷Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 16-22; Gross J. *The Divination of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers* / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 121-133, 178-182, 220-221.

⁴⁸Origen also so taught (see Mantzaridis, p. 17).

⁴⁹See *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 10

⁵⁰See *The Instructor*, 2, 10

⁵¹*Natural Chapters*, 27, taken from Mantzaridis, p. 17.

⁵²See *On the Making of Man*, 5, 16.

⁵³See *On Virginity*, 12.

⁵⁴Gross, p. 220.

⁵⁵Mueller, p. 208-209.

⁵⁶Dieter M. E. *The Wesleyan View // Five Views on Sanctification*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – P. 22-23.

b. Not Corresponding to Evangelical Faith

The following views do not correspond to biblical revelation, and, therefore, are not acceptable for evangelical faith.

As mentioned above, Roman Catholics, for example, recognize a difference between God's image and His likeness. The first concerns natural qualities that all humans possess, while the second consists of a person's moral qualities. Catholics also believe that the Fall only partially affected the natural image in humans, and that the moral image was not totally obliterated. Therefore, since a "residue" of God's image-likeness remains, the unregenerate person can still obtain some knowledge of God through reason and observation and can do good to some degree. Thus, Catholics hold that the Fall had a milder effect on human nature than evangelical believers tend to allow. A biblical defense of the typical evangelical position of total human depravity is found in chapter 4, section B.2.d.

Concerning Orthodox faith, God's "image" is understood not as natural endowments inherent to human nature, but divine qualities instilled in the human constitution by God.⁵⁷ Orthodox literature describes God's image with terms like "divine element" or "divine spark." These divine qualities enable people to know God by reflection on His image in them.⁵⁸

Orthodox theologians defend their view by appealing to Genesis 2:7, where we read that God breathed into man "the breath of life." It is thought that at this moment God instilled in humans some of His divine qualities. Meyendorff feels that one of the divine qualities people possess by nature is eternal existence.⁵⁹ Archimandrite Nikon lists the following: spirituality, rationality, free will, creativity, and immortality.⁶⁰

Since humans possess these qualities of God's image, they possessed (before the Fall) a natural tendency toward virtue. Therefore, to be a *person* in the original sense of the word is to be moral. This original life-orientation is termed the human's "natural will." After the Fall, people obtained another will – the "gnomic will," which is associated not with human nature, but with the individual's personality.⁶¹ Therefore, when one's gnomic will runs contrary to one's natural will, this person is divorced from his or her true self.⁶²

Lossky's term for that which God "breathed" into humanity is "fragments of deity."⁶³ Since God Himself is unfathomable, His image in people is also beyond complete understanding. In addition, Lossky connects God's image with the human personality, rather than with human nature: "That in us which corresponds to God's image is not part of our nature, but our personality, which includes our nature as well."⁶⁴ Finally, according to Lossky's teaching, Adam contained in himself the entirety of humanity. This is why his name in Hebrew, אָדָם (*adam*), is often used to refer to humanity in general. Consequently, we may speak of a "general human nature."⁶⁵

Nikon adds the thought that there exists not only a certain commonality among persons, but also between humanity and all creation: "Humanity concentrates in itself... the world's entire being."⁶⁶ This ontological

⁵⁷Calvin also taught that before the Fall, humans were united with the Lord, and spoke of God's image as "participation in God" (see *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.2.1, 1.13.14; taken from Billings J. T. John Calvin: United to God through Christ // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions. – Madison, NJ: Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 204).

⁵⁸Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрит Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. - Москва: Сибирская Благовонница, 2004. – P. 22.

⁵⁹Мейендорф И. Введение в святоотеческое богословие. – Минск: Лучи Софии, 2007. – P. 323.

⁶⁰Слово об обожении, p. 28. Author's translation.

⁶¹Мейендорф, Введение в святоотеческое богословие, p. 324.

⁶²Hart D. B. Providence and Causality: The Divine Innocence // Murphy F. A., Ziegler P. G. The Providence of God. – London; New York: T.T. Clark, 2009. – P. 47.

⁶³Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и Догматическое богословие. М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 89-90. Author's translation.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 95. Author's translation.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 92. Author's translation.

⁶⁶Слово об обожении, p. 18. Author's translation.

connection plays an important role in Orthodox Theology, since it makes possible humanity's ascent to God and the ascent of all creation with it. Maximus the Confessor advanced such a view, stating, "Humanity must unite all things in itself and through itself unite all things with God... People are the image of God, and in them all God's power and energies, which are revealed in the world, are secretly focused."⁶⁷

In addition, the divine qualities that make up God's image in humanity also provide people the opportunity to enter into personal fellowship with God and eventually attain perfection. Meyendorff speaks of God's image as a person's "openness to God."⁶⁸ Gregory Palamas taught, "From the moment of humanity's creation, people strive to draw near to their archetype, that is, God, and thereby achieve deification."⁶⁹

Since God's image supposedly imparts elements that provide persons with potential to fellowship with God and attain perfection, the individual is incumbent to develop those qualities. God's image in people actually made possible the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.⁷⁰

Orthodox faith understands God's "likeness" as the realization of the potential provided by the "image." This means that when persons develop the qualities with which God has endowed them, they attain "God-likeness." However, in light of humanity's fallen state, attaining God's likeness is not possible without the intervention of God's grace.⁷¹

Meyendorff considers wisdom and goodness as the main components of God's likeness: "...being created good by Him, who is good, and wise by Him, who is wise, and in this way by grace being made like the One, who is good and wise by nature. Therefore, every rational being is God's image, but only those who are good and wise are like Him."⁷²

The attainment of God's "likeness," in Orthodox thought, is also called "deification," which we will discuss in detail in a subsequent chapter in this volume. In this regard, Ilarion writes, "In creating people in His image and likeness, God created creatures called to become gods. A human is a potential divine-person."⁷³ In a similar way, Lossky claims that God's image in people, i.e., the "fragments of deity," provide them with "the ability to perceive and assimilate this deifying energy."⁷⁴

Orthodoxy defends its position by appealing to the following. In Genesis 1:26-27, God's intention was that humans would reflect both His image and His likeness. Therefore, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." Yet, according to verse 27, He made them only in His image. The "likeness," which is the realization of the potential of the "image," was not accessible at that time.⁷⁵

However, the problem with this interpretation is that the text does not say, "Let Us make man in Our image, and let him attain to Our likeness." Rather, He created them in His image and likeness from the start. So then, from the very beginning humans bore both God's "image" and His "likeness." In addition, we demonstrated earlier the synonymic nature of these terms. Finally, the Orthodox understanding of God's image in humans is an integral component of their teaching on deification, which we refute in a later chapter.

The protestant thinker E. W. Kenyon also advanced an exaggerated view on God's image in persons. Kenyon taught that God created people out of necessity for the purpose of fellowship with Himself: "Man... possessed an intellect of such caliber as to be the companion of Deity, and... had in his hands the joy or sorrows of God."⁷⁶ Yet, in our study of God's aseity in chapter 2 of volume 3, we demonstrated that God has need of nothing (see Acts 17:25; Rom 11:35; Isa 40:13; Job 22:2; 35:7; 41:11; Ps 50:12).

⁶⁷Florovsky G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eight Centuries* / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. – Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. – P. 225.

⁶⁸Иларион, p. 67, Author's translation; Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 139-140.

⁶⁹Mantzaris, p. 21.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 52, 62.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 63, 71.

⁷²Мейендорф, Введение в святоотеческое богословие, p. 323. Author's translation

⁷³Иларион, p. 67, Author's translation

⁷⁴Лосский, p. 97, Author's translation.

⁷⁵Иларион, p. 67-68.

⁷⁶Kenyon E. *Redemption*, p. 25, taken from Hejzlar, p. 171.

Kenyon also taught that God gave humans entire authority over the Earth, and consequently He is not able to act in the world without permission from people: "God cannot touch the human today only through the Church, it is His only mediator and if the Church fails to assume its obligations then the hand of God is powerless."⁷⁷ In refutation, we recall the testimony of Psalm 135:6, "Whatever Yahweh pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." We also note that God allowed Satan to enter the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve. Satan had no right to enter there, and Adam and Eve did not invite him. Additionally, God visited the first family in the Garden after their sin, when they did not want to see Him. Yet, they could not prevent His coming, since He is Lord of all.

Finally, in Kenyon's view humans enjoy omnipotence and can direct nature through their spirits by faith: "Man belongs to God's realm, the realm of Omnipotence. It is the faith realm. It is the realm of the One 'who called the things that are not as though they were.' In that realm, words hold a strange power, for they are filled with Omnipotence."⁷⁸ So then, "Man belongs to God's class."⁷⁹ Kenneth E. Hagin also holds to an elevated estimation of the human condition. He writes, "(Man) was created on terms of equality with God, and he could stand in God's presence without any consciousness of inferiority."⁸⁰ It appears here that Kenyon and Hagin share some common features with Eastern Orthodoxy's exalted view of humanity's condition and destiny, termed by the latter as "deification." We refute this theory in chapter 7.

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⁷⁷Kenyon E. The Father and His Family, p. 37, taken from Hejzlar, p. 189.

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⁷⁹Kenyon E. Father, p. 39, taken from Hejzlar, p. 198.

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## Chapter 2: Humanity, part 2

### A. The Physical Body

Having studied the nature of our inner person, we embark on an investigation of other aspects of the human constitution, beginning with human physicality. In all of the natural world, there is nothing to compare with the mastery of form and function found in the human body. Let us learn the biblical view of human physicality.

#### 1. Proper Attitude toward the Body

The human body is a masterpiece of God's wisdom and creative power, which constantly leaves us amazed and inspires us to worship our Creator. Let us briefly highlight several of its amazing features.

People possess a respiratory system that enables them to procure oxygen from the atmosphere, a necessary element for all bodily processes. The digestive system processes food, incorporating the useful parts and disposing of the rest. Skin covers the body, providing protection and form. Hormones and enzymes, regulated by the endocrine system, control the physical processes of the body.

The urinary system rids the body of unnecessary and potentially harmful substances. The muscular-skeletal system allows bodily movement and enables physical labor. The circulatory system, with its constantly beating heart, bathes the body with elements needed for survival and normal functioning. The nervous system enables a person to perceive the outside world, process information, and initiate movement. Finally, human reproductive capacities secure the perpetuation of the human race.

The Bible never forbids care for one's body, but encourages us to nurture it (Eph 5:29). The material world that God created provides people with all they need to both survive and thrive. The following passages affirm that truth:

- Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things (Matt 6:31-32).
- ...who forbid marriage {and advocate} abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude (1 Tim 4:3-4).
- ...to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy (1 Tim 6:17).

Moreover, the Scriptures give us a number of instructions for proper care of the body. First, the body needs rest. For this reason, God established the Sabbath for restoration of strength (Ex 31:15-17). Even young people can tire and need periodic relief (Isa 40:30). Psalm 127:2 also prescribes rest: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved {even in his} sleep." From time to time, Jesus led His disciples away for periods of inactivity (Mk 6:31).

Second, the Mosaic Law speaks much of physical hygiene, which ensured not only ceremonial purity, but also prevention of communicable diseases. The sons of Israel were commanded to cover their excretions outside the camp (Deut 23:13), to isolate people with contagious infections (Lev 13), and to wash themselves after a bodily emission (Lev 15). Third, in His earthly ministry, Jesus devoted much attention to physical health – healing the sick.

Furthermore, although Paul recommends spiritual discipline over physical exercise, nonetheless he recognizes that physical training has value (1 Tim 4:8). Finally, followers of Jesus must consecrate their bodies to the Lord by abstaining from sin:

- Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin {as} instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members {as} instruments of righteousness to God (Rom 6:13).
- Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship (Rom 12:1).
- For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor 6:20).

## 2. Neglect of the Body

In this section, we defend the position that a normal, healthy human experience requires possession of a physical body. Some, however, devalue the physical aspect of humanity and neglect their bodily needs. Asceticism, unfortunately, has a long history in organized Christianity. Many have sought to attain higher levels of “spirituality” by neglecting or abusing their bodies. Some have even denied a future physical resurrection, teaching that the saints will enjoy eternal glory in a disembodied state.

Neglect and severe treatment of the body traces its origins not to the biblical witness, but to Greek philosophy, especially in the thought of Plato.<sup>81</sup> In his view, echoed later by Plotinus, the essence of the person is the soul. Plato records Socrates saying, “Since neither the body nor both together (i.e. “body and soul”) are man... if man is something, he turns out to be nothing but soul” (*Alcibiades I*, 130 c 1).<sup>82</sup> Again, Plato cites Socrates referring to the body as the “sepulcher” or “prison” of the soul, drawing a parallel between the Greek terms σῶμα (*soma*), i.e., “body,” and σήμα (*sema*), i.e., “grave” (*Cratylus*, 400 c 2).<sup>83</sup>

Plato thought that the body hinders the soul from knowing truth and classed it as “non-being.”<sup>84</sup> Plotinus taught that in order for the soul to become immortal and eternal, it must become a substance independent from the body.<sup>85</sup> Such an attitude would naturally lead to neglect of the body, which Plotinus indeed did practice. Porphyry notes that Plotinus acted as if he was ashamed of his body, failing to observe proper hygiene or receive needed medical therapy.<sup>86</sup>

The historian Lane summarizes the Greek view of human nature:

The Greek philosophers saw human nature as essentially twofold: body and soul. The body belongs to this world of becoming and change. The soul is a ‘divine spark’ from the world of being, and is rational.... The *real* person is the soul. The body is like a house or a set of clothes in which the person lives. In fact, the body is often seen as the tomb or the prison of the soul. The ultimate destiny of the soul, which is immortal, is to be released from the body. Our destiny is deification, becoming like God. This includes the goal of impassibility – total absence of all feeling and emotion.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>See Лера В. П. Тело и плоть: платоновское и христианское понимание // Евангельский Интернет; Иларион А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 70.

<sup>82</sup>Plato. Socrates and Alcibiades / Trans. D. Johnson. – Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library/Focus Pub., 2003. – P. 48.

<sup>83</sup>Plato. The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides, Timaeus, and Critias of Plato / Trans. T. Taylor. – Minneapolis: Wizards Bookshelf, 1976. – P. 30.

<sup>84</sup>From Леги.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>See Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*. Taken from Леги.

<sup>87</sup>Lane T. A Concise History of Christian Thought. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 7.

Origen, being heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, echoed this same attitude in his own teaching. He felt that God created humans as spiritual beings, but due to some sinful act committed by them, He made the material world to punish his human creatures by giving them bodies. God's intent, however, is to someday liberate humanity from their material state.

Unlike Greek thought, the Bible claims that God created all things "very good" (Gen 1:31), including the human body. The New Testament confirms this truth. In 1 Timothy 4:4, we read, "Everything created by God is good," including the physical body. Asceticism runs contrary to Paul's teaching in Colossians 2:23, where he states, "These are matters (i.e., asceticism) which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, {but are} of no value against fleshly indulgence."

Although we reject asceticism, we in no way undervalue fasting, which the Bible encourages. Fasting, though, differs from asceticism. First, fasting is for a limited period of time, while asceticism is a lifestyle. Second, the goal of the ascetic life is attaining greater spirituality, while fasting aids in intensifying one's prayer life in times of crisis or special need.

The Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Ilarion gives the following wise counsel about our attitude toward the body, "The Christian ideal is not to abate the flesh, but to cleanse it and liberate it from the effects of the Fall."<sup>88</sup>

The Scriptures reveal that in order to be a complete person, one must possess a physical body. Paul stresses this point in 2 Corinthians 5, where we read, "For we know that if the earthly tent (*οἰκία*) which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house (*οἰκία*) not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1). This verse contains two mentions of the idea "tent/house," rendering the single Greek term *οἰκία* (*oikia*). The first instance obviously refers to the physical body. We may also safely assume that in the second instance, a physical body is also meant, but now a glorified, resurrected body.

We then read, "For indeed in this {house} we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked" (v. 2-3). Paul makes an important point here. He states that the departed soul wishes to "be clothed with our dwelling from heaven," that is, receive the glorified body, in order not "to be found naked." Thus, the disembodied state is compared to being naked. Life outside of the body is an incomplete, abnormal condition.

Erickson concurs, "Scripture indicates that there is an intermediate state involving personal conscious existence between death and resurrection.... For the intermediate (i.e., immaterial or disembodied) state is clearly incomplete or abnormal (2 Cor. 5:2-4)."<sup>89</sup> Ilarion affirms the same, "Only the combination of soul and body make up a full-fledged person-hypostasis. Neither the soul, not the body alone does so."<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, Paul claims that it is disagreeable and uncomfortable to leave the body. Therefore, Paul comforts the dying with the hope of a future resurrection: "For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life" (v. 4). Nonetheless, we must someday leave this body behind. Therefore, we need to muster courage to do so:

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight – we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (v. 6-8).

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<sup>88</sup>Иларион, p. 71. Author's translation.

<sup>89</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 555.

<sup>90</sup>Иларион, p. 70. Author's translation.

In summary, a dying person desires to immediately obtain a new body in order to avoid the disembodied state. Yet, resurrection day is still to come. Therefore, one must muster courage to depart from the body and enter into this incomplete, abnormal, disembodied state.

Some hold to the opinion that God does indeed provide the departed soul with a temporary physical body. In support, they cite the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. It is assumed that they appeared in the flesh. It is also supposed that the “white garments,” in which the martyrs are clothed (Rev 6:11), are temporary physical bodies.<sup>91</sup> We encounter this teaching in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher.<sup>92</sup>

However, this theory lacks biblical support. Several times, we see in Scripture that the departed are in a disembodied state (Rev 6:9; 7:9; 20:4; Heb 12:23). We also note Stephen’s prayer, when he requested the Lord to receive his spirit. It appears that he did not expect to receive a temporary body (Acts 7:59). In addition, a careful reading of 2 Corinthians 5, as we have seen, shows that at death, the individual departs from the body for the disembodied state. This is why we must “be of good courage” and await the resurrection of the body at the coming of the Lord. Finally, Paul is “willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

## **B. Social Life**

This section will inform us about the means that God has provided for us to develop the social aspect of our nature. Many find in marriage, for example, satisfaction for both physical and social needs. In addition, family life provides a context for fellowship and relational interaction. Outside of family life, people develop friendships with like-minded individuals. Additionally, each is born and raised in a certain culture, where they share with others a common language, history, customs, etc. Finally, each person finds themselves in a certain nation and society and interact with others on that level as well. We will investigate each of these contexts for human interaction.

### **1. Marriage**

God has arranged a special interrelationship between the genders, that is, between men and women, called marriage. Since this relationship plays such a key role in an individual’s life, we will devote substantial attention to its study.

#### **a. Premarital Relationships**

We will begin by studying the biblical view of proper relations between the genders before the marriage covenant is enacted. The Bible takes a positive view of love and romance. It is one of the many gracious gifts of God to humanity in general. The Scriptures actually describe several engaging romances, such as between Jacob and Rachel, David and Michal, Boaz and Ruth, and others.

In the book of Proverbs, Agur expresses amazement at the wonder of romantic love. In Proverbs 30:18-19, he writes, “There are three things which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid.” In addition, the entire book of Song of Solomon is devoted to romantic love. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon speaks again about marital bliss:

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<sup>91</sup>Noted in Horton S. The Last Things // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 691-692.

<sup>92</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 618.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm {alone}? (Ecc 4:9-11).

It will interest us to know how people in the cultures of biblical times approached marriage. We will examine premarital customs in Greco-Roman and ancient Jewish cultures.

Greeks and Romans of New Testament times considered the family subservient to the state. The institutions of marriage and family existed to produce strong and able bodies to serve the state. Men sought wives who could most likely produce such offspring. We also note that for men, engaging in sex outside of marriage was common and acceptable, yet it was a disgrace for women. In general, women occupied a lower rank than men in ancient society – on the level of servants.

Clearly, this approach runs contrary to the biblical norm. First, the woman is deserving of equal respect in marriage and society. Additionally, the Bible values family relationships over one's service to the state. Finally, Scripture categorically forbids sex outside of marriage for either gender. Therefore, there is little in Greco-Roman culture that is worthy of imitation.

In Jewish culture, the parents arranged the marriage. Sometimes they chose the bride or groom themselves (Gen 24:1-4), while at other times, they allowed a son to choose a wife within set boundaries (Gen 28:1-2). Another practice was to simply approve the son's choice or a bride (Judg 14:1-3).

Before the wedding date, a representative of the groom negotiated with a representative of the father of the bride concerning the match. In Rebekah's case, her father asked her approval as well. The groom conventionally worked for his father-in-law for a period of time. The daughter received a wedding gift from her father – possibly some land or a servant. Marriages with Gentiles were forbidden (Ezra 9:2), as well as with a close relative (Lev 18:6-8).

After the marriage covenant was agreed upon, the prospective groom proposed to the prospective bride. Their relationship from that point was considered a legal marriage. It could only be annulled by a legal act and for reason of adultery. The engagement period lasted 12 months, during which the groom prepared a home for his future bride, and the bride prepared her wedding garments. The bride's parents prepared the wedding feast.

This system has both pluses and minuses. On the positive side, it employed the wisdom and counsel of the parents, who may well know their children better than they know themselves. Also notable is that Israel practiced this system many years and never received rebuke or correction from the Lord concerning it. On the other hand, this approach: (1) failed to allow the couple to develop an acquaintance beforehand, (2) created marriages not always based on love, and (3) empowered parents to potentially abuse the system in order to personally gain from the match.

Let us attempt to glean from Scripture wise counsel on preparation for marriage. First, many mistakenly believe that God has chosen only one special mate for each individual. There are examples where God indeed plays the "matchmaker," such as the case with Isaac and Rebekah. In most cases, however, the individual himself or herself is left to make their own choice. In 1 Corinthians 7:39, we read, "A wife is bound as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is free to be married *to whom she wishes*, only in the Lord" (also see Num 36:6). Here, Paul also highlights a key principle for Christians seeking a mate – they must marry only other true believers.

Although God grants each believer freedom in choosing a mate, certain guiding principles can aid us. Again, we stress that the union must be between fellow followers of Jesus (2 Cor 6:14). It is also desirable that: (1) they have a common denominational affiliation, (2) they enjoy freedom in fellowship together and open

communication, (3) they share a common vision for the future, (4) they are physically attracted to each other,<sup>93</sup> and (5) they relate well with their potential in-laws.

God's only command for the single believer is to abstain from sex before marriage, i.e., fornication (1 Thes 4:3). One might wonder, though, why people are physically ready to marry and reproduce before they are mentally, emotionally, and financially ready to do so. The reason may well be that temptations to sexual sin happen not only before marriage, but in marriage as well. Therefore, God arranged this period of time between physical readiness for marriage and the actual marriage union for individuals to learn self-control over sexual desires, which may enable them to better resist sexual sin in marriage. A person who successfully resists such temptations before marriage may well resist them more successfully during marriage as well. Consequently, Paul urges young Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim 2:22).

## **b. Marriage relationships**

The Bible is very positive about the marriage relationship: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from Yahweh" (Prov 18:22). Wayne Grudem makes an insightful comparison of the marriage relationship with that which exists in the Trinity.<sup>94</sup> We will employ his insights in our study.

The Scriptures present the Trinity as a plurality in unity. One God exists in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A proper understanding of the Trinity affirms that all Members of the Godhead are equal in nature and dignity. One Person is not greater than the others. In addition, the Persons of the Trinity differ in function among themselves. Each has a specific role to play in accomplishing God's plan.

It is interesting to note that all these features present in the Trinity find correspondence with the marriage union. First, the couple is obliged to preserve unity in their diversity. Before God, they are "one flesh." Second, before God, they are equal in importance and dignity. One is not superior to the other. Finally, husband and wife differ in how they function in the marriage bond. Some responsibilities lie with the husband, while others are incumbent on the wife. So then, the example of the Trinity serves as an excellent model for a successful marriage. Let us examine these features in still more detail.

Both Old and New Testaments affirm unity in marriage (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31-32; Matt 19:5-6). Husband and wife are one flesh. Therefore, adultery is forbidden (Deut 5:18; Heb 13:4). This unity, however, is often not actualized in married life. Divorce is the tragic result.

In the Old Covenant, Yahweh allowed divorce and remarriage under certain circumstances (Deut 24:1). Nonetheless, His basic attitude toward divorce was negative. Through the prophet Malachi, God revealed, "'I hate divorce,' says Yahweh, the God of Israel" (Mal 2:16).

We must also consider a key verse in Deuteronomy 24:1: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts {it} in her hand and sends her out from his house..." The key term here giving grounds for divorce is "indecency." This word translates the Hebrew עֲרֹוֹת דָּבָר (*davar ervath*).

The rabbis differed in their interpretation of this phrase.<sup>95</sup> Shammai thought that it referred to some sexual misconduct by the wife, while Hillel considered it to be anything that displeased the husband. In the latter's view, then, the husband could demand a divorce for any reason.

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<sup>93</sup>At the same time, physical attraction should not be the main criterion in choosing a mate. Proverbs teaches us, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, {but} a woman who fears the Yahweh, she shall be praised" (Prov 31:30). We also learn from the tragic example of Samson, who chose poorly in marriage because of physical attraction (Judg 14:3). Also of note is that Scripture lauds inner beauty over outer beauty (Prov 11:16, 22; 1 Tim 2:9-10; 1 Pet 3:3-5).

<sup>94</sup>Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 454ff.

<sup>95</sup>See Strack H. L., Billerbeck P. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch 1922–1961; and Wolff, Robert J. Hillel // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001. – P. 1979-1988.



Shammai's view finds support in the literal meaning of the Hebrew terms, which is, "a matter of nakedness."<sup>96</sup> Moreover, in Deuteronomy 23:15 the phrase is again associated with uncleanness. We also see affinities between Shammai's view and Jesus' teaching, who taught that divorce and remarriage is permissible only for reason of adultery. On the other hand, Hillel's view is supported by Deuteronomy 22:22, where adultery results not in divorce, but in the execution of the offender. In addition, Deuteronomy 24:2 allows divorce simply if the husband hates his wife.

Advancing to the New Covenant, several key passages underscore Jesus' teaching on the topic. In Mark's Gospel, we read, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery" (Mk. 10:11-12). Matthew adds, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except for {the} reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt 5:32). We may assume that the opposite case would also be true – if a wife divorces her husband, except for the reason of unchastity, she makes him commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced man commits adultery. We find the same conditions in Luke 16:18 and Matthew 9:9. We note here that Jesus did not so much forbid divorce, as He forbade remarriage.

Jesus made an exception, however, in the case of adultery. According to Matthew 19:9 and 5:32, He allowed remarriage in that case. We base our claim on the assumption that if one is *guilty* of adultery for divorce and remarriage *not because* of adultery, then one in *not guilty* of adultery for divorce and remarriage *because* of adultery.

The word translated here "adultery," that is πορνεία (*porneia*), deserves special comment. It is defined as "unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication."<sup>97</sup> The question arises, "Does πορνεία (*porneia*) refer to sex before marriage (fornication), of which the other partner was not aware before the wedding, or sex outside of marriage (adultery)?" A third option is also possible – Jesus could be referring to both transgressions.

In support of the interpretation of πορνεία (*porneia*) as fornication, Matthew 15:19 lists πορνεία (*porneia*) separately from adultery. We see the same in Mark 7:21. In support of πορνεία (*porneia*) as adultery, some non-canonical books use it in this way (*Sirach*, 23:23; *Hermas*, *Com.* 4.1). Although neither *Sirach*, nor *Hermas* are biblical books, they are nonetheless valuable since they were written about the time of the New Testament and may well reflect the common usage of πορνεία (*porneia*) at that time.

Moreover, in Matthew 5:32 we learn, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except for {the} reason of unchastity (πορνεία), makes her commit adultery." Most likely, the opposite proposition also holds true, "Everyone who divorces his wife for {the} reason of unchastity (πορνεία), does not make her commit adultery." This is so because the wife has already committed adultery when she committed πορνεία (*porneia*). Therefore, in this verse πορνεία (*porneia*) is adultery.

Finally, in defense of the position that both fornication and adultery are in view, we may argue that if the Evangelists had wanted to specifically identify adultery, they could have used the common Greek term for that act, namely μοιχεία (*moicheia*). The choice of πορνεία (*porneia*) over μοιχεία (*moicheia*) may indicate that Jesus meant more than simply adultery. It is also insightful to compare this verse with Deuteronomy 22:20-22, where both fornication and adultery are addressed in one context.

In light of the evidence presented, we are more convinced by the final theory – that both a previously unconfessed act of fornication before marriage, or adultery in marriage gives grounds for divorce and remarriage to the offended party.

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<sup>96</sup>The word עֶרְוַת (*ervath*) means "nakedness" or "sexual organs," while דָּבָר (*davar*) is a "word" or a "matter." Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. – Electronic Edition, Logos Bible Software. – P. 789, 182 (We abbreviate this resource BDB).

<sup>97</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 854. We abbreviate this resource BDAG.

This interpretation coincides well with the principle of “one flesh,” of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 19:6. Whenever two people, married or unmarried, enter a sexual union, they become one flesh. Even relations with a prostitute constitute this union (1 Cor 6:16). Therefore, in line with this principle, remarriage is permitted in those cases when the husband or wife violates or had violated that principle by fornication before marriage or adultery in marriage. Such a disruption of the “one flesh” union with the marriage partner liberates the offended party to divorce and remarry.

The apostle Paul informs us of yet another exception to the ban on divorce and remarriage. To the Corinthian church, he writes, “Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such {cases,} but God has called us to peace” (1 Cor 7:15).

Not all agree that Paul is permitting remarriage in this verse. Some debate the meanings of “bondage” and “peace.” To clarify the matter, we consider similar expressions in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and Romans 7:2, where Paul specifically permits remarriage after a husband’s death.

- A wife is *bound* as long as her husband lives; but if her husband is dead, she is *free* to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39).
- For the married woman is *bound* by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is *released* from the law concerning the husband (Rom 7:2).

We also note that Paul acknowledges that a single person may well “burn {with passion}” (1 Cor 7:9), which may correspond to his use of the expression “God has called us to peace” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 as referring to satisfaction of sexual desire through remarriage.

Another observation reinforces our conviction that Paul was permitting remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:15. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-16, he creates a parallel between divorce between believers, and the believer being divorced by an unbeliever. Concerning the former, we read, “But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (*but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband*).” In the latter case, however, Paul makes no qualification such as “she must remain unmarried,” which one might expect to see if he was not allowing remarriage in that case either. Instead, he writes, “The brother or the sister is not under bondage in such {cases}, but God has called us to peace,” which implies the opposite – remarriage is permitted.

In church history, we witness examples where Christian confessions have adopted unbiblical views on divorce and remarriage. On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that only death of a spouse can nullify the marriage covenant. Those who divorce and remarry are denied participation in the Eucharist.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, from the tenth century on Eastern Orthodoxy allows divorce and remarriage (up to the fourth marriage).<sup>99</sup> Meyendorff explains the Orthodox position:

Remarriage of the widowed was only tolerated by them, as was the remarriage of the divorced. But this “toleration” did not mean approval. It implied repentance, and remarriage was allowed only to those men or women whose previous marriage could be considered non-existent in practice.”<sup>100</sup>

He justifies this view as follows:

Like all sacraments marriage requires a free response and implies the possibility of human rejection and human mistake; and that, after a sinful such rejection or human mistake, repentance always allows a

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<sup>98</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1640, 1649, 1650. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM). Yet, they can be restored to Eucharistic fellowship through the sacrament of confession (see <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/divorce-annulment-remarriage-and-communion-a-catholic-primer>).

<sup>99</sup>Meyendorff J. Byzantine Theology. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 198.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

new beginning. This is the theological basis for the toleration of divorce in the early Christian Church, as well as in Byzantium.”<sup>101</sup>

The second comparison between the Trinity and the marriage relationship concerns the equality of husband and wife in value and dignity. They both enjoy free and equal access to God through Christ. Paul comments on this, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). It is notable that in the Old Testament, the sign of one’s covenant with God, circumcision, applies only to males. In the New Covenant, though, both genders receive water baptism.

Finally, just as in the Trinity, the Bible reveals that each partner fulfills special and complimentary functions and carries certain responsibilities. Ephesians 5:25-33 instructs the husband to love his wife, and then goes on to define this love – he should love her as his own body and as Christ loves the Church. The wife stands in need of the husband’s protection, provision, attention, and affection.

In Colossians 3:19, Paul again instructs husbands to love their wives, but adds, “Do not be embittered against them.” The husband is called to exercise patience toward his wife and not to focus on her shortcomings. Peter admonishes the husband in a similar manner: “You husbands in the same way, live with {your wives} in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet 3:7).

We may sum up the biblical teaching on the husband’s responsibility to the wife with the words “care,” “patience,” and “respect.” The godly husband handles his wife like a precious vessel, which he looks after with great care and tenderness. It is no surprise, then, to discover that a common complaint made by wives about their husbands is neglect or lack of attention. This failure by the husband is directly addressed by the Scriptures quoted above and can be corrected by their observance.

The Scriptures also address the wife’s role and responsibilities. Both Ephesians 5:22 and Colossians 3:18 declare, “Wives, be subject to your husbands.” Peter echoes this injunction (1 Pet 3:1). This is the primary charge to the wife found in Scripture – being subject to one’s spouse. Therefore, we are not surprised that a common complaint by the husband is a lack of respect and cooperation from his wife. It is difficult for the husband to lead if the wife refuses to follow. Since the biblical teaching of the wife’s submission is very controversial in today’s world and Church, we devote more attention to this issue in Appendix A.

In conclusion, we must address certain practices that were widespread and well-accepted under the Old Covenant, but are not applicable in the New Covenant, namely, polygamy and levirate marriage. The latter refers to a man’s obligation to marry his brother’s widow if she is childless (Deut 25:5-10; Ruth 4:5, 10). This practice was instituted so that a man’s “name will not be blotted out from Israel.” Yet, since in the New Covenant salvation and inclusion in God’s people does not depend on physical descent, this practice has lost its relevance.

Concerning polygamy, God allowed multiple wives in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, this arrangement led to many complications, for example, bitter envy and jealousy between a man’s wives (see Gen 16, 29-30; 1 Sam 1:1-6). Polygamy also resulted in Solomon falling away from the Lord (1 Kin 11:1).

New Covenant believers observe the principle of “one flesh,” which Jesus emphasized in His teaching on divorce: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Matt 19:5). In this same context, Jesus clarified that divorce (and, by implication, polygamy) was formerly permitted because of “hardness of heart” (Matt 19:8). The apostles’ teaching confirms the New Testament standard – bishops and deacons are to be husbands “of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12).

### **c. Singleness**

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

In discussing marital relations, we must not neglect to touch on the issue of singleness. Not all people marry or desire to marry. First of all, though, we must qualify that, unlike certain trajectories in the Church and religion in general, the Scriptures never decry marriage (Prov 18:23). Forbidding marriage, in fact, is classed as a “doctrine of demons” (1 Tim 4:1-3).

Nevertheless, from a practical point of view the unmarried state boasts some advantages, which Paul highlights in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35. The primary benefit is devoting more undistracted attention to the Lord and the things of God. The book of Acts gives an example of the four virgin daughters of Phillip, who prophesied (Acts 21:9).

The Bible reveals that the ability to remain single is a gift from God (1 Cor 7:7; Matt 19:11). The natural human tendency is to desire intimate relations with the opposite sex. Therefore, to counteract that tendency God must provide supernatural grace in order for one to live comfortably in that state.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also affirms that “virginity for the Kingdom of God come(s) from the Lord himself. It is he who gives (it) meaning and grants (it) the grace which is indispensable for living (it) out in conformity with his will.”<sup>102</sup> Yet, Catholics err in supposing that the grace of celibacy “is an unfolding of baptismal grace,”<sup>103</sup> and in requiring celibacy of their clergy.

A person can determine whether he or she has the gift of celibacy by discovering how well he or she can handle sexual temptation in the unmarried state. If a person lacks self-control, then Paul’s counsels, “Let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn {with passion}” (1 Cor 7:9). Paul advises young widows to marry for the same reason (1 Tim 5:11-15). On the other hand, Jesus advises those who are endowed with the gift of celibacy to employ it (Matt 19:12).

Certain Church Fathers held to an errant view on celibacy that some Orthodox writers have echoed. They felt that God’s original plan was not to divide the human race by genders. It is thought that such distinctions would violate the unity that creation was intended to display. This preservation of unity was an important feature of patristic theology due to the dominating influence of Neoplatonism on many of the Fathers (see Appendix B).

Consequently, it was thought that God originally intended for human reproduction to take place in a non-sexual way. Maximus the Confessor comments,

It was widely held that procreation through the union of man and woman had not been the original will of God. God would have devised another method of procreation if man had not fallen to the level of the animals, and he would have abolished the difference between male and female.<sup>104</sup>

Originally man had been created for “a mode of propagation that was deifying, divine and nonmaterial,” but his fall into sin meant that this divine plan was replaced and that man would be trapped in a material mode of propagation, one dominated by sexual passion.<sup>105</sup>

However, according to this theory God allowed the separation of the genders since He foreknew humanity’s fall into sin. Thus, sexual distinctions were a condescension by the Lord. Bulgakov comments, “(The body) was imperfect and incomplete, but made fleshly reproduction possible.... This division along with affinity of the earth with the body testifies of the body’s imperfection.”<sup>106</sup> Drawing from Maximus the Confessor, Lossky asserts,

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<sup>102</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1620.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., № 1619.

<sup>104</sup>Taken from Pelikan J. The Christian Tradition, Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom. – Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago: 1974. – P. 87; See Maximus the Confessor, *Difficult Passages*, 31; Simon the New Theologian, *Катехизические слова*, 15; Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, 3.

<sup>105</sup>Taken from Pelikan, p. 11; See Maximus the Confessor’s commentary on Dionysius’ *On the Divine Names*, 2.9.

<sup>106</sup>Булгаков С. Евхаристический догмат, часть 2-я // Журнал "Путь". 1930. №21. С. 26.

The first human was called to unify in himself the entirety of the created order; he was to attain complete union with God and at the same time communicate deification to all creatures. First of all, he was to overcome the division in his own nature between the sexes by means of a life without passion in accordance with the Divine Archetype.<sup>107</sup>

John of Damascus believed that the Fall resulted in people becoming attached to earthly things. This necessitated reproduction by sexual means:

But since God in His prescience knew that man would transgress and become liable to destruction, He made from him a female to be a help to him like himself... if he transgressed and inclined the rather to what was material, and tore his mind from the Author of his being, I mean God, his fate was to be corruption, and he was to become subject to passion instead of passionless, and mortal instead of immortal, and dependent on connection and unsettled generation.<sup>108</sup>

Clement of Alexandria thought along the same lines. On the one hand, he affirmed the institute of marriage and considered it God's gift. Nevertheless, he believed that the married couple should abstain from sexual intimacy, except to have children.<sup>109</sup>

Commenting on the teaching of Gregory Palamas, Mantzaridis defends celibacy, arguing that it reflects eschatological life:

Man imitates the Kingdom of heaven and participates in the life to come.... Marriage, inaugurated on earth because of the disobedience of our progenitors, is forgiven by God and has His blessing; but it is not the ideal way for man to achieve perfection, because it binds him to a life of cares and renders more difficult the attainment of virtue.<sup>110</sup>

The Western Church at times joined the Eastern Fathers in lauding the celibate life. Jerome, for example, writes,

Virginity is natural while marriage only follows guilt [the fall] ... I praise marriage – because it gives me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns.<sup>111</sup>

However, this teaching has no biblical basis. The Scriptures speak positively of the marriage state. This theory is merely another attempt to adapt Christianity to the Neoplatonic worldview by which many of the Fathers were deceived. It results in a disparaging view toward our material nature and has affinity with Greek philosophy, but is contrary to sound Christian doctrine.

#### **d. Homosexuality**

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<http://www.odinblago.ru/path/21/1>. Author's translation.

<sup>107</sup>Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия Восточной Церкви и Догматическое богословие. – М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – Р. 83. Author's translation.

<sup>108</sup>*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 2:30.

<sup>109</sup>Lane, p. 19.

<sup>110</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 73-74.

<sup>111</sup>*Letter 22*, 19-20. Taken from Lane, p. 46.

Our final topic for discussion is homosexuality and the related issues of trans-sexuality. Although alternative lifestyles are gaining support and acceptance in society, they have no biblical justification. The Scriptures consider such behavior abominable (Lev 18:2; 20:13) and errant (Rom 1:26-27). 1 Corinthians 6:9 states that those who practice it “will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

## **2. Family**

A healthy family life is one of the keys to successful living. God Himself invented the idea of family, “from Whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Eph 3:15). A happy home is better than riches (Prov 17:1). Those who destroy it harm themselves (Prov 11:29).

The Bible speaks positively of family life: “Behold, children are a gift of Yahweh, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them” (Ps 127:3-5). Some mistakenly feel that children play an insignificant role in God's plan. Due to such thinking, Jesus' disciples tried to prevent children from coming to Him. Jesus, though, rebuked them saying, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt 19:14).

### **a. Role of the Parents**

Parents who faithfully follow the Lord can expect His blessing on their family. We first encounter this promise in the Mosaic Law. For those who are faithful to the covenant, “Blessed {shall be} the offspring of your body” (Deut 28:4). The Psalms repeatedly echo this thought: “Praise Yahweh! How blessed is the man who fears Yahweh, who greatly delights in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed” (Ps 112:1-2); “The children of Your servants will continue, and their descendants will be established before You” (Ps 102:28); and, “His descendants are a blessing” (Ps 37:26). The Proverbs continue this theme: “The tent of the upright will flourish” (Prov 14:11); “The descendants of the righteous will be delivered” (Prov 11:21). On the other hand, “The descendants of the wicked will be cut off” (Ps 37:28).

Although the Bible records barrenness among God's people, God also intervened to give children to Sarah (Gen 17:15-16), Rebekah (Gen 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:22), Hannah (1 Sam 1:20), the wife of Manoah (Judg 13:3), Elizabeth (Lk 1:13), and others.

God's Word stresses that fathers should instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. Both testaments contain this exhortation:

- You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up (Deut 6:7; cf. Deut 6:20-23; 11:19; Joel 1:3).
- Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

The mother is also to participate in the spiritual nurture of children, especially when the father is an unbeliever. Paul's gospel coworker, Timothy, was raised under the godly influence of his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois (2 Tim 1:5). In 1 Corinthians 7:14, Paul writes that a believing wife exerts a sanctifying influence on her children. Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord (1 Sam 1:24-28), and he became the great prophet Samuel.

God's Word promises that the spiritual instruction received in the home will remain with the child: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6).<sup>112</sup> Moreover, in Old Testament times a father influenced the spiritual health of the family in other ways as well. Job, for example, made sacrifices for his children in case they had sinned in some manner (Job 1:4-5). According to Mosaic Law, a father could annul an inappropriate vow made by his daughter (Num 30:3-5).

Along with instruction in the Word, parents are obliged to discipline their children. The Proverbs abound with such exhortations: "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Prov 13:25), and "Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not desire his death" (Prov 19:18; cf. 19:19; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). The life of David exhibits the tragic consequences of failing to adequately discipline one's children (see 1 Kin 1:5-6).

Nevertheless, in Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 Paul warns fathers not to exacerbate their children. A father who is overly demanding or insensitive to his children can, in the end, embitter them and incite them to rebel against his authority. A father must act wisely – to instruct without being heavy handed.

The biblical portrait of the father also portrays him as the provider for the home. Elimelech is a worthy example, who left his home country during a famine to provide for his family in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1-2). In addition, a father defends his family. We note how Jacob went on before his wife and children to meet Esau, whom he feared might do harm to them (Gen 33).

The Bible assigns to the wife the special role of caring for the physical needs of the home. They serve as hostesses of the home and direct its operations (1 Tim 5:14; Tit 2:4-5). Although the working wife has become fashionable in modern times, she must not allow outside involvements to cause her to neglect home and family.

A mother naturally possesses a special attachment to her children. We observe this when Solomon resolved a conflict between two women claiming the same child as their own (1 Kin 3:26-27). Additionally, although she was not her actual descendant, Naomi demonstrated exceptional care for her daughter-in-law, Ruth (Ruth 3:1).

Scripture records several unfortunate instances where parents mistreated their children. The Mosaic Law, for example, forbade child-sacrifice (Lev 20:1-5), a practice of that time in pagan religions. We read of the unthinkable act of eating one's offspring in time of famine (2 Kin 6:28-29). In another instance, a man of Ephraim, who received a Levite as a guest, offered to a mob of homosexuals his own daughters instead of his guest (Judg 19:22-24). Moreover, although such an act was never forbidden, some fathers abused their daughters by offering them as a reward for some service done for them (Judg 1:12-14; Josh 15:16; 1 Sam 18:17, etc.).

Problems also arise when parents show favoritism to a certain child.<sup>113</sup> This was the case with Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:28; cf. chp. 27) and between the sons of Jacob (Gen 37:3ff). It is very possible that the special attention Jacob paid to Benjamin (Gen 42) led to the loose behavior of his descendants (Judg 19-21).

In spite of the mistakes and offenses done by parents in child raising, God's redemptive purpose for the family remains: "He will restore the hearts of the fathers to {their} children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal 4:6).

Beyond the nuclear family, the influence of godly grandparents is invaluable. With age lies wisdom (Job 12:12), which can enrich the entire family. At the same time, grandchildren are considered the "crown of old men" (Prov 17:6).

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<sup>112</sup>At the same time, we recognize that other factors may effect the promised outcome. We see in Scripture that not all descendants of godly parents followed their example, such as the sons of Samuel (1 Sam 8:3), Hezekiah (2 Kin 21:1-3), and the grandson of Moses (Judg 18:30).

<sup>113</sup>Having said that, we also take into consideration that in the Old Testament the firstborn had rights to a larger share of the family inheritance. Still, there were exceptions when a different son received the inheritance (1 Chr 26:10) or when, in the absence of a son, a daughter was named the heir (Num 27:1-14; Josh 17:3-4).

## **b. Role of the Children**

The basic principle children are to observe in relation to their parents is expressed in both testaments: “Honor your father and your mother” (Deut 5:16; Eph 6:2), which is accompanied by a promise of blessing: “...so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth” (Eph 6:3), as well as by a curse to those who fail to do it (Deut 27:16).

Honor for parents primarily consists of obedience (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20). Children are obliged to harness their desire for freedom and independence until they complete their entire course of domestic training (see Lk 15:12ff). The Old Testament presents us with some interesting examples of children’s obedience. God Himself singled out the sons of Jonadab, whose submissive spirits contrasted with the stubborn independence of Israel at that time (Jer 35). God promised them a special blessing for their obedience to their father: “Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me always” (Jer 35:19).

Respect and obedience to parents requires children to heed their instruction: “A wise son {accepts his} father’s discipline, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke” (Prov 13:1). Wise Solomon repeatedly urges children to listen to their parents (Prov 1:8-9; 4:1-4; 6:20-23).

Honoring parents also means doing them no harm. The book of Proverbs forbids one to “curse his father or his mother” (Prov 20:20; 30:11, 17), “rob his father or his mother” (Prov 28:24), or “assault” or “drive (them) away” (Prov 19:26).

Children are to care for their elderly parents. In Solomon’s words, “Do not despise your mother when she is old” (Prov 23:22). Jesus interpreted the commandment, “Honor your father and mother,” in terms of financial support (see Matt 15:3-6). In addition, Jesus provided for his mother as He was dying by entrusting her to His disciple John (Jn 19:26-27). Paul affirms the same principle:

But if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.... But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:4, 8).

The happiness and well-being of parents depend to a great degree on their children’s behavior. Proverbs repeatedly echoes the refrain, “A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish son is a grief to his mother” (Prov 10:1; also see Prov 15:20; 17:21, 25; 19:13; 23:15-16, 24-25; 27:11; 29:3). A child’s success has an effect on his or her parents (1 Sam 17:55-58). Not only do parents glory in their children, but also a son glories in his father (Prov 17:6).

## **c. Other Factors**

Between family members, a special bond exists that becomes most apparent during times of crisis, as the Scripture says, “A brother is born for adversity” (Prov 17:17). When hard time come, as a rule, the family rises up to lend support to those members in need. Even Joseph’s brothers, who hated their brother, nonetheless were ready to show him some measure of mercy because he was their brother (Gen 37:27). Joseph himself is an excellent example of forgiveness within the family unit. Even after his brothers sold him into slavery, he was ready to forgive them and provide for them (Gen 45).

Support may come even from outside the boundaries of the immediate family. For example, Boaz showed favor to the family of his departed relative Elimelech by marrying his widowed daughter in law, Ruth. In addition, it was proscribed in the Mosaic Law that an individual should redeem the land of a poor relative (Lev 25:25). Moreover, Mordecai took in Esther, his uncle’s daughter, because she was without support (Est 2:7). In the New Testament, Paul was warned by his sister’s son of an ambush planned against him (Acts 23:16-22).



However, the Bible also recorded numerous instances of abuse within the family. Along with the case of Joseph's brothers, the half-brothers of Jephthah also dealt cruelly with him (Judg 11:1-3). Furthermore, Job's family abandoned him in his time of need (Job 19:13-19) and Laban took advantage of Jacob's vulnerable position (Gen 29-31). Even the Savior was initially rejected by his family (Matt 13:53-57; Jn 4:44). Therefore, Micah's admonition sometimes applies:

Do not trust in a neighbor; do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom guard your lips. For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household (Mic 7:5-6).

No matter how meaningful good family relationships may be, one's relationship with God always holds priority (Lk 14:26). According to our Lord Jesus, our role as disciples has higher priority than our position in our natural family: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt 10:37). There are times when obedience to God results in conflicts in the home. In such instances, one must do that which pleases God. Even the Old Covenant required family members to participate in the execution of someone leading Israel away from Yahweh (Deut 13:6-11). We also recall the time when some Israeli men parted with their Gentiles wives, whom they had been forbidden to marry (Ez 10:3ff).<sup>114</sup>

### 3. Friendship

Friendship is part of God's plan for a healthy social life. Williams defines friendship as "a relationship of mutual trust and congeniality."<sup>115</sup> It is important to remember that, unlike familial relationships, which are set from birth, friendship is a voluntary association. Families are determined by birth, while friendship is a free choice.

Before we examine the Bible's teaching on the subject, we will comment on the historical context in which these instructions were given, that is, the practice of friendship among the Jews and the Greeks.<sup>116</sup>

The Greeks highly valued friendship. It held an important place in their culture. Although friends did gather in groups, more commonly one party would meet with another. Curiously, the Greeks considered that the highest expression of friendship was for one individual to lay down his or her life for a friend. Jesus taught His disciples the same in John 15:13. The Greeks not only enjoyed friendship, but also wrote about it. Aristotle spoke of friends as "one soul," that is, soulmates.

The Old Testament sometimes describes friendship in covenantal terms. When two individuals became friends, they would sometimes make a covenant between themselves (see 1 Sam 23:18). A covenant obligated the parties to support one another, which extended the friendship beyond the level of feeling and emotion to promise and dedication. Because of his friendship/covenant with Jonathan, for example, David extended kindness to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:1, 7; 21:7).

In the apocryphal work *Sirach*, we find specific instruction about friendship (see *Sirach*, 6.5-17; 11.29-12.18; 22.19-26; 37.1-6). In *Sirach*, we also read, "A faithful friend is a strong defense, and he that findeth him findeth a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price, and his worth cannot be weighed. A faithful friend is a 'bundle of life,' he that feareth God obtaineth him (*Sirach*, 6.14-16)."<sup>117</sup>

The Hebrew term for friendship is רֵעַ (*rea*). It can refer to a friend, a near neighbor, a countryman, a comrade, the friend of the bridegroom, or a lover. It is also used in the expression "one another," which in the

<sup>114</sup>However, this rule does not apply to "mixed" marriages (i.e., believers with unbelievers) today (see 1 Cor 7:12-13).

<sup>115</sup>Williams S. K. Friendship // Achtemeier P. J. Harper's Bible Dictionary. – San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. – P. 322-323.

<sup>116</sup>Williams, p. 322-323; Stählin G. φίλος // Kittel G., Gerhard F., Geoffrey W. B. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 1267.

<sup>117</sup>Williams, p. 322-323.

Hebrew is rendered “a person with his friend.”<sup>118</sup> Other Hebrew terms expressing this concept are אֱלֹף (*aluph*), meaning “one engaged,” מִיֻּדָּע (*miyudah*), or “acquaintance,” and אֹהֵב (*othav*), denoting “one who loves.”<sup>119</sup> In addition, the phrase אִישׁ שְׁלֹמֹם (*ish shalom*), i.e., “a man of peace,” could also refer to a friend.<sup>120</sup>

The Greek designations for friendship are as follows. The primary term is φίλος (*philos*), or in the verbal form, φιλέω (*phileo*), indicating brotherly love. The adjective ἰδιός (*idios*), meaning “one’s own,” can refer to friends as well.<sup>121</sup>

What does the Bible have to say about friendship? The bond of true friendship is stable and consistent (Prov 17:17). A friend is there even in hard times (Prov 27:10; Ecc 4:9-12; 1 Sam 19-20; 2 Sam 15:13). One may expect from a friend open and honest counsel (Prov 27:6, 9, 17). A friend can keep a secret (Prov 17:9; 11:13). In Jesus’ words, the highest expression of friendship is to lay down one’s life for a friend (Jn 15:13). The Scriptures speak of “a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov 18:24).<sup>122</sup>

The Bible presents several examples of friendship, such as Ruth with Naomi, David with Jonathan, and Daniel with his three friends. Jesus Christ, being truly human, also had friends. Although He loved all persons, He nonetheless had a special relationship with the apostle John (Jn 21:7) and with Lazarus and his sisters (Jn 11:5, 36).<sup>123</sup>

At the same time, the Bible warns us to be aware of certain excesses. If a friend, for example, is leading us away from the Lord, we must not follow him or her into error (Deut 13:6-8). Thus, we cannot always trust our comrades – a friend may give us bad counsel (2 Sam 13:1-5). If one must decide between being faithful to God or a friend, the former always has our first loyalty (Ex 32:27). The Bible also warns that improper behavior by a friend can have a negative effect (Prov 22:24-25; 1 Cor 15:33). This may also necessitate terminating the relationship.

It is interesting to observe that the Bible discourages us from having too many friends (Prov 18:24). Furthermore, possibly the most destructive foe of friendship is gossip (Prov 16:28; 17:9). A healthy friendship is preserved by refraining from speaking or listening to empty rumors.<sup>124</sup>

In spite of the intimacy and familiarity that close friends enjoy, one must be on guard not to take one’s friend for granted, but rather always show due respect (Prov 27:14; 25:17). The Scriptures warn, “A brother offended {is harder to be won} than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel (Prov 18:19).

A friend’s betrayal is most painful (Lk 21:16; Mic 7:5), or when a friend abandons us in time of trouble (Prov 19:4-7). Therefore, our trust must be, first and foremost, in the Lord, who will never leave us or forsake us. The Bible forbids becoming surety for a companion (Prov 22:26-27). It is preferred to seek another means out of a financial crisis.<sup>125</sup>

In ancient Israel, we encounter a special designation – the “friend of the king.” The Bible mentions: Ahuzzath, the “friend” (מִרְעֵ) of king Abimelech (Gen 26:26); Hushai, the friend of David (2 Sam 15:37); and Zabud, the friend of Solomon (1 Kin 4:5). Other, unnamed “friends” of Saul (2 Sam 3:8) and Baasha (1 Kin 16:11) are also mentioned, as well as friends of Haman (Est 6:3).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Harris R. L. רעה // Harris R. L., Archer G. L., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980. – P. 853; Swanson J. Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament). – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997. – Electronic resource.

<sup>119</sup>Scott J. B. אֱלֹף // Harris R. L., Archer G. L., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980. – P. 47-48; Harris R. L. ידע // Harris, Archer, Waltke, p. 367; BDB, p. 12-13

<sup>120</sup>Williams, p. 322-323.

<sup>121</sup>BDAG, p. 466.

<sup>122</sup>Swanson J. T. New Nave's Topical Textbook.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Mitchell T. C. Friend of the King // Wood D. R. W. Marshall I. H. New Bible Dictionary. – 3rd ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996. – P. 386.

Most likely, the expression “friend of the king” refers to someone who was not necessarily a personal friend of the king, but rather a counsellor. Certain features confirm our conclusion: (1) they were commonly found in the royal court, (2) they are listed among other deputies (1 Kin 4:5), (3) Haman’s friends are also called “wise men” (Est 6:13), and (4) Hushai, the friend of David, subsequently served Absalom in that same capacity (2 Sam 15:34; 16:18). On the other hand, occupying a government position does not exclude a personal friendship developing along with it. For example, when everyone was abandoning David, Hushai desired to remain with him and support him.<sup>127</sup>

God’s Word provides some helpful suggestions for establishing healthy friendships. One must consider the character of candidates for friendship. The book of Proverbs advises us not to be “with heavy drinkers of wine, {or} with gluttonous eaters of meat,” (Prov 23:20), not to “eat the bread of a selfish man, or desire his delicacies” (Prov 23:6-8), and not to “associate with a gossip” (Prov 20:19), or “with those who are given to change” (Prov 24:21).

It is vital to care for one’s friends (Acts 19:31; Ps 35:14). One must be aware of a friend’s needs and respond to them. Friends help one another (Lk 7:6; 11:5-8; Gen 38:20). It is important to support a friend in difficult times (Acts 27:3). It is necessary to spend time together in order to develop and solidify that relationship (Matt 9:11; Lk 14:12; 15:29; Gen 38:12; Zech 3:8).<sup>128</sup>

Friends share with one another their life experiences (Acts 10:24; Lk 15:6, 9). They often share common interests (Lk 23:12), which allows them to share more life experiences. They seek each other’s good and rejoice with the success of the other (Dan 2:49; Ps 122:8). Without doubt, good friends, if they are believers, pray one for another (Job 42:10).

Friends share with each other not only life experiences, but inner thoughts and feelings as well (Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15; Judg 7:13-14; Lk 12:4; 16:9). They counsel one another (2 Sam 13:3), give gifts to each other (1 Sam 30:26), and are prepared to suffer with their comrades (1 Kin 16:11).<sup>129</sup>

Although all friends hope that their relationship will be characterized by intimacy and faithfulness, the Bible warns that it does not always turn out that way. Friends may fail to support us (Job 6:14), may mock us (Job 12:4; 16:20), forget us (Job 19:14), or even betray us (Ps 55:12-14; Job 6:27; 17:5; Zech 13:6; Ps 41:9). It may come to the point that a friend wishes our demise (Jer 20:10; 38:22; Lam 1:2, 19). Although friendship is necessary and beneficial, there are no perfect people in a fallen world. Therefore, we can never expect a perfect relationship. Our best friend is always the Lord.<sup>130</sup>

#### 4. Culture

Among people groups in the world, a phenomenon called “culture” has developed, which involves the sharing of certain features between those in a defined group. We will examine culture as an aspect of God’s plan for the social development of humanity.

Carl Henry proposes a good definition of culture: “Culture is a complex of shared beliefs and customs, laws and morals,”<sup>131</sup> and, “By culture we mean those beliefs, norms and practices that distinguish the lifeway and lifestyle of a particular society.”<sup>132</sup> In other words, we can define culture as the sum total of factors that unite a certain people group and distinguish it from others. We can include a common language, history, customs, and

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<sup>127</sup>Mitchell, p. 386; Anderson A. A. 2 Samuel // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 205; Payne D. F. 1-2 Samuel // Carson D. A., France R. T., Motyer J. A., Wenham G. J. New Bible commentary: 21st century edition. – 4th ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994. – P. 330.

<sup>128</sup>Swanson J. T. New Nave's Topical Textbook.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Henry C. F. H. God, Revelation, and Authority. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999. – V. 5. – P. 406.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., v. 5, p. 395.

worldview. In Hiebert's opinion, culture is an integrated system of learned thought and behavior that characterizes a certain culture.<sup>133</sup> Nida states that culture includes "all learned behavior which is socially acquired.... It is a way of behaving, thinking, and reacting.... We see the manifestation of culture in objects, actions, and situations."<sup>134</sup>

How do cultures form? We trace their earliest development to the time after the Fall, when certain groups of people began to manifest certain distinguishing traits. Scripture distinguishes the line of Cain from the line of Seth (Gen 5), ascribing more praiseworthy behavior to the latter.

The flood of Noah, of course, erased all ethnicity and cultural diversity. The descendants of Noah's sons strove for unity instead. God interpreted this unified humanity as a threat and disbursed humanity by confusing their languages. Therefore, the factor that precipitated the formation of postdiluvian cultures was language. Inability to communicate forced people groups to form around those with a common tongue and isolated them from others. In time, these groups formed their own unique worldviews, customs, and traditions that isolated them from other people groups even more.<sup>135</sup> Genesis 10:5 describes the descendants of Japheth as a scattered people, characterized by cultural distinctions: "From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations."

All people, including believers in Jesus Christ, belong to a certain culture. The Church, however, is a subculture in the midst of secular cultures, to which belong certain beliefs, experiences, and practices that define the faith and lifestyle of its members. Consequently, the Church and secular culture interface and interact one with another.

On the one hand, culture exercises a strong influence on believers' lives, especially due to the fact that they were participants in their secular culture before they entered the subculture of the Church. Consequently, secular culture may define for believers their values, priorities, perspective, lifestyle, etc. It is vital, then, that believers are aware of those features of their culture that conflict with Christian faith, and of those that present no conflict. The Bible does not forbid participation in non-sinful aspects of one's culture. Yet, when cultural values depart from biblical ones, the sincere believer will side with God.

Culture also influences how followers of Jesus interpret the Bible. We often read Scripture through the prism of our cultural values. Therefore, believers must be vigilant and attentive to ensure an honest and objective interpretation of the biblical text.<sup>136</sup>

On the other hand, the Bible also indicates that the Church exercises a certain influence on secular culture. Jesus called His disciples to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matt 5:13-14). Salt preserves, and light shows the right path. Therefore, by means of the Church God enlightens humanity with His truth and seeks to preserve it from destruction. We note how God promised Abraham that He would spare Sodom if He found only ten righteous persons there (Gen 18:32). We can claim that the presence of God's people in the world today has a similar effect, and that God delays His judgment for our sake. A belief exists, in fact, that the "one who restrains" in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 is the Church, whose presence hinders the appearance of antichrist.

In conclusion of this topic, we will give a quick look at a well-known publication on this issue: *Christ and Culture*, by H. R. Niebuhr.<sup>137</sup> He lists five different approaches to defining this relationship: Christ against culture, the Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture. To simplify this scheme, we will focus on three options: rejection of culture, endorsement of culture, and sanctification of culture.

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<sup>133</sup>Hiebert P. G. *Cultural Anthropology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983. – P. 25.

<sup>134</sup>Nida E. cited in Sookhdeo P. *Cultural Issues in Partnership in Mission* // Taylor W. D. *Kingdom Partnerships for Synergy in Missions* / World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission. – Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1994. – P. 52.

<sup>135</sup>Henry, v. 5, p. 396; Abate E. *The Church, Culture and Ethnicity: A Theological View* // *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 2000. № 24. – P. 144.

<sup>136</sup>Sookhdeo, p. 53; Henry, v. 5, p. 397.

<sup>137</sup>Niebuhr H. R. *Christ and Culture*. – New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951.

The first position asserts that believers should reject culture and separate themselves from people of this world. It is believed that human cultures are totally given over to sin. Therefore, Christians should have nothing to do with distorted secular culture and must refrain from participation in secular affairs.

Exponents of this view cite in support the biblical injunction to be separate from the world. Friendship with the world is forbidden (2 Cor 6:14; Jam 4:4). The world lies under the power of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19; 2 Cor 4:4). Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). We are only strangers and aliens on this planet (1 Pet 2:11). Some early Fathers adopted this view, Tertullian in particular. Monasticism arose as a means to escape this sinful world and devote oneself to the Lord.<sup>138</sup>

However, there are problems with this understanding. First, later in this section we will list biblical arguments supporting Christians' involvement in the world. Second, when we examine passages of Scripture speaking of separation from the world, we must be careful to properly define the concept "world."

The word "world" translates the Greek term κόσμος (*cosmos*), which has several denotations, including: (1) the planet Earth, (2) humanity, and (3) a system of thought, belief, and action that is contrary to God and His ways. In other words, κόσμος (*cosmos*) can indicate: (1) where people live, (2) people themselves, or (3) how people live.

It is insightful to compare these three usages of κόσμος (*cosmos*) with the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. In chapter 1, God created the material world and all that it contains. Genesis chapter 2 focuses on the creation of people. Genesis 3 records the Fall of humanity into a state of sin and depravity. It is vital to distinguish these three meanings from one another in order to have a proper understanding of the relationship between Christianity and culture.

The apostle John devotes special attention to this question. In John 1:9, he speaks of κόσμος (*cosmos*) as the planet Earth: "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." In John 3:16, κόσμος (*cosmos*) refers to humanity: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Finally, in 1 John 2:15-16, he speaks of κόσμος (*cosmos*) as an anti-God system of values: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." All three nuances of κόσμος (*cosmos*) are found in John 17:15-18.

So then, separation from the world does not mean isolation from the planet or its inhabitants, but rejecting worldly values and lifestyle. The world we must separate ourselves from is not culture in its entirety, but from the anti-God values and sinful practices that it sometimes promotes. Since at times cultural values may overlap with biblical standards and some cultural practices are morally neutral (neither right nor wrong), we cannot recommend total abstinence from cultural life.

The second approach is to reconcile Christ with human cultures and unify them. On the other hand, it is clear that all human cultures embrace certain values and practices that depart from the biblical norm. In fact, Paul summons all peoples of all cultures to repent (Acts 17:26-30). Peter calls the secular world of his day a "perverse generation" (Acts 2:40).<sup>139</sup>

The final option, "sanctification of culture," acknowledges both positive and negative elements in the cultures of the world and feels that God can cleanse and restore human cultures to conformity with His standards. We defend the claim that culture contains positive elements by citing passages where people observed certain cultural practices without censor from the Lord.<sup>140</sup> Even after his conversion to Christ, Paul observed certain Jewish traditions, like taking a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:21-26) and celebrating the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 20:16).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Niebuhr, p. 56.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>See Judg 14:10; Ruth 4:7; 2 Kin 11:14; Est 1:13; 9:27-30; Jn 19:40; Acts 25:16

<sup>141</sup>Kaiser W. C. Hard Sayings of the Bible. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1996. – P. 537-539. Yet we also take into consideration that these "cultural activities" are rooted in God's Old Testament revelation.

In addition, Paul viewed cultural adaptation as an effective tool for evangelization. He became “all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). We also consider the incarnation of God’s Son a powerful example of adaptation to human culture. The Son of God laid aside His heavenly glory to become human and participate in Jewish culture.

A definite advantage to cultural diversity is that people from different cultures may look at the Scriptures and interpret them differently. These different perspectives can potentially enrich our understanding of the Bible in general. In addition, in 1 Corinthians 12 we see that God prefers diversity in unity. Cultural diversity, then, can enrich life in general.<sup>142</sup>

We also note that in Revelation 7:9, all peoples of the earth stand before the Lord. Their ethnicity is not erased, but is still recognized even after the rapture of the Church. Finally, according to the principle voiced in 1 Timothy 6:17, believers in the Lord are allowed to enjoy earthly pleasures, including customs of their culture, provided that they present no contradiction to God’s will.<sup>143</sup>

If we conclude, then, that the best approach to culture is to sanctify it, we must nonetheless heed several warnings. The Bible reveals that every culture has its vices, which believers must avoid (see Lev 18:30; Mk 7:8; Acts 15:20). Additionally, believers must undergo renewal of their minds to overcome false ideas and convictions instilled in their thinking by their cultural milieu (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23).<sup>144</sup>

Finally, we must acknowledge, “That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God” (Lk 16:15). That is, culture may highly value something that is reprehensible before the Lord. Citing Isaiah, Peter emphasizes the temporal nature of earthly glory: “All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Pet 1:24-25).

## 5. Society

Another avenue provided by God for relational development is participation in a secular society. We can define society as a social group living under one government system and order. It differs from culture in that, more than common ethnic features, it concerns: (1) geographic location, (2) the system of government, and (3) community order. A single society may host multiple cultures.

Although governments of the world are far from perfect, they still fill a meaningful place in God’s plan. They are established by God “for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right” (1 Pet 2:13-14; cf. Rom 13:1-6). The book of Proverbs speaks positively about government (Prov 28:16; 29:2-4, 14) and of paying taxes to it (Rom 13:6-7; Lk 20:25). We read, “The king’s heart is {like} channels of water in the hand of Yahweh; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov 21:1). Therefore, rulers are worthy of respect and submission. Without governments, society would be reduced to chaos.

A ruler, though, should care for his nation: “A king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land” (Ecc 5:9) and behave properly: “Take away the wicked before the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness” (Prov 25:5; cf. Prov 29:12; 16:10-12; 31:4-7). The Bible also reveals that the destiny of a ruler is in God’s hands. Although the Lord at times will tolerate a bad leader for a season, He can depose him or her at any time and raise up another (Dan 2:21).

Government authority, however, has limits. If certain civil laws contradict God’s laws, the latter are to be observed, even if it leads to persecution by the civil authorities. Peter and John are good examples here, when they resisted the Jewish authorities’ attempts to hinder their preaching of the gospel (Acts 4:18).

Uniting the world under one governmental system at first glance might seem advantageous. It would promote greater cooperation in solving world problems, allow greater mobility, minimize wars and political conflicts, etc.

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<sup>142</sup>Sookhdeo, p. 61.

<sup>143</sup>Gangel K. O. Christian Higher Education and Contemporary Culture: Isolation or Penetration? // Bibliotheca Sacra. 1978. № 135:540. P. 298.

<sup>144</sup>Abate, p. 145-146.

On the other hand, the world once enjoyed such a unity and employed it to rebel against the Lord (Gen 11). As a result, God confused human languages to divide the people. The Psalmist also appeals to this principle in his polemic against his enemies: “Confuse, O Lord, divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city” (Ps 55:9). The Bible also speaks of a future unification of nations under the antichrist, which also will be a conspiracy of rebellion (Revelation chp. 13). Therefore, in spite of the seeming advantages to world unity, in this fallen age it does not resonate with God’s plan.

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## Chapter 3: Satan and Demons

According to Scripture, there exist not only good angels, who serve the Lord, but evil ones as well, living in rebellion to Him. However, as often happens with any truth, people tend to either minimize it or exaggerate its importance. Animism, for example, draws attention to demonic powers to an excess, believing that spirits are responsible for every event in life. On the other hand, liberal theology denies the existence of demons, considering them mythological.<sup>145</sup>

In this chapter, we will attempt to delve into the biblical teaching on Satan and demons. Besides a biblical survey of the topic, we will also highlight several controversial questions, such as the origin of the devil and evil spirits, the existence of a demonic hierarchy, the interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, the relationship between demonic activity and God's sovereignty, and others. We will delay discussion on the themes of demon possession and victory over demonic forces until chapter 18 of this volume.

### A. Faith in Demons among the Ancients

Before embarking on our biblical survey of evil spirits, we will briefly review how certain people groups in antiquity dealt with the issue. We will discover a remarkable resemblance between the beliefs of the ancients and the biblical revelation.

Unger, in his work *Biblical Demonology*, reports that faith in evil spirits has been a universal phenomenon.<sup>146</sup> Unger rejects the proposition that the ancient understanding of demons derived from an animistic view of the powers of nature. He feels, rather, that ancient peoples retained (at least in part) God's original revelation about the nature of evil given in connection with humanity's fall into sin.<sup>147</sup>

Carus conducted research on several specific ancient people groups.<sup>148</sup> The Egyptians feared and worshipped Set, who was typically represented as a snake. He was "the awful God of irresistible power, of brute force, of war, and of destruction."<sup>149</sup> He formerly was one of the gods of Egypt, but became the "demon of death and evil."<sup>150</sup> Some Egyptians considered him the only true god.

In the religion of ancient the Akkadian Empire, we observe some interesting parallels with biblical revelation as well. We learn of Tiamtu, also represented as a snake, who was associated with the creation narrative. A cylinder from ancient Babylon depicts a snake and two humans sitting near a tree. The Persians tell of Ahriman, the rival of Ahura Mazda, who was also in the form of a snake. Ahriman was not created, yet he still occupies a place lower than Ahura Mazda. He brings harm to the world.<sup>151</sup>

As well as similarities, we also observe differences between ancient views on demons and the Bible.<sup>152</sup> Commenting on superstition among the ancients, Unger reports, "Superstitious peoples so multiply the number of demons that no part of the day or night is void of their visitations.... Countless protective expedients are resorted to, such as charms and magical incantations, to frighten them away."<sup>153</sup> Homer assigned to the word *daimōn* the meaning "the activity of God," but to the word *theos* – "the person of God." In addition, demons were sometimes considered the spirits of the deceased, who served as mediators between people and

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<sup>145</sup>Macchia F. D. Repudiating The Enemy: Satan And Demons // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 217-218.

<sup>146</sup>Unger M. F. Biblical Demonology. – Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1952. – P. 38.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p. 12-14.

<sup>148</sup>Carus P. The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil. – LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1974. – P. 15-53.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>151</sup>Unger, p. 4-5.

<sup>152</sup>McClelland S. E. Demons, Demonization // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 331.

<sup>153</sup>Unger., p. 31.

the gods and directed the universe's activity. Therefore, demons were not necessarily evil. Xenocrates (396-314 BC) made specific distinctions between good and evil demons.

## B. Biblical Doctrine of Demons and the Intertestamental Literature

### 1. Old Testament

We will see in this study how, in the course of the biblical canon, the doctrine of evil spirits undergoes a definite development. We will come to understand that God only progressively revealed to His people the existence and nature of evil forces.

#### a. Terminology

God's Word provides a variety of names and titles for Satan, each of which give us insight into his character and activity. The name "Satan" comes from the Hebrew שָׂטָן (*satan*), which does not always appear in the Old Testament as a proper name. When it stands without the article, it denotes an "adversary" or an "accuser" (Ps 109:6, 20, 29).<sup>154</sup> Consequently, Satan is always acting in opposition to the plan of God and is active in accusing the saints before the Lord.

However, when the Hebrew word שָׂטָן (*satan*) takes the definite article, it refers to a personal being, i.e., Satan. We find such a usage in Job chapters 1-2 and in Zechariah 3:1-2. The article precedes the noun in the Septuagint as well.

The word שָׂטָן (*satan*) in 1 Chronicles 21:1 is often mistakenly translated "Satan," yet here the definite article is absent: "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel." When we compare this verse with its parallel passage in 2 Samuel 24:1, we discover its true meaning: "Now again the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" The Lord, in His wrath, raised up an adversary (שָׂטָן), that is, a political threat to Israel, which caused David to number Israel in preparation for battle.

Page, however, defends the idea that Satan is meant here and argues that the article was omitted by copyist according to the common custom of omitting it before proper names. Page also notes that the text employs the word סוּת (*suth*) to describe David being stirred to number his troops (1 Chr 21:1). In Job 2:3, this same word describes how Satan incited God to test Job.<sup>155</sup> On the other hand, the article is typically omitted only before well-known names that are often encountered in the biblical text. The name "Satan," however, is rare in the Old Testament.

A key Old Testament term for the designation of demons is שֵׁט (*shed*), which is translated "demon" in Deuteronomy 32:17 and Psalm 106:37. Some propose that the term שֵׁט (*shed*) is kin to the Assyrian word *shedu*, i.e., "guarding spirit."<sup>156</sup> However, people of biblical times likely understood שֵׁט (*shed*) not as a fallen angel that followed Satan in rebellion, but as a pagan god, as seen in Deuteronomy 32:17: "They sacrificed to demons (שֵׁט) who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new {gods} who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread."

Discussion also arises over the meaning of שָׂעִיר (*sair*), which in many texts refers to a goat and derives from the word שָׁעַר (*sair*), i.e., "hairy."<sup>157</sup> In some passages, שָׂעִיר (*sair*) is an object of worship (Lev 17:7; 2 Chr 11:15), which creates the impression that some pagan idols were in the form of a goat. Of special interest is its

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<sup>154</sup>Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. – Electronic Edition, Logos Bible Software. – P. 996. (We abbreviate this resource BDB). See Num 22:22, 32; 1 Sam 29:4; 2 Sam 19:22; 1 Kin 5:4; 11:14, 23, 25; Ps 71:13; 109:4.

<sup>155</sup>Page S. H. T. Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study on Satan and Demons. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 24, 34-35

<sup>156</sup>BDB, p. 993-994. Page, p. 66.

<sup>157</sup>BDB, p. 972.

usage in Isaiah 13:21 and 34:14. Some see in these texts a reference to demons. The Septuagint and the Syrian translation translate it so. Page comments here, “Perhaps the demons were thought to take the form of goats or were conceived as hairy beings.”<sup>158</sup> However, the contexts of these verses leads us to believe that literal goats are in view.

Page also sees another indication of demons in Isaiah 34:14 in the word לִילִית (*lilith*), translated “night monster.”<sup>159</sup> This term did, in fact, refer to a demon in the Ancient Near East. Revelation 18:2, which like Isaiah 34:14, speaks of conditions after God’s judgment, may serve as a parallel: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.” Yet again, even if a demon is indicated in Isaiah 34:14, it is unlikely that the original readers of Isaiah would have understood it so.

Another controversial term in אֲזַזֵּל (*azazel*) in Leviticus 16:8, 10, 26. In its context, it refers to the scapegoat that was released into the wilderness for atonement on the Day of Atonement. Some think that a “desert demon” is meant here.<sup>160</sup> Supporters of this view draw a parallel between the phrase לְאֲזַזֵּל (*laazazel*), i.e., “for Azazel,” and לַיהוָה, i.e., “for the Lord,” seeing both as referring to personalities.<sup>161</sup> In addition, 1 *Enoch* calls a demon by this name (1 *Enoch*, 8.1).

However, Page notes several weaknesses in this interpretation.<sup>162</sup> First, why would the Lord command that His people would present a sacrifice to *Azazel*, a pagan god? Second, the Septuagint translators took this word in a different sense, translating it ἀποπομπή (*apopompe*), meaning, “a sending away.”<sup>163</sup> Third, the rabbis understood this term as referring to a certain location in the wilderness.<sup>164</sup>

Another supposed reference to demons is found in Exodus 12:23, where we encounter the word מַשְׁחִית (*mashith*), “destroyer,” i.e., the one who struck the firstborn of Egypt.<sup>165</sup> Yet, the same word is used for the angel of Yahweh in 2 Samuel 24:16. God’s angels sometimes execute His judgments. The same angels are likely in view in Psalm 78:49 as well: “He sent upon them His burning anger, fury and indignation and trouble, a band of destroying angels.” The Hebrew term translated “destroying” here is עַל (*pa*), which can denote “evil” not only in a moral sense, but also in the sense of “causing harm.” This would be a proper description for angels executing God’s judgment.

Finally, Aune directs our attention to Psalm 96:5, which the Septuagint (95:5) renders, “For all the gods of the peoples are demons (δαίμόνια).” The Hebrew text, though, reads, “For all the gods of the peoples are idols (אֱלֹהִים).” The witness of the Septuagint alone is insufficient to establish the original text of this verse.<sup>166</sup>

All things considered, our findings above do not lead us to believe that early Israel had a clear conception about the existence of evil spirits. Aune correctly concludes, “The ancient Israelite notion of Yahweh’s sovereignty did not encourage or necessitate the development of religious thought in this area.”<sup>167</sup>

## **b. Old Testament Narrative**

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<sup>158</sup>Page, p. 69.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 70-72.

<sup>160</sup>Aune D. E. *Demonology* // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 1. – P. 920.

<sup>161</sup>Noted in Page, p. 83.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid, p. 83-84.

<sup>163</sup>Lust J., Eynikel E., Hauspie K. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint: Revised Edition*. – Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2003. – P. 73.

<sup>164</sup>Aune sees references to demons in many other Old Testament passages, such as “plague” (Hab 3:5), “death” (Isa 28:15), “desert creatures” (Isa 23:13), and others (see Aune, v. 1, p. 919). Yet, these are clearly exaggerations.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 919.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., p. 919-920.

We will begin our survey of Old Testament narrative with the Fall. Although the biblical text describes the serpent as an animal (Gen 3:1), other factors lead us to believe that either Satan spoke through the serpent, or that he was the serpent himself. First, he tempted Eve. Temptation is one of the devil's main activities. Second, he displayed great cunning, which one would not expect from a simple animal. Third, Yahweh punished him for his deed, whereas animals do not carry moral responsibility.<sup>168</sup> Finally, the New Testament identifies the serpent with Satan (Rev 12:9).

However, it is unlikely that the first readers of Genesis comprehended the full significance of this narrative. All they likely understood was that once there was an evil serpent in the Garden of Eden. Page concurs, "It appears that the concept of Satan was not well developed in the OT period and that it did not exercise the sort of influence on the faith of ancient Israel that it would on late Judaism and early Christianity."<sup>169</sup>

Later in the Torah, the Mosaic Law forbade sorcery and spiritism (Ex 22:18; Lev 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:9-14), yet there is no mention that such practices were connected with a devil. Sorcery was part of pagan worship and involved calling forth departed spirits.

In spite of God's taboo on participation in sorcery, Israel nonetheless transgressed in this manner. Even though Saul "had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists," he himself employed a witch during a time of crisis (1 Sam 28). At times, false prophets served even in the king's court (1 Kin 18, 22). Among the sins for which the Lord sent the Northern Kingdom into exile were the following: "(They) worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments" (2 Kin 17:16-17). Manasseh "practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists" (2 Kin 21:6).

So then, although Israel knew little about Satan and demons on the theoretical level, in practice they delved deeply into the realm of darkness. McClelland comments here, "Though the OT offers little speculation on the subject, the practices of idolatry, magic, and witchcraft were related to demonic forces" (Deut 32:17; Ps 96:5).<sup>170</sup>

Later in the biblical canon, we see a more specific mention of the powers of darkness in the phrase "an evil spirit from Yahweh" (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14-16; 1 Kin 22:23). In Hebrew, the expression is רֵיחַ רָעָה (*ruach raa*). Especially noteworthy is the presence of an apparently evil spirit before Yahweh among the angels in 1 Kings 22. This creates the impression that this spirit is also an angel (albeit a fallen one). God's revelation of the powers of darkness is expanding.

In the examples cited above, God commissioned evil spirits for certain tasks. Does this mean that the Lord is the source of evil? We can clarify this by appealing to Paul's teaching in Romans 1, where he explains that when people persist in sin, God "gives them over" to their sinful desires and sin's consequences.

Corresponding to this, in all our examples where Yahweh sent an evil spirit, the recipients were in disobedience to Him. Before God sent an evil spirit to Saul, he has already rejected the Lord (1 Sam 15:23). The same was true for Ahab (1 Kin 22:8). Before Yahweh sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the inhabitants of Shechem, Abimelech had already seized the kingdom by violence (Judg 9:1-6). So then, evil spirits became God's method of "giving over" people to their sinful ways and their consequences.

We must clarify, though, that acknowledging the existence of demons does not imply that they are equal to Yahweh. Rather, they are under His authority. They are "from Yahweh" not in the sense of cooperation between them, but submission to His authority. As Page claims, the Old Testament does not always delineate primary from secondary causes. Ascribing the activity of evil spirits to the Lord "was sorely needed in the polytheistic environment in which the writers lived."<sup>171</sup>

The prophetic Old Testament books specifically forbade participation in the occult: Isa 8:19; 19:3; 47:9-14; 65:4, 11. Beyond this, many see in the books of Isaiah (Isa 14:4-16) and Ezekiel (Ezek 28:12-19) concrete

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<sup>168</sup>Page, p. 14.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>170</sup>McClelland, p. 331.

<sup>171</sup>Page, p. 76, 80.

information on the fall of the cherub Lucifer, who became Satan. We must investigate these passages in detail. Although he is not specifically mentioned in these texts, he appears to be represented by persons of the king of Tyre and the king of Babylon.

Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, "Thus says the Lord Yahweh, 'You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the ruby, the topaz and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers and I placed you {there}. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you. By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries. Therefore I have brought fire from the midst of you; it has consumed you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the eyes of all who see you. All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have become terrified and you will cease to be forever'" (Ezek 28:11-19).

Various interpretations are offered for this passage. The most widespread and likely correct understanding is that the king of Tyre represents the fallen cherub, Satan. Of note is that verses 1-10 address the "leader" of Tyre, in Hebrew: נָזִיר (*nazir*). Verses 11-19, though, are directed to the "king" of Tyre, i.e., מֶלֶךְ (*melech*). This change of title may reflect a change in the party addressed.

We read that the king of Tyre was a cherub, was in the Garden of Eden, dwelt on the mountain of God, and was without sin. Such a description fits an angel better than any earthly king. Next, we learn that this cherub fell into sin due to pride, which corresponds to Satan's fall as described in 1 Timothy 3:6. We also note that the king of Tyre was "created." However, God directly created only one human – Adam. Finally, God's punishment of the king corresponds to what occurred with the devil – he lost his position before God, was cast out of heaven (Rev 12:9), and will be punished with fire (Rev 20:10).

Another interpretation asserts that a historical king of Tyre is in view and that his greatness was simply exaggerated.<sup>172</sup> However, we feel that the description here is too specific and the correspondence to Satan's history too close to be merely coincidental.

A third theory proposes that aspects of Adam's history were employed to describe the literal king of Tyre. The Septuagint seems to support this view, since instead of the phrase, "You were the anointed cherub," it reads, "You were with the anointed cherub." Here, we are dealing with the Hebrew particle אֶת (*eth*) that precedes the word "cherub." This word (in its original, consonantal form) can be translated "with," or serve as the marker for the object of the verb, which is not translated. However, although Adam was with the cherub in the Garden, the remaining descriptions of this figure do not correspond to Adam. Consequently, this interpretation is also suspect.

Still others assert that this is a mythological representation of the historical king of Tyre. Such interpreters feel that other "histories" in Scripture are also mythological, such as the description of the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 and the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis.<sup>173</sup> However, we know of no such myth of a king of Tyre in ancient literature. This is pure speculation.

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<sup>172</sup>Allen L. C. Ezekiel 28-40 // Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002. – P. 94ff.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

Another theory proposes that Ezekiel 28:11ff applies to Antichrist. Yet, Ezekiel is writing about a heavenly being here. Finally, some feel Ezekiel is addressing the pagan god that supports the king of Tyre. However, Ezekiel speaks of him as a formerly sinless being who served as a cherub on the mountain of the Lord. This would not apply to a pagan god. One must also question whether Ezekiel would directly address a pagan god and thereby acknowledge its real existence.

We will take an excerpt out of Isaiah 14:4-16, which, most likely, also refers to Satan's fall:

Take up this taunt against the king of Babylon... "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol."

Among the proposed interpretations of Isaiah 14:4-16, the most popular and convincing one is a representation of Satan. The being described here resembles him most of all.

According to a rival view, the text is referring to Sennacherib, king of Assyria. The Bible testifies of his pride and haughtiness (2 Kin 18:19-25) and how the Lord smote him (2 Kin 19:35). Adherents of this interpretation feel that Sennacherib's aspiration to deity is consistent with the practice in ancient times to ascribe to a king divine prerogatives. However, this text is dealing with a king of Babylon, not of Assyria.

Still another theory holds that Isaiah is writing not about a specific Babylonian king, but of the Babylonian dynasty in its entirety. The kings of Babylon, as we know from history, were hardly modest individuals. Proponents of this view echo the argument that in antiquity people deified rulers. On the other hand, the text speaks specifically of one concrete individual.

Others feel the text applies to Antichrist under the figure of a Babylonian king. True, Antichrist will claim to be God. Yet, before he was "cut down," the Lord spoke of the figure in Isaiah 14 as the "star of the morning, son of the dawn," an unlikely designation for Antichrist.

A still more nuanced position is also advanced. According to this view, the literal king of Babylon is represented under the figure of a mythological personality named Hilel, the son of Shachar, who aspired to deity. It is thought that that expression "star of the morning," in Hebrew הִילֵל (*hilel*), and "morning" i.e., שָׁחַר (*shachar*), are proper names. It is worth noting that שָׁחַר (*shachar*) is, in fact, the name of a Canaanite god. It is also believed that the expression "the mount of assembly" may refer to the Greek idea of gods assembling on Mount Olympus. A similar tradition existed in Mesopotamia and Ugarit. Our text also contains the word צָפוֹן (*tsafon*), translated "north." A mountain by that name in northern Palestine was considered a dwelling place for the gods.<sup>174</sup>

Several factors, though, weigh against taking הִילֵל (*hilel*) as a proper name. The term is similar to the verbal form תָּלַל (*thalal*), meaning "to shine." Correspondingly, the Septuagint translates the phrase הִילֵל בֶּן־שָׁחַר (*hilel ben-shachar*) εωσφορος ο πρωι ανατελλων (*eosphoros ho proi anatellon*), i.e., "morning star, which precedes the sunrise." Along with this, the Vulgate renders it "Lucifer, qui mane oriebaris," or "Lucifer, you, who rise before the sun."

Concerning the word שָׁחַר (*shachar*), although it is the name of a Canaanite god, its conventional definition is "daybreak." Therefore, we can confidently translate בֶּן־שָׁחַר (*ben-shachar*) as "son of the daybreak."

Defenders of this theory claim that faith in mountain-dwelling gods was characteristic of pagan religions. Yet, the idea of Yahweh dwelling on a mountain (e.g. Mount Zion in Jerusalem) is also an Old Testament motif. Moreover, the Old Testament often employs the figure of a mountain for God's presence (see Ps 3:4; 15:1; 24:3; 48:2). Therefore, a single mention of a "mountain" in our text does not necessarily imply that the entire

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<sup>174</sup>Coppes L. J. הִלֵל // Harris R. L., Archer G. L. Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (electronic ed.). – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. – P. 217.

episode was borrowed from pagan superstition. The idea of “the mountain of God” is a thoroughly Old Testament concept.

Regarding the claim that the Hebrew term צפון (*tsafon*) refers to the dwelling place of Canaanite gods, we must keep in mind that this is the common word for “north” as well. Furthermore, the very same expression is used for Jerusalem, Yahweh’s dwelling place (Ps 48:2). Finally, even if myths similar to the one proposed for Isaiah 4:4-16 existed in antiquity, no concrete myth concerning Hilel, son of Shachar, has ever been identified.

Therefore, we conclude that both Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 contain a veiled revelation of Satan’s history before his fall. Since we benefit from having God’s complete revelation, today’s interpreters can recognize the symbolic nature of these passages. We do not know, however, how well people of Isaiah’s time comprehended this mystery. Possibly, they gleaned from it the existence of a certain fallen cherub.

Since the original readers would not have understood the significance of Satan’s fall, Page insists that one cannot interpret the text in this manner.<sup>175</sup> However, we do recognize the presence of “types” in Scripture, which are placed in the text not so much for the benefit of the original readers, but future ones.

In the final section of the Hebrew canon, more about the nature and activity of evil spirits is made known. Daniel 10 recounts a battle between God’s angels and “the princes of Persia and Greece.” It appears that these demonic rules are able to war with angels and hinder them for a time (Dan 10:13, 20-21). The fact that these “princes” are interacting with other angels, and that Michael is also called a “prince” (10:13), indicates that “the princes of Persia and Greece” are not pagan gods, as the ancients may have at one time understood demons, but actual fallen angels.

Finally, in the books of Zechariah and Job (which entered the Old Testament canon near the end of the canonical period) we encounter the name Satan for the first time. In addition, his evil devices are described in more detail. In Zechariah 3:1-2, we read,

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The Yahweh said to Satan, “Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?”

Here, Satan is not only called by name, but is depicted as an accuser. In response, the angel of Yahweh rebukes him in the name of the Lord.

In the book of Job, Satan is again an accuser, only this time he is accusing Job. It is curious to note that Job apparently knew nothing of the debate between God and Satan over his faithfulness. If Job, as is most likely, lived before Moses wrote the Law, then he likely did not even know of Satan’s existence. Yet, God revealed this fact to the composer of the book, both confirming Satan’s existence and describing his evil agenda. We learn also that the devil does not enjoy total freedom, but is limited by the Lord in his dark deeds.

From our survey of the Old Testament narrative, we clearly see that the Lord only progressively revealed the truth about the powers of darkness. We recall that the Old Testament came at a time when Israel was challenged by the polytheistic faith and practices of its neighbors. If Yahweh had immediately made known the truth about Satan and his fallen angels, Israel may have fallen into the error of dualism, regarding the devil as an equal rival to the Lord. In order to prevent this outcome, God withheld this revelation.

## **2. Intertestamental Literature**

Comparing the somewhat primitive understanding of demons in the Old Testament with the more developed New Testament view, we are safe to assume that this theme experienced significant development during the intertestamental period. McClelland is of the opinion that the Septuagint usage of Greek

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<sup>175</sup>Page, p. 39.



designations for demons had a marked effect on its Jewish readers' understanding of evil spirits.<sup>176</sup> The Septuagint has the terms δαιμόνια (*daimonia*) and δαιμόνιον (*diamonion*) in Ps 96:5 (LXX = 95:5) and Ps 91:6 (LXX = 90:6) respectively. The Hebrew text does not mention demons in these verses.

Curiously, many terms used to denote demons in the New Testament are already found in the intertestamental literature,<sup>177</sup> such as "demons,"<sup>178</sup> "spirits,"<sup>179</sup> "unclean/evil spirits,"<sup>180</sup> "principalities and powers,"<sup>181</sup> and "world rulers."<sup>182</sup> Angelic followers of Satan are also termed "sons of Belial,"<sup>183</sup> "angels of Satan,"<sup>184</sup> "Satan and his spirits,"<sup>185</sup> and "angels of the kingdom of Belial."<sup>186</sup>

According to the intertestamental teaching, before the world's creation a certain angel led others in rebellion against the Lord.<sup>187</sup> He is named Mastema,<sup>188</sup> Satan,<sup>189</sup> Samael,<sup>190</sup> Belial,<sup>191</sup> or the devil.<sup>192</sup> In the book of *Adam and Eve*, we read that the devil fell into sin due to his failure to worship Adam, the image of God.<sup>193</sup>

We also observe a correspondence between the activity of demons in the intertestamental literature and in the New Testament. They cause illness (*Jubilees*, 10.10-13), accuse people (*1 Enoch*, 40.7), execute God's judgment (*1 Enoch*, 53.3; 56.1; 62.11; 63.1), and tempt people (*1 Enoch*, 69.6).<sup>194</sup> The intertestamental teaching also aligns with the New Testament view that idols are, in reality, demons (1 Cor 10:20), and that demonic powers stand behind idols (see *Jubilees*, 11.4-5; 10.7-11; *Testament of Job*, 1-4; *1 Enoch*, 19.1; 99.6-9; *Baruch*, 4.7).<sup>195</sup>

Aune comments on how the activity of demons was understood at that time: "Evil began to be traced increasingly, not directly to Yahweh Himself, but rather to supernatural beings who had rebelled against God sometime in the primeval past."<sup>196</sup> In the intertestamental view, Satan is ultimately in submission to the Lord, yet he and his minions enjoy a certain degree of freedom. In *Jubilees* 10.4-13, we read that in answer to Noah's prayer, God confined 90% of the demons in prison, but allowed the remaining 10% to continue their evil work.<sup>197</sup>

The intertestamental writers devoted much attention to the interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4. Many books of that period teach that the "sons of God" that went into the daughters of men were angels.<sup>198</sup> The writers differ as to the status of the "sons of God" before that time. The book of *Jubilees* claims that they were good

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<sup>176</sup>McClelland, p. 332.

<sup>177</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 921; Arnold C. E. *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997. – P. 38.

<sup>178</sup>See *1 Enoch*, 19.1; 69.12; 99.7; *Jubilees*, 10.1; *Tobit*, 3.8, 17; 6.7, 13–15, 17; 8.3; *Baruch*, 4.7, 35.

<sup>179</sup>*Jubilees*, 10.5, 8; 11.5; 19.28; *1 Enoch*, 15.10–12; 16.1; 19.1; 69.12; *Testament of Dan*, 6.1.

<sup>180</sup>*1 Enoch*, 99.7; 15.8-9; *Tobit*, 6.7.

<sup>181</sup>*1 Enoch*, 61.10; *2 Enoch*, 20.1; *Testament of Levi*, 3.8

<sup>182</sup>*Testament of Solomon*, 18.2

<sup>183</sup>*Testament of Dan*, 1.7; *Testament of Joseph*, 7.4; *Testament of Benjamin*, 3.3; *Testament of Issachar*, 7.7

<sup>184</sup>*Testament of Asshur*, 6.4

<sup>185</sup>*Testament of Dan*, 6.1

<sup>186</sup>*1QM*, 1.15

<sup>187</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 920-921.

<sup>188</sup>*Jubilees*, 10.8-10; 11.5, 11; 49.2; 17.16; 18.9, 12; 48.1-15

<sup>189</sup>*Jubilees*, 10.11; *Adam and Eve*, 9.1; *Apocalypse of Moses*, 17.1; *1 Enoch*, 40.7; 54.6

<sup>190</sup>*CD*, 16.5

<sup>191</sup>*Testament of Dan*, 5.1; *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, 1.8-9; 2.4; 3.11; *Sibylline Oracles*, iii.63; *CD*, 5.18; *1QS*, 2.5

<sup>192</sup>*Adam and Eve*, 10.2; 11.1; 12.1; 13.1; *Apocalypse of Moses*, 15.3; 16.1, 5

<sup>193</sup>*Adam and Eve*, 12.1–16.4

<sup>194</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 921.

<sup>195</sup>Nielsburg W. E. *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. – P. 78; Page, p. 225.

<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 920.

<sup>197</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 921.

<sup>198</sup>We can list the following: *1 Enoch*, *Jubilees*, Philo, Josephus, *Testament of Reuben*, *2 Baruch*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, Dead Sea Scrolls, *Testament of Naphtali* (see Sullivan K. P. *Wrestling with Angels: A Study on the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament*. – Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004. – P. 215-220; Moeller H. R. *The Legacy of Zion*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977. – P. 52).

angels before that, while the book of Enoch calls them evil (1 Enoch, 69).<sup>199</sup> Philo of Alexandria called them demons, but at the same time, he shared the Greek opinion that demons could be good or evil.<sup>200</sup>

Furthermore, the “Nephilim” that issued from the sons of God and the daughters of men were supposedly demons (1 Enoch, 15.8-10; 16.1). Because of this brash act, the “sons of God,” which “abandoned heaven” (1 Enoch, 12.4; 1.3, 7), were bound with chains (1 Enoch, 10.4-12; 13.2; 14.5) until the day of judgment.<sup>201</sup> The world became corrupt due to their influence, necessitating the flood of Noah.<sup>202</sup>

### 3. New Testament

#### a. Terminology

The English designation “devil” comes from the Greek διάβολος (*diabolos*). The Septuagint translates the Hebrew שָׂטָן (*satan*) with this term. Its basic meaning is “slanderer/gossip,” or “accuser.” It is used with this sense in 1 Timothy 3:11, 2 Timothy 3:3, and Titus 2:3. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is the “accuser of our brethren... who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Satan is described as a δράκων (*drakon*), “dragon,” only in the book of Revelation, but there the term is used 12 times. This designation emphasizes the threat this creature presents to God’s people and the world in general. The term ὄφις (*ophis*), “serpent,” also applies to the devil (2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:14-15). This brings to mind the narrative of Genesis 3, where Satan manifest as a serpent. The term can refer to demons as well (Lk 10:19; Lk 11:11). The serpent is characterized by slyness and repulsiveness, features that apply well to Satan.

Revelation 9:11 contains the only mention of the “angel of the abyss.” The way this book uses the term “abyss” is notable. On the one hand, it is the place of departure for the beast and the scorpions, who are ruled by the prince of darkness (Rev 9:1-11; 11:7; 17:8). On the other hand, it is the place where the devil will be cast and bound during the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:1-3).

The title Abaddon, or in Greek ἀβαδδών (*abaddon*), is found only in Revelation 9:11. The word ἀβαδδών (*abaddon*) is a transliteration of the Hebrew אֲבַדֹּן (*abaddon*), meaning “destruction.” In the Old Testament, it can refer to death (Ps 88:12; Job 28:22; 31:12), or to Sheol (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11). This designation reminds us of Christ’s words that the devil comes to “steal, kill, and destroy” (Jn 10:10). A third designation found in Revelation 9:11 is ἀπολλύων (*apollyon*), i.e., Apollyon, which also means “destruction.”

In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called κατήγωρ (*kategor*), which is commonly translated “accuser.” We see him engaged in this activity in the early chapters of Job and in Zechariah 3:1. Satan seeks people’s condemnation, while the Lord seeks to justify them.

In the parable of the tares and the wheat, the devil is represented as an “enemy.” He is called the same in Luke 10:19: “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy,” and in 1 Timothy 5:14, “...give the enemy no occasion for reproach.” Satan is the enemy of humanity. His intentions are always malicious.

Once, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of “Beelzebul the ruler of the demons” (Matt 12:24). Beelzebul was the name of one of the gods of the Philistines. Likely, 2 Kings 1:2 refers to the same god, “Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron,” since Ekron was one of the chief cities of Philistia. Yet, Baal-zebub (בעל זבוב) differs slightly from Beelzebul (בעל זבול). The former compound word literally translates “lord of the flies,” while the latter means “lord of the dirt.” Either meaning, though, has direct significance for Satan. He is both the lord of the flies and of the dirt, that is, he has a filthy nature. Also noteworthy is that Satan is thus identified with a pagan god of the Philistines. As we know, when Gentiles worshiped their idols, they were in fact paying devotion to Satan and his demons.

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<sup>199</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 920-921.

<sup>200</sup>Sullivan, p. 215.

<sup>201</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 920-921; Page, p. 236-237.

<sup>202</sup>Sullivan, p. 201-203, 224-225; Moeller, p. 50.

One of the devil's chief activities is temptation. Consequently, he is called in the New Testament "the tempter" (Matt 4:3; 1 Thes 3:5). The Greek term here, πειράζω (*peiradzo*), can denote either testing (Jam 1:2, 12; 1 Pet 1:6; 4:12; Heb 11:17; Rev 2:10) or temptation (Matt 4:1; 1 Cor 7:5; 1 Cor 10:13; etc.). The fact is that every time the devil tempts someone to sin, it provides an opportunity to test the believer's faith. Those who successfully resist temptation have passed the test of faith.

Another common title for Satan is "the evil one" (Matt 6:13). The Greek term here is the adjective πονηρός (*poneros*). The point is debated whether Jesus meant deliverance from "evil," or from "the evil one." In the phrase "from the evil" (ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ) the word in question, πονηροῦ (*ponerou*), could be either masculine ("evil one") or neuter ("evil"). We prefer translating πονηροῦ (*ponerou*) in the masculine gender for the following reasons.<sup>203</sup> First, in other Matthean passages, this adjective refers to the devil (Matt 13:19, 38). Second, the use of the preposition ἀπὸ (*apo*) with the verb ῥύομαι (*ruomai*), i.e., "deliver," usually refers to deliverance from a personality. Finally, other New Testament writers use this expression for Satan (Jn 17:15; Eph 6:16; 2 Thes 3:3; 1 Jn 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19).

In 2 Corinthians 6:15, we encounter a curious designation for Satan: "What harmony has Christ with Belial?" Belial, or in Greek βελιάρ (*beliar*), is the translation for the Hebrew בְּלִיַּצַּר (*beliyatsar*), meaning "unprofitable." The term βελιάρ (*beliar*) was first employed in the intertestamental period, for example, in the *Testament of Reuben* (2, 4, 6) and *Jubilees* (15.33). It was also used at that time for antichrist, the servant of Satan (*Testament of Dan*, 5; *Sibylline Oracles*, 2.167; 3.63; 73; *Ascension of Isaiah*, 4.2). Unquestionably, both Satan and his antichrist are "unprofitable." They cause only harm.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Satan is described as the "god of this world." This does not mean, of course, that he is a divine being or equal to God. The devil merely occupies the place of God in the lives of the people of this age. In other words, the unbelieving world lies under his dominion.

Similarly, in Ephesians 2:2 the devil is the "prince and power of the air." This phrase locates Satan in the atmosphere of our planet. His arena of action, consequently, is planet Earth. This verse also calls Satan "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience," which shows his influence on the unbelieving world. Unbelievers think that they are directing their own lives, but they are really held captive to do Satan's will.

The New Testament also contains numerous designations for demon spirits. As mentioned earlier, some see in several Old Testament terms references to demons, such as טַבַּל (*tabal*). Yet, in our study above, we concluded that these terms more likely applied to pagan gods or creatures.

In the New Testament, the conventional Greek word for demons, δαίμων (*daimon*), is found only once (Matt 8:3).<sup>204</sup> More commonly, the term διαμόνιον (*diamonion*) is employed. The Greeks used this latter term more frequently for their gods, as in Acts 17:18. In the Septuagint, διαμόνιον (*diamonion*) refers both to false gods and to the idea of "destruction."

In Luke 9:42, a demon is equated with an "unclean spirit." Other names for demons are "powers," "world force of this darkness," "dominions," "thrones," "authorities," "principalities," and "spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}." Some propose that these latter titles reflect a demonic hierarchy. We will return to this question later.

Certain titles for demons reflect their work of deception:<sup>205</sup> πνεῦμα πονηρόν (*pneuma poneron*), i.e., "evil spirit," (Lk 7:21; 8:2; Acts 19:12-13; 15-16), πνεῦμα πλάνον (*pneuma planon*), i.e., "deceiving spirit" (1 Tim 4:1), and πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης (*pneuma tes planes*), i.e., "spirit of error" (1 Jn 4:6).

The expression πνεῦμα δαιμονίου (*pneuma daimoniou*), "demonic spirit," is found in Luke 4:33 and Revelation 16:14. It consists of two nouns, the second standing in the genitive case, which sometimes can be translated as an adjective. However, in the combination πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας (*pneuma astheneias*), "spirit of infirmity," found in Luke 13:11, the noun in the genitive is better understood as a genitive of result. Thus, it is a

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<sup>203</sup>Page, p. 112-113.

<sup>204</sup>Aune, v. 1, p. 919.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

spirit that results in or causes infirmity. Scripture informs us that in certain cases, demons are the underlying cause of a disease (Matt 12:22; Mk 9:25; Lk 13:11).

Jesus employed a metaphor for demons – scorpion. He left His disciples this promise, “I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Lk 10:19). Revelation chapter 9 describes scorpions who come out of the abyss to harm people, a passage that also likely refers to demonic activity.

Finally, Peter calls demons “angels” (1 Pet 3:22). He is referring here not to God’s angels, but to fallen angels, since they are subjected to Christ along with the powers and authorities at His coming.

## **b. Survey of New Testament Teaching**

The Gospel writers openly acknowledge the existence of evil spirits and Satan himself. Even a brief glance at the Four Gospels confirms Unger’s claim that neither “Jesus or any of the NT writers had the slightest doubt as to the real existence of either Satan or demons.”<sup>206</sup>

The Gospels also depict a total antagonism between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. One of Jesus’ primary ministries was casting out demons, which served as a sign that God’s kingdom had drawn near (Lk 11:20). The antithetical relationship between these two realms is reflected in Christ’s words, which he uttered in response to the accusation that He cast out devils with Satan’s power: “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” (Mk 3:23-24; cf. Lk 11:17-23; Matt 12:25-26). Suggesting that Jesus employed dark powers is considered blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mk 3:28-30).

We encounter the Gospels’ initial mention of the prince of darkness when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4; Lk 4). It is interesting to note that when tempting our Lord, the devil quoted Scripture, which shows that temptation can be cloaked in religious talk and even in biblical citations.<sup>207</sup> In response to the devil’s temptation, however, Jesus also employed Scripture, only this time in its proper sense.

Also worthy of note is that during Christ’s temptations, the devil claimed to have authority over the earth (Lk 4:6), which was given to him, assumedly, when Adam sinned. Interestingly, the Lord did not challenge that assertion. Page comments, though, that nothing is said in Genesis 3 about a transfer of authority over the earth. On the contrary, the earth was cursed.<sup>208</sup>

The Gospels also reveal information about the nature of demon spirits.<sup>209</sup> They are immoral, as demonstrated in the possessed man living naked in the tombs (Lk 8:27). This account also highlights the supernatural strength of demons: “He was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard, and {yet} he would break his bonds” (Lk 8:29). We discover in Matthew 12:45 that different degrees of malfeasance exist among demons. Jesus spoke of a demon that “takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself.”

Although the Gospels present God’s kingdom in opposition to the kingdom of darkness, this in no way implies that they are equal rivals. Demons acknowledge Christ’s authority and submit to His commands (Mk 5:1-13; Lk 4:33-34, etc.). Satan’s subordinate position is shown in that freedom *was given* to him to sift the disciples like wheat (Lk 22:31) and to crucify the Savior (Lk 22:53). Moreover, when Jesus encountered evil spirits, they feared Him and acknowledged His authority (Matt 8:29; Mk 1:24; 5:7; Lk 4:34; 8:28).<sup>210</sup> Jesus gave this authority to His disciples as well (Lk 10:17-19).<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Unger, p. 36.

<sup>207</sup>Page notes Satan’s powerful influence on the religious leaders of Israel (Page, p. 126).

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>209</sup>Unger, p. 67

<sup>210</sup>McClelland, p. 332.

<sup>211</sup>Page notes that the expression “tread on serpents and scorpions” traces back to the Old Testament (Ps 91:13) and the intertestamental literature (*Testament of Simeon*, 6.6; *Testament of Levi*, 18.12) (Page, p. 198).

Besides demon possession, a topic covered in chapter 16, the Gospels reveal that Satan and demons hinder the reception of God's Word (Matt 13:19), cause disease (Mk 9:20-27; Lk 11:14; 13:16, etc.), and give supernatural power to false prophets (Matt 24:24).<sup>212</sup> Satan can at times even use Jesus' disciples to accomplish his aims, even the closest of disciples (Matt 16:22-23).

We observe Satan infiltrating the circle of the disciples in the book of Acts as well. Peter rebuked Ananias with the words, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back {some} of the price of the land?" (Acts 5:3). The early church practiced exorcism of demons (Acts 16:16-18; 19:12-13) and observed the Old Covenant prohibition on participation in the occult (Acts 19:19). A remarkable feature is the seeming ability of a demon-possessed girl in Acts 16 to predict the future.<sup>213</sup>

The book of Acts reveals the pitiful condition of the Gentiles, who are under the power of evil. Paul was commissioned to "to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

Acts 10:38 is a key verse for our understanding of the work of devils. We read how "God anointed (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit and with power, and {how} He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil." Here, we learn that the source of people's suffering is, in general, Satan and demons.

The General Epistles contain several curious passages concerning evil powers. According to Jude and Peter, some fallen angels are confined in prison until the judgment of the end times (Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4). We will discuss this issue later. We also learn from these epistles that Michael the archangel argued with the devil about the body of Moses, nonetheless showed him a certain amount of respect (Jude 9; cf. 2 Pet 2:11).<sup>214</sup>

In Hebrews, we encounter the claim that Satan has the power of death (Heb 2:14). Page understands this not as Satan's power to kill, but as him introducing sin and death into the world.<sup>215</sup> Whatever power Satan possessed, though, the death of Jesus "renders (him) powerless." Now, our Lord holds the "keys of hell and death" (Rev 1:18).

The General Epistles also contain practical advice for dealing with devils. Peter counsels, "Be of sober {spirit}, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in {your} faith" (1 Pet 5:8-9). Peter underscores here Satan's aggressive nature and intention for evil.

James exhorts us in a similar way: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jam 4:7). In both texts, we see the verb ἀνθίστημι (*anthistemi*), i.e., "resist."<sup>216</sup> At the same time, Peter teaches that the ability to resist Satan does not depend on our efforts alone, but "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation" (2 Pet 2:9). Peter, like Paul, hints at the existence of different classes or types of demons, namely "angels and authorities and powers" (1 Pet 3:22). We will later discuss in more detail the idea of a demonic hierarchy.

The apostle Paul, whom our Lord commissioned "to open (the Gentiles') eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), gives us even more light on the nature and activity of the powers of darkness. He enumerates "rulers, authorities, powers, dominions, world forces of this darkness, and spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}" (Eph 1:21; 6:12) with Satan, the "god of this world," at their head (2 Cor 4:4). Paul instructs us that Satan directs world events as the "prince of the power of the air... the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). Consequently, he takes people captive to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). Yet, all the powers of evil cannot prevent God from accomplishing His plan for His people (Eph 3:10).

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<sup>212</sup>It is notable that in the New Testament, the same words, "signs and wonders," are used to describe the works performed by the apostles: Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12 (Page, p. 220).

<sup>213</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 175. Concerning a demon's ability to prophecy, John of Damascus proposed, "The demons also make predictions, sometimes because they see what is happening at a distance, and sometimes merely making guesses: hence much that they say is false" (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 2.4).

<sup>214</sup>The event is described in the non-canonical book *Testament of Moses* (Page, p. 209).

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>216</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 207.

In 1 Corinthians 10:20-21, Paul reveals the true nature of idolatry, at which the Old Testament hinted. Idol worship is not simply a harmless religious practice, but the actual worship of demons (cf. Rev 9:20).<sup>217</sup>

Paul devotes attention to Satan's strategy for misleading the Church. In order to escape his snare, believers must avoid pride (1 Tim 3:6), unforgiveness (2 Cor 2:10-11; Eph 4:26-27), gossip (1 Tim 5:13-15), long abstinence from marital relations (1 Cor 7:5), and a poor reputation among outsiders (1 Tim 3:7).<sup>218</sup>

In addition, Paul indicts the devil for the spread of false teaching (2 Cor 11:3-4; 2 Tim 4:1). Satan presents himself as an "angel of light" in order to penetrate into the Church (2 Cor 11:14-15). He tests the Church's faith not only from within, but also from without through persecution (1 Thes 3:3-5). In their struggle against demonic forces, believers must "put on the full armor of God" so that they may "stand firm" (Eph 6:11).<sup>219</sup>

For Paul, this struggle with Satan is not only an issue for the Church, but a personal struggle for every believer. He relates to the Thessalonians that the devil prevented him from coming to them (1 Thes 2:18). He also suffered long from a "thorn in the flesh" sent by Satan (2 Cor 12:7).

Paul understands excommunication from the Church as a "handing over to Satan" (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). Page correctly concludes that "handing over to Satan" means being sent into the world, that is, "into the realm where Satan held sway."<sup>220</sup> This question is addressed in detail in volume 5 of this series in the context of church discipline.

In spite of the power and intensity of Satan's work, Paul confidently claims his victory over him in Christ: "Neither... angels, nor principalities... will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). Ultimate victory, though, still awaits us when "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20). Yet, in the meantime, "The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil {one}" (2 Thes 3:3).<sup>221</sup> He "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Cor 10:13). Paul was personally assured that "the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom" (2 Tim 4:18).

According to Paul's teaching, one of the devil's devices consists in accusing people on the basis of the Law (Col 2:14). However, when Jesus accomplished our redemption, He "disarmed the rulers and authorities" and "made a public display of them" (Col 2:15).<sup>222</sup> Consequently, believers in Jesus triumph (Col 2:15; 2 Cor 2:14)!

Finally, we will examine the apostle John's contribution to our understanding of the domain of darkness. John tells much of Satan's character: he is a liar and murderer (Jn 8:44). He is a sinner (1 Jn 3:8) and the father of all sinners (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:8-10). For example, Cain was "from the evil one" (1 Jn 3:12).<sup>223</sup> John recorded the words of the Lord, who described the devil's intentions: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (Jn 10:10). He propagates false teaching (1 Jn 4:1).<sup>224</sup> John stresses that it was the devil that crucified the Lord (Jn 14:30), employing as his agent Judas Iscariot (Jn 13:2, 9; 6:70). Yet, Christ's crucifixion will rebound on Satan to his destruction (Jn 12:31; 16:11).<sup>225</sup>

John also relates the worldwide extent of Satan's dominion over the sinful world: "The whole world lies under the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19). He occupies the place of the "prince of this world" (Jn 16:11). John's Revelation is dedicated to the cosmic conflict between the Lord and the devil. Yet, John already anticipates Christ's victory, declaring that the Son has come "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8).<sup>226</sup> John proclaims Christ's victory in other passages as well: "I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one" (1 Jn 2:13), "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because

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<sup>217</sup>McClelland, p. 332.

<sup>218</sup>Page, p. 188-195.

<sup>219</sup>We again encounter the verb ἀνθίστημι (*anthistemi*). Cf. 1 Pet 5:9 and Jam 4:7 (Page, p. 208).

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., p. 252-253.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>224</sup>Ibid., p. 238-239.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., p. 128, 131.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 Jn 4:4), "...the evil one does not touch him" (1 Jn 5:18; cf. Jn 17:15).<sup>227</sup>

The biblical book that devotes the most attention to Satan and his works is the book of Revelation. This is consistent with the fact that the Bible predicts greater demonic activity in the end times (see 2 Thes 2:10-11; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 1 Jn 2:18).<sup>228</sup> Correspondingly, in Revelation Satan is highly active and enjoys great freedom. He spreads false teaching in the Church (Rev 2:24), persecutes God's people (Rev 3:9; 12:17), and supports the world reign of Antichrist (Rev 13:2, cf. 2 Thes 2:9).<sup>229</sup> At the same time, he cannot overstep the boundaries set by God. The use of the passive voice in Revelation 13:7, 15 shows that Satan's authority comes only by Divine permission. In addition, it seems that demonic powers are permitted by the Lord to afflict unbelievers during the Great Tribulation (Rev 9:1-11).

However, as we noted above, the devil's power even in the last times is limited by (and sometimes employed) by God, and will eventually be revoked by Him. Satan's fall begins in Revelation 12:7-9, where we learn that after a conflict with Michael and his angels, the devil is cast down to the earth with his angels.<sup>230</sup> In Revelation chapter 20, he is bound for 1000 years (Rev 20:1-7). In the end, Satan and his angels are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:18).

We find intriguing the mention in Revelation 2:13 that Pergamum was the place "where Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwells." Several theories exist to explain this.<sup>231</sup> In Pergamum people worshiped Zeus before an altar shaped as a throne. There, they also worshiped Asclepius, who was depicted in the form of a snake. Finally, Pergamum was the center of emperor worship.

### C. Activity of Satan and Demons

One can summarize all the activity of Satan and demons with one word – evil-doing. They are entrenched in evil and can do no other. They actively pursue to destroy people and to thwart God's plan. The Bible does not specifically reveal why the devil is so vehement toward humanity. Possibly, it is out of envy, hatred for God, or because he feels his kingdom is threatened.<sup>232</sup>

From the beginning of human history, the devil has tempted people and continues to do so. The word we translate "tempt," that is, *πειράζω* (*peiradzo*), is found in Matthew 4:1 and 1 Corinthians 7:5, as well as other places. The word can connote both temptation and testing. As we noted earlier, whenever the devil tempts believers, God takes advantage of the opportunity to test their faith at the same time. Yet, they are pursuing different goals – Satan tempts with the intent of destroying the one tempted, while God favors their victory over temptation and sin.

The idea of temptation is also expressed in the term *ἐξαπατάω* (*exapatao*), which is found in 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:14 and means "to entice." The root of this word means, "bait." Temptation makes sin look attractive. Another term is *πλανάω* (*planao*), found in 1 John 2:26 and 2 Tim 2:13, meaning "to mislead." Temptation diverts people from the right way and leads them on the path to sin and death.

All of these satanic strategies, listed above, came into play in the Garden of Eden when the devil tempted Eve. It began with a testing of faith (*πειράζω* - *peŷradzo*). The devil challenged God's command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve had a choice of either believing God's Word or the lie of Satan. Next, the devil sought to make his temptation attractive to Eve (*ἐξαπατάω* - *eksapatao*). He emphasized the value of partaking from the forbidden fruit, while minimizing the consequences. The final step was to misguide

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<sup>227</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>228</sup>Unger, p. 198-201.

<sup>229</sup>Page, p. 199, 211-212.

<sup>230</sup>Unger feels that when Jesus was exalted, Satan was thrown down from the third heaven, yet can inhabit the first and second heavens until the battle described in Revelation 12 (Unger, p. 53). Page equates Revelation 12:9 with Luke 10:18 (Page, p. 109-110).

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>232</sup>Unger, p. 217.

her (πλανάω - *планао*). Due to Satan's deceptions, Eve began to deviate from clear thinking and to picture the forbidden fruit as a means to blessing. This all resulted in her transgression.

However, we find comfort in the fact that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor 10:13). This implies that Satan cannot overpower us with temptation. Concerning demon possession, we cover that topic in chapter 18.

Satan and his angels actively spread false doctrines (1 Tim 4:1). According to 2 Timothy 2:26, false teachers carry out the will of the evil one. False teaching is also referred to as the "deep things of Satan" (Rev 2:24). Not all that seems good is truly so. Satan can take on the appearance of "an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14). Unger insightfully notes, "Demonic deception left no cardinal Christian doctrine unattacked, from the deity of Christ to the resurrection of the dead."<sup>233</sup>

Demons are one cause of physical illness (Acts 10:38). The Bible gives examples where they can cause dumbness (Matt 9:32; 12:22; Mk 9:17; Lk 11:14), blindness (Matt 12:22), epilepsy (Mk 9:18; 1:26), deafness (Mk 9:25), or back pain (Lk 13:16). At the same time, is it mistaken to believe that all sickness comes from demons. The New Testament provides many examples where deliverance from demons and healing of the sick are mentioned separately (Matt 4:24; 10:8; Mk 1:34; 6:13; Lk 4:40-41; 9:1; 13:32).

According to what we know of the devil from Isaiah 14, he strove to be considered divine. He seeks worship from people and even tempted Jesus to worship him (Lk 4:6-8; Rev 13:4). He will indeed receive worship from people during Antichrist's reign. Demons are also active in this way – worship of idols is actually demon worship (1 Cor 10:20-21; Rev 9:20).

The devil and his demons also accuse. One of the meanings of Satan's name is "accuser." We discover three episodes in the Bible where Satan is so engaged: he accused Joshua the high priest (Zech 3:1), he accused Job before the Lord (Job 1-2), and accuses God's saints before Him (Rev 12:10). Of note is that in the case of Joshua, Satan stood at his right hand. According to Psalm 109:6, the "right hand" is the place of the accuser. The devil has cause to accuse people before the Lord, since all have sinned. Yet, believers in Christ answer his accusations with the blood of Jesus, which was shed for their redemption.

Demons possess power to wreak havoc on the earth. They brought much misery to Job and his kin (Job 1-2), and, assumedly, stirred up a storm at sea when Jesus and His disciples were on route to deliver a demon-possessed man (Matt 8:23-27).

We are aware that Satan is the primary agent at work in persecuting the Church, and Israel as well. The Bible gives multiple examples of this phenomenon (Lk 22:31; 2 Cor 12:7; Rev 2:10; 12:4, 12-17). Although it sometimes seems that persecution arises for political or economical reasons, the truth is that behind all persecutors of God's people stands the prince of darkness.

Satan also serves as the primary opponent of gospel preaching. By any and every means, he attempts to slow or completely arrest the progress of the gospel in the world. He hinders the conversion of unbelievers by blinding their minds (2 Cor 4:4) and stealing the Word of God from their hearts (Mk 4:15). Furthermore, Satan attacks those who preach the good news. He assaults their reputation, so that people will not listen to them (1 Tim 3:7) and works through contrary circumstances in order to thwart the Church's attempts at evangelization (1 Thes 2:18).

Satan aims his assaults not only from outside the Church, but also from within. He sows tares among the wheat (Matt 13:38-39), i.e., introduces false teaching into the congregations of the saints thus leading sincere believers into error. He produces quarrels and division among God's people (2 Cor 2:10-11; Eph 4:26-27) by emphasizing the shortcomings of others. He is an enemy of Church unity.

The Bible teaches that the unbelieving world is under the dominion of the devil. He controls adherents of non-Christian religions (Rev 2:9; 3:9; Acts 13:10) and unbelievers in general (Col 1:13; Eph 2:2; 1 Jn 5:19). His control extends over backsliders as well (Jn 13:2; 1 Tim 5:15), i.e., former believers in Christ. The example of

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<sup>233</sup>ibid., p. 178.



Peter's interference in Christ's plan show that Satan can even influence devoted followers of Christ (Matt 16:23).

In the end times, Satan will exercise control over all the peoples of the world by the instrumentation of Antichrist (Rev 13:2-8). Yet, even at the present time the one who "deceives the whole world" exerts a strong influence on humanity (Rev 12:9). Some voice the theory that a demonic hierarchy is superimposed over the political systems of this age and dominates them. We will revisit this question in a later section.

#### **D. Destiny of Satan and Demons**

The final topic for our investigation from Scripture concerns the destiny of Satan and the demons. Their destiny is firmly fixed – defeat and eternal punishment await them. Even from the beginning of Satan's activity in the Garden, his verdict was announced: "He shall bruise you on the head" (Gen 3:15). Satan experienced defeat during Christ's earthly ministry when he failed to lead the Savior into sin (Matt 4:1-11). Moreover, as a result of Jesus' miracle ministry, Satan again suffered setbacks when people in bondage were set free (Matt 12:27-28). The most decisive blow was dealt to Satan through the crucifixion of Christ, when He "disarmed the rulers and authorities," and, "made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him" (Col 2:15).<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, the devil's defeat is now being realized in the Church. God's people progressively master the art of overcoming the evil one, encouraged by His promise, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom 16:20). The time will come when Satan's influence on our planet will be curtailed during the thousand-year reign of Messiah (Rev 20:2). Finally, Satan and his angels are destined for eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Matt 8:29; Rev 20:10; Matt 25:41).<sup>235</sup>

#### **E. Doctrine of Demons in Church History**

We will give a brief summary of early Christian understandings of the nature and activities of demons. In the second and third centuries, many writers expressed the belief that the worship of pagan gods was really the worship of demons.<sup>236</sup> Justin Martyr believed that pagan gods represented demons that were once angels who were entrusted with the care of humanity.<sup>237</sup>

Also significant is the Church Fathers' acceptance of the intertestamental interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4, that the "sons of God" who went into the "daughters of men" were demons.<sup>238</sup> Later, Thomas Aquinas taught that demons continue this practice.<sup>239</sup>

Some commentators associate the teaching of angels cohabitating with women with the doctrine of deification. It is taught that the mixture of angelic and human natures presented a threat to the purity of human nature in general. It was necessary for the Son of God to receive a pure human nature at His incarnation in order for Him to deify it in Himself and consequently deify human nature in general. It is further thought that God sent the flood of Noah to purify human nature and eliminate all "hybrids."

However, such thinking finds no support in Scripture. According to the Bible, God sent the flood to punish humanity's sins (Gen 6:5). Moreover, according to Scripture, the "sons of God" were attracted by women's

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<sup>234</sup>Macchia, p. 220.

<sup>235</sup>Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 200, 204. Based on 1 Corinthians 6:3, Page holds to the opinion that the saints will participate in the condemnation of fallen angels. However, this verse may be referring to "administering" angels during the Millennium (Page, p. 226).

<sup>236</sup>Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1.5; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 27; Athenagoras, *Supplicatio*, 26.1-5; Tertullian, *Apology*, 20; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 7.69 (Aune, v. 1, p. 922).

<sup>237</sup>2 *Apology*, 5 (noted in McClelland, p. 332).

<sup>238</sup>Sullivan, p. 201-202.

<sup>239</sup>*Summa Theologica*, 1.51.3, 6; *De Potentia* 6.8, 57 (McClelland, p. 332)

beauty.<sup>240</sup> Nothing is said about an attempt to introduce impurities into human nature. This theory has more in common with Neoplatonism, a worldview that affected the Church Fathers (see Appendix B). We may also attribute to Neoplatonism the teaching of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa that demons will, in the end, be reconciled to God.<sup>241</sup>

Origen also taught that a good and a bad angel accompany each individual through life and prompt him/her to behave in a certain way. He also believed in “vice demons,” that is, certain demons tempt people to commit certain sins.<sup>242</sup>

In his time, John of Damascus made the following comment on the nature and activity of demons:

For evil is nothing else than absence of goodness, just as darkness also is absence of light. For goodness is the light of the mind, and, similarly, evil is the darkness of the mind. Light, therefore, being the work of the Creator and being made good (for *God saw all that He made, and behold they were exceeding good*) produced darkness at His free-will. But along with him an innumerable host of angels subject to him were torn away and followed him and shared in his fall. Wherefore, being of the same nature as the angels, they became wicked, turning away at their own free choice from good to evil.

Hence they have no power or strength against any one except what God in His dispensation hath conceded to them, as for instance, against Job and those swine that are mentioned in the Gospels. But when God has made the concession they do prevail, and are changed and transformed into any form whatever in which they wish to appear.<sup>243</sup>

David Kek informs us of other early teachings about demons.<sup>244</sup> Church Fathers all shared the opinion that Satan fell due to pride, wanting to be equal to God. The Scriptures confirm this view (1 Tim 3:6). They differed, though, in their opinions about why demons could not be saved. Some say that after their first sin, demons became irreversibly confirmed in evil. Others feel that they lie outside the boundaries of God’s mercy since their sin was unprovoked by temptation. Anselm taught that, unlike humans, angels have no “generic nature” which the Savior could have taken upon Himself to redeem them.

Moreover, Thomas Aquinas proposed that, in distinction from seraphim, who “burn” in love for the Lord, cherubim (like Lucifer) were able to sin since their defining characteristic is not love, but knowledge. Finally, many believed that God plans to set His saints on the heavenly thrones abandoned by the fallen angels. Bonaventure asserted that for this very reason, the good angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Lk 15:10).

One of the most influential liberals of the 20th century, Rudolf Bultmann, advanced the view that Satan and demons were a religious myth borrowed from Persian religion by Judaism and Christianity. In ancient Persia, worshipers embraced a dualistic worldview, where two great equal powers ruled the universe and warred with each other. Bultmann asserted that Judaism and Christianity identified the evil force with Satan.

Liberal theology mistakenly claims that Jesus Himself did not believe in demons, but merely condescended to the accepted beliefs of that time. Unger correctly responds that such a view “accuses the Lord Jesus, who exposed and denounced superstition in matters of far less moment, of sanctioning particular error which has never been the bastion of superstition.”<sup>245</sup> In addition, why was Jesus condescending? The Sadducees of His day did not believe in spirits anyway (Acts 23:8).<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Page, p. 53.

<sup>241</sup>Gross J. *The Divination of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers* / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 188.

<sup>242</sup>*De principiis*, 3.2.2-4 (noted in McClelland, p. 332).

<sup>243</sup>*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 2.4.

<sup>244</sup>Keck D. *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*. – New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. – P. 24-27.

<sup>245</sup>Unger, p. 24

<sup>246</sup>Piggin F. S. *Principalities and Powers* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 956.

Another misguided 20th-century liberal, Paul Tillich, taught that Satan and demons are merely symbols of evil social structures that exist in the world and cause oppression. However, the Bible depicts evil spirits as real personalities. In addition, these powers are not on the earth, but “in the heavens” (Eph 1:20; 3:10; 6:12). Moreover, the apostle Paul taught, “Our struggle is not against *flesh and blood*, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}” (Eph 6:12).<sup>247</sup>

## F. Special Topics

In our study of demons, we meet up with difficult questions that seem to defy clear answers. How did they become evil? What is the relationship between the devil’s activity and God’s sovereignty? Does a demonic hierarchy exist that directs the course of nations? What is happening in Genesis 6:1-4, where the “sons of God” go into the “daughters of men?” Are some demons already bound in prison, and why? How should we interpret 2 Kings 3:27, where the king of Moab sacrificed his son and “there came great wrath against Israel?”

### 1. Origin of Satan and Demons

Unlike the ancient worldview “dualism,” according to which the powers of good and evil have eternally coexisted, the Bible reveals that God created Satan and the fallen angels (Col 1:16; Jn 1:3).<sup>248</sup> God is creator of all thing, including evil spirits before their descent into rebellion.

Concerning Satan’s fall, if Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 refer to him, then we see that he was created good by God. Therefore, the Lord is not responsible for the direction of rebellion he later took. God confirms this through Ezekiel, “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you” (Ezek 28:15). In this verse, we note the use of the passive voice, expressed in the Hebrew verbal form *Niphal*. This indicates that his prompting to sin arose from within himself and was not caused by God. In addition, the Hebrew term translated “unrighteousness” is עוֹל (*ul*), having the basic meaning “deviation.” Therefore, Satan “deviated” from the right way that the Lord had prepared for him.

The parallel text, Isaiah 14:13, enhances our understanding of Satan’s fall. Here, pride was the reason he fell, i.e., his desire to be exalted to the level of deity. This is likely that which “was found” in Satan according to Ezekiel 28:15. In 1 Timothy 3:6, Paul confirms that the devil sinned through pride.

What about the origin of demon spirits? Here, we encounter disagreements. Most commentators identify them as the fallen angels that joined Satan in rebellion. The New Testament, in fact, speaks of “the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41) and also of angels who sinned (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). In addition, Revelation 12:9 speaks of angels who were “thrown down” with Satan. They are commonly associated with the stars that the dragon “swept away” and “threw to the earth” with his tail (Rev 12:4).

Moreover, demons are often associated with Satan. For example, the casting out of demons is connected with Satan falling (Lk 10:17-18), (2) a certain disease caused by an evil spirit is attributed to Satan (Lk 13:11, Acts 10:38), and (3) Satan is called the “ruler of the demons” (Matt 12:24). Since angels did fall with Satan and demons are often associated with him, it is fair to assume that demons are indeed fallen angels.

Others, though, feel that demons are the spirits of the departed. Greek thinkers of New Testament times like Hesiod and Plutarch so taught, as did Jewish authors like Philo and Josephus. Among Church Fathers, we can name Justin Martyr, Origen, and Irenaeus as adherents.<sup>249</sup> Yet, we can challenge the authority of these authors, especially in light of their divergence from biblical revelation.

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<sup>247</sup>Ibid.

<sup>248</sup>It is worth noting that God did not create Satan or demons evil – they became that way later.

<sup>249</sup>Alexander Campbell, *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, P. 379-402; taken from Beam J. Seeing the Unseen. – West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard, 1994. – P. 91-94.

Supporters of this view appeal to the “gap theory,” according to which a pre-Adamic civilization existed that perished due to a rebellion against the Lord. Genesis 1:1 describes the creation of heaven and earth, while Genesis 1:2 supposedly refers to the judgment of this pre-Adamic civilization. Demons, then, are the souls of those who perished at that time. Nevertheless, we refuted the gap theory in chapter 12 of volume 3.

Others glean support for this theory by noting that demons desire to inhabit a human body. They can indwell animals as well (Matt 8:31). When demons are not possessing a body, they “seek rest,” that is, a body to indwell (Matt 12:43). These factors are consistent with the claim that demons are spirits of departed humans who are seeking to live in a body.

On the other hand, one may explain that demons desire to possess a body so that they can exert an influence on the material world. Having a body makes that possible. We also consider Judas’ experience when Satan entered him. If that was literally true, then fallen angels can inhabit humans.

We earlier mentioned the teaching of the “sons of God” entering the “daughters of men,” who allegedly gave birth to the “Nephilim.” It is furthermore taught that the Nephilim somehow issue forth demonic spirits. We will soon deal with the interpretation of that problematic verse.

We will dismiss some final theories. Origen taught that once all persons and all demons dwelt in heaven as disembodied spirits and there rebelled against God. Those whose rebellion was more brash became demons, while the remainder became humans with bodies.<sup>250</sup> Some rabbis considered that demons are spirits that failed to receive a body before God “rested” on the Sabbath. Other rabbis asserted that God punished those who built the Tower of Babel by making them into demons.<sup>251</sup> The Bible lends no support to these views.

## 2. Demonic Activity and God’s Sovereignty

The question of how demonic activity corresponds to Divine sovereignty troubles many. How can a good God and evil spirits coexist? Two extremes must be avoided. On the one hand, we must not embrace dualism, which states that God and Satan are equal rivals, contending for control of the universe. Satan and demons, rather, are part of God’s creation.

On the other hand, we may not claim that God directly controls Satan and the demons, or that all their activities trace back to Him. In Matthew 12:25-29, Jesus plainly taught that God’s kingdom and the domain of darkness are in total contradiction to one another. It is preferred to assume that God in His sovereignty grants evil spirits a certain freedom in their activity, but does not direct their actions. Both Old and New Testaments support such a view. In the Old Testament, God allowed Satan to afflict Job, but also set limits to his destructive power (Job 1-2). In the New Testament, Satan demanded permission to sift the apostles like wheat (Lk 22:31), and permission was granted.<sup>252</sup>

Why, then, does God allow the powers of darkness freedom to operate? What goal is He pursuing? According to Scripture, when Satan tempts or assaults believers, God uses the opportunity to test our faith (Job 1-2; 2 Cor 12:7). The Lord wants to see how His people will react under pressure and trials. Will they remain true to Him?

However, does not the claim that God permits temptation in order to test His people contradict Jesus’ teaching in the Lord’s Prayer: “Do not lead us into temptation?” (Matt 6:13). If temptation is part of God’s plan for the believer, then why did the Lord Jesus teach us to pray in this fashion?

We must give attention in this verse to the Greek phrase εἰς πειρασμόν (*eis peirasmon*), i.e., “into temptation.” Aside from the Lord’s Prayer, this Greek expression is found only in Mark 14:38 (and its parallels: Matt 26:41; Lk 22:40) and in 1 Timothy 6:9. These texts deal not with temptation itself, but with giving into

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<sup>250</sup>*De principiis*, 2.9.6 (noted in McClelland, p. 331).

<sup>251</sup>McClelland, p. 331.

<sup>252</sup>Macchia, p. 223.

temptation resulting in sinning. If this meaning applies to the passage in the Lord's Prayer, then we conclude that Jesus prayed not that His disciples would be spared from temptation, but that they would not yield to it.

It will also be helpful to compare the phrase εἰς πειρασμόν (*eis peirasmon*) with other similar expressions. In other cases, where εἰς πειρασμόν (*eis peirasmon*) is not employed, the issue is not sinning as a result of temptation, but the act of being tempted itself. Jesus, for example, was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Here, we have the infinitive πειρασθῆναι (*peirasthanai*). In 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 1:2, and James 1:12, we have the noun πειρασμός (*peirasmos*), yet without the accompanying preposition εἰς (*eis*). The noun πειρασμός (*peirasmos*) is used in 1 Peter 1:6 and 4:12, but with other prepositions: ἐν (*en*) or πρὸς (*pros*).

In summary, in biblical passages that speak of temptation that results in sin, we encounter the phrase εἰς πειρασμόν (*eis peirasmon*). In all other cases, though, where the act of temptation is in view, another grammatical construction is used. So then, Jesus taught us to pray that we would not *yield* to temptation.

Another aspect to consider in God's relationship to evil spirits is that satanic opposition provides God with the opportunity to display his power and authority in delivering those oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38; 2 Pet 2:9). In addition, the experience of trials and temptations toughens believers and solidifies their faith. They learn spiritual warfare and become more confident in their faith (Eph 6:10-11; Judg 3:1-2).

The Bible also reveals that the destructive and seductive works of the enemy can become a means by which God punishes unbelievers. Paul relates that in the end times, the Lord will employ "a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2 Thes 2:11-12). In Judges 9:23, it states that God "sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem" to punish both parties. As far as Christ-followers are concerned, excommunication from the Church can involve being delivered over to Satan, which may prove useful in leading backsliders to repentance (1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20).

Furthermore, God's in His providence can employ demonic activity to accomplish other key elements in His plan. For example, the devil stirred up Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery, but God used this act to prepare a place of refuge for Jacob's family (Gen 45:5-8). According to God's plan and foreknowledge, Satan led the Jewish and Romans leaders to crucify Christ, which secured our salvation (1 Cor 2:8). The devil tormented Paul with a "thorn in the flesh," which in turn prevented him from becoming proud (2 Cor 12:7-10).

Finally, John of Damascus advanced a thought-provoking theory about the relationship of demonic activity and the spiritual development of believers. Both he and Aquinas taught that Lucifer was the chief of the angels.<sup>253</sup> Due to his exalted position, he became puffed up with pride and aspired to equality with God. The Damascene proposed that Satan's fall and his subsequent work of temptation is a necessary step in the development of God's salvation plan. God's people, tested and proven by temptation, will not follow Satan's example of self-exaltation when they are glorified. Damascus writes, "For it was no profit to man to obtain incorruption while still untried and unproved, lest he should fall into pride and under the judgment of the devil."<sup>254</sup>

This theory gains plausibility in light of the strong emphasis the Scriptures put on humility, portraying it as one of the fundamental traits of the mature believer (1 Pet 5:6; Lk 14:11; 18:14; Jam 4:10). God, in fact, offers salvation only by faith in order that "no one may boast" (Eph 2:9, cf. 1 Cor 1:29; Rom 3:27).

### 3. Demonic Hierarchies

We will investigate the claim that a demonic hierarchy of spirits exists that dominates the governmental structures of this age and inspires them to do evil. In support, adherents of this theory appeal to passages referring to the authority Satan apparently possesses (Matt 12:26; Rev 2:13; Acts 26:18; Col 1:13). In addition,

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<sup>253</sup>See *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 2.4; Keck, p. 25. Yet, Keck comments that the order of the angelic hierarchy accepted in the Middle Ages placed seraphim, not cherubim, at the head position.

<sup>254</sup>*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 2.30.

some designations for demons seem to reflect positions of authority, such as “principalities,” “powers,” “thrones,” “dominions,” “world powers of this darkness,” and “spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}.” If these titles belong to various classes of demon spirits, then they may well form a hierarchy of demonic authority.

Paul employs the term “principalities,” which in Greek is ἀρχή (*arche*).<sup>255</sup> The Bible reveals that, like all other things, principalities were created by the Son (Col 1:16). Additionally, they wage spiritual warfare against the saints (Eph 6:12). Yet, according to Scripture, they have already been defeated by Christ’s cross (Col 2:15) and are now subject to the authority of the exalted Son (Eph 1:21). Although at the present time they enjoy a certain amount of freedom in their devilish work, at Jesus’ Second Coming He will abolish their authority (1 Cor 15:24). Even now, their activity is limited. They cannot, for example, separate a believer from the Lord’s love (Rom 8:38).

What does Paul mean in Ephesians 3:10 when he writes “The manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers (i.e., principalities) and the authorities in the heavenly {places}?” The mention of “in the heavenly {places}” makes one think of God’s angels. Nonetheless, all other mentions of “principalities” put them in a negative light. Therefore, we conclude that Ephesians 3:10 speaks of demonic powers. When we compare this verse with Ephesians 2:2, where Satan is called the “prince and power of the air,” we associate this with the atmosphere surrounding our planet. According to Ephesians 3:10, then, God displays the wisdom of His salvation plan through the victory His Church gains over principalities and authorities.

In all its usages (except Romans 8:38), the term principalities is accompanied by the title “authorities” (ἐξουσία), which also refers to evil spirits. 1 Peter 3:22, though, mentions authorities without mention of principalities. Additionally, according to Ephesians 1:21, authorities were made subject to the exalted Christ.

The only reference to “world rulers of this darkness” is in Ephesians 6:12 in connection with principalities, authorities, and the “spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}.” This expression reminds us that Satan was called “the god of this world,” and indicates that, along with Satan, demons direct the course of this fallen world. The designation “spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places}” (Eph 6:12) speaks of the character of demons – they are evil, and of their location in the atmosphere, where they abide and act. The term “thrones” in Greek is θρόνος (*thronos*), which coincides with other titles that emphasize the domination of dark powers over this fallen world. Nevertheless, they are only creatures, made by the Christ the Creator (Col 1:16).

Another term to study is “dominions,” or κυριότης (*kuriotes*). In several passages, they are associated with thrones, principalities, authorities, and powers (Col 1:16; Eph 1:21). The final term is “powers,” or δυνάμεις (*dunameis*, see Rom 8:38; Eph 1:21).

Those who believe that a demonic hierarchy exists appeal to Daniel chapter 10, where we find mention of “the prince of Persia,” “the kings of Persia,” and “the prince of Greece.” These are spiritual powers that, supposedly, stand behind human rulers and work in the world through them.<sup>256</sup> Each nation, then, has a “spiritual sponsor,” against which God’s angels battle (Dan 10:21; 12:1). Page makes the following commentary:

The portrayal of the princes of the nations in Daniel reveals that the unfolding of human history is not determined solely by the decisions made by human beings, for there is an unseen dimension of reality that must also be taken into account. In particular, there are malevolent forces in the universe that exercise a baneful influence in the sociopolitical realm, especially where the people of God are concerned.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup>Piggin attributes Paul’s expression “principalities and powers” to the intertestamental literature (Piggin, p. 956).

<sup>256</sup>The Septuagint uses the term ἀρχων (*archon*) for the prince of Persia, which Paul used in his designation “principalities.”

<sup>257</sup>Page, p. 64.

Along with the more substantial proofs listed above, some less convincing arguments support belief in a demonic hierarchy. In Deuteronomy 32:8, we read, “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.” In the Septuagint and one of the Qumran manuscripts, we find the words “according to the number of the angels of God,” which allegedly draws a connection between the angels and people groups on the earth.<sup>258</sup> However, since the Septuagint is a less reliable source, this argument is unconvincing.

It is also proposed that in Psalm 82, God speaks to angels (named *elohim*), whom He appointed over the nations. Yet, they abandoned their positions and became evil.<sup>259</sup> However, this Psalm does not deal with angels, but with the judges of Israel. This is proven by an appeal to Exodus 21:6 and 22:8, where the Hebrew term *elohim* again refers to judges. In addition, it is highly unlikely that the Psalmist would record a lengthy address by God to demons.

Moreover, the following passages supposedly indicate high-ranking demons in the demonic hierarchy: Psalm 97:9; 96:4; 106:37.<sup>260</sup> Upon closer examination, though, we conclude that these passages are referring to idols, worshiped as gods by the Gentiles.

Commentators on this topic disagree as to the order of demons in the hierarchy. Kenneth Hagin claims that Christ revealed to him in a vision that the lowest rank of demons were principalities, above them were authorities, then world rulers of this darkness, and then spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies.<sup>261</sup>

Taking all things into consideration, it appears likely that there does exist some type of demonic authority structure headed by Satan. Yet, the Bible does not provide us with much detail about it. We must affirm with Piggan, “It is not possible on the basis of NT evidence to rank these spirit powers or to attribute distinctive meanings to each.”<sup>262</sup>

We must also consider that, although human rulers of this world are under demonic influence, Paul also calls them “God’s servants,” who are worthy of respect and obedience (Rom 13:4). We also note that all evil spirits, regardless of position or rank, are beneath the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1: 21-22) and, therefore, are under the feet of His Body as well – the Church (Eph 1:23).

#### **4. The “Sons of God” in Genesis 6:2-4**

A hotly debated text concerns the supposed sexual union between fallen angels and human women. The text is Genesis 6:2-4:

...the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.... The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore {children} to them. Those were the mighty men who {were} of old, men of renown.

Various attempts have been made to clarify this perplexing text. Some claim that angels can reproduce and that this verse speaks of sexual union between angels and women that resulted in the birth of Nephilim, who are identified with or progenitors of demons. Another view interprets the sons of God as pagan rulers who

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<sup>258</sup>Noted in Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 199 and Arnold, p. 152.

<sup>259</sup>Arnold, p. 150-152.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

<sup>261</sup>Hagin K. E. Ministering To the Oppressed. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1987. – P. 6.

<sup>262</sup>Piggan, p. 956; Contrary to this opinion, Unger (without basis) describes in detail the demonic hierarchy. “Principalities” hold the highest rank, and “authorities” submit to them. “World powers of this darkness” work through human governments, and “spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies” are demons (Unger, p. 193).

married common women. A third interpretation is that the sons of God were descendants from the line of righteous Seth, while the daughters of men come from the lineage of sinful Cain. We will investigate each theory in turn.

The first theory is supported by the fact that in Job 1-2, angels are called “sons of God.” In addition, according to Genesis 6:4 these women bore “mighty men,” which one might expect from a union of angels with humans. Third, in Jude 6 we learn of some angels who “did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (cf. *1 Enoch*, 12.4; 15.3, 7) and were “kept in eternal bonds” (cf. *1 Enoch*, 10.4-12; 13.2; 14.5). This is understood as the punishment for cohabitating with women. Also significant is that in verse 7, the behavior of these angels is compared to that of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, “since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh.”<sup>263</sup>

Moreover, the word Nephilim derives from the Hebrew verb נָפַל (*naphal*), which means “to fall.” Therefore, Nephilim are “fallen ones.” Additionally, the phrase “daughters of men” does not refer to one certain group of women, like the descendants of Cain, but women in general.<sup>264</sup> Finally, this view is endorsed by the intertestamental literature and by many respected Jewish and Christian writers.<sup>265</sup>

Nevertheless, there are several problems with this theory. Jesus specifically taught that angels do not marry (Matt 22:30).<sup>266</sup> In addition, they are spiritual beings without bodies or reproductive organs. The Old Testament refers to people as sons of God in two eschatological contexts (Isa 43:6; Jer 3:19). Furthermore, a literal translation of Genesis 6:4 can shed light on our interpretation.

הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָּאָרֶץ בְּיָמֵינוּ  
וְגַם אֲחֵרֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-בָּנוֹת הָאָדָם וַיֵּלְדוּ לָהֶם  
הַמָּה הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מְעֹלָם אֲנָשִׁי הָשָׁם

The first line reads, “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days.” The second: “and even after the sons of God entered into the daughters of men, and they gave birth by them.” The third: “These are the mighty ones, who are from old, men of fame.”

The key point here is to whom the pronoun “these” in the third line refers. Those who defend the theory of fallen angels propose that these “mighty ones” are the offspring of the angels and women. Yet, in the Hebrew text there is no direct object after the verb, i.e. “gave birth.” In other words, there is no definite word in line 2 to which the pronoun “these” could apply.

It is very possible, then, that the pronoun “these” of line 3 refers to the Nephilim of line 1. If that is so, then line 2 simply indicates *the time when* the Nephilim were on the earth. We can paraphrase the passage as follows: “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and they were still on the earth when the sons of God went into the daughters of men, who bore by them. These Nephilim were mighty ones, who are from old, men of fame.” According to this rendering, the daughters of men did not give birth to these “mighty ones.” Line 3 simply further describes the Nephilim of line 1.

Although Page believes that the sons of God were demons, he nonetheless admits, “The text can be understood to suggest that the Nephilim and men of renown were on the scene prior to the intermarriage of the sons of God and daughters of men.”<sup>267</sup>

We can also take issue with the claim that “just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since in the same way as these (the fallen angels) indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh...” (Jude

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<sup>263</sup>Unger, p. 50.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid., p. 47-48.

<sup>265</sup>Unger lists Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Luther, but qualifies that not all of these believed that demons resulted from this union (Unger, p. 46).

<sup>266</sup>In response to this argument, Unger claims that Jesus had in mind good angels. Yet, evil spirits can somehow perform this act. He also notes that angels are always referred to as masculine (Unger, p. 52).

<sup>267</sup>Page, p. 52.



7). The pronoun “these” could easily apply not to the supposed “fallen angels” of verse 6, but “ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness” from verse 4.

Others posit that the sons of God in Genesis 6 are Gentile rulers, and that their sin was amassing large harems of wives.<sup>268</sup> In support, adherents note that the Gentiles would refer to their rulers as “sons of God.”<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, according to Daniel 10:13 Gentile rulers are “sponsored” by demons, who support their rule. Possibly, their subjects regarded them as sons of God because their angelic sponsors gave them supernatural power. The Jews have a similar tradition – the “sons of God” were princes that married women among the common people.<sup>270</sup> On the other hand, though, the text does not speak directly of Gentile rulers or princes.

The most plausible theory is that the “sons of God” were descendants of the righteous line of Seth, while the “daughters of men” were from the line of wicked Cain. This theory fits well with the context of the passage. In the previous chapters, these genealogies are listed in detail. The genealogy of Seth includes righteous Enoch and Noah, while Cain’s line is marred by the inclusion of the sinner Lamech. Several Church Fathers embraced this view: John of Damascus, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoet, and Augustine.<sup>271</sup>

This final theory, however, has both pluses and minuses. We must consider that all people are sinners – not only in the line of Cain. One may also challenge the claim that no “mixed marriages” took place before that time. Yet, in comparison with the other proposed theories this one seems more convincing. Even if the sons of God were indeed fallen angels, we still lack evidence that the birth of the Nephilim somehow led to the formation of demons, or that Satan’s goal in this was to pollute the purity of human nature, as the Eastern Orthodox claim.

## 5. Demons in Prison

Are certain fallen angels already imprisoned? Both Peter and Jude write about those whom “He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6), and “cast into hell and committed to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). God did this because these angels “sinned” in that they “did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 6). We assume that they sinned in an audacious manner in order to receive such a retribution.

Several explanations are offered for this passage. Some hold to the opinion that Peter meant the angels who supposedly cohabitated with women in Genesis 6:1-4 (see above). Another theory is that we are dealing here with a figure of speech representing the fallen and corrupt nature of demons as a kind of incarceration. In line with this, Peter speaks in a similar way in 2 Peter 2:9 about lawless people, that God knows “how to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.” Judging from verse 10, it seems that these unrighteous people are still free and active. Their being “under punishment” might just relate to their fallen and corrupt nature. Therefore, some conclude that these fallen angels are still free, and that no demons have yet been incarcerated.<sup>272</sup>

A third interpretation claims that a certain group of angels is in view, but we do not know exactly what transgression led to their imprisonment. It is unlikely that their initial rebellion is the issue, since all the fallen angels and Satan himself committed the same transgression, yet they are still free.<sup>273</sup> We may assume that, since neither Peter nor Jude feel the need to describe what these angels did, the original readers of their letter may have already known what caused their banishment.

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<sup>268</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>269</sup>Wenham G. J. Genesis 1-15 // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 139.

<sup>270</sup>Page, p. 50.

<sup>271</sup>Unger, p. 46.

<sup>272</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 471-472.

<sup>273</sup>Unger, p. 54-55.

Another explanation is that some angels intruded on the sphere assigned to other angels.<sup>274</sup> This seems consistent with the indictment that “they did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 6). However, not keeping “their own domain” does not necessarily imply intrusion onto another’s domain.

In conclusion, we affirm that a group of fallen angels are indeed in bonds, as Peter and Jude describe, but the nature of their transgression is not clear. We must keep in mind that the epistle writers’ goal was not to delineate their sin, but to emphasize that God does punish sin, even among angels.

## **6. Chemosh, God of Moab (2 Kin 3:27)**

The following passage presents significant difficulty for interpretation: “Then (the king of Moab) took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land” (2 Kin 3:27). The word קֶצֶף (*ketseph*), translated “great wrath,” is common in descriptions of God’s wrath against His people.

Paul House investigates this question.<sup>275</sup> First, we must inquire whether the power of Chemosh, god of Moab, was actually released? It is interesting to note that in the annals of Moab, this event is recorded and the power manifest is attributed to Chemosh. Yet, this would imply that Chemosh is stronger than Yahweh, which is not true.

Second, did the biblical writer here simply record a superstitious reaction by the Israelites as the reason for their retreat? Belief in Scripture’s inspiration and integrity complicates this option. The event is presented as historical fact, not the imagination of Israel’s troops. Is it possible that no power was released at all, but that the troops of Israel feared a response from Chemosh, and so retreated? This interpretation, though, does not give proper weight to the use of קֶצֶף (*ketseph*), i.e., “wrath.”

A more creative option asserts that the sacrifice of the king’s son inspired the troops of Moab to fight more courageously, which led to Israel’s retreat. We cannot rule out this interpretation, but would like to see a clearer indication of it in the text.

Another option is that Yahweh was wrathful that Israel’s aggression led the king of Moab to do such a despicable thing. Again, we find this variant unconvincing. The king made his own decision to sacrifice his son. Finally, the event may have so shocked and sickened the troops of Israel that they themselves retreated. This again, however, weakens the thrust of קֶצֶף (*ketseph*), i.e., “wrath.” So then, we are left without a satisfactory explanation.

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<sup>274</sup>Noted by Thiessen, p. 199.

<sup>275</sup>House P. R. 1, 2 Kings // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, electronic ed. Logos Library System. – P. 264.

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## Chapter 4: Sin, part 1

The study of sin is a key element in our understanding of Christian theology. In it, we discover the basic human dilemma and lay the foundation for a proper conception of salvation. In this and the following chapters, we will look at the question of sin from four perspectives: what sin is, how it appeared, how it operates, and where it leads.

### A. Definition of Sin

#### 1. Terminology

In our search for a definition of sin, we will find it helpful to study the biblical terms used to designate it.<sup>276</sup> In Scripture, one concept may be expressed by various terms. We will especially note this in regard to sin, since the Bible uses many synonyms to characterize it. When Jews and Greeks heard the words we will soon examine, they were aware of their basic, “secular” meanings as well. Therefore, we will also include in our investigation the more common uses of these terms.

The first terms to examine are the basic Hebrew and Greek terms for sin – חַטָּה (*hata*) and ἁρματία (*harmatia*), which are conventionally translated simply “sin.” In its various grammatical forms, the word חַטָּה (*hata*) appears 580 times in the Old Testament, while ἁρματία (*harmatia*) occurs 255 times in the New Testament. The basic meaning for both terms is “miss the mark,” as in Judges 20:16: “Out of all these people choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (חַטָּה).” So then, one who sins is “missing the mark,” or failing to live up to God’s standards.

The Hebrew term חַטָּה (*hata*) also overlaps in meaning with the Greek word πλανή (*plane*) – “turn from the way.” We cite Proverbs 19:2 as an example: “He who hurries his footsteps errs (חַטָּה).” Therefore, חַטָּה (*hata*) also describes sin as turning from the right path. The Greek synonym, πλανή (*plane*), is found 53 times in the New Testament in the same sense. Matthew 22:29 will serve as an example: “You are mistaken (πλανή), not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.” The view of the Sadducees, to whom Jesus was speaking, erred from the truth.

The following terms both carry the sense “harmful.” They are רָע (*ra*), κακός (*kakos*) and πονηρία (*poneria*). The word רָע (*ra*) is usually translated “evil.” We encounter it 1682 times in the Old Testament. The connotation of “harmful” is well illustrated in Jeremiah 39:12, where Nebuchadnezzar orders the captain of his bodyguard concerning the prophet, “Take him and look after him, and do nothing harmful (רָע) to him.” Another example is Amos 6:3: “Do you put off the day of calamity (רָע).” So then, sin is harmful and benefits no one. We find this same meaning for κακός (*kakos*), and πονηρία (*poneria*), i.e., “harmful,” in Luke 16:25 and Matthew 7:17.

Our next term is רֶשֶׁת (*resha*), which appears 497 times in the Old Testament and is typically translated “wickedness” or “lawlessness.” Its basic definition, though, is “anxiety/turbulence” as illustrated in Isaiah 57:20: “The wicked (רֶשֶׁת) are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud.” Sin is restless and not content to stay within the boundaries God has established.

The Greek term ἀδικία (*adika*) is found 85 times in the New Testament and usually translates as “injustice/iniquity.” It is a legal term denoting a “transgression,” as in Acts 18:14: “When Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrong (ἀδικία) or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you.’” Gallio did not punish Paul because he had committed no transgression. Sin, then, is a transgression of God’s law.

The Hebrew יָדָא (*aon*) occurs 316 times in the Old Testament, and is translated “lawlessness,” “sin,” “injustice,” or “guilt.” Its basic meaning, though, is “to distort.” We see an example of the latter in Psalm 38:6,

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<sup>276</sup>See Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 583ff.

where David says, “I am bent over and greatly bowed down (יָיַו).” David describes here a physical distortion of his body. Similarly, sin is a distortion or perversion of human nature.

The final descriptive word for sin that we will examine is נֶשֶׁוּׁ (pasha). This word is encountered 175 times in the Old Testament and is rendered by various terms, like “lawlessness,” “transgression,” “wrongdoing,” “guilt,” etc. Its basic denotation is “rebellion,” and is so used in 1 Kin 12:19 in reference to political revolution: “So Israel has been in rebellion (נֶשֶׁוּׁ) against the house of David to this day.” Sin rebels against God’s authority.

## **2. Essence of Sin**

### **a. Sin as Lawlessness**

In light of the wide spectrum of nuances that the concept of sin encompasses, we will be well advised to focus on a more concrete definition. The Word of God, in fact, provides us with such a definition in 1 John 3:4: “Sin is lawlessness.” The essence of sin, then, is a violation of God’s laws. Other Scripture passages confirm this idea.<sup>277</sup> Romans 4:15 reads, “Where there is no law, there also is no violation.” Sin is defined by law. Therefore, the absence of law makes its violation, i.e., sin, impossible. Similarly, Romans 5:13 states, “Sin is not imputed when there is no law.” The same idea is encountered in Romans 7:7: “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.”

We must make a distinction, however, between sin as an act and sin as a habitual nature. When persons violate God’s laws, they commit acts of sin. When people sin, though, they are acting out of a sinful nature inherent to them due to Adam’s fall. This “sinful nature” is a habitual propensity to commit acts of sin.

The apostle John deals with both these aspects in his first epistle. In 1 John 1:10, we read about specific sinful acts: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1:8). Prior to that, though, John reveals the source of sinful acts – the sinful nature, which he also calls “sin”: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” David makes this distinction as well. In Psalm 51, he acknowledges his transgression before Yahweh: “Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight” (v. 4). At the same time, he recognizes in himself this innate propensity to sin: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (v. 7). In our study, we will initially treat sin as concrete acts and later will deal with the sin nature.

### **b. Sin and Temptation**

When we speak of sin as “lawlessness” or violation of the law, we imply that there is a choice of the will involved. This is the key to understanding the difference between sin and temptation. James helps us here: “Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (Jam 1:14-15). Note the difference between lust and sin. Evil desires can arise in people’s minds or hearts. If an individual makes a decision to act upon that desire, he or she commits sin. Similarly, an evil thought can arise in one’s mind. If one chooses to embrace that thought, that person has sinned. If no movement of the will toward sin is made, the person has simply been tempted.

We cannot control what enters our mind or heart. We are responsible for how we respond to those thoughts or desires. We cannot control who knocks at our door, but we can control whom we admit into our house. Similarly, we cannot regulate random thoughts or desires, but, with God’s help, we can determine our response.

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<sup>277</sup>Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 240.

According to James 1:14-15, when lust conceives it gives birth to sin. Lust conceives at the moment when the will acquiesces to it. Therefore, temptation operates before the participation of the will, and sin – after its participation.

When tempted, we can rely on God's promise through Paul, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13). Jesus also instructed His disciples that prayer strengthens one's resistance to temptation (Lk 22:40).

### c. Role of Law and Conscience

If sin is defined by law, how do we know what God's law requires? The Bible states that all people know God's standard of right behavior. It is available either through the study of Scripture or through conscience.

Scripture enlightens us as to a life pleasing to the Lord. The teachings of our Lord and the apostles gives us needed guidance for moral living as Christians. The Mosaic Law served not only to reveal God's righteous standards, but also to show human inability to observe it, leading sinful humanity to Christ to receive salvation by faith. The Old Testament law remains a helpful guide to proper behavior when understood in the light of New Testament revelation.<sup>278</sup>

We understand God's standards not only through Scripture, but also by means of conscience. The Greek term translated conscience is συνείδησις (*suneidesis*). Conscience can convict a person who knows nothing of the Bible. In Romans 2:12-16, Paul speaks of conscience as the "law, written in the heart."

Two theories exist concerning the origin of conscience. Is conscience an aspect of humanity's original created state, or something introduced as a result of the Fall? The latter view theorizes that by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve received the "knowledge of good and evil," or conscience. On the other hand, Thiessen, who champions the first view, explains that although in the Garden, Adam and Eve received experiential knowledge of good and evil, the theoretical knowledge of good and evil through conscience was implanted in them from the beginning.<sup>279</sup>

The Greeks originally employed the term συνείδησις (*suneidesis*) in the sense of "self-awareness." In time, the word came to include the connotation of "reflection on one's life." Eventually, the Greek philosopher Seneca expanded its meaning until it came to mean judgment on the rightness of one's conduct. It is interesting to note that there is no word for conscience in the Old Testament. Instead, the function of the conscience is ascribed to the "heart." In the first century AD, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria combined the Old Testament concept of conscience with the Greek word συνείδησις (*suneidesis*).

Although only one Greek word expressed the general idea of "conscience," the biblical text modifies it with various adjectives:

1. Good conscience (ἀγαθός – *agathos*, or καλός – *kalos*)
2. Clear conscience (καθαρός – *katharos*)
3. Pure conscience (ἀπρόσκοπος – *aproskopos*)
4. Evil conscience (πονηρός – *poneros*)
5. Defiled conscience (μιαρός – *miaros*)
6. Seared conscience (κεκαυστηριασμένων – *kekausteriasmenon*)
7. Weak conscience (ἀσθενής – *asthenes*)

For convenience's sake and ease of study, we will condense this list of seven types of consciences to three main categories: good conscience, evil conscience, and weak conscience.

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<sup>278</sup>For a detailed analysis of the relationship of Old Testament law to New Testament believers, see volume 2, chapter 8.

<sup>279</sup>Thiessen, p. 254.

The good conscience is one that convicts a person after committing a sin. The experience can be described as a painful heart (1 Sam 24:6; 2 Sam 24:10), or a sense of guilt (Gen 3:8; Jn 8:7-9), or unpleasantness (Rom 13:5). The book of Acts describes the conviction of conscience as being “pierced to the heart” (Acts 2:37) or being “cut to the quick” (Acts 7:54). Curiously, in one case the Greek adjective *πονηρός* (*poneros*), which typically refers to an evil conscience, can connote the conviction caused by a good conscience (Heb 10:22). Another characteristic of the good conscience is that it does not convict one who has not sinned (see 1 Pet 3:16, 21; Acts 23:1; 2 Tim 1:3; 1 Tim 3:9; Acts 24:16). Finally, it indicates whether a future course of action is forbidden (1 Tim 1:5, 19; Heb 13:18).

Unlike the good conscience, the evil conscience fails to convict a sinner. It can be described as a “seared conscience” (1 Tim 4:2). Such an individual has lost sensitivity and responsiveness to the conviction of a good conscience. It also permits unlawful behavior (Tit 1:15). The evil conscience is also known by the synonym “depraved mind,” of which Scripture often speaks (2 Tim 3:8; 1 Tim 6:5; Rom 1:28; Jonah 4:11).

The third general classification of conscience is the weak conscience. It can be contrasted with the evil conscience. An evil conscience will allow forbidden behavior, while a weak conscience will forbid legitimate behavior. In other words, the evil conscience allows what God forbids, while the weak conscience forbids what God allows (see 1 Cor 8:7-12; 10:25-29).

In addition, unlike the good conscience that does not convict the innocent, the weak conscience will convict one who had not truly sinned or has already received forgiveness. The weak conscience is well described in 1 John 3:19-20: “We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.” Here, the word “heart” reflects the action of a weak conscience. It may condemn one for sins already forgiven.

In summary, the good conscience warns us before we commit sin, while the evil conscience permits such behavior. After a transgression, the good conscience will convict the offender, while the evil conscience will not. The weak conscience will forbid behavior that God permits, and may convict one when no true sin was committed or condemn for sins previously forgiven.

In light of the fact that one’s conscience may be in different conditions, we need guidance as to how to respond to the messages it sends. Scripture counsels to not violate conscience by participating in questionable behavior (Rom 13:5; 1 Tim 1:19; 3:9; 1 Pet 2:19; 3:16). Even if the act is not strictly sinful, acting against conscience can itself be considered sin (1 Cor 8:10-12; Rom 14:20-23). Paul, for example, consistently followed the dictates of conscience (see Acts 23:1; 24:15-16; Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 1:12; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 13:18).

As noted above, a weak conscience may forbid a legitimate act. This is because the believer is undergoing the “renewing of the mind” (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23). To the degree that this process is advancing, the believer will have an increasingly clearer perception of what is permitted and what is not and subsequently will enjoy more freedom in the Lord. Yet, while this process is underway, it is still advisable to refrain from questionable behavior until one is convinced that the behavior is acceptable.

If a good conscience convicts of sin, one must confess the sin, repent of it, and seek reconciliation with others as needed (1 Jn 1:9; Lk 19:8-9). If the weak conscience unjustly condemns, then one may “assure one’s heart” through faith in the blood of Christ, shed for our forgiveness (Heb 9:14; 10:22; 1 Jn 3:20; Acts 15:9). If we are unsure whether we are hearing from a good conscience or a weak one, we can appeal to Scripture and the Holy Spirit for clarification.

### **3. Classification of Sin**

We can classify different types of sin. For example, there are both external and internal sins. External sins concern what a person does in the body. Stealing, adultery, and the like are examples. Internal sins occur in the heart and mind. They include pride, lust, jealousy, etc. Other people can witness an external sin, but only God sees the heart and tests the mind. Interestingly, the Old Testament Law focuses more on external behavior, while the New Testament, which presents a higher moral standard, gives more attention to internal sins. This is



very evident in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where He revealed that the internal condition of a person is just as important as their public behavior.

Another set of categories is the distinction between sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission involve doing what is forbidden. Sins of omission are failing to do what is required. James brings out the latter by writing, "Therefore, to one who knows {the} right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin" (Jam 4:17). We can also highlight "social sins," that is, participating in the sins of others or one's culture, such as not testifying against a guilty party (Prov 29:24). Correspondingly, Paul charges the church in Ephesus: "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph 5:11).

So then, we may sin in many ways: in what we do or do not do; in what we say or do not say; in what we think or do not think; in what we intend or do not intend to do. God's standards are so high because they are a reflection of His holy nature. This truth stands behind the words of Jesus, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). God cannot change or lower His standards because He does not change. We observe them not only to avoid punishment, but also to imitate the Lord.

#### 4. Degrees of Sin

Although all sins are grievous, the Bible nonetheless speaks of degrees of sins – some are more serious than others. The following passages make mention of this (Jn 19:11; Ezek 8:6; Matt 11:22; Matt 23:14). The use of the word "abomination" for transgressions especially grievous to God also confirms this observation (Prov 29:27; Lev 18:22; Deut 22:5).<sup>280</sup> Nevertheless, whether or not a certain sin can be classified as an abomination or not, a sin of any degree can lead to condemnation. According to Scripture, only one offense is sufficient to condemn (Jam 2:10-11; Gal 3:10).

The main categories to distinguish degrees of sinfulness are: sins of ignorance, habitual sins, and deliberate sins. Sins of ignorance are committed without the person's knowledge that such behavior is sinful. The Mosaic Law required a violator to bring a sacrifice, thus indicating that the act was nonetheless considered sinful before Yahweh (see Num 6:11; 15:22-29; Lev 4-5).

Likely, the reason that sins committed in ignorance are still considered sinful is that people have access to God's standard, either through the Law or through conscience. In the first three chapters of Romans, in fact, Paul appeals to conscience and the Law to show that all persons are sinful and guilty before the Lord. God calls those guilty of sins of ignorance to repentance (Acts 17:30). The Bible also reveals that those committing sins of ignorance are shown greater mercy (1 Tim 1:13) and receive less punishment (Lk 12:47-48). The psalmist's prayer is worthy of imitation: "Keep back Your servant from presumptuous {sins}" (Ps 19:13).

A habitual sin is committed when a person, due to weakness of character, continues to commit the same offense over and over. Hebrews 4:15 refers to this as "our weaknesses." Mueller defines it as "the habitual evil inclination... which is produced and confirmed by repeated sinful acts."<sup>281</sup> A person trapped in a sinful habit must confess the sin to the Lord and strive for victory in this area by relying on God's grace in Christ.

Unlike the sin of ignorance or habitual sins, deliberate sins are known sins that the person has no specific predilection toward, but are nonetheless consciously committed in disregard of God. The Old Testament refers to such acts as sinning "defiantly" (Num 15:30-31). The New Testament calls it "sinning willfully" (Heb 10:26).<sup>282</sup>

There are two other types of sins mentioned in Scripture: the sin leading to death, and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is also called the unpardonable sin.<sup>283</sup> Two options exist for explaining the "sin leading to

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<sup>280</sup>Marino B. The Origin, Nature, and Consequences of Sin // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 311.

<sup>281</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 225.

<sup>282</sup>In Hebrews 10:26-29, the word "sinning" is a Greek present participle, which indicates continuous or repetitive action.

<sup>283</sup>Martin R. P. Blasphemy // Wood D. R. W., Marshall I. Howard. New Bible Dictionary. – 3rd ed. – Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996. – P. 142; Rees T. Blaspheme, Blasphemy // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001. – V. 1. – P. 522.

death”: a sin that results in physical death, or one that leads to spiritual death. The first option gains support from 1 Corinthians 11:30-32, where those who are disrespectful to the Lord’s Supper may die prematurely. We may also cite Acts 5:1-11, where Ananias and Sapphira perished for lying to the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, understanding it as spiritual death coincides with other passages that speak of an unpardonable sin (such as Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-31). John states that prayer for someone who has committed the sin resulting in death is unprofitable, which is consistent with an unpardonable sin. Hebrews 6:4-6 informs us that those who fall away from the faith cannot be renewed to repentance.

Many wonder what Jesus meant by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: “Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the {age} to come” (Matt 12:31-32). This comment by Jesus was provoked by the Pharisees’ claim that the Lord cast out demons by “Beelzebul the ruler of the demons” (Matt 12:24).

Mueller defines blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as follows: “The sin against the Holy Ghost is committed only when the Holy Spirit has clearly revealed the divine truth to the sinner and the sinner nevertheless utters blasphemies against it.”<sup>284</sup> Similarly, Horton understands it as the complete rejection of the work of the Spirit in drawing a person to Christ, thus making this individual’s salvation impossible.<sup>285</sup>

## **B. Original Sin**

Having given definition to the concept of sin, we now ask, “How did sin originate among humans?” The technical term for sin’s origin is “original sin.” It locates the beginning of sin’s destructive course to the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. As a result of their original sin, all humans inherit from Adam a sinful nature, or “depravity,” as well as a share in Adam’s guilt. In addition, the natural world, which God originally intended to furnish people with only blessing, has now become hostile to humanity. The human body, consequently, is now subject to death and decay.

### **1. Concept of Corporate Personality**

The biblical teaching of original sin is better understood in light of the concept “corporate personality.” Corporate personality refers to the phenomenon, often encountered in Scripture, when God deals with an entire group as with one entity. According to this system, the fate of a representative of the group becomes the fate of the entire group. The theologian possibly championing this theory more than any other, H. Wheeler Robinson, defined it thusly: “The whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it.”<sup>286</sup>

This principle of solidarity stands behind the edict in Ex 20:5-6 (Deut 5:9-10): “...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” It also compromises the foundation for God’s covenantal system. He makes a covenant not with one individual, but also with that one’s descendants as well

The Old Testament abounds with examples of this phenomenon. In Numbers 16:27-33, we learn of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, whose families perished along with them in their rebellion. When Hiel

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<sup>284</sup>Mueller, p. 233.

<sup>285</sup>Horton S. What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit. – Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976. – P. 100-101.

<sup>286</sup>Robinson H. W. Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel. – Rev. ed. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1980. – P. 25. We must qualify, though, that the concept of corporate personality presented in this chapter differs somewhat from Robinson’s understanding. Robinson focused more on solidarity as a feature of Hebrew culture. He wrote, “The group possesses a consciousness which is distributed among its individual members and does not exist simply as a figure of speech or as an ideal” (Robinson, p. 30; also see p. 45-46, 57). However, we will focus on corporate personality as a judicial position before God.

disobediently rebuilt Jericho, it was not he who perished, but his sons (Josh 6:25; 1 Kin 16:34). Moreover, when Achan sinned, his entire family shared in his tragic fate (Josh 7:1-5, 24-26). When David conducted an “illegal” census of his people, He did not suffer for it, but the people of Jerusalem did instead (2 Sam 24:15-17; 1 Chr 21:3).

We can cite other examples. Because Amalak “set himself against him (Israel) on the way while he was coming up from Egypt,” Saul was commissioned to “strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has” (1 Sam 15:2-3). Moab and Ammon suffered similarly (Neh 13:1-3). In 2 Samuel 21, Yahweh punished Israel in the days of David with a three-year famine for sins that Saul committed previously.<sup>287</sup> Furthermore, Canaan was cursed for Ham’s transgression (Gen 9:25). Rehoboam lost most of his kingdom because of his father Solomon’s sin (1 Kin 11:11-12). All the sons of Jeroboam perished because of Jeroboam’s rebellion.<sup>288</sup>

However, we must qualify that those under corporate punishment could escape it by means of personal devotion to the Lord. This was so in the case of Rahab, who should have perished along with the other inhabitants of Jericho (Josh 2:8-14; 6:22-24). Yet, she was delivered because she feared God. In addition, the Moabites were excluded from the assembly of Israel, yet Ruth was welcomed due to her faithfulness. Therefore, we cannot claim that corporate punishment is inevitable.

By far, the most significant example of the principle of corporate personality, which affects us all, is the transmission of sin and its consequences from Adam to all his descendants. In Romans 5:12, we read, “Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin.” Later, Paul writes in verse 17, “By the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one.” The theme continues in verses 18-19:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Adam’s sin has repercussions for all his descendants of all generations. Therefore, Robinson is correct in regarding this as another clear example of corporate personality:

The most familiar of all examples of this representative value is seen in the thoroughly Hebraic contrast of Adam and Christ made by the apostle Paul, which draws all its cogency from the conception of corporate personality.<sup>289</sup>

Acknowledging that solidarity exists between Adam and humanity in sin, death, and condemnation, we must next raise the question of the mechanism of this solidarity. Two theories are advanced: federalism and realism. According to the theory “federalism,” Adam was humanity’s representative in Eden. Consequently, what Adam did in the Garden affects us all. Adam violated his covenant with God and thereby brought on all his offspring, who were included in that covenant, the curse of the Fall.<sup>290</sup> In “realism,” people somehow actually participated in Adam’s transgression, since they were “in him” when he ate of the forbidden fruit.<sup>291</sup>

In defense of realism, some appeal to Hebrews chapter 7. Here, the author asserts that Melchizedek is greater than Levi because the latter was in the “loins” of Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore, Levi participated in that act. In a similar manner, all humanity was in the “loins” of Adam in the

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<sup>287</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>288</sup>Many other examples exist, such as Lam 5:7; Job 27:14-15; Ps 109:10, 14; 1 Kin 9:6-7; 2 Kin 5:27.

<sup>289</sup>Robinson, p. 37.

<sup>290</sup>Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 147-149; Thiessen, p. 262-263; Marino, p. 300-301.

<sup>291</sup>Berkhof, p. 143; Thiessen, p. 264-265.

Garden when he sinned and therefore participated in the act. We may include Tertullian and Augustine as adherents of this theory.<sup>292</sup>

Realism, though, encounters various problems. If all people became sinners by being “in Adam” when he sinned, then why did only Adam’s first sin affect his offspring? All of his subsequent transgressions should have influenced humanity as well. In addition, why do we not suffer for the sins of our other ancestors, “in whom” we were located as well when they sinned? Others note that Jesus was born of Adam’s race, but did not inherit the consequences of his sin. Finally, in Romans 5:14 we read that those who sinned after Adam and before Moses did not sin “in the likeness of the offense of Adam.” This implies that they did not participate in his actual sin.<sup>293</sup>

The theory “federalism” claims that God appointed Adam the representative of the entire human race. Therefore, what Adam did in the Garden affects all humanity, since he was its representative. Adam violated his covenant with the Lord and in this way brought a curse on all who were included in the covenant. Unlike realism, human depravity is communicated not by physical descent, but as a punishment from God for covenant violation.<sup>294</sup>

One may defend federalism in the following way.<sup>295</sup> First, Hosea 6:7 speaks of a covenant between God and Adam. Second, Genesis 3:17 states that God cursed the earth as a punishment on humanity’s representative, which may imply that humanity itself was cursed as a punishment on its representative as well. Third, some argue that Jesus avoided inheriting Adam’s sin since He belonged to a different covenant with the Father. Finally, the word אָדָם (*adam*) is used in the Hebrew text both for Adam’s personal name, and also for humanity in its entirety (e.g. Gen 6:6-7). This correspondence may indicate Adam’s role as humanity’s representative.

Finally, it is worth commenting on several passages that seem to contradict this principle of solidarity. In Deuteronomy 24:16, Moses wrote, “Fathers shall not be put to death for {their} sons, nor shall sons be put to death for {their} fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” In recognition of this command, Amaziah refrained from punishing the children of those who assassinated his father (2 Chr 25:3-4). Moreover, in certain passages the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel stress personal responsibility before God:

- In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge (Jer 31:29-30).
- “What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live,” declares the Lord Yahweh, “you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die” (Ezek 18:2-4).

However, Robinson notes that in other passages from these prophets, they also recognized corporate solidarity. Jeremiah speaks of new covenant “with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). He also prays in accordance with this principle to Him “who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them” (Jer 32:18). Ezekiel, in turn, prophesied about the restoration of the house of Israel (Ezek 37: 1-14), the reunification of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, and the appointing of King Messiah over them (v. 24-28).

Other passages that indicate the continuation of solidarity include Jeremiah 16:11-13, where through the prophet God rehearses the guilt of Israel’s ancestors. Even after the return from Babylon, we witness instances

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<sup>292</sup>Ibid.

<sup>293</sup>Berkhof, p. 143; Thiessen, p. 265. Marino, p. 301.

<sup>294</sup>Berkhof, p. 147-149; Thiessen, p. 262-263; Marino, p. 300-301.

<sup>295</sup>See Thiessen, p. 264-265. Marino, p. 300-301.

of enforcement of corporate responsibility (see Neh 13:1-3; Est 9:6-10).<sup>296</sup> We might explain God's command in Deuteronomy 24:16 about not enforcing corporate punishment by assuming that the Lord was forbidding His people from taking initiative themselves to apply this principle. Nonetheless, God Himself frequently so acted in the course of Old Testament history.

In conclusion, Robinson claims, "It is quite wrong to place the individualism of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in direct antithesis to the group conception which had hitherto prevailed. The group conception still remained dominant."<sup>297</sup>

Possibly, verses that appear to refute the principle of solidarity may be intended to correct a misperception among God's people about personal responsibility. Some Jews may have begun to think that all the hardship they endured was the fault of their ancestors, and that they were guiltless. We can see this attitude reflected in the saying, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (see Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2).

Because of this misunderstanding and abuse of the solidarity principle, God brought this corrective through Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>298</sup> Eichrodt affirms that such an emphasis on personal responsibility "does not stand in mutually exclusive opposition to, but in fruitful tension with, the duty of solidarity, and such affects the individual and motivates his conduct."<sup>299</sup>

The most likely option is that Jeremiah and Ezekiel began to show that the system of corporate personality was soon to fade out. It was meant to operate until the coming of Messiah to prepare people to conceptualize their position of solidarity with Christ (see chapter 8). Thus, the principle remains in force now only in a limited fashion in the believer's union with Christ as well as in God's ongoing covenant with the descendants of Abraham.

## **2. Inherited Depravity**

### **a. General Considerations**

Let us examine in more detail the three elements of original sin, the first being inherited depravity. Human sinful nature, or "depravity," is the distortion of human nature so that it has an innate tendency to sin. When we speak of "nature," we mean how an object acts "naturally," that is, when no outside factors are exerting an influence on it.

Concerning fallen human nature, it sins "naturally." Paul testifies, "We too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest" (Eph 2:3), and, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom 3:12). Jeremiah reveals that sinful humans cannot liberate themselves from their fallen condition: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? {Then} you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer 13:23). Similarly, the Proverbs assert, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?'" (Prov 20:9). David adds, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 50:5). James speaks of "your pleasures that wage war in your members" (Jam 4:1).

The Bible reveals that people's problem is within, in the heart. Jesus knew what the human heart was like (Jn 2:25), that it is hardened (Matt 19:8). A bad tree cannot bear good fruit (Matt 7:18). Jesus taught, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting {and} wickedness, {as well} {as} deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride {and} foolishness" (Mk 7:21-

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<sup>296</sup>Kaminsky J. S. Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible // Clines D., Davies P. R., eds Supplemental Series of the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, no. 196. – Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995. – P. 138, 142-143. Yet, in these examples the principle was applied not directly by God, but by people.

<sup>297</sup>Robinson, p. 32.

<sup>298</sup>Allen L. C. Ezekiel 1-19 // Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1998. – P. 270ff.

<sup>299</sup>Eichrodt W. Theology of the Old Testament / Baker J. A. trans. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1967. – V. 2. – P. 232.

22). Jeremiah concerns, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9). In Ecclesiastics, we read, “The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives” (Ecc 9:3).

The Bible, then, concludes that the fallen humans are dead in relation to God (Col 2:13; Matt 8:22). They are slaves to sin (Jn 8:34) and love “darkness rather than light” (Jn 3:19). Since all people are polluted by sin, we can characterize the entire race as “a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil 2:15), which is in rebellion against God (Acts 4:25-26). Moreover, Jesus testifies that the world’s “deeds are evil” (Jn 7:7).

The book of Proverbs devotes much attention to the “wicked.” It characterizes them as deceitful (Prov 12:5), perverted (10:32; 21:8), arrogant (21:29), haters of God (14:2) and people (21:10), especially the righteous (29:10, 27), unconcerned about the poor (29:7), lovers of violence (13:2), and perverse in speech (19:1). They slander (15:28; 11:9-11; 19:28), walk in darkness (4:19), do not understand justice (28:5), sew discord (Prov 6:14; 17:19), act disgustingly and shamefully (Prov 13:5), even mistreat animals (12:10).

One can educate sinners, medicate them, apply remedial punishment, but they nonetheless remain sinners. People are born with a sinful nature and in order to resolve the dilemma, they must experience a new birth.

The term most often used in the New Testament to designate fallen human nature is σάρξ (*sarks*), usually translated “flesh.” The word σάρξ (*sarks*) has many meanings. It can refer to that which covers the bones, i.e., “meat,” as in Luke 24:39: “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” A second meaning is the body as a whole. Ephesians 5:29 is an example: “No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it.” Third, σάρξ (*sarks*) can apply to the entire person. John 1:14 reveals that the “Word became flesh,” that is, the Son of God became a human person – in soul as well as in body.

A fourth definition is heredity or origin. Romans 4:1 declares, “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?” Here, σάρξ (*sarks*) points to Abraham as the forefather of the Jewish nation. A further meaning is human judgment: “You judge according to the flesh” (Jn 8:15). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in that they judged based merely on externals, not understanding the essence of the matter.

A sixth application of σάρξ (*sarks*) is human weakness or inability. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, we read, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, or the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful.” Paul is comparing what humans can do in their own strength with what they can do in God’s strength. Another example is Mark 14:38, where Jesus prayed while the disciples slept. He reprimanded them with the words, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Most likely, the disciples desired to pray, but their bodies were weak. Again, σάρξ (*sarks*) characterizes human weakness. This will be key to understanding “flesh” as sinful nature.

Paul is foremost in using σάρξ (*sarks*) to denote human depravity. In Galatians 5:19-21, he enumerates the works of the flesh: “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,” etc.

Many people, unfortunately, wrongly associate the idea of “flesh” as sinful nature with “flesh” as the human body. Due to this error, the body is thought to be the root and source of human depravity. Therefore, victory over sin supposedly consists in suppression of the physical aspect of life. However, Scripture contradicts this view. Looking at Galatians 5:19-21, we note a number of vices that do not involve physical desire, such as jealousy, anger, dissensions, and others. We also recall the words of Jesus, “From within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting {and} wickedness, {as well} {as} deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride {and} foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man” (Mk 7:21).

Therefore, the Bible does not teach that the body is the source of sin. This idea arose in Greek philosophy. The basic premise of Greek thought is that the mind or soul is good, but the body is evil. Salvation for the Greek

comes from suppression of the body and development of the mind. Unfortunately, this type of thinking continues to have a significant effect on the Church today.

A more appropriate association is to connect the connotation of σάρξ (*sarks*) as “sinful nature” with the idea of “human weakness.” The term σάρξ (*sarks*) in relation to depravity merely indicates human weakness in regard to moral living – a person “in the flesh” cannot refrain from sin.

Having shown that all persons inherit moral depravity from Adam, it becomes clear why all persons sin. Paul confirms this in Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Solomon also recognized, “There is no man who does not sin” (2 Chr 6:36), and, “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who {continually} does good and who never sins” (Ecc 7:20). Isaiah writes, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa 53:6). The psalmist testifies, “For in Your sight no man living is righteous” (Ps 143:2). Jesus taught that all people are evil (Lk 11:13) and that only God is good (Lk 18:18-19).<sup>300</sup> Consequently, the Bible summons all to repentance (Lk 24:47).<sup>301</sup>

We may gain insight by comparing the moral condition of humans before and after the Fall. Before Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, they possessed the potential not to sin and not to die. After the Fall, however, they became sinful and mortal, that is, became unable not to sin and unable not to die. Some thinkers theorize that if Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would have become confirmed in righteousness. In other words, they would have become unable to sin and unable to die and would have continued in that state eternally. This position, though, is only theoretical.<sup>302</sup>

As noted above, human depravity is “inherited.” Peter comments on this, “You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers” (1 Pet 1:18). The inheritance of human depravity traces back to the first man – Adam.

In describing human depravity, we gain insight by drawing a parallel between theology and genetics. We are familiar with the phenomenon in nature called a “mutation.” When the chromosome experiences some sort of insult, a mutation may occur that can lead to a physical deformity in one’s offspring. Similarly, Adam’s disobedience resulted in a “spiritual mutation” in his moral nature. Now, just as children may receive a physical defect from a mutation in their parents, humanity in general inherits this “moral mutation,” or human depravity, from Adam.

Thus, we conclude that sin is not some sort of substance or power. It has no material existence. It is, rather, a distortion or perversion of what God created good. When a physical mutation occurs, nothing new is added to the chromosome – only the structure is altered. Similarly, when Adam sinned, nothing new was “added” to his human composition. His nature merely was altered and became sinful.

Augustine concurs with the idea of depravity as a distortion of the original human condition. He writes, “Original sin is not the nature itself, but... an accidental defect and damage in nature.”<sup>303</sup> The Lutheran theologian Mueller agrees, “Sin is not positive in the sense that it is a material substance, which subsists of itself... but is an accidental matter.”<sup>304</sup>

## **b. Pelagianism**

The following sections will deal with the degree of human depravity, that is, how deeply is sin rooted in human nature? Can a fallen person do any good at all? If so, to what degree? Three theories predominate: Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and total depravity.

Pelagianism claims that Adam’s sin has no effect on human nature at all. This theory was advanced by in the fourth century by Pelagius. It also found expression in the post-reformation movement “Socinianism.”

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<sup>300</sup>Also see: 1 Kin 8:46; Prov 20:9; Rom 3:9-12; Gal 3:22; Jam 3:2; 1 Jn 1:10 (Thiessen, p. 185).

<sup>301</sup>Also see: Lk 13:1-5; Jn 3:5-6; Acts 17:30.

<sup>302</sup>Berkhof, p. 134.

<sup>303</sup>Mueller, p. 222.

<sup>304</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

Pelagius taught that persons are born with free will, untainted by slavery to sin. The human spirit is created directly by God. The human being has inherited no sin nature from Adam. If one objects that humans have indeed inherited mortality as a consequence of Adam's sin, Pelagius would respond that God intentionally created humans mortal. Even without any effect from the Fall, the human body was appointed to die.<sup>305</sup>

According to Pelagianism, human "depravity" arises from a lack of education. People do not need deliverance from a sinful nature, but better educational opportunities. In addition, "depravity" is mistaken for simply bad habits that people develop. However, with application of sufficient will-power, people can break bad habits. Finally, sin can result from imitating the bad habits of others. One merits eternal salvation by doing good works. Pelagius felt that the fact that God gave commandments implies that we can observe them.<sup>306</sup>

However, the Bible refutes Pelagius' views. They clearly contradict Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 5 of the tragic consequence of Adam's sin for all humanity. In addition, the New Testament categorically rejects the idea of salvation by good works: "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Gal 2:16).

Furthermore, the Bible abounds with texts that affirm human sinfulness. We have already cited some in this chapter. Finally, one must consider the purpose for Jesus' sacrificial death. The witness of the New Testament and our Lord Himself is that He died for the sins of the world, which indicates that people are in need of God's grace for salvation. The Early Church aptly condemned Pelagius' teaching as heresy.<sup>307</sup>

Some seek to justify Pelagius by claiming that his opponents exaggerated his views. Lamberigts states, "Pelagianism was for the most part created by his opponents. Pelagius himself would not recognize this teaching as his own."<sup>308</sup>

Pelagius' supporters also claim that some documents attributed to him are not actually his. Moreover, Pelagius is said to have been pursuing a noble goal – to defend the Church from the teaching of determinism, which he felt would weaken its moral fiber. Pelagius' main opponent, Augustine, did in fact hold to determinism, claiming that God controls a person's behavior. Pelagius saw in determinism no motive for striving for holiness. If God controls everything, why should we strive? Pelagius' defenders also claim that he did not specifically deny original sin or the operation of supernatural grace. He affirmed that God's grace was present in creation, revelation, and the forgiveness of sins.<sup>309</sup>

In response to this defense of Pelagius, we note that the issue is not so much his actual teaching – that is merely a historical question. We are resisting the teaching called "Pelagianism," which is errant, whatever one may name it, or wherever it may have come from.

### c. Semi-Pelagianism

Semi-Pelagianism is a moderate view between "Pelagianism" and "total depravity." According to this point of view, people do indeed inherit depravity from Adam, but are still able to do some good.<sup>310</sup> This teaching traces back to a fourth-fifth century monk named Cassian. We can include among its adherents Philip Melancthon, some adherents of Arminianism, the Roman Catholic Church, and some Eastern Orthodox.<sup>311</sup>

As mentioned above, in semi-pelagian thought, persons inherit depravity from Adam, but still retain sufficient will-power to resist sin to a certain degree. Yet, all people eventually sin. No one is able to totally

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<sup>305</sup>Berkhof, p. 132-133, 149; Thiessen, p. 260-261.

<sup>306</sup>Berkhof, p. 132-133.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid.

<sup>308</sup>Lamberigts M. Pelage: La réhabilitation d'un hérétique. Author's translation

<sup>309</sup>Ibid.

<sup>310</sup>Berkhof, p. 138-139, 148-150.

<sup>311</sup>For a description of the Orthodox position, see Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и Догматическое богословие. М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 150; Florovsky G. Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eight Centuries / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. – Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. – P. 239.



resist temptations to sin. Therefore, salvation is by grace through the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from the sinful nature.<sup>312</sup>

Exponents of Semi-Pelagianism appeal to Scripture for support. In Matthew 7:11, Jesus taught that even “evil” people are able to do good to their children. In addition, if we presume that in Romans chapter 7, Paul is speaking from the perspective of unbelievers, then they can still “joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man” (v. 22). Moreover, Jesus spoke of some sinners as “sick,” and others as “healthy” (Matt 9:12). Does this indicate different gradations of depravity? Paul also wrote, “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law...” (Rom 2:14). It seems here that Gentiles can indeed fulfill the Law to some degree.

This theory has the advantage of being able to more easily explain why some sin more brashly than others do. Additionally, this system offers a better explanation for the good behavior of Old Testament saints (assuming that the new birth was not yet available to them).

On the other hand, we encounter some difficulties as well. First, we will soon examine a substantial number of biblical texts that point to the total depravity of the human nature. Second, we know from experience that seemingly “good” people often react with hostility to the preaching of the gospel and to those who preach it. Finally, the sixth-century Council of Orange declared, “The sin of the first man has so impaired and weakened free will that no one thereafter can either love God as he ought or believe in God or do good for God's sake, unless the grace of divine mercy has preceded him.”<sup>313</sup>

#### **d. Total Depravity**

In agreement with Semi-Pelagianism and in distinction from Pelagianism, the theory “total depravity” claims that we do indeed inherit a sinful nature from Adam. Unlike Semi-Pelagianism, though, this position asserts that depravity effects every aspect of the human condition, and that every thought, desire, intention, and choice of a fallen person is sinful. It may appear that unregenerate persons are doing good, but their motives are thought to be amiss. True obedience and an expression of genuine love must come from a heart with pure motives. In addition, fallen persons cannot deliver themselves from this curse or alter the condition of their hearts.<sup>314</sup>

Supporters of this theory offer the following clarifications to their position. First, although all people are enslaved to sin, they do not necessarily participate in all manner of sins. Second, people may sin to different degrees or grow more sinful. Even John Calvin, a staunch supporter of this view, felt that fallen people retain “remnants of original dignity.... Total depravity, for Calvin, does not mean that human beings are as bad as they could be, but that original sin has corrupted every good gift.”<sup>315</sup>

Two theories are proposed in order to explain how unregenerate persons sometimes do good. Possibly, these works just appear good before other people, but God, who sees the heart, knows the sinful roots of these actions (see Prov 16:2; 21:2). Others posit that God gives to fallen people a certain measure of so-called “general grace,” which enables them to do some good. One example would be the care parents show to their children, or leaders to their subjects. It is thought that without God’s intervention in these ways, life on this planet would be impossible.<sup>316</sup>

The following Scripture texts support total depravity. From Romans 3:9-18, we learn, “There is none who seeks for God.” Therefore, the Father must take the initiative to draw sinners to Christ (Jn 6:44). Moreover, fallen persons are described as “dead in sin,” i.e., unresponsive to God (Eph 2:3; Col 2:13). Additionally,

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<sup>312</sup>Berkhof, p. 138-139, 148-150.

<sup>313</sup><https://www.cVOICE.org/creedorange.html>.

<sup>314</sup>Berkhof, p. 135, 148; Thiessen, p. 267-268.

<sup>315</sup>Horton M. Traditional Reformed Response // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R. Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed., 3185-3190.

<sup>316</sup>Berkhof, p. 135, 148; Thiessen, p. 267-268.

according to 1 Corinthians 2:14, “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.” In other words, unregenerate people lack spiritual perception. Sinners “walk in darkness” (Eph 5:8; Jn 1:5), are “slaves to sin” (Rom 6:17, 20), are not able to subject themselves to God’s Law (Rom 8:7), and have “given themselves over to sensuality” (Eph 4:18-19). It appears dubious that such a person can genuinely do good.<sup>317</sup>

The leading theologians of both sides of the predestination debate, John Calvin and Jacob Arminius, both held to total depravity. Both affirmed that God’s grace was necessary for a sinner to turn to Christ. These schools of thought, though, diverge as to the nature of this grace. Calvin insisted that God extends this grace only to the elect, while Arminius taught that He does so for all people. Calvin called this grace “irresistible,” since the elect cannot refuse it or resist being drawn to Christ. Arminius, however, named this grace “prevenient,” since it does not compel conversion, but merely makes it possible by softening sinners’ hearts so that they can make a free decision to accept Christ.<sup>318</sup>

### 3. Inherited Guilt

The second element of original sin is inherited guilt. This means that we inherit from Adam not only a sinful nature, but also the guilt resulting from his transgression. In other words, from birth people are already guilty and worthy of condemnation because of what Adam did.

The teaching of inherited guilt is, in general, derived from Romans chapter 5. There, we read, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (v. 12). It is important to note here that death entered the world through Adam’s sin. Death was the punishment that God proscribed for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned Adam and Eve, “For in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” (Gen 2:17).

Verse 13 declares that although sin was in the world after Adam, it was not reckoned as such until the Law came into effect. Verse 14 becomes key. Paul argues that death afflicted those who had not sinned as Adam did by eating of the forbidden fruit. If people after Adam had no guilt for personal violations of the law and did not sin as Adam did, then why did they die? Paul’s conclusion – they sinned in Adam.

Later in chapter 5, Paul further expands his thought. Adam’s sin results not only in his offspring becoming subject to death, but also subject to condemnation: “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (cf. 18-19). This is the basis for the doctrine of inherited guilt.

Several mechanisms are suggested for how Adam’s guilt is transmitted to all humanity. We recall our earlier discussion about “realism” and “federalism.” According to realism, we were organically “in Adam” when he sinned, while federalism teaches that Adam was our representative before God. By either mechanism, we can understand how Adam’s guilt could be passed on to us. A third view, “mediate imputation,” claims that guilt is based on the fact that Adam’s descendants possess a sinful nature – even before they commit actual sins.<sup>319</sup>

A certain theological movement among Arminians, called “Wesleyan arminianism,” teaches that people inherit Adam’s guilt, yet God unilaterally applies to all people justification from his guilt. To receive justification from personal sins, however, one must personally come to Christ for forgiveness. Since God has already provided justification for all through Christ’s sacrifice, He is free to apply it in this way.<sup>320</sup>

Some commentators, however, totally reject the proposition that we inherit guilt from Adam’s transgression. We can include in their number some Arminians and the Eastern Orthodox.<sup>321</sup> These Arminians

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<sup>317</sup>Mueller, p. 236ff.

<sup>318</sup>Berkhof, p. 188-189.

<sup>319</sup>Marino, p. 299-300.

<sup>320</sup>Berkhof, p. 155-156.

<sup>321</sup>Berkhof, p. 150; Thiessen, p. 261.

insist that we inherit from Adam only depravity, but not guilt. Our condemnation is based solely on the sins we personally commit, but not on Adam's sin. Such thinkers object that to be condemned because of someone else's sin is unfair.

Defenders of the doctrine of inherited guilt respond that if Adam's offspring inherit death and depravity as a result of his sin, why would one object if guilt was inherited as well? In all three cases, parties suffer due to the fault of another.

One must also consider that the redemptive work of Christ corresponds to all aspects of original sin in Adam. The new birth is God's answer to depravity. Resurrection overcomes death. Our justification in Christ is God's solution for the guilt inherited from Adam's sin. Mueller comments, "Scripture teaches the imputation of Adam's guilt to his descendants in such a way that, if the imputation of guilt is denied, also the imputation of Christ's righteousness to Adam's descendants is also denied."<sup>322</sup>

It is interesting to note that when we read about the Last Judgment, Adam's sin as a basis for condemning sinners is not mentioned. Instead, we read, "The dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds" (Rev 20:12), not according to Adam's deeds. Thiessen explains this puzzle by saying, "By sin of nature we refer to the guilt of inborn sin, but there is a greater guilt when we have allowed the sin of nature to cause us to commit acts of personal transgression."<sup>323</sup> Consequently, Revelation 20 does not mention inherited guilt since the guilt of personal transgression is more grievous.

Another objection to inherited guilt is the fate of infants and toddlers who have never committed personal sin. Are they nonetheless condemned because of Adam's sin? We respond that, as an expression of God's mercy and grace, He applies the redemptive work of Christ to their lives unconditionally should they die before reaching the age of accountability. If we presume that infants and toddlers are saved based on their own innocence, then God ceases to be the Savior of all people in the full sense of the word. Yet, 1 Timothy 4:10 teaches us that God "is the Savior of all men, especially believers." A more extensive discussion of this topic is found in chapter 24.

The final objection that we will entertain comes from Romans 7:9-10, where Paul "died" when the commandment came. If the word "died" refers to the moment he incurred guilt before the Lord, then people become guilty only when they personally sin.<sup>324</sup> On the other hand, Paul's goal here is not to pinpoint the moment when people first become accountable for sin. His goal is simply to demonstrate the effect law has on persons – it prompts them to sin.

Eastern Orthodoxy holds the view that people inherit from Adam neither depravity, nor guilt, but only mortality. People become accountable for sins in the same way that they obtain salvation – by personal choice.<sup>325</sup> In Meyendorff's words, "As we have seen, the patristic doctrine of salvation is based, not on the guilt inherited from Adam and from which man is relieved in Christ, but on a more existential understanding of both 'fallen' and 'redeemed' humanity."<sup>326</sup>

Orthodox theology fails to emphasize a person's judicial status before God. Therefore, they show little interest in the question of inherited guilt. Meyendorff describes the Orthodox approach to justification as follows: "Byzantine theologians never succumbed to the temptation of reducing sin to the notion of a legal crime, which is to be sentenced, punished, or forgiven."<sup>327</sup>

Comparing the Catholic view (and the subsequent Protestant view) with the Orthodox understanding yields the following results. For Catholics and Protestants, the primary spiritual need is being justified before God and in a proper judicial relationship with Him. Because of the Fall, humanity has lost that status before the

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<sup>322</sup>Mueller, p. 217.

<sup>323</sup>Thiessen, p. 269.

<sup>324</sup>Marino, p. 301.

<sup>325</sup>Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 145-146.

<sup>326</sup>Meyendorff, p. 193; also see Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 25.

<sup>327</sup>Meyendorff, p. 196.

Lord and must regain in through an act of justification. In Orthodoxy, though, the main issue in our relationship with God is not restoration of status, but spiritual growth with the goal of attaining deification. Orthodox theology, then, pays little attention to the doctrine of justification or the issue of guilt inherited from Adam.<sup>328</sup>

#### **4. Mortality**

The third element of original sin is mortality. As we well know, all living organisms in the material world will eventually die. It is an inescapable part of human existence. The apostle Paul informs us of the origin of human mortality, “In Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22).

In Scripture, the term “death” applies not only to physical death. Spiritual death is the absence of God’s life in the heart of an individual. Scripture also speaks of eternal death, which is eternal exclusion from God’s presence and kingdom. All these experiences have the common element of “separation.” Physical death is separation of soul from body. Spiritual death is separation from the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Eternal death is eternal separation from the Lord, who is the source of all good (Rev 20:14).

We can delineate the relationships between these types of death. All individuals are born in the condition of spiritual death, that is, without the presence of God’s Spirit in their hearts. If a person crosses over into physical death without experiencing the new birth by the Spirit, they enter into eternal death.

##### **a. Physical Death**

The world of medicine defines death as the cessation of brain or circulatory function. The Bible offers an alternate version – the separation of the soul/spirit from the body. James writes, “The body without the spirit is dead” (Jam 2:26). Genesis 2:7 reveals that Adam became a living being after receiving the breath of life from God. In a similar way, when the breath of life departs, death results. In addition, when Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, “her spirit returned, and she got up immediately” (Lk 8:55). In other passages, death is described as the spirit’s exit (Lk 12:20; Ps 146:4). Finally, when Jesus expired, He “yielded up His spirit” (Matt 27:50; cf. Acts 7:59).<sup>329</sup>

Other biblical texts employ the term “departure” to describe physical death. Both Paul (2 Tim 4:6) and Peter (2 Pet 1:15) describe their deaths this way, and the term is employed for Jesus’ as well (Lk 9:31). Other expressions include, “gathered to his people” (Gen 25:8), “depart in peace” (Lk 2:29), “sleep” (Matt 9:24; 1 Thes 4:13), and “to go to his own place” (Acts 1:25).<sup>330</sup>

Before we go on to investigate the true origin of death, we will briefly mention some invalid theories. As we discussed above, the fifth-century heretic Pelagius taught that people are born in a normal spiritual condition without inherited depravity or mortality from Adam. Nevertheless, God created people with a mortal body. This is the origin of death. We encounter another false view on death’s origins in the theory “progressive creationism,” which claims that God used the process of evolution to make all living creatures. Therefore, death existed long before Adam lived, and by the process of natural selection, the Lord progressively developed humans from apes. However, in light of the biblical witness, which we will soon examine, both these theories are found wanting.

According to the Bible, death arose as a result of Adam’s sin. Because Adam disobeyed God in the Garden, the entire world and humanity as well received the curse of mortality. Both Old and New Testaments confirm this truth (Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12; 6:23; 1 Cor 15:21-22). For example, Paul specifically states that death came into the world “through one man” (Rom 5:12) and that “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:21-22).<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup>Fairbairn D. Partakers of the Divine Nature. – 1991. – P. 47-48. Chapter 9 provides a more throughout treatment of the Orthodox view of justification.

<sup>329</sup>Mueller, p. 613.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid., p. 613-614.

<sup>331</sup>Mueller, p. 615; Thiessen, p. 256-257.

Mantzaridis incorrectly proposes that death is not punishment for Adam's sin, but a natural consequence of broken fellowship with God. He observes that all the curses for sin, listed in Genesis chapter 3, are stated in the passive voice.<sup>332</sup> On the other hand, Paul concretely speaks of death as the "wages of sin" (Rom 6:23).

The Bible also speaks of the inevitability of death. Hebrews 9:27 declares, "It is appointed for men to die once." The book of Ecclesiastics concurs, "There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked" (Ecc 9:2). The psalmist claims, "What man can live and not see death?" (Ps 89:48; cf. Ps 49:12).

The psalmist also stresses the transient nature of human life: "In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades and withers away" (Ps 90:6; cf. 103:15-16), and, "My lifetime as nothing in Your sight" (Ps 39:5). No one can "by any means redeem {his} brother" from death (Ps 49:7). Death is "the way of all the earth" (1 Kin 2:2) and "the covering which is over all peoples" (Isa 25:7). In fact, in all of human history we know of only two individuals who escaped death: Enoch and Elijah.

In light of the fact that death is inevitable and that "our days on the earth are like a shadow" (1 Chr 29:15), one must "take {it} to heart" (Ecc 7:2) and act wisely, making full use of the time one has. The psalmist prays, "Teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom" (Ps 90:12; cf. Ecc 9:10).

We will now touch on the time of one's death. A very popular conviction is that God has appointed a certain moment of time for each person's death, and that time is fixed and immovable. In His foreknowledge, God does know, of course, the number of our days (Ps 139:16; Job 14:5). Yet, that does not invariably mean that our behavior has no effect on our lifespan.

The Bible clearly declares that long life is a blessing from the Lord (Ps 128:5-6; Ps 91:16).<sup>333</sup> In addition, Scripture delineates specific things that can lengthen life: honoring parents (Eph 6:2; cf. 5:16); attentiveness to God's Word (Prov 3:1-2; 4:10, 22) and its practice (Deut 6:2; Ps 34:12-14; 1 Kin 3:14); fear of the Lord (Prov 10:27); and even care for animals (Deut 22:7). On the other hand, sin can shorten one's life (Ecc 7:17; Ps 55:23). Having said that, it is problematic to establish a fixed principle here since "there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs {his life} in his wickedness" (Ecc 7:15).

It is fascinating to note that men of God often knew the time of their departure, such as Jacob (Gen 49:29), Moses (Deut 32:49-50), Aaron (Num 20:23-26), Hezekiah (Isa 38:1-5), Jesus (Jn 12:23), Peter (2 Pet 1:15), and Paul (2 Tim 4:6). Paul was certain that he would not die as long as he was still useful to the Church (Phil 1:24-25).

However, from these examples we cannot conclude that God will reveal everyone's time of death. In many cases, "man does not know his time" (Ecc 9:12) and has no "authority over the day of death" (Ecc 8:8). Nevertheless, there are a significant number of instances in Scripture where people did know the time of their departure.

The Bible testifies that death is a temporary state. Even the Old Testament predicts, "He will swallow up death for all time" (Isa 25:8). Christ has conquered death (1 Cor 15:22) and now has the keys of hell and death (Rev 1:18). Yet, only in the future will we see the full realization of his victory (1 Cor 15:23-26), when death itself will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14). The new earth will be free of death's curse (Rev 21:4).

For believers in Christ, death holds no fear. The Bible asserts, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Cor 15:56). However, in Christ we are delivered from the curse of death and slavery to the Law. We are now among those who once "through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives," but are now liberated from that slavery by the One who rendered "powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14-15).

## **b. Question of Euthanasia**

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<sup>332</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 24.

<sup>333</sup>Horton S. The Last Things // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 687.

In connection with the biblical teaching on death, we can venture some comments on a more contemporary issue – euthanasia, which translates, “good death.” Evangelical believers stand in opposition to so-called “active euthanasia”, that is, when one party intentionally ends the life of another, even with the latter’s permission.<sup>334</sup> Yet, it is valuable to look more closely into the question of “passive euthanasia,” which is when one party simply allows a dying person to die of natural causes.

Many consider passive euthanasia acceptable under the following conditions. First, the medical prognosis must give no hope for recovery. Second, death is already imminent. Third, the ill person, if possible, must agree to the act. If his or her condition does not allow him or her to decide (as in a coma), then a close relative may make the determination.<sup>335</sup>

Furthermore, we must specify how the act of euthanasia may be performed. One means is to disconnect a life-support system that is artificially sustaining life, for example, a respirator. A more aggressive method is to withhold food or drink that is artificially administered. Not all, of course, would agree on exactly which methods are appropriate.<sup>336</sup>

However, two vital questions remain. First, if the ill party is not able to give permission, is it acceptable for a relative to decide his or her fate? Second, if the ill party is an unbeliever, it seems crucial for the sake of that person’s eternal destiny to prolong life as long as possible.

### c. Death’s Power in Creation

Death takes its toll not only on the human body, but also on the entire planet. Death in nature expresses itself in various natural disasters and the destruction tendencies of nature. The curse of death in nature traces back to Adam’s sin, as God spoke to him, “Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17).

Why did Adam’s sin result in a curse on the earth? First, Yahweh gave Adam and Eve authority over the planet. In Genesis 1:26, God said of humanity, “Let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Consequently, when Adam received the consequences of his transgression, those consequences spread to all that was under his charge, i.e., planet Earth. Another possible explanation is that by cursing the earth, God was punishing the first people for their disobedience.

We will again find helpful, as we did in our study of human depravity, a comparison with genetics. Just as Adam’s sin produced a “moral mutation” in his human nature causing its perversion, his transgression also somehow caused a “mutation” in the natural world resulting in the death and decay of all living organisms. The passage of Scripture that best of all brings out this truth is Romans 8:20-21: “For the creation was subjected to futility... the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” We will give special attention to the words “futility” and “corruption.”

“Futility” translates the Greek term *ματαιότης* (*mataiotēs*), meaning the “state of being without use or value, *emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness.*”<sup>337</sup> The natural world no longer fulfills its purpose. God determined that nature would promote life, health, and well-being. However, it fails to do so in all cases. Therefore, Paul can describe it as “futile.”

The second term, *φθόρα* (*phthora*), means the “breakdown of organic matter, *dissolution, deterioration, corruption.*”<sup>338</sup> It is used in 1 Corinthians 15:42 to describe the mortal human body. This term indicates that all nature is moving toward degradation. Interestingly, scientists are unable to uncover the reason for aging. Yet,

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<sup>334</sup>We can cite a biblical example here, when at Saul’s request an Amalekite ended the mortally wounded Saul’s life (2 Sam 1:6-10).

<sup>335</sup>Dr. John Kilner. Trinity International University.

<sup>336</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>337</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 621.

<sup>338</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 1054.

the Bible explains it as a consequence of the Fall. So then, Romans 8:20-21 aptly describes the condition of the natural world since the Fall – it is under the curse of death.

From our experience, we are aware of the present tragic condition of the natural world. Yet, since there still remains in nature a remnant of God's creation order that supports life on this planet, we may still enjoy the beauty and benevolence of God's creation. Nonetheless, eventually we all encounter the dark side of nature and the destructive powers it exerts. Therefore, we appropriately called nature "wild."

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## Chapter 5: Sin, part 2

### A. Sin's Mechanism of Action

The third question in our search for the biblical understanding of sin is how it operates. By what mechanism does sin lead a person into disobedience? We will highlight three aspects in our study: distortion of God's order, unbelief concerning God's care, and rebellion against God's authority.

#### 1. Components of Sin's Mechanism of Action

##### a. Distortion of God's Order

In order to understand how sin distorts God's order, we must first acquaint ourselves with that order. When God created humans, He made them with three basic needs: a need for (1) physical satisfaction, which includes items like food, comfort, sex, etc., (2) security, which is often associated with having possessions, and (3) significance, which results from receiving attention and affection from others.

The Bible affirms that all these desires, in themselves, are good and given by God, who desires to meet these needs. Scripture never condemns someone for attaining any of the three items listed above. Several biblical texts, in fact, confirm that claim: concerning physical satisfaction (Eph 5:29; 1 Tim 4:4-5), security/possessions (Acts 5:4), and significance/attention (Jn 12:26; 1 Thes 5:12).

The question arises, then, as to why God created people with needs and desires. We understand this reason in light of God's purpose for creating humans – to establish a relationship of love. Jesus expressed God's plan in His Great Commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mk 12:30-31).

How does the Lord show His love for humankind? In the Garden of Eden, His plan was to manifest His love by caring for the needs of His human creatures. The fact that people have these inborn necessities provides God with the opportunity to demonstrate His love by satisfying them. The experience in the Garden also reveals the means by which people were intended to show their love for the Lord – through obedience. In fact, Yahweh forbid Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to give them an occasion to demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His command. Jesus echoes this idea in His words to His disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (Jn 14:15).

Having established God's original plan to establish a love-relationship with us, we can now proceed to show how sin distorts and undermines that plan. In Genesis 3:7, we see that Eve was tempted in the three areas of human need: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make {one} wise".

First, she noticed that the tree was good for food. Eve had a basic requirement and desire for physical sustenance. Yet, she was tempted to eat from the forbidden fruit, which would take her beyond the boundaries that Yahweh established for satisfying that need. So then, her natural desire for physical satisfaction was stretched beyond proper limits, which led to her act of disobedience. Her natural desire became excessive and "unnatural."

Next, Eve saw that the tree was a delight to the eyes. In Scripture, the eyes are often associated with the desire to possess something. Matthew 6:22-23 is an example: "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" Of note is that prior to and after this text, Jesus speaks of money, which is an object desired to be possessed. However, Eve was tempted to possess something forbidden, and thus her lawful desires went beyond boundaries and again led her into sin.

Finally, Eve saw that the tree was desirable to make one wise. Here, we encounter the third area of temptation. Satan suggested to Eve that if she ate of the forbidden fruit, she would be like God. Now, she is being tempted to go beyond the order Yahweh had established to satisfy her need for significance and attention. Again, her natural, God-given desires have become pathological.

In summary, we see that God's plan was for people to turn to Him to fulfill their basic needs in physical satisfaction, security/possessions, and significance/attention. Sin, however, distorts God's perfect order. Unfortunately, all humanity has followed Eve's example of violating God's standards in order to satisfy their needs and desires. Instead of turning to God, we look to creation, the natural world, for satisfaction. Sin operates to distort God's plan, which He originally intended for people's good.

Orthodox Metropolitan Ilarion says it well, "Before the Fall, the singular object of humanity's love was God, but then another item of value appeared – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food..."<sup>339</sup> Orthodox priest Shmemann confirms,

The world is fallen because it lost the awareness that God is all in all.... Humanity's natural dependence on the world was intended to continually lead to fellowship with God, in whom is all life.... Whenever we view the world as a goal in itself, everything comes to have value, and therefore everything loses significance, because the significance of everything is found only in God.<sup>340</sup>

James employs the term "lust" to describe natural desires that have become disproportionate: "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (Jam 1:14-15).

Next, we can examine the case in Luke chapter 4, where Satan tempted Jesus. We observe that the Lord was tempted in the same three area of basic human need. In verse 3, we read, "And the devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" Here, Jesus is first tempted in the area of physical satisfaction. He was hungry because of His forty-day fast. Yet, the time to eat had not yet arrived. Satan is attempting to induce Jesus to satisfy His own needs in disregard of His Father's will.

In verses 6-7, then, Satan resorts to his second temptation: "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Similar to his strategy against Eve, who saw that the tree was a delight to the eyes, the devil tempts Jesus with the riches of the world. Of course, in time Jesus will inherit all things as King of kings and Lord of lords, but that time had not yet come. Again, Satan wants Jesus to seek His own gain in violation of God's plan for Him.

Finally, in verses 9-11, we read, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you,' and, 'On {their} hands they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" In this instance, Jesus is tempted in the area of personal significance. Satan wants Him to draw attention to Himself. Again, in time, all will worship the Lord, but that time had not yet come. This was the period of His humiliation. So then, both Eve and Jesus were tempted in the three areas of basic human need, yet unlike Eve, Jesus successfully resisted.

Our next key passage is 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the

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<sup>339</sup>Иларион А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – Р. 77.

<sup>340</sup>Schmemmann A. Sacraments and Orthodoxy. – New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1965. – С. 17. However, Lossky advances a more extreme, unbiblical position. God's goal for Adam (and Eve) included "the renunciation of all that was not God... full self-renunciation; he was to voluntarily renounce not only forbidden fruits, but also from all external objects in order to live only by God and strive for unification with Him (Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и догматическое богословие. М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – Р. 99-100). Athanasius held to a similar view. In his opinion, Adam's mind "had nothing to do with his body. It transcended all bodily desires and senses and contemplated 'intellectual reality'" (see Lane T. A Concise History of Christian Thought. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – Р. 33).

eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and {also} its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”

The three main area of temptation appear again: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. These enticements correspond to the three basic human needs. The lust of the flesh corresponds to physical satisfaction. The lust of the eyes corresponds to the desire for security and possessions. The pride of life is an exaggerated desire for significance and attention. When the desire for physical satisfaction exceeds limits, it becomes lust. When the desire for possessions exceeds limits, it becomes greed. When the desire for significance exceeds limits, it becomes pride. Thus, sin distorts the natural needs and desires implanted in us by the Lord. Following a similar line of thought, Mantzaridis considers the main areas of temptation to be sensuality, the desire for riches, and ambition.<sup>341</sup>

Sensuality, or the inappropriate satisfaction of physical desires, is very widespread in the world today and one of the more visible expressions of sin. People generally have their “portion is in {this} life” (Ps 17:14), are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4; cf. Prov 21:17) and “set their minds on earthly things” (Phil 3:19). It is commonly thought, “{Men} prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything” (Ecc 10:19).

Sensuality led to Israel's fall in the wilderness (Ps 106:14) and caused the sons of Eli to despise the ministry of the Lord (1 Sam 2:12-17) and Esau to despise his inheritance (Heb 12:16). Excessive attention to the physical can result in laziness (Prov 20:13; 26:13-16), drunkenness (Prov 31:4-7; 23:29-35), adultery (2 Sam 11:2-5), and even homosexuality (Gen 19). Nonetheless, in the end, such people remain unsatisfied (2 Sam 13:15).

Although enjoying earthly pleasures is not sinful in itself (1 Tim 4:4), Paul is nonetheless guarded to “not be mastered by anything” (1 Cor 6:12). Correspondingly, he urges Timothy, “Flee from youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22; cf. Job 31:1). Solomon advises moderation in eating (Prov 25:16) and also recommends not associating with those who indulge excessively in wine or meat (Prov 23:20).

The desire for riches leads to many ills. Because of it, people sometimes resort to illegal means (Prov 11:18; 12:12; 17:23), oppress the poor (Job 24:2-12; Hab 2:1-2, 15), and may even commit murder (1 Kin 21; 2 Kin 11:1). Some may abuse their position among God's people for personal gain (Mk 12:38-40). Judas Iscariot, in fact, betrayed the Lord for money (Matt 26:14-16).

Riches do not satisfy the soul (Prov 30:15-16; Isa 5:8). Although wicked people may prosper in this life (Ps 37; 73; Ecc 8:14), their prosperity is short-lived (Ps 49; Isa 33:4; 2 Kin 5:20-24; Lk 12:13-21). Therefore, the Bible counsels us to put God in first place (Lk 16:13; 18:22; Heb 12:16) and to be content with what we have (Heb 13:5-6). Riches may distract from devotion to the Lord (Lk 8:14; 18:21-25). Solomon's pray exemplifies this attitude:

Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny {You} and say, "Who is Yahweh?" or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God (Prov 30:7-9).

The third element of the love of this world, pride, characterizes many figures in the biblical narrative. The prophets especially indicted the Gentile nations and their leaders in this vice: Babylon (Isa 47:7-9), Assyria (Isa 37:24-25; 2 Chr 32:9-19), Moab (Isa 16:6), Edom (Ezek 35:12-13), Tyre (Ezek 27:1), and Egypt (Ezek 29:3). The book of Daniel highlights God's humbling of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4). God's people, Israel, were not immune to pride (Isa 2:12-20), neither were their leaders (2 Kin 14:10; 2 Chr 12:1; 26:16). God considers pride an abomination (Prov 16:5), which leads to a downfall (Prov 16:18; 15:25; 18:12; 29:23).

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<sup>341</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 80-81.

Let us look more closely at the term “lust.” It translates the Greek word ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*). This word can be translated either “desire” or “lust.” For example, in Luke 22:15 Jesus says, “I have earnestly desired (ἐπιθυμία) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” Similarly, Paul employs the same word to express his desire to be with the Lord (Phil 1:23). He uses it again in 1 Thessalonians 2:17, where he strongly desires to see that congregation again.

Galatians 5:17 displays the use of ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) in both a positive and negative sense: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.” The flesh has ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) against the Spirit, and the Spirit has ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) against the flesh. Therefore, “desire” and “lust” are in essence one and the same – one word expresses both concepts. Our basic desires (ἐπιθυμία) and needs are just and good. Only when we allow our desires to take us beyond God’s law, they become “lust” (ἐπιθυμία).

Due to a misunderstanding of this concept, many mistakenly feel that the way to overcome sin is to suppress all natural desire. Church history is full of examples of monks, hermits, and other religious persons who attempted to overcome sin in this way. They deprived themselves of food, comfort, marriage, money, friendship, etc., thinking that such self-denial will lead to greater spirituality. However, if we define spirituality by God’s Word, we must reject this position. Our God-given desires are good. God created us this way and He wants to meet our needs. Only when these desires take us beyond appropriate limits do they become evil.

Paul’s words to the church of the Colossians are key here:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! (which all {refer} {to} things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, {but are} of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Spirituality is not attained by suppressing all natural desires, but by fulfilling them in accordance with the will of God. We can now better understand Solomon’s words in light of this teaching:

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven – A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. A time to search and a time to give up as lost; a time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; a time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

In other words, no action or desire in itself is evil. Everything depends on how we perform those actions or satisfy those desires. Do we fulfill them in line with God’s Word, or in contradiction to it? We can compare the “art of obedience” to playing a musical instrument. When we play the right notes at the right time, beautiful music results. When we do not, we create dissonance.

Therefore, to avoid sin, one must simply remain within the boundaries that God has established. We must be mindful that God desires to meet our legitimate needs and desires (Ps 78:10-12). We recall David’s sin with Bathsheba, when God said that He was ready to meet David’s sexual needs, if David would have looked to Him to provide (2 Sam 12:8). Seeking fulfillment through sin, as Ezekiel relates, never satisfies (Ezek 16:28-29).

## **b. Unbelief concerning God’s Care**

Related to sin as “distortion” is the idea of sin as “unbelief.” Hebrews 3:18-19 makes this clear: “And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? {So} we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.” Israel’s disobedience, therefore, was rooted in unbelief.

Earlier, we stated that God provided Adam and Eve with an expression of their love for Him by refraining from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This command was also a test of their faith. The tree had the potential to give them something – it was good for food, a delight to the eyes, and could make them wise. These are good things, but the method of their attainment was not. The first humans were called on to trust God to meet their needs and not seek another means.

Therefore, the tree provided a test of faith. As long as Adam and Eve maintained their trust in Yahweh to care for them, there was no need to take from the forbidden fruit. If their faith weakened, though, the tree would have added appeal and would put them in danger of sinning.

Satan’s strategy, now, becomes clear. He began his deception of Eve by asking, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). The devil exaggerated the limitations that the Lord gave to his first humans. He was attempting to picture God in Eve’s mind as a demanding overlord who did not care for her. Then, Satan directly challenged God’s goodness: “The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (v. 4-5).

Until the moment of this temptation, Eve was confident that God cared for her and that He would not withhold any good thing from her. Satan, though, suggested that God is withholding something needful for her that she must take for herself. Regrettably, Eve believed the serpent’s lie, and her faith was shaken. The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church reflects this thought:

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.<sup>342</sup>

Page concurs, “(Satan’s) question as framed implies that God is unjust.... God has placed unreasonable restrictions on Adam and Eve.... Satan planted in her heart seeds of doubt concerning God’s benevolence.”<sup>343</sup>

The drama continues in verse 6: “The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make {one} wise.” Eve had already noticed this tree many times before. Now, however, she sees it in a different light – as a means to obtain these benefits. Previously, the tree served as a means for Eve to express her love for and trust in the Lord. As a result of Satan’s suggestions, though, Eve perceived the tree as a way of satisfying her needs and desires independent of God which led to her disobedience.

Reinhold Niebuhr advanced the following theory of the relation of sin to unbelief. He proposed that the root of sin was anxiety. He observed the tension people experience between freedom and finitude. Because of human freedom, people want to do whatever they desire, while, on the other hand, they are limited by time, space, strength, resources, etc. In order to find liberation from this tension in human nature, persons must choose between three options. First, they can express their freedom to the maximum and rebel against God and hurt others in the process. Second, they can suppress their freedom and passively give way to sensuality and immoral living. Third (and preferably), they can trust God to provide their needs and curb their freedom out of respect for Him.<sup>344</sup>

### c. Rebellion

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<sup>342</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 397

<sup>343</sup>Page S. H. T. Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study on Satan and Demons. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 17-18.

<sup>344</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 604ff.

The final element in our proposed mechanism of sin is rebellion. Unlike the first two elements, rebellion has no logical basis. We can understand how sin could arise through distortion of God's order or through human unbelief. Because people doubt God, they are ready to seek fulfillment independent of Him, which leads to a distortion of His order for their lives.

However, sometimes sinful acts make no sense at all. This is because sin simply compels people to rebel against God's authority. If the Lord would say, "stand," sin would say, "sit." If God would say, "speak," sin would say, "keep quiet." Paul enlightens us about this truth in Romans 7:8: "Sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind." Titus 3:3 reveals that sin causes us to hate one another. Sin creates in people's hearts hostility toward God and others.

## **2. Errant Understandings**

### **a. Judaism**

The Judaistic view of sin is summed up in the terms "*yester tov*" and "*yester ra*." These two impulses, translated "impulse to good" and "impulse to evil" respectively, are present in each individual from birth as part of God's creation order. Our task is to develop the former and suppress the latter. Rabbis cite Genesis 8:21 in support: "The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth."<sup>345</sup> This passage is taken to refer to the evil impulse.

The following considerations, though, stand in contradiction to the system *yester tov*, *yester ra*. First, in Genesis 1:31 we learn that God initially created all things "very good." The "evil impulse" is certainly not good. In addition, Paul taught that sin entered the world through Adam's transgression (Rom 5:12), not by God's creative act. Finally, if God implanted both a good and evil impulse in humans, then He becomes the author of evil. James rejects this claim (Jam 1:13, 17).

### **b. Liberal Theology**

Liberal theology appears in various forms and advances various doctrinal positions. The common feature among liberals is a rejection of the total truth-value of Scripture. Along with that, liberals tend to underestimate the fallen nature of humans.<sup>346</sup>

For liberals in general, the human dilemma is caused by poor education. If people had proper upbringing and good educational opportunities, they would develop into morally excellent individuals. Erickson well summarizes liberal thought:

Liberals do not believe that humans' original nature has been corrupted; rather, they view human nature as intrinsically good and capable of developing further. What is needed is not some radical transformation by grace from without, but development of the potential divinity of humans, amplification of the divine presence within. Nurturing of the strengths, ideals, and aspirations of the human race is what is called for, not a supernaturalistic alteration. Humans do not need a conversion, a radical change of direction. Rather, they need inspiration, a vision of what they can become.<sup>347</sup>

In refutation of this view, we appeal to Paul's teaching in Romans 7, where he clearly states that people are in slavery to sin and that knowledge of the Law is inadequate to liberate them:

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<sup>345</sup>Marino B. The Origin, Nature, and Consequences of Sin // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 298.

<sup>346</sup>McGrath A. E. Historical Theology. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. – P. 224.

<sup>347</sup>Erickson, p. 332.

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.... For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members (Rom 7:19-23).

We also note that the level of education in the world increases yearly. Yet, we do not observe a corresponding increase in morality, but rather a decline. Also important to note is that God gave Israel a perfect law under the tutorage of the finest instructor in ethics in Old Testament history – Moses. Nonetheless, in spite of all these advantages, Israel failed to become an obedient people.

A final point in refutation is the time when the Jewish teacher Nicodemus approached Jesus with the appellation: “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God {as} a teacher” (Jn 3:2). Apparently, he was looking for instruction from the Lord as a teacher in order to increase his understanding and insight into the things of God. Jesus unexpectedly responded: “You must be born again” (Jn 3:3). He thus revealed that the human dilemma was not a lack of education, but the need for a new heart, a new birth.

In the following sections, we will detail several liberal views on sin.

### **1) Remnant of Animal Nature**

Some hold to the opinion that people sin due to a remnant of animal nature left over from the evolutionary process. Therefore, the moral perfection of humanity is only a matter of time. Eventually, the human race will mature, cast off its animal nature, and attain moral integrity.

However, this theory finds no biblical support. According to Genesis, Yahweh created humans not from apes, but from the dust of the earth. We also recall Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter 5 that the origin of sin is not a remnant of animal nature, but inherited depravity from Adam.<sup>348</sup>

### **2) Teaching of Spinoza**

The French philosopher Baruch Spinoza created a unique approach to understanding sin, associating it with human finiteness. He proposed that God, being a perfect being, possesses all the qualities that make up perfection. Other beings, though, since they are finite, possess only some of these qualities. Depravity, then, is not a distortion or perversion of human nature, but simply the absence of certain of these qualities necessary for perfection. People do not need deliverance from slavery to sin, but rather need to develop the qualities they lack. Yet, even a quick glance at Spinoza’s theory reveals its lack of coherence with biblical truth. Sin is not the lack of certain qualities, but disobedience to God (1 Jn 3:4).<sup>349</sup>

### **3) Teaching of Schleiermacher**

The German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher theorized that our main problem was sensuality, that is, dependence on the material world. At creation, God endowed humanity with an innate sense of God’s presence. Jesus developed this God-consciousness to the highest degree. We, however, fail to develop our God-consciousness due to sensuality and therefore fail to reach our moral potential.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup>Erickson, p. 600ff.

<sup>349</sup>Geisler N. L. Christian Apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 180; Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 252.

<sup>350</sup>Sykes S. Friedrich Schleiermacher / Nineham D. E. Robertson E. H. Makers of Contemporary Theology. – Richmond VA: John Knox, 1965. – P. 39-40.

In refutation of Schleiermacher, we respond that, according to Jesus' teaching, the seat of sin is not in material things, but in the human heart (Mk 7:20-23). When found in contexts discussing sin, the term "flesh," i.e., σάρξ (*sarks*), refers not to the human body, but to the sinful nature of the heart. One must also consider that the material world in itself is not evil. It was created by God. Finally, according to Colossians 2:20-23, asceticism is of no value in overcoming the sin nature.<sup>351</sup>

#### 4) Liberation Theology

Liberation theology claims that the human dilemma consists in improper interpersonal relations.<sup>352</sup> Unjust social structures support the abuse and oppression of certain peoples, which leads to the general disorder of life in this world. Especially noted is the discrimination of minorities and women, and the oppression of poorer nations by wealthy ones. In the case of the latter, wealthy nations obtain inexpensive raw materials from poorer ones and resell manufactured products back to them at inflated prices. If we could rectify unfair social structures and institutions, humanity could reach utopia.

Theologians of this movement seek justification for their perspective. First, they observe the obvious and widespread suffering in the world. Second, they feel that God wants to alleviate suffering and provide for people's needs. Therefore, they conclude that the Church should be wholly committed to social action in bringing this about. They also draw from Scripture, citing passages that rebuke injustice and advocate for the poor (see Mic 2:1-2; Isa 5:8; Amos 6:5-6; Jam 5:1-6).

Adherents of liberation theology indict the traditional approach to biblical interpretation in undergirding evil social structures. They take issue with the traditional approach of consulting the Bible first to define our behavior, and then seeking to apply these principles to everyday life. We must do the opposite – look first at human need, and then turn to Scripture to find methods to meet those needs. The methods for change-making are as follows. Initially, the Church can preach Scriptural principles of goodness and justice. Beyond that, followers of Christ can promote strikes and demonstrations. Even more extreme measures can be appropriate – the use of violence and revolution. As noted above, this teaching finds greatest acceptance in poorer nations, especially in Latin America, and among minorities in industrialized nations.

Interestingly, the same basic approach is championed in the thought of Karl Marx and other communist leaders. Marx taught that if we could establish a perfect society, in which all people had equal opportunity, then a new humanity would evolve that had genuine concern for others. Both communists and exponents of liberation theology claim that humanity's problem lies neither in one's relationship to God, nor in the internal condition of persons, but in oppression in society. To eliminate injustice and oppression, both groups embrace revolution. One major difference between these groups exists – one is religious and the other areligious. Liberation theology, then, is in reality a hybrid of communism and Christianity.

Does liberation theology truly reflect the biblical view? We note the following contradictions. First, contrary to the claim that the starting point for theological reflection is not Scripture, but human need, we affirm that Scripture is primary. God knows the human situation better than people do and in Scripture, He lays out a perfect plan for the resolution of all human ills. Proponents of liberation theology use God's name to justify their own approach, but reject His agenda for humanity.

Second, the Bible warns against over attachment to life in this age. Paul counselled the church in Colossae, "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3). Although the Lord promises us blessing in this life, our hope is in the future revelation of Jesus Christ. We cannot expect utopia in this life. The author of Hebrews relates that Old Testament saints considered themselves "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb 11:13). Peter

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<sup>351</sup>Erickson, p. 596-597.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid., p. 608ff.



called his readers “aliens and strangers” (1 Pet 2:11). In the first chapter of this epistle, he wrote, “Conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay {on earth}” (1:17). Peter compares our time on this planet with a journey. Our true home is God’s eternal kingdom. For now, we are strangers on the earth.

Third, the Bible opposes the use of violence for meeting personal needs. Jesus taught His disciples, “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matt 5:38-41). Followers of Jesus are obliged to keep His Word.

Peter echoes this teaching: “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this {finds} favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly” (1 Pet 2:18-19). Furthermore, Peter relates that even the Lord Jesus suffered unjustly on the cross. These passages clearly contradict liberation theology, which teaches resistance to personal insults and injustices. Scripture declares that enduring poor treatment without complaint finds favor with God.

It is true that the Bible often addresses the issues of poverty and injustice. Nearly all of these passages, though, are taken from the Old Testament. The question arises whether the Old Testament is speaking of poverty and injustice in society in general or among God’s people. This question is complicated by the fact that these two entities, i.e., “church and state,” were at that time one and the same. Adherents of liberation theology conclude that these Old Testament texts refer to society in general and therefore urge the Church to social action.

To resolve the question, one must appeal to the New Testament, where secular society and the people of God were two different overlapping entities. Remarkably, the New Testament addresses poverty and injustice almost exclusively in the context of the Church (see Acts 11:29; Gal 2:10; 2 Cor 8-9; Jam 2; 1 Jn 3:17). Consequently, the corresponding Old Testament texts likely had God’s people in view as well. Nonetheless, the New Testament does not forbid involvement in social action. One can cite the example of the Good Samaritan. The Old Testament has a clear example as well in Jonah’s preaching to the Gentiles of Nineveh.

The guiding principle in this regard is found in Galatians 6:10: “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” In 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, Paul also wrote, “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within {the church}? But those who are outside, God judges.” In light of the above, we conclude that God does not forbid involvement in social action, even encourages it. Yet, His first priority is order in the Church, which is God’s new society that will someday replace the secular order and endure forever.

We also draw insight from the history of Israel. Through the Law of Moses, Yahweh provided Israel with perfect social structures. In addition, Moses was unparalleled as a leader. However, even under such ideal conditions, Israel failed to create a utopian society. They sinned, worshiped idols, etc. Israel’s example shows that humanity’s true problem is not external, but internal – in the human heart.

Finally, this system contradicts the actions of our Lord during His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. The Jews expected Messiah to be a political deliverer and to overthrow their Roman oppressors. Yet, Jesus did not satisfy those expectations. Upon entering Jerusalem, He did not proceed to the Roman garrison to overthrow it and start a revolution, but to the Jewish temple to cleanse it. In this way, He demonstrated that the human problem was not in bad governments, but in people’s spiritual condition. Jesus is not a revolutionary, but a Savior from sin.

### **c. Roman Catholicism**

The Roman Catholic teaching can be summed up in the phrase “deprivation of original holiness/justice.”<sup>353</sup> It is proposed that God created humans with two aspects: a higher aspect and a lower one. The higher one is identified with reason and volition, while the lower one consists of desires (passions).

Our goal for moral development should be to be guided by reason and harness our passions. For this purpose, God gave humans so-called “original justice/holiness,” which consists of spiritual power that enables one to live by the “higher aspect.” When Adam sinned, however, humanity lost this original holiness and came under the power of passion.

We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Scripture portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose the grace of original holiness. They become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image – that of a God jealous of his prerogatives” (№ 399), and, “The harmony in which they had found themselves, thanks to original justice, is now destroyed: the control of the soul's spiritual faculties over the body is shattered” (№ 400). So then, through Adam all receive a human nature “deprived of original holiness and justice” (№ 404). Humans are born with an inherent tendency to sin, called “concupiscence.” Concupiscence, though, is not in itself considered sin – only when someone decides to yield to its impulses.

In addition, Catholics believe that, although human nature is distorted by sin, the will is nonetheless free and under certain circumstances can still move toward God.<sup>354</sup> Therefore, our goal should be to restore the original harmony human nature enjoyed with the aid of the grace provided for in the sacraments.

In many respects, the Catholic teaching derives from Augustine's early views. He gave definition to the idea of concupiscence and believed that the will of a fallen human is still free. However, Augustine considered that people are free to do what they *want* to do, but not what they *ought* to do. Since fallen human nature constantly produces sinful desires, people will behave accordingly. Therefore, people sin of their own free will.

Later in life, Augustine altered his views and began to teach that the human will was enslaved to sin and that persons were not free to move toward God. God must take the initiative to draw people to Himself. He does this only for His elect. Thus, Augustine laid the theological foundation for the later development of Calvinism.

After Augustine, the Western Church adopted a more moderate form of his teaching. It agreed that without grace, no one can turn to God. However, it differed from him in rejecting the idea that God predestines only certain individuals to receive this grace. This opinion was canonized at the Second Council of Orange (529).<sup>355</sup> Since that time, the Roman Catholic Church has moved closer and closer to Augustine's original teaching about the Fall, defending the doctrine of human free will that can cooperate with the grace of God.

In evaluating the Catholic teaching, we note it diverges from the idea of “total depravity,” as discussed in the section on “inherited depravity,” and better approximates the position “Semi-Pelagianism.” Additionally, even though evangelical believers heartily concur that God's grace is necessary to restore human nature, they challenge the claim that this grace is provided through the sacraments. We will investigate this issue in more detail in chapters 21-23 in our discussion of sacramental theology.

Another weak point in the Catholic position is dividing human nature into higher and lower aspects. This leaves the impression that reason is essentially better than the material aspects of human nature, which undervalues part of God's created order. Here, we see the effect of Greek philosophy, where the mind is good and the body is evil.

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<sup>353</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church; Noted in Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 144-145; Kdrkkdinen V. Deification View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 2532-2536; Blocher H. A. The Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 206-207; O'Collins G., Rafferty O. P. Roman Catholic View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 2935-2958.

<sup>354</sup>O'Collins, Kindle ed. 2935-2938.

<sup>355</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_Council\\_of\\_Orange](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Council_of_Orange).

The biblical portrait of humanity differs from the Catholic one. Scripture affirms, especially in the Old Testament, that the Lord created humans “very good” in all respects. Therefore, it is improper to divide human nature in this way, but rather one should view it holistically. The human struggle is not mind against body or “higher aspect” against “lower aspect,” but the individual in his/her entirety against sin.

#### **d. Eastern Orthodoxy**

Let us examine how the Eastern Orthodox view sin and human depravity. They consider that people do not inherit depravity from our forefather Adam, but only mortality.<sup>356</sup> Mortality is what leads to sinful behavior. Because people fear death, they focus more on earthly things than on heavenly ones. Behavior, in turn, follows after our thought processes. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve reflected more on spiritual/heavenly concerns and consequently conducted themselves in submission to the Lord. After death entered the world, people became engrossed in affairs connected with their earthly survival. As a result, vices like passion, fear, sorrow, anger, hatred, etc. entered the human experience.<sup>357</sup>

Correspondingly, Nikon claims that our problem is that the “mind.... has become enslaved to irrational passions.”<sup>358</sup> He also writes, “Just like the soul longs for future pleasures, the body longs for present and temporary pleasures.”<sup>359</sup> In the words of Maximus the Confessor, “Having become a transgressor and mixing his rationality with sensuality, people acquired a passionate drive to know sensual things.”<sup>360</sup> Mantzaridis adds, “Man, subject to corruption and death, is constantly spurred on to sin and becomes a slave to it.”<sup>361</sup> Meyendorff describes human nature as “bound by mortality, inevitably sinful.”<sup>362</sup>

The Orthodox view is also expressed in the following excerpts:

The necessity of satisfying the needs of the body... lead to “passions,” for they present unavoidable means of temporary survival.... There is indeed a consensus in Greek patristic and Byzantine traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an inheritance essentially of mortality rather than sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality.<sup>363</sup>

From the “old Adam,” through his natural birth, man inherits a defective form of life – bound by mortality, inevitably sinful, lacking fundamental freedom from the “prince of this world.”<sup>364</sup>

The Orthodox tradition of Saint Marcus Eremita does not feel that people participated in Adam’s sin: “We are passed down by inheritance not transgression, but death.”<sup>365</sup>

So then, Eastern Orthodoxy stresses our inheritance of mortality, not depravity. The former, in fact, is thought to cause the latter. Bulgakov expresses it this way:

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<sup>356</sup>It is proposed that God’s clothing of Adam and Eve in animal skins symbolizes their receiving mortality (Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрата Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – М.: Сибирская Благовонница, 2004. – Р. 60).

<sup>357</sup>Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974 – Р. 145.

<sup>358</sup>Слово об обожении, р. 38. Author’s translation.

<sup>359</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 40. Author’s translation.

<sup>360</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 60. Author’s translation.

<sup>361</sup>Mantzaridis, р. 63.

<sup>362</sup>Meyendorff, р. 193.

<sup>363</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 145.

<sup>364</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 193.

<sup>365</sup>Марк Подвижник, Нравственно-подвижнические слова. – Троице-Сергиева Лавра, 1922. – Р. 111; from Кураева А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – Р. 83.

Due to original sin, the human body lost its sophistic “glory.” Instead of enjoying kingdom glory in the world, people became enslaved to the body, which submits to the elements of the world instead of the service of the spirit.<sup>366</sup>

In Orthodox thought, then, the path to victory over sin is not deliverance from our sin nature through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but victory over the fear of death through His resurrection. Kuraev writes, “We consider that Christ came in order to rise from the dead (1 Pet 3:21). We are saved not by the death of Christ, but rather that in Him death lost its power.”<sup>367</sup> After people are delivered from their fear of death, they can then turn their attention to heaven and conduct themselves accordingly.

In addition, since sin is rooted primarily in physical passions, aroused by death, the key to victory over sin lies in suppression of bodily necessities, i.e., in overcoming passions by acquiring the quality of *apatheia*, i.e., “impassibility.”<sup>368</sup> One should embrace ascetic cleansing not only from “all that is... sinful,” but also from “all sensual and mental images.”<sup>369</sup>

Let us qualify this point. On the one hand, Orthodoxy rejects the teaching that matter is in itself evil. Nikon comments here:

The ascetic struggle is waged not against matter, but against the unnatural, contra-natural. Bodily necessities are not killed off, but their improper use. Using created things is not forbidden, but their abuse.<sup>370</sup>

On the other hand, since the material world and bodily necessities distract from spiritual things, abstaining from bodily desires has practical value.

Mantzaridis, looking at this question from the vantage point of Gregory Palamas, adds necessary elements to our discussion. In agreement with what has already been said, he connects sin with attachment to the physical: “Man loves the world because he loves his own body, while a love of the spirit generates love for God,”<sup>371</sup> and, “The source of passions is the concern for the flesh.... Excessive satisfaction of bodily desires breeds the passions.”<sup>372</sup> Nonetheless, he still believes in the essential goodness of the physical: “The body is good.... What is evil, and should be considered the child of sin, is concern for the body.”<sup>373</sup>

Therefore, one should withdraw for contemplation of God and develop a spiritual mindset in order to obtain a higher level of morality and spirituality. This is best accomplished through the monastic life: “By restricting even the proper use of God’s gifts, the monk mourns for the misuse of these gifts by Adam, which expelled man from Paradise, and concentrates himself on preparing for the age to be,”<sup>374</sup> and, “The stillness of the desert provides man with the fittest atmosphere for pursuing his work of concentration and self-awareness.”<sup>375</sup>

We need to include still another consideration. A key to Orthodox thinking is distinguishing “nature” and “person,” both in regard to God and to humans. They even propose the existence of two wills in people: the natural will, which corresponds to “nature,” and a gnostic will, which corresponds to the person. The first was

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<sup>366</sup>Булгаков С. Евхаристический догмат, часть 2-я // Журнал "Путь". 1930. №21. С. 25-27.

<http://www.odinblago.ru/path/21/1>

<sup>367</sup>Куряев, р. 91. Author’s translation.

<sup>368</sup>Florovsky G. Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eight Centuries / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. — Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. — P. 241-242.

<sup>369</sup>Слово об обожении, р. 44-45. Author’s translation.

<sup>370</sup>Ibid., р. 40.

<sup>371</sup>Mantzaridis, р. 71.

<sup>372</sup>Ibid., р. 81.

<sup>373</sup>Ibid., р. 83.

<sup>374</sup>Ibid., р. 76.

<sup>375</sup>Ibid., р. 85.

initially oriented toward God, but was weakened by the Fall. The second appeared only at the time of the Fall and enables individuals to make free decisions in spite of their weakened condition.<sup>376</sup>

The Orthodox view in general is based on Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Orthodox theology claims that this verse teaches that the root cause of sin is the presence of death in the world.<sup>377</sup> The word “because” in the final phrase “because all sinned,” translates the Greek phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ (*eph o*), which the standard Russian translation renders “in him (all sinned).” The relative pronoun ᾧ (*o*) stands in the masculine gender and singular number and could refer to Adam. However, the Greek term θάνατος (*thanatos*), i.e., “death,” is also in the masculine singular.

Consequently, Orthodox commentators refer the pronoun ᾧ (*o*) to the word “death,” and translate the verse: “...in death all sinned.” Thus, death becomes the root cause of sin. The Orthodox see further support in 1 Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” This verse specifically links human mortality with Adam’s sin.

Before we proceed to a refutation of the Orthodox view, it will prove insightful to compare this teaching with the ancient philosophy of Neoplatonism, from which the Eastern Church has borrowed heavily (see Appendix B). According to Neoplatonism, perfection consists of unity, in particular, unification with the “One.” Any deviation from this state is considered evil.

In light of Orthodoxy’s dependence on Neoplatonism, it does not surprise us that the former also frequently link sin with disunity. Lossky, for example, asserts, “After the original sin, human nature became separated, fractured, and torn into many individuals.”<sup>378</sup> Therefore, one must strive to reunite with the “general human nature” that Christ restored (see chp. 8, “Deification”). Maximus the Confessor taught: “The fall broke the chain of existence – into the world came death, which disunites and decays.”<sup>379</sup>

The Orthodox conception of sin overlaps with Neoplatonism in still another way. In Neoplatonism, the “Fall” is when the soul “is turned away from this vision by matter, by the necessities of the bodily life, which enslave it to the changes of the sensory world.”<sup>380</sup> Therefore, the soul must separate itself from the world and become impassionate, contemplating spiritual things. The similarity with Lossky’s teaching is striking:

For the soul itself is impassionate, yet when it exits from its inner simplicity into the outer world, it becomes subject to passions. Renunciation of the world brings the soul back to itself, into focus, it is the restoration of the spiritual being returning to fellowship with God.<sup>381</sup>

We can note an obvious connection between these two aspects of the Orthodox view of sin: sensuality and disunity. The material world changes and thereby disrupts the perfect unity of the spiritual world. Precisely for this reason the Greeks despised the material world: “It is temporal and changing.”<sup>382</sup> We also note Orthodoxy’s clear dependence on Neoplatonism and its divergence from biblical revelation. We thus now proceed to its refutation.

Returning to the Orthodox claim that the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ (*eph o*) in Romans 5:12 should be translated to “in death (all have sinned),” we respond that nowhere in the New Testament is that phrase translated “in

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<sup>376</sup>Мейендорф И. Введение в святоотеческое богословие. Минск: Лучи Софии, 2007. – P. 324; Nassif B. The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 73.

<sup>377</sup>Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology, p. 144.

<sup>378</sup>Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и догматическое богословие. М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 94. Author’s translation.

<sup>379</sup>Noted in Florovsky, p. 226.

<sup>380</sup>Gross J. The Divination of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 53.

<sup>381</sup>Лосский, p. 151. Author’s translation.

<sup>382</sup>Lane, p. 7.

something.” In this context, the preferred translation should be “because,” which all major English translators employ. Instead of translating “in death (all have sinned),” we read “because (all have sinned).”

All the consequences of Adam’s sin are passed on to his descendants. In Romans 5:14-15, we learn about our inheriting mortality. In verses 16-19, Adam’s guilt is passed on. One may safely assume that inherited depravity is implied as well. Other texts specifically indicate that we received from Adam a sinful nature:

- ...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life *inherited from your forefathers* (1 Pet 1:18).
- Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature* children of wrath, even as the rest (Eph 2:3).

According to Scripture, our problem is not over-occupation with bodily and earthly affairs, but the sinful state of our hearts:

- For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting {and} wickedness, {as well} {as} deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride {and} foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mk 7:21-23).
- The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it (Jer 17:9).

Some Orthodox teachers are ready to admit that people inherited from Adam a sinful nature.<sup>383</sup>

However, although Eastern Orthodoxy officially adheres to the goodness of the material world, yet in practice it treats it as something unclean that hinders spiritual development. This is why Orthodox teachers laud the monastic life and ascetic practices. However, the Bible plainly teaches that suppression of legitimate bodily desires does not aid in overcoming sin (see above discussion on “Distortion”).

#### **e. Selfishness as the Root of Sin**

Some Scripture passages seem to indicate that the root problem of sin is selfishness. The Bible reveals, for example, that a sinner turns “to his own way” (Isa 53:6), and that in the end times, “people will be lovers of self” (2 Tim 3:2). The gospel teaches us to live for God, not for ourselves (2 Cor 5:15).<sup>384</sup>

On the other hand, although the Bible warns about selfishness, it never identifies it as the basic element in sinful behavior. Jesus’ Great Commandments do not exclude love for oneself: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). It seems that a prerequisite for normal relationships with others is a healthy respect for oneself.<sup>385</sup> Although Thiessen believes that sin springs from selfishness, he nonetheless concedes,

There is, we grant, a proper love of self. It constitutes the basis of self-respect, self-preservation, self-improvement, and of a proper regard for others. None of these are inherently sinful. What we do mean is such an exaggerated love of self, as puts self-interests ahead of God’s interests.<sup>386</sup>

We must also consider the following point. At times, it is necessary for people to act in their own interests. In fact, all human actions can be characterized this way. For example, if someone has an extra sum of money,

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<sup>383</sup>See Palachovsky V., Vogel C. Sin in the Orthodox Church and in the Protestant Churches / Trans. C. Schalderbrand. – New York: Desclee, 1966. – P. 9-10; and C. N. Callinicos The Greek Orthodox Catechism. – New York: Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, 1960. – P. 23. Noted in Horton M., response to Bradley Nassif // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 123.

<sup>384</sup>Thiessen, p. 246-247.

<sup>385</sup>Erickson, p. 597-598.

<sup>386</sup>Thiessen, p. 246.

then the decision arises whether to spend it on oneself or give it to another. The thing that prompts this person to give the money away is a *personal desire* to do so. This individual *prefers* to bring someone else joy. So then, this person is, in a sense, acting out of self-interest in serving another. He or she is being ruled by a personal desire, which in this case turns out to be an altruistic one. Therefore, the key to moral living is not to suppress all personal desires, but to develop good ones that lead to acts of generosity and godliness.

We can qualify the claim of sin as selfishness in still another fashion. Some people demonstrate great commitment and self-sacrifice in devoting themselves wholeheartedly to what they perceive to be a good cause. Adherents of false religions, for example, do so. Yet, such “unselfish” behavior is not admirable since in it involves a rejection of Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father.<sup>387</sup>

## B. Consequences of Sin

The final question to consider in our investigation of sin is its consequences.<sup>388</sup> The book of Proverbs gives us a general idea in stating that the wicked have no future (Prov 2:22; 10:7), they will fall (Prov 6:15; 28:18), and they will be punished (Prov 11:21, 23; 12:2; 10:31). We will divide our study into three parts: the consequences of sin in relation to God, for the individual, and for others.

### 1. In Relation to God

In order to understand how sin affects our relationship to God, we must emphasize several aspects of His character, such as holiness and righteousness. In both Greek and Hebrew, the word holiness means “separation.” God’s holiness means that He is unique and separate from sin. Therefore, sin leads to separation from God. Isaiah 59:2 declares, “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” Habakkuk 1:13 adds, “{Your} eyes are too pure to approve evil.”

One can compare God’s attitude toward sin with combining oil with water. The two substances do not mix. The chemical nature of both substances makes this impossible, no matter how we may try. In a similar way, God cannot fellowship with sin. His nature will not allow it. Sin leads to eternal separation from the Lord.

Sin results not in a passive separation from God, but in an active rejection by Him. Yahweh says through Jeremiah, “I will cast you out of My sight” (Jer 7:15). Here, we can draw a parallel with magnets of the same polarity. When we bring them into close approximation, they repel one another. Similarly, when God and sin come together, God rejects it from His presence. The Bible calls this active resistance to sin God’s “wrath.” In Ezekiel 43:8, the Lord speaks of Israel, “They have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger.” Therefore, in the light of God’s holiness, we can understand why sin leads to separation from Him and rejection by Him.

How does God’s righteousness come into play? “Righteousness” means the fulfillment of a certain standard. God Himself is the standard of righteousness. His nature defines what is right. Jesus spoke of the Father in Matthew 5:48, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” When we say that God is righteous, we are saying that He acts in consistency with His nature and the law that He gave us.

In order to uphold His standards, the Lord punishes violators. He will not lower His standards, and in fact cannot do so, since they are a reflection of His nature. Therefore, He punishes every transgression. Exodus 32:34 informs us, “In the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.” Therefore, in light of God’s righteousness, we gain further insight into His attitude toward sin. He stands as Judge and punishes transgressors.

Regarding how God punishes, we distinguish two concepts: natural consequences and direct punishment. The first consists of God allowing the natural consequences of a wrong action to come upon the sinner. Paul

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<sup>387</sup>Erickson, p. 598.

<sup>388</sup>Material taken from Erickson, p. 618ff.

speaks of this in Romans 1:27 concerning homosexuality – such people receive “in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” Direct punishment involves God’s direct intervention. An example would be His judgment on Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5.

When the Lord punishes, He pursues three goals. As a righteous judge, He seeks satisfaction of His justice. In addition, punishment can lead the sinner to repentance. Finally, punishment can serve as a warning so that others do not imitate this behavior.

God is holy and righteous, but also infinite and unchanging. Since He is eternal and unchanging, His punishment for sin is eternal. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus says to the condemned, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.” In addition, in Mark 9:48 Jesus said that in that place, “Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

In our judicial system, we punish criminals according to the severity of their crime. Correspondingly, if one sins against another person, who is finite, they receive a temporary punishment. Yet, if one sins against an infinite being, that person’s punishment is unending. God considers every sin as being committed against Him. When David sinned with Bathsheba, he declared, “Against You, You only, I have sinned” (Ps 51:4).

A final aspect to consider in God’s relation to sin is His mercy. God once promised Moses to proclaim His name to Him. In biblical thought, the “name” is a description of one’s character. Therefore, when the Lord promised to declare His name to Moses, He was planning to reveal His character.

The passage in question is Exodus 34:6-7, where God proclaimed, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.” In His mercy, God desires to forgive sin. In the Garden of Eden, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord spoke to them about His salvation plan, promising that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head. He then made garments for Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness.

We note here that the Lord first shows mercy to the sinner, and not wrath. This was a characteristic difference between Jesus and the Pharisees. When the latter saw a sinner, they thought of condemnation. When Jesus saw a sinner, He thought of mercy. In Matthew chapter 9, the Pharisees were offended that the Lord ate and drank with tax gatherers and sinners. Yet, Jesus responded, “[It is] not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice’” (Matt 9:12-13).

We read further in Exodus 34:7, “He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” We see here that God’s mercy has a limit. God is a God of holiness that hates sin. If people reject His love and offer of forgiveness, He will manifest His wrath.

The Bible provides a graphic picture of God’s attitude toward the unrepentant sinner – the image of the cup of wrath (see Isaiah 51:17 and Revelation 14:10). When a cup is filling, we do not see the liquid. When the cup is full, it is ready to be poured out. Similarly, God exercises patience toward the sinner and withholds His wrath. Yet, the time will come for it to be manifest.

## **2. In Relation to Self**

Sin causes misery not only for one’s relationship with the Lord, but subjectively for the individual himself/herself. We will highlight three of these woes: slavery to desire, fear, and ignorance. Earlier we stated that our natural human desires are good, but when they lead us beyond God’s standards of proper behavior, they become evil. Sin perverts our nature in such a way that it becomes difficult to control our desires, and they frequently lead us into sin by prompting us to seek satisfaction of our desires outside of God’s will. In other words, sinners are enslaved to their desires.

Fear is a universal human experience. Hebrews 2:15 helps us understand this: through “fear of death” we are “subject to slavery.” The Bible reveals why people fear death: “Inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die



once and after this {comes} judgment” (Heb 9:27). After death, there will be no more opportunity for repentance and faith in Jesus. People subconsciously are aware of this, which is the root of this fear.

Sin also leads to ignorance. We live in the “information age,” where knowledge is growing exponentially in every field. However, in the field of religion we encounter much that could easily be called irrational and nonsensical. Romans 1:21-22 gives us insight here: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

When people reject the Lord, they reject truth as well, which leads to ignorance. Jesus taught us an important principle in John 7:17: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or {whether} I speak from Myself.” In other words, only those who are open to truth will receive truth. Some may consider themselves great scholars or thinkers, but if they reject the truth of God’s Word, they remain in ignorance.

Another key passage is Ephesians 4:17-18: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.” Here, we note that people’s ignorance is connected with their hardness of heart. An open heart is necessary to receive God’s truth. Therefore, the Scriptures declare, “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10).

The book of Proverbs speaks much about “fools.” They “despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7), “mock at sin” (Prov 14:9), are “arrogant and careless” (Prov 14:16), and “will quarrel” (Prov 20:3). Moreover, their “way is right in (their) own eyes” (Prov 12:15), they “ruin (their) way” (Prov 19:3), and their “lips bring strife” (Prov 18:6). In the end, they will be punished (Prov 19:29; 26:3; 10:13).

Finally, sin leads to physical death and eternal punishment for those who have not been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. We will look more into this truth in volume 5 of this series.

### **3. In Relation to Others**

We will name the initial aspect of sin’s effect on our relationships with others “competition.” We will begin with a reading from Hebrews 10:24: “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” The word “stimulate” translates the Greek term *παροξύσμος* (*paroxusmos*). The root of this word implies “raise up to a high level.” Therefore, in Hebrews 10:24 the author implies that believers should stimulate each other to high levels of spiritual life in Christ.

On the other hand, competition has a negative side. The Bible calls it “envy,” and its root is unbelief. A good example is when James and John wanted to occupy the place at the right and left hand of Jesus in the Kingdom (Matt 20:20ff). In other words, they wanted to rank ahead of the other disciples. We can also cite Saul’s jealousy of David (1 Sam 18), Joseph’s brothers’ jealousy of Joseph (Gen 37), and Sarah of Hagar (Gen 21). Envy can reach the point where Solomon would write, “I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is {the result of} rivalry between a man and his neighbor” (Ecc 4:4).

We recall that in the Fall, Adam and Eve lost their trust in God. Instead of trusting the Lord to meet their needs, they sought satisfaction outside of God and fell into sin. God, the ultimate source to supply our needs, was supplanted by a finite source, i.e., what humans could attain for themselves. A finite source can only supply temporary satisfaction. If we rely on a finite source, it may turn out that there is not enough for everyone. Therefore, we compete with one another out of fear of losing out. If you obtain what I was striving for, envy results. In “healthy” competition, as described in the first paragraph above, I want my success to encourage you to succeed as well. In “unhealthy” competition, I want my success at your expense.

Jesus’ dealing with the hungry multitude will prove insightful. He was faced with the challenge of feeding 5000 persons with limited food. How should He decide whom to feed? Would He arrange some competition for it? Yet, Jesus is an unlimited source of supply. He fed all and thereby demonstrated that in God’s kingdom,

there is always enough for everyone. My success does not threaten you, and your success does not threaten me. We can all trust God to take care of us.

Related to competition is “manipulation.” People of this age, as a rule, tend to value things more than people. People are often used to get things. We call this manipulation. James, in particular, rebukes those in the church who show partiality to rich members and disdain the poor (Jam 2:1-9).

A dramatic and tragic example is found in 1 Kings chapter 5. From verse 5, we read Jezebel’s question to King Ahab, “‘How is it that your spirit is so sullen that you are not eating food?’ So he said to her, ‘Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you a vineyard in its place.’ But he said, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” As a result, Ahab killed Naboth and took his vineyard. He regarded a piece of land more valuable than Naboth’s life.

However, the values of God’s kingdom differ from the world’s values. Paul writes, “Do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil 2:4). In God’s kingdom, people are more important than things. We use things to serve people.

Finally, a third element in sin’s effect on relationships is “enmity.” We have already commented that due to the Fall, our sinful nature harbors hatred toward God and people. In comparison to the previous two points, this feature is the most heinous. In competition, we express only indirect antagonism. It does not usually involve a direct conflict. In manipulation, we are in direct contact, but nonetheless I am pursuing a certain goal – to get something from another. However, in the case of enmity, I am not necessarily seeking a specific goal. I hate simply because it is in my fallen nature to do so. Paul writes about this in Titus 3:3, “...spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” There does not have to be any reason to hate others. It comes out unprovoked.

Often, these hostile attitudes are expressed in arguments and fights. An extreme application is war. It is fascinating how people are fascinated with war. This is due to the natural enmity in the fallen human heart wanting expression in violence. Of course, we applaud those who go to war and make the ultimate sacrifice to defend their country. Yet, there is no honor in loving war. Psalm 68:30 states, “He has scattered the peoples who delight in war.”

When nations are not at war, enmity finds expression in a different way through discrimination. Every nation has certain groups who are looked down upon – usually minorities. We look for reasons to justify our negative attitude in their appearance, dress, customs, skin color, etc. However, when we reside in other countries, the citizens there look on us the same way. It is natural for sinners to seek shortcomings in those who differ from them. This is another method that hate employs to express itself while seeking justification for its actions.

Another example of this phenomenon is the popularity of violent films and television programs. These programs owe their popularity to the fact that persons in their carnal nature relish death and violence. It provides an indirect expression of the hatred that exists in the human heart.

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## Part 2. Object of Faith: Salvation through Christ

### *Section 1. Introduction*

## Chapter 6: The Idea of Salvation and Theories of Redemption

### A. Old Testament

#### 1. Terminology

The Hebrew language expresses the idea of salvation with the verb root *יָשָׁא* (*yasha*). From it derives the name *יְהוֹשֻׁעַ* (*Yehoshua*), i.e., “Joshua.” During the Babylonian captivity, this name was abbreviated to the form *יֵשׁוּעַ* (*Yeshua*), i.e., “Jesus.” This corresponds to Gabriel’s message to Mary: “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

The basic meaning of the verb *יָשָׁא* (*yasha*) is “to expand.”<sup>389</sup> It describes movement from a crowded place to a spacious one, where people can enjoy more freedom of movement to accomplish their goals. Liefeld comments, “The root idea seems to be that of enlargement, providing space, or, conversely, removing that which restricts.”<sup>390</sup>

The verb *יָשָׁא* (*yasha*) is used in the Old Testament two ways. Usually, it refers to deliverance from a physical enemy or physical danger (see Ex 14:30). At times, though, it relates to deliverance from sin.<sup>391</sup> For example, in Ezekiel 36:29 we read, “I will save you from all your uncleanness,” and in Ezekiel 37:23, “I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them.”

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<sup>389</sup>Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000. – P. 446 (abbreviated BDB).

<sup>390</sup>Liefeld W. L. Salvation // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 288.

<sup>391</sup>Pecota D. The Saving Work of Christ // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 371-372.

A synonym to *yasha* (יָשַׁע) is *natsal* (נָצַל), which also carries a dual meaning of both physical and spiritual salvation. Regarding physical deliverance, we find *natsal* (נָצַל) in the following texts: “I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians,” (Ex 3:8), and, “The God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand” (2 Chr 32:17). In a spiritual sense, the psalmist employs *natsal* (נָצַל) in the following passages: “Deliver me from all my transgressions” (Ps 39:8), and, “...deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake” (Ps 79:9).<sup>392</sup> The basic sense of the term is “to pull out.”<sup>393</sup>

A well-known Hebrew term, *shalom* (שָׁלוֹם), is often used as a greeting, but also relates to salvation. It carries a heavy semantic load that can be expressed by words like “peace,” “prosperity,” “well-being,” “health,” and “security.”<sup>394</sup>

Three Hebrew terms communicate the idea of “redemption”: *gaal* (גָּאַל), *padah* (פָּדָה), and *kipher* (כִּפֶּר). The latter term literally means, “to cover,” and often is used for “propitiation” or “appeasement.”<sup>395</sup> We find an example of this usage in Exodus 32:30, where Moses says to Israel, “I am going up to Yahweh, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”<sup>396</sup>

The term *padah* (פָּדָה) applies to paying a fee to release property. The word *gaal* (גָּאַל) is similar in meaning, but relates primarily to releasing that which belongs to a kinsperson.

Leviticus chapter 25 provides us an example of the usage of *gaal* (גָּאַל). In verse 25, we read, “If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back (גָּאַל) what his relative has sold.” In fact, the phrase “nearest kinsman” is derived from the verb *gaal* (גָּאַל) as well and can be translated “redeemer.” So then, a near kinsman can serve as a redeemer. We find another example in Leviticus 25:47-48:

Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, then he shall have redemption right (גָּאַל) after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him.

When the Old Testament speaks of “redemption,” it usually has Israel’s deliverance from Egypt in view. Murray concurs, “The redemption from Egypt occupies a central place; therefore, the import of OT redemption must be derived from this event.”<sup>397</sup>

In contexts discussing the deliverance from Egypt, one encounters the term *gaal* (גָּאַל): “You have by Your power redeemed (גָּאַל) Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph” (Ps 77:15). Yahweh established a covenant with the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were His people, and He was their God. Therefore, God filled the place of their “near kinsman,” or “redeemer.”

The deliverance from Egypt is also denoted by the verb *padah* (פָּדָה). Deuteronomy 15:15 is an example: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed (פָּדָה) you.” The Lord redeemed His people from bondage.

Murray provides this summary: “Redemption involved the securing of release or recovery by the payment of a price.”<sup>398</sup> At the same time, he correctly notes that the use of *gaal* (גָּאַל) and *padah* (פָּדָה) do not always involve the payment of a price. For example, in Genesis 48:16, *gaal* (גָּאַל) functions in the simple sense of

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<sup>392</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>393</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 289.

<sup>394</sup>Liefeld makes mention of other Hebrew terms for salvation, such as *palat* (פָּלַט – “flee”), *azar* (אָזַר – “help”), and *malat* (מָלַט – “flee”). See Liefeld, v. 4, p. 289.

<sup>395</sup>Rightmire R. D. Redemption // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 664.

<sup>396</sup>BDB, p. 497-498.

<sup>397</sup>Murray J. Redeemer, Redemption // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 61.

<sup>398</sup>Ibid.

“deliver.” The same is true for פָּדָה (*padah*) in 1 Kings 1:29. In some texts, these terms are merely synonymous with “salvation”: גָּאָל (*gaal*) in Psalm 107:2, Isaiah 43:1, Jeremiah 31:11, and Micah 4:10; פָּדָה (*padah*) in Hosea 13:14.<sup>399</sup>

Liefeld agrees that in many cases “there is little concern... with payment of ransom and even less with a payee. The focus is rather on the fact that divine action is needed to obtain freedom for God’s people.”<sup>400</sup> However, it is important to keep in mind that in the overall Old Testament conception of redemption, the idea of liberation by paying a price is not totally absent (see Ex 15:16; Deut 32:6; Ps 73:2; Isa 43:3-4).

## 2. Survey of Old Testament Teaching

In the Old Testament, the goal of salvation, in general, is deliverance from physical enemies and physical danger. The most graphic example, as noted above, is God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex 7-14), during which the Lord did great miracles that Israel retained in its memory for its entire history. Liefeld comments, “The greatest demonstration of God’s salvation in the OT was the Exodus from Egypt.” It is mentioned in every section of the Old Testament: the Torah (Ex 20:1; Lev 26:13; Deut 6:21), the historical books (Judg 2:12; 6:8-9), the poetical books (Ps 106:9-10; 136:10-12), and the prophetic books (Mic 6:4; Amos 2:10).

As noted earlier, the term “redemption” is used to describe Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. It will be insightful here to compare Exodus chapters 3 and 6, where we encounter Yahweh’s first promise to deliver His people from Egypt. In Exodus 3:7-8, we read, “Yahweh said, ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt.... So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians.’” Exodus 6:6, though, reads, “I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem (גָּאָל) you.”

The citation from chapter 6 contains a term for redemption, גָּאָל (*gaal*), while the text from chapter 3 does not. This shows that, strictly speaking, God did not “redeem” His people, but “delivered” them. The idea of “redemption” is introduced later as a figure of speech. Clearly, “deliverance” is a more appropriate description, since Yahweh paid no price to “redeem” the sons of Jacob. He delivered them by means of mighty miracles. Therefore, we are to take the description in chapter 3, “I will deliver,” literally, but the reference in chapter 6, “I will redeem,” – figuratively. As we shall see, the insertion of “redemption” will serve as a symbol of a future redemption.

Although no redemption price was paid to liberate Israel from slavery, the event that led to their release was the Passover. During Passover, each family butchered a lamb and spread its blood on the doorframe of their house. On Passover night, God passed through the land of Egypt and struck every firstborn of the Egyptians. When He saw the blood on the houses of Israel, though, He passed by. After that event, Pharaoh released the people. The events that triggered Israel’s liberation, then, were the death of the firstborn in Egypt and the sacrifice of the lamb. Therefore, the price for the “figurative redemption” of Israel from Egypt was the death of the firstborn and the death of the lamb. In this way, Passover became the symbol for the future sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Father’s Only Begotten Son.

The book of Judges narrates many examples of God’s saving work. Whenever Israel suffered because of straying from Yahweh and His covenant, He delivered them in His faithfulness: “Then Yahweh raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them” (Judg 2:16). Nehemiah reflects on this as well, “When they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors” (Neh 9:27).

Throughout Israel’s history, Yahweh was ready to intervene in the life of His people and save them when they called on Him. He was David’s savior from the hand of Saul (1 Sam 19ff), Hezekiah’s savior from the

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<sup>399</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>400</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 289.

Assyrians, (2 Chr 32), the Jews' savior from the hand of Haman (book of Esther), etc. In all these cases, deliverance was from a physical or political threat.

The Psalms speak much of God as Savior. The psalmist expresses his trust in the Lord his Deliverer: "He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken" (Ps 62:2); "God is to us a God of deliverances" (Ps 68:20); and, "Yahweh is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation" (Ps 118:14). He is confident that God will hear his prayer and answer: "I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies" (Ps 18:3); and, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me" (Ps 138:7).

The psalmist testifies that God saves out of troubles (Ps 34:6; 34:17; 54:8), death (Ps 56:13; 68:20), and Sheol (Ps 86:13). Salvation brings great joy (Ps 9:14; 13:5-6; 35:9).<sup>401</sup> God's salvation applies not only to His people in general, but to each individual as well.<sup>402</sup>

The most impressive example of celebrating God's salvation in the Psalms is found in Psalm 107. After describing various situations where people found themselves in danger, the psalmist repeats the refrain, "Then they cried out to Yahweh in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distresses" (Ps 107:6, 13, 19, 28). Whatever the problem might be, the Lord is ready to save.

Salvation is more than just an act of deliverance, but leads to a condition of well being, which is well described in Psalm 103:2-5: "Bless Yahweh, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; who satisfies your years with good things, {So that} your youth is renewed like the eagle." God is not only the Savior of Israel, but also its Good Shepherd (Ps 28:9) and Keeper (Ps 121).<sup>403</sup> Arnold affirms, "In addition to the notion of deliverance the Bible also uses salvation to denote health, well-being, and healing."<sup>404</sup>

We should also take note of the fact that according to Psalm 103:3, salvation in the Old Testament also has a spiritual dimension in that God provides forgiveness of sins: "Who pardons all your iniquities." The same thought is expressed in Psalm 130:8: "He will redeem (גָּאַל) Israel from all his iniquities."

The prophetic books stress that salvation always comes from God. He is the only Savior of Israel. Isaiah 43:11 declares, "I, even I, am Yahweh, and there is no savior besides Me. (cf. Isa 12:2; 45:15, 21). Jeremiah echoes this same theme, "Surely in Yahweh our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jer 3:23; cf. 20:13; 50:34). Hosea records, "There is no savior besides Me" (Hos 13:4; cf. 13:9-10). As Arnold states, "Despite the importance of human agency, salvation is attributed above all to God."<sup>405</sup>

Moreover, in the book of Isaiah God often speaks of Himself as the Redeemer of His people.<sup>406</sup> Isaiah also contrasts God's ability to save with the ineptitude of pagan gods. This was demonstrated in practice as well when Isaiah experienced deliverance from Assyria, who openly challenged the God of Israel (2 Kin 18:33-35).<sup>407</sup>

The prophetic books relate salvation to temporal ills, for example, to deliverance from the threat of Babylon. Micah prophecies, "Dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies" (Mic 4:10; cf. Mic 2:13). Jeremiah predicts the same, "Their Redeemer is strong, Yahweh of hosts is His name. He will vigorously plead their case so that He may bring rest to the earth, but turmoil to the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer 50:34; cf. 31:11).<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>401</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 288-289; Arnold W. T. Salvation // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 702.

<sup>402</sup>Rightmire, p. 664.

<sup>403</sup>White R. E. O. Salvation // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1050; Arnold, p. 701.

<sup>404</sup>Arnold, p. 701.

<sup>405</sup>Ibid.

<sup>406</sup>See: Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; 63:16 (Rightmire, p. 664; Murray, v. 4, p. 62).

<sup>407</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 288-289.

<sup>408</sup>Harrison E. F. Redeemer, Redemption // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 994.



In addition, the prophetic picture of salvation includes not only individual episodes of deliverance, but also an ongoing condition of peace and well-being. We read in Isaiah 26:1-3, “We have a strong city; He sets up walls and ramparts for security.... The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.”

In addition, salvation sometime relates to spiritual deliverance, i.e., the forgiveness of sins, as in Isaiah 44:22: “I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.” Isaiah also writes, “A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (Isa 59:20).<sup>409</sup> Ezekiel adds, “I will save you from all your uncleanness” (Ezek 36:29), and, “I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them” (Ezek 37:23).

Another special feature of God’s salvation noted in the prophets is that Yahweh’s mercy extends beyond the borders of Israel to the whole world: “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isa 45:22).

Finally, the Old Testament prophets at times link the Lord’s salvation with the coming of Messiah. Jeremiah writes, “I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely And do justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer 23:5). The messianic salvation promised in the Old Testament is, in essence, eschatological in nature.<sup>410</sup>

We should also make note of various Old Testament metaphors symbolizing salvation, such as a cup (Ps 116:13), a horn (Ps 18:2), “a torch that is burning” (Isa 62:1), a spring (Isa 12:3), and a shield (2 Sam 22:36).<sup>411</sup>

In summary, we affirm with White, who emphasizes the centrality of salvation in the Old Testament, “‘The Lord is ... my salvation’ is the heart of OT testimony, always with an overtone of undeserved mercy.”<sup>412</sup> The most remarkable example and model of God’s salvation in the Old Testament is the Exodus from Egypt.

Although Old Testament salvation sometimes relates to spiritual themes and individual matters, Arnold correctly observes, “In general the Old Testament writers see salvation as a reality more physical than spiritual, more social than individual.”<sup>413</sup>

In the Old Testament, salvation also has an eschatological aspect connected with the coming of Messiah. Still, Liefeld properly cautions, “God’s saving acts in the OT are not merely a foreshadowing of NT salvation; they have reality and validity in themselves.” Liefeld also acknowledges that God’s salvation is “not merely for the benefit of Israel,” but is also intended “that the ‘ends of the earth’ also know God’s salvation.”<sup>414</sup>

## B. Intertestamental Period

In the intertestamental time, salvation was a timely topic for both Greeks and Jews. Greeks often sought salvation through the so-called “mystery religions,” as Liefeld records, “In the eyes of many inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world, the greatest promise of salvation was offered by the mystery religions.”<sup>415</sup> They offered individuals liberation from futility and bliss in the afterlife: “Ultimately the devotees hoped for a better hereafter, in which the griefs and limitations of this present life would receive compensation.”<sup>416</sup> The mystery religions included devotion to Isis and Osiris. According to legend, Osiris died and was raised to life by Isis. In

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<sup>409</sup>Ibid.

<sup>410</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 288.

<sup>411</sup>Arnold, p. 702.

<sup>412</sup>White, p. 1049.

<sup>413</sup>Arnold, p. 701.

<sup>414</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 289.

<sup>415</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 290.

<sup>416</sup>Ibid.

Greek literature in general, the concept of salvation related to deliverance from sickness, troubles, and defeat in battle. Some Greek gods were regarded as “saviors,” such as Zeus.<sup>417</sup>

In the Jewish apocryphal literature, God is the Savior from physical threats. The term “Savior” is primarily directed to Him. Unlike typical Jewish thought, in Qumran salvation was associated with righteousness. The teachings of Moses, Sadok, and the Teacher of Righteousness can lead to salvation. In the Qumran community, salvation was also understood eschatologically. The ultimate liberation of the righteous person was still future.<sup>418</sup> First-century Judaism, though, laid stress on political deliverance from enemies and the restoration of God’s kingdom on earth under Messiah.<sup>419</sup>

## C. New Testament

### 1. Terminology

The Greek term denoting salvation is σωτηρία (*soteria*).<sup>420</sup> Its meaning is similar to the Hebrew נַשָּׂא (*yasha*). It can indicate: (1) deliverance or protection from physical danger, (2) favorable external circumstances, (3) a healthy psychological condition, and even (4) victory over death. Because of the overlap between the words σωτηρία (*soteria*) and נַשָּׂא (*yasha*), the Septuagint generally translated the latter with the former. Both could designate: (1) deliverance from danger, (2) a condition of peace and well-being resulting from that deliverance, and (3) protection from threats.

The noun σωτηρία (*soteria*) derives from the verbal form σώξω (*sodzo*), which carries both a material and spiritual connotation. The following texts highlight the material aspect. When a storm struck on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples cried out to Jesus, “Save {us,} Lord; we are perishing!” (Matt 8:25). When another storm threatened Paul and his shipmates, he counselled, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved” (Acts 27:31). This word also applied to healing the sick. In three instances of Jesus’ healing ministry, He pronounced to the recipients of healing, “Your faith has saved you” (Mk 5:34; 10:52; Lk 17:19). In James 5:15, the word σώξω (*sodzo*) is even translated “heal.” Therefore, it is evident that God’s salvation plan, in both Testaments, applies to the whole person – soul and body.

The New Testament term denoting redemption is ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolutrosis*). It comes from the root λύω (*luo*), which means “set free” or “destroy.” We encounter the basic meaning of λύω (*luo*) in Luke 13:15: “You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie (λύω) his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water {him}?” Both of these words were used in a commercial sense in relation to trade and freeing of slaves.<sup>421</sup>

Another key word derived from λύω (*luo*) is λύτρον (*lutron*), i.e., “ransom.” For the Greeks, this term described liberating something or someone by paying a fee. It could involve freeing prisoners of war, freeing slaves, or cancelling a debt.

It is important to note that receiving a ransom was an act of grace. A slave owner could receive a ransom for liberating a slave, or refuse it.<sup>422</sup> Also significant is that Jesus called Himself λύτρον (*lutron*), i.e., “ransom”: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom (λύτρον) for many” (Mk 10:45; cf. 1 Tim 2:6).<sup>423</sup> We thank the Father that He received the ransom for our redemption – the life of His Son, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>417</sup>Ibid.

<sup>418</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 291.

<sup>419</sup>Rightmire, p. 664.

<sup>420</sup>Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995. – P. 1132.

<sup>421</sup>Rightmire, p. 664.

<sup>422</sup>Kittel, p. 545.

<sup>423</sup>Rightmire, p. 665.

The New Testament uses the word ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolutrosis*) basically in two ways: liberation from sin and liberation from death. It is used for liberation both from the penalty for sin (Eph 1:7), and from its power (Tit 2:14).

In future chapters, we will discuss other New Testament term for salvation, such as “justification” and “sanctification.”

## **2. Survey of New Testament Teaching**

### **a. Synoptic Gospels**

In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament devotes much more attention to the theme of spiritual salvation. The New Testament focuses on salvation from the ultimate danger – eternal damnation. It reveals that people are under God’s wrath and therefore are in need of salvation from it. This is why the angel Gabriel announced that Jesus came “to save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). Jesus Himself stated that He came with the goal “to save that which was lost” (Matt 18:11; cf. Lk 19:10; Lk 15).<sup>424</sup> The way He would do this is by giving “His life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45).<sup>425</sup>

The salvation offered by Messiah Jesus was novel to the Jews of His day. They could not appreciate His saving mission since they were looking for Messiah to be a political deliverer. It is interesting to note that at the births of Jesus and John the Baptist, people expressed their expectation of salvation in a mixed form: sometimes physical (Lk 1:51-55; 68-74; 2:38), sometime spiritual (Lk 1:75-77; 2:30-32).<sup>426</sup> Even John the Baptist began to doubt the purpose of Christ’s mission. In response, Jesus explained,

Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: {the} blind receive sight, {the} lame walk, {the} lepers are cleansed, and {the} deaf hear, {the} dead are raised up, {the} poor have the gospel preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me (Lk 7:22-23).

In addition, Christ brought spiritual salvation by an unexpected means. Jews of that time believed that people receive righteousness before the Lord based on their observance of the Mosaic Law. Yet, after His conversation with “the rich young ruler,” the Lord announced, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Lk 18:25). When His disciples objected, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus responded, “The things that are impossible with people are possible with God” (Lk 18:26-27).

The salvation that Jesus offers is, in reality, not foreign to Old Testament revelation. Isaiah spoke of the “Suffering Servant of Yahweh,” who bears the sins of the people (Isa 53). The New Testament writers see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>427</sup> In addition, Jesus associated salvation with the coming of God’s kingdom, with which His contemporaries were well acquainted.<sup>428</sup>

Although the New Testament focuses on salvation in a spiritual sense, the Synoptic Gospels include physical deliverance in the concept of salvation as well. Jesus, in fact, called the healings He performed “salvation” (e.g. Lk 7:50; 17:19). Additionally, He did not draw a distinction between the spiritual and physical aspects of salvation, but combined them. When healing the lame man, Jesus declared to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5).<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>424</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 292.

<sup>425</sup>Harrison, p. 994.

<sup>426</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 292.

<sup>427</sup>See: Matt 8:17; 12:18; Acts 4:27, 30; 8:32-33; Rom 15:21; 1 Pet 2:22-25 (Rightmire, p. 665).

<sup>428</sup>Arnold, p. 702.

<sup>429</sup>Ibid.

Moreover, the fact that the Lord required faith from those He healed reveals the connection between salvation and faith. He spoke of salvation by faith directly in His parable of the sower: “Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not *believe and be saved*” (Lk 8:12).<sup>430</sup>

Finally, in the Synoptics, God’s salvation is also eschatological, that is, it is fully accomplished at the end of time. Twice in these Gospels, we encounter the prediction, “Those who endure to the end will be saved” (Mk 13:20; Matt 10:22).<sup>431</sup> In addition, as was predicted in Isaiah, salvation will extend beyond the borders of Israel. Jesus commissioned His disciples that “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (Lk 24:47).<sup>432</sup>

## **b. Acts of the Apostles**

In the book of Acts, Jesus is the only Savior. God the Father exalted Him as “a Prince and a Savior” (Acts 5:31). Before the leaders of Israel, Peter boldly proclaimed, “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12), and before the people, Peter promised, “Everyone who calls on the name of the lord will be saved.”<sup>433</sup> In answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31). Even demons acknowledged salvation through Jesus (Acts 16:17).

Salvation is not only for the soul, but also for the body. In Acts 4:9, we read that a lame man was “healed” (literally, “saved”). Salvation provides not only forgiveness of sins, but relief from the consequences of sin, which was demonstrated in the miracles of healing that accompanied the preaching of the gospel.<sup>434</sup>

It is interesting to note that the early chapters of Acts focus on salvation for the Jews. God appointed Jesus “to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). In addition, “God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:23). In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, Paul assured the Jews and God-fearers gathered there, “To us the message of this salvation has been sent” (Acts 13:26).

At the same time, Peter also preached salvation to the Gentiles who were gathered at Cornelius’ house (Acts 11:14). God charged Paul, “I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth” (Acts 13:47). In the end, Peter declared that in God’s salvation there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles: “We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15:11).

## **c. General Epistles**

The General Epistles further develop our understanding of God’s plan of salvation. James writes that God is “able to save” (Jam 4:12). In his brief epistle, he speaks about various dimensions of salvation. God saves in the sense of justification (1:12; 5:20), sanctification (2:14), and bodily healing (5:15 – using the term σωξω - *sodzo*). In James’ treatment of justification, however, he lays great stress on the good works that accompany justification. Possibly, for this reason, James speaks of salvation as a future entity.

Peter, however, speaks of salvation as past, present, and future.<sup>435</sup> On the one hand, believers in Jesus are already redeemed from their “futile way of life” (1 Pet 1:18) and are already “a people for {God's} own possession” (1 Pet 2:9). On the other hand, salvation is only fully revealed “in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5).

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<sup>430</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 292.

<sup>431</sup>Ibid.

<sup>432</sup>Arnold, p. 702.

<sup>433</sup>White observes that Peter’s call to salvation had a moral thrust as well: “Be saved from this perverse generation!” (Acts 2:40). See White, p. 1050.

<sup>434</sup>Ibid.

<sup>435</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294.

Followers of Jesus will then receive the “outcome of (their) faith,” which is the salvation of their souls (1 Pet 1:9). Nevertheless, Peter warns, “It is with difficulty that the righteous is saved” (1 Pet 4:18).<sup>436</sup> Finally, for Peter salvation has a present application as well. Christians can “grow in respect to salvation” through the Word of God (1 Pet 2:2).

Furthermore, Peter often ascribes the title “Savior” to Jesus (2 Pet 1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18).<sup>437</sup> For him, Christ is also the Redeemer (2 Pet 2:1), who redeemed the world with His blood (1 Pet 1:18-19).<sup>438</sup> It is interesting to note that Peter associates receiving salvation not only with faith (1 Pet 1:5-9), but also with water baptism (1 Pet 3:21). At the same time, he qualifies that what saves is “not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Finally, Peter makes other comments on salvation.<sup>439</sup> The Old Testament prophets only partially understood God’s salvation plan, which is now revealed to the Church (1 Pet 1:10). In addition, the way of salvation is still open – God continues to show patience toward the unrepentant (2 Pet 3:15).

In Hebrews, Jesus is assigned such titles as the “author of salvation” (Heb 2:10) and the “source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9). Consequently, He “is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him” (Heb 7:25). Redemption is accomplished through His blood, which was shed as a sacrifice for sins (Heb 9:12-15).<sup>440</sup> Since the main goal of Hebrews is to urge Jewish believers to hold fast their faith until the end, it is no surprise that the author presents salvation as a future entity (Heb 1:14; 9:28), which one must highly value (Heb 2:3). The book of Jude also emphasizes the need for perseverance (Jude 5, 23).<sup>441</sup>

#### **d. Epistles of Paul**

The apostle Paul provides us with a very exhaustive treatment of the topic of salvation. First, the apostle to the Gentiles reveals that God’s plan of salvation dates back to eternity past. It was granted us “in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (2 Tim 1:9).<sup>442</sup> God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4), but revealed this mystery through the apostles’ teaching (Eph 3:9).<sup>443</sup>

For both Paul and all the New Testament writers, Jesus is the only Savior. God the Father made Him for us “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). He is rightfully called the “Savior” (Tit 1:4; 2:13; 3:6), a title also attributed to the Father, who initiated this salvation plan (Tit 1:3; 2:10; 3:4).<sup>444</sup>

Paul boldly declares that Jesus accomplished our salvation through His death and resurrection from the dead. The redemption of the world comes as a result of the Son’s sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, where He shed His precious blood: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7).<sup>445</sup> He “gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:6).<sup>446</sup> We “were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10).<sup>447</sup> In the final chapters of his first Corinthian correspondence, Paul emphasizes the importance of these redemptive events: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that

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<sup>436</sup>White, p. 1050.

<sup>437</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294.

<sup>438</sup>Murray, v. 4, p. 62.

<sup>439</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294.

<sup>440</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294; Murray, v. 4, p. 62.

<sup>441</sup>White, p. 1050; Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294.

<sup>442</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 293.

<sup>443</sup>Arnold, p. 702.

<sup>444</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 293.

<sup>445</sup>Harrison, p. 994.

<sup>446</sup>Murray, v. 4, p. 62.

<sup>447</sup>White, p. 1049.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3), and, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17).<sup>448</sup>

God offers the salvation Christ accomplished through a gift of grace. Paul insists that good works do not earn salvation: “(He) has saved us... not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9), “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy” (Tit 3:5), and “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8-9).<sup>449</sup> The final part of verse 9 reveals why God offers salvation freely: “...that no one may boast.”

Additionally, Paul teaches that the Lord wants to save all people. He gave up His Son to redeem the whole world. Paul wrote to Timothy, God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:4-6).<sup>450</sup> Consequently, God is the “Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim 4:10).

However, God has set conditions for receiving His free gift of salvation: “Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (see Acts 20:21). Paul lays special stress on the aspect of faith: “You have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8), “The righteous {man} shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17), “{The} righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe” (Rom 3:22), “A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ” (Gal 2:16), etc. In addition, to inherit eternal life one must remain in faith until the end (Col 1:23; 1 Cor 15:2).

In order to believe in Christ, one must hear about Him. Therefore, Paul underscores the importance of preaching the gospel. He eloquently expresses this thought in his epistle to the Romans: “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). Earlier, Paul called the gospel “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).<sup>451</sup>

In the writings of other New Testament authors, we noted that salvation can apply to different times: past, present, and future. Paul treats salvation in the same manner. Regarding salvation’s past aspect, redemption in Christ provides the believer with forgiveness of sins and justification before God: “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Moreover, Paul also claims that we “have now received the reconciliation” (Rom 5:11). Also see Ephesians 2:5-8 and Titus 3:5-8.<sup>452</sup>

Regarding salvation in the present, we obtain deliverance from the power of sin. We read in Titus 2:14, “Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Furthermore, Paul writes in Romans 6:18, “Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.” Thanks to salvation in Christ, believers are free from sin’s power and able to live righteously. Therefore, Paul urges followers of Christ to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).<sup>453</sup>

Additionally, redemption from sin results in liberation from Satan’s power (Col 1:13-14). When people are delivered from the dominion of sin, the devil can no longer control them through temptations and enticements. In this way, believers enjoy liberation from Satan’s rule. Other aspects of our present enjoyment of salvation include adoption into God’s family (Gal 4:4-5) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6).<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>448</sup>Arnold, p. 703.

<sup>449</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 293.

<sup>450</sup>Ibid.

<sup>451</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 293.

<sup>452</sup>White, p. 1050.

<sup>453</sup>Arnold, p. 703. The verb “to save” is in the present tense in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2 Corinthians 2:15 (White, p. 1050).

<sup>454</sup>Arnold, p. 703.

In the future, salvation will consist of victory over death: “We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). In that day, we will also be glorified (Col 3:4). Paul joyfully anticipates that day: “Now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed” (Rom 13:11). By the Holy Spirit, believers are “sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).<sup>455</sup> Finally, although believers are already justified at the present time, justification has a future application, when the justification we have already received by faith will be confirmed.

Nonetheless, since we have already received reconciliation with God, we can with confidence claim that we are already saved. Romans 5:9-10 assures us, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath {of God} through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Arnold summarizes well the three time aspects of salvation of which Paul writes:

For Paul, the past dimension of salvation is generally conceived as justification, redemption, and reconciliation, while its present dimension is depicted in terms of the Spirit’s sanctifying work. Its future dimension is said to be glorification.<sup>456</sup>

In conclusion, we may comment on the scope of salvation in Paul’s teaching. As we know, he had a burning desire to reach his fellow countrymen – the Jewish nation (Rom 10:1).<sup>457</sup> He understood that salvation first and foremost was offered to them (Rom 1:16). Yet, God appointed Paul an apostle to the Gentiles to reach them for Christ.<sup>458</sup> To the Gentile believers in Ephesus, Paul joyfully announces, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household” (Eph 2:19).

Paul also understands that salvation has an application to the natural world as well. In Romans chapter 8, he writes in connection with believers’ resurrection, “The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). We anticipate a time of great blessing for the planet during the millennial reign of Christ, when creation will enjoy greater freedom from the curse and will better serve humanity.

## **e. Epistles of John**

We will conclude our survey with the writings of the apostle John, who prefers the expressions “life” or “eternal life” when speaking of salvation. In his Gospel, he equates salvation with “life” 36 times, and in his epistles – 13 times.<sup>459</sup> At times, he equates salvation with the “kingdom of God” (Jn 3:3-5).<sup>460</sup>

Nevertheless, in John’s writings we do encounter the word “salvation” as well.<sup>461</sup> God sent His Son to save the world (Jn 3:17; 12:47). Christ explained to Samaritan woman that “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22). John further clarifies that this “salvation” is in Jesus Christ, who is “Savior of the world” (Jn 4:42; 1 Jn 4:14). Only those who come to the Father through Him can be saved (Jn 10:9).

As was noted earlier in the writings of Paul, John also emphasizes salvation by faith (Jn 3:16-18). In order to inspire faith among the people, Jesus appeals to several “witnesses”: Scripture, miracles, and John the Baptist. He makes this appeal so that “you may be saved” (Jn 5:34).

In the book of Revelation, salvation is seen in a different light. It is presented under the figure of the Lamb slain for sins (Rev 5:6). In connection with the breaking of the seals, it is written, “Worthy are You to take the

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<sup>455</sup>Rightmire, p. 665; White, p. 1050.

<sup>456</sup>Arnold, p. 703.

<sup>457</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 293.

<sup>458</sup>White, p. 1049.

<sup>459</sup>Ibid., p. 1050.

<sup>460</sup>Arnold, p. 702.

<sup>461</sup>Liefeld, v. 4, p. 294.

book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood {men} from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). Christ “released us from our sins by His blood” (Rev 1:5). Those cleansed by the blood of the Lamb are dressed in “white robes” (Rev 6:11; 7:14) and by it overcome the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev 12:10-11).

For His saving work, God receives glory: “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10), and, “I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God’” (Rev 19:1).

## **f. Summary**

In summary, we first note that the New Testament teaching on salvation has much variety of expression and application. It is especially applies to spiritual needs, but can also relate to temporal ones. It embraces all time elements: reconciliation with God (past), life transformation (present), and bodily resurrection (future). Salvation is available to all people and even affects the natural world. Liefeld offers this helpful summary: “Beginning with the initial point of conversion, salvation terminology is applied to a full range of blessings, including forgiveness, justification, redemption, sanctification, and glorification.”<sup>462</sup>

White expands this thought about the blessings of redemption:

...by what we are saved from. This includes sin and death; guilt and estrangement; ignorance of truth; bondage to habit and vice; fear of demons, of death, of life, of God, of hell; despair of self; alienation from others; pressures of the world; a meaningless life.<sup>463</sup>

Yet, one factor unites all these aspects of salvation: the only Savior, Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice on Calvary. In addition, salvation comes as a gift of God’s grace received by faith. Rightmire comments on the Christocentric nature of salvation:

Fundamental to the message of the New Testament is the announcement that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hope and that, in him, the long-awaited redemption has arrived. Deliverance of humankind from its state of alienation from God has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>464</sup>

## **D. Understandings of Salvation in Church History**

In this section, we will attempt to investigate how different thinkers in church history understood salvation. After a summary treatment of the topic, we will pinpoint for more extensive analysis a set of influential positions that have come to be known as “theories of redemption.” All these theories seek an answer to the question, “What exactly did Jesus accomplish on the cross?”

Jesus’ death is a historical event. As a rule, historical events do not interpret themselves. We must ascribe a significance to these events. Christ’s death, as a historical event, requires an interpretation. The “theories of redemption” we will discuss in this section offer various interpretations of that momentous event.<sup>465</sup>

### **1. Historical Survey**

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<sup>462</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 288.

<sup>463</sup>White, p. 1050.

<sup>464</sup>Rightmire, p. 664.

<sup>465</sup>Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 315-320.



In this survey, we will rely heavily on the research of Robert Franks.<sup>466</sup> He notes, first of all, that the Apostles' Creed treats the redemptive work of Christ only superficially, that He "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried." Franks feels that the early Fathers only weakly developed this doctrine. They seemed to devote more attention to the revelation Jesus brought of the Father, His provision of immortality, and His example of righteous living. Nevertheless, we do discover in the writings of some early Fathers mention of Christ's sacrifice for sin (for example, *Barnabas*, 5.1; 7.37.5; *Pastor Hermas*, *Similitudes*, 5.6.2; *1 Clement* 49.6; 7.4).

Early in church history, some began to advance the theory that salvation was provided not so much through the death of Christ as through His incarnation. At the incarnation, His deity supposedly penetrated His humanity and deified it. Consequently, human nature as a whole has been deified and this can now be the potential experience of every human individual. This theory is discussed in detail in chapter 7 on "Deification." The early church also embraced the "ransom theory," discussed below.

Let us turn our attention to the views of specific early teachers of the faith. Along with other thinkers of his day, Irenaeus emphasized obtaining immortality and practicing morality. He was also one of the first to develop the understanding of salvation through the incarnation. Salvation for Irenaeus also included redemption from the devil's power. Franks offers this critique of Irenaeus' teaching and of that of the Church Fathers in general: "Still on the whole the practical Christianity of Irenaeus, like that of the Apologists, is a moralism very different from Pauline Christianity."<sup>467</sup>

Clement of Alexandria looked at salvation from two vantage points. More "simple" believers are obliged to keep the moral teachings of Jesus and by that means will merit eternal life. More "advanced" believers can acquire salvation by a mystical approach by obtaining "gnosis." Origen shared this view, yet he doubted that many would find salvation by this second avenue:

Blessed are they, as many as needing the Son of God have become such as no longer need Him as a physician healing those who are ill, nor as a shepherd, nor as redemption, but as wisdom and word and righteousness, or anything else to those who through perfection can receive of Him what is best (*Commentary on John*, 1.22).<sup>468</sup>

Origen developed the "ransom theory" more than any other early Christian teacher (see discussion below). Along with this, though, he also acknowledged Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for sins.<sup>469</sup> However, for Origen Jesus' death was not so much a propitiation for sins, but rather he spoke of the "mysterious cleansing power of the shed blood of sacrifice."<sup>470</sup>

Athanasius, in turn, basically followed Irenaeus' teaching on salvation through the incarnation of Christ, but also saw value in the death of our Lord. Jesus' death and resurrection perfected the restoration of human nature begun at the incarnation. However, Christ's redemptive work concerns only the transformation of human nature and the cancelling of God's death sentence. Athanasius saw no need in propitiation through a substitutionary sacrifice. In his view, God is able to forgive without receiving retribution for sins committed.

In many ways, the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa resonates with Athanasius' teaching. The goal of Christ's death was to cleanse people from depravity and conquer death. We observe the same view in the works of Gregory Nazianzen and Cyril of Alexandria. Nonetheless, we also see in Cyril's teaching an approximation of the concept of a substitutionary sacrifice:

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<sup>466</sup>Franks R. S. *The Work of Christ*. – London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962. – 702 p.

<sup>467</sup>Franks, p. 33.

<sup>468</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>469</sup>See *Commentary to Num* 24.1, *Lev* 1.2; 3.1, *Jn* 28.14, and *Rom* 3:8.

<sup>470</sup>Franks, p. 41.

He who knew no sin, that is Christ, has been brought under the judgment, having endured an unrighteous sentence and having suffered that which became those under the curse, in order that He who is of equal worth with the whole of humanity... might free all from the accusation of disobedience and therewith redeem the terrestrial world by His own blood (*De recta fide ad reginas*, 2.7).<sup>471</sup>

John of Damascus echoes the idea of substitution:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin... He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin. He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. For we had sinned against Him, and it was meet that He should receive the ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation (*Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 3.27).

The Western Church, however, embraced a more legal approach to salvation. Tertullian viewed Christianity as a new law that would grant merit to those who kept it. He recognized, of course, the death of Christ, but only weakly developed his understanding of its significance. For him, repentance was the way to forgiveness of sins committed after water baptism.<sup>472</sup>

Hilary of Poitiers ascribes more significance to the cross of Christ:

Thus He offered Himself to the death of the accursed that He might break the curse of the Law, offering Himself voluntarily a victim to God the Father... securing complete salvation for the human race by the offering of this holy, perfect victim (*Commentary to Ps 53:13*).

Ambrose, who considered Christ's death a ransom paid to the devil and a means to overcome death, also acknowledged the substitutionary value of Jesus' sacrifice; "What greater mercy was there than that He offered Himself to be sacrificed for our crimes, that He might wash with His blood the world, whose sin could be blotted out in no other way" (*Commentary on Ps 47:17*).<sup>473</sup>

The soteriology of Augustine is multifaceted. He agreed with Ambrose that Jesus was a ransom paid to Satan for the redemption of humanity. Yet, His death also satisfied God's wrath. In Augustine's thought, these two views are interrelated in that Satan had grounds to accuse people before God. When Satan accepted Jesus' death in exchange for the condemnation of humanity, he lost the right to accuse since God's wrath for sin was now satisfied.

In addition, Augustine thought that Christ's sacrifice was not absolutely necessary. In His almighty power, the Father could have come up with another means to save the world (see *On the Trinity*, 10.10.13). Furthermore, for Augustine, Christ's sacrifice inspires us to love God more. Finally, along with other Fathers, Augustine taught that Christ's redemptive work was received through the sacraments.

In Augustine's wake, Peter Lombard taught that Jesus' sacrifice satisfied the devil's accusations and inspires us to love the Lord. Lombard's contemporary, Peter Abelard, more extensively developed this last feature. He constructed the theory of redemption called the "moral influence theory," which we will soon examine.

Lombard, along with the later thinkers Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas, taught that because of His sinless life and voluntary death, Jesus received "merit" before the Father of sufficient quantity that He can credit it to believers in Him, which results in their justification. This idea of "merit" became one of the key elements in Anselm's "commercial theory" of redemption, which we will discuss below.

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<sup>471</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>472</sup>The concept of "repentance" in the Early Church is discussed more in chapter 19 of this volume.

<sup>473</sup>Franks, p. 84.

Finally, we will briefly touch on the theology of two well-known liberal theologians on the theme of salvation. Albrecht Ritschl, for example, considered that humanity's goal was to develop moral character. Christ's death has no relation to propitiation or forgiveness of sins before God. God simply forgives all who ask Him to forgive. He has no need for retribution or satisfaction for sins by means of sacrifice. The death of Christ serves as an example of the operation of God's kingdom through patient enduring of suffering.

Friedrich Schleiermacher held to a more existential understanding of God's salvation plan. For him, Jesus' death was chiefly a source of inspiration. Christ invites us to a mystical participation in His perfect "God-conscience." According to the teaching of Schleiermacher (who cites Leitsatz), "The Redeemer receives believers into the fellowship of His undisturbed beatitude, and this is His reconciling activity."<sup>474</sup>

## **2. Theories of Redemption**

### **a. Accident Theory**

Unbelievers in the Lord and some liberals claim that Jesus' death was just a chance event in history and has no special significance. Jesus was not the Son of God, but a mere human. Religious leaders of the time had Him executed out of jealousy. Christ's death was tragic, but not redemptive.

However, the New Testament clearly states that Jesus' death has redemptive significance. Jesus Himself claimed that his blood would be shed "as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). We may also appeal to Old Testament prophecies about the death of Messiah. Isaiah 53, for example, clearly indicates that the sufferings of Messiah would lead to the salvation of sinners.<sup>475</sup>

### **b. Ransom Theory**

The ransom theory appeared in various forms. One variation of it proposed that humans became slaves of Satan because of the Fall. God was unable to rescue humans directly because they by right belonged to Satan. Therefore, in order to liberate people, He was obliged to pay a ransom to the devil. Satan demanded the life of Christ in exchange for humanity, intending to gain mastery over Jesus. Yet, the Father knew that the devil could not hold Christ and that through the resurrection the power of Satan would be broken. Through the cross, God liberated humanity, and through the resurrection – His Son. Therefore, the cross of Jesus was a trap for Satan. Augustine, in fact, compared the cross with a mousetrap, and Jesus with the bait.<sup>476</sup>

According to the second version, Satan is the one who possesses the power of death. Therefore, he had authority to kill due to the sinful state of humanity under God's curse. Yet, when the devil killed Jesus, he overstepped his authority because Jesus death was undeserved. As a result, Satan lost his authority and the power of death. Now, through Christ, humanity is liberated from his hand.<sup>477</sup>

The ransom theory is much discussed since it was a prominent view among the Church Fathers. At that time, they named it "Christ the Victor."<sup>478</sup> Some of the leading theologians of the time refer to it. We will highlight a few of them.<sup>479</sup>

In the second century, Irenaeus refers to this teaching: "And since the apostasy tyrannized over us unjustly... righteously turn against that apostasy, and redeem from it His own property, not by violent means... but by means of persuasion" (*Against Heresies*, 5.1.1).

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<sup>474</sup>Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>475</sup>Thiessen, p. 315-316.

<sup>476</sup>Berkhof L. *The History of Christian Doctrines*. – London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 74.

<sup>477</sup>McGrath A. *Christian Theology*. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 334; Fairbairn D. *Partakers of the Divine Nature*. –1991. – P. 51-52.

<sup>478</sup>McGrath, p. 334.

<sup>479</sup>Franks, p. 28-228.

Possibly the most ardent defender of this theory in the Early Church was Origen. He writes,

If therefore we were bought with a price, as Paul also agrees, without doubt we were bought from some one, whose slaves we were, who also demanded what price he would, to let to from his power those whom he held. Now it was the devil who held us, to whom we had been sold by our sins. He demanded therefore as our price, the blood of Christ (*Commentary on Rom 2:13*).<sup>480</sup>

Additionally, Origen introduced the idea that God tricked Satan: “(The devil) was deceived by thinking that he could have dominion over (the soul of Jesus) and did not see that he could not bear the torture caused by holding it” (*Commentary on Matt 16:8*).<sup>481</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa joined in support of the ransom theory. He advanced the idea that Satan thought that he would receive some kind of power through Christ’s death, but did not foresee that he could not contain the divine power that Jesus possessed. We can also include Ambrose among the ransom theory’s adherents (see *Concerning Virgins*, 19, 126; *Letter to Constantine*, 72, 8).

As was mentioned above, Augustine and Peter Lombard held to a unique variant of the ransom theory – Jesus became the ransom paid to Satan to deprive him of the right to accuse people in sin.

The following arguments support the position “Christ the Victor.”<sup>482</sup> The Bible speaks of Satan’s authority over the present age (2 Cor 4:4; 1 Jn 5:19). Jesus came to destroy the devil’s works and remove his authority (1 Jn 3:8; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; Gen 3:15). During the earthly ministry of Jesus, this conflict raged (Mk 9:25; Lk 13:11-16; Acts 10:38; Jn 12:31). Believers in Jesus are already delivered from the power and authority of the devil (Col 1:13; Acts 26:18).

The key to the liberation of human souls is the redemptive work of Christ (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7). Our Lord Himself referred to Himself as a “ransom”: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Paul states, “You have been bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20), and, “...Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim 2:5-6).

Supporters of this theory declare that Jesus’ death on the cross was the ransom price for the liberation of humanity from Satan’s power. They feel that Paul hints that God did indeed outsmart the devil: “If they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).

We can affirm that this theory does make some positive contributions to our understanding of redemption. First, it declares the victory that Jesus won over the devil. Satan can no longer exercise control over followers of Jesus by means of temptation. In addition, we rejoice that Satan can no longer accuse us before the Father since we have received forgiveness of sins in Christ.

However, this teaching encounters serious theological problems. First, none of the proof texts cited in its support directly confirm its claims. We acknowledge that the devil rules over the present age and that believers are delivered from his dominion through Christ. Yet, the Bible does not confirm that God gained this victory or liberated humanity by paying a ransom price to Satan.

Second, it is improper to claim that sinners *belong* to the devil and need to be delivered from that condition. Sinners do not belong to Satan – all things belong to the Lord. The Prince of darkness exercises control indirectly by manipulating people’s sinful desires. Ephesians 2:2 is insightful here: “...in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” Here, we learn that unbelievers are under Satan’s control. The next verse, however, describes *how* the devil exercises that control: “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

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<sup>480</sup>Franks, p. 40.

<sup>481</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>482</sup>Noted in Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 121-125.

Therefore, we can conclude that, strictly speaking, the unbelieving world is not enslaved to Satan, but to sin. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (Jn 8:34). The devil exercises control over souls indirectly through enticement of sinful desires.

However, when people receive forgiveness of sins and deliverance from its power, they are liberated from Satan’s accusations and enticements. We cite Colossians 1:13-14: “He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom *we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” Redemption consists not in paying Satan a ransom, but in providing forgiveness of sins.

Another defect in this theological system is that it does not address the issue of humanity’s guilt. Our main problem is not slavery to Satan, but our separation from God because of sin. Isaiah instructs, “But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden {His} face from you so that He does not hear” (Isa 59:2). If the blood of Jesus only frees us from the power of the devil, we would still remain in a position of condemnation before the Father.

Moreover, evidence exists that God paid the ransom price not to Satan, but to Himself. During the first Passover, the Israelites slaughtered a lamb and painted their doorframes with its blood. When the Lord saw the blood, He passed by the homes of the Israelites. It is important to note that the blood was not for Satan, but for God. It was not the devil, but God who said, “When I see the blood I will pass over you” (Ex 12:13). In addition, the “destroyer” mentioned in Exodus 12:23 is in Hebrew הַמְשִׁחִית (*hamashihith*). This word also refers to the Angel of the Lord in 2 Samuel 24:16 and 1 Chronicles 21:15.

Also significant is a text addressing redemption from death: “But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, For He will receive me” (Ps 49:15). Earlier, though, we read, “No man can by any means redeem {his} brother or give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease {trying} forever” (v. 8-9). Note that again the ransom is paid to God. Therefore, we conclude that God both pays the ransom and receives it.

We also take into consideration Paul’s teaching in Romans 3:24-25: “...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.” We observe in this passage that redemption is accomplished through Christ’s sacrifice. The goal of that sacrifice is the propitiation of the Lord’s righteous demands so that He can forgive transgressions. This is the biblical view of “redemption.”

Finally, we note that not all Church Fathers embraced the ransom theory. For example, Gregory Nazianzen unapologetically rejects this position (see *Orations*, 45.22). John of Damascus comments, “For we had sinned against Him, and it was meet that He should receive the ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation. God forbid that the blood of the Lord should have been offered to the tyrant” (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 3.27). In the West, Peter Abelard joined those in opposition to this teaching.

### c. Moral Example Theory

The next theory, the “moral example theory,” was advanced in the Middle Ages by the 12th-century thinker Peter Abelard. The Enlightenment greatly enhanced the popularity of this view due to that movement’s rejection of the deity of Christ and His substitutionary sacrifice for sin.<sup>483</sup>

According to this teaching, people suffer from carrying the weight of their guilt and shame. People avoid God out of fear of punishment. We see this fear in action when Adam and Eve hid from God in the Garden. However, exponents of this position feel that such a fear of God is unfounded. What separates us from the Lord is not guilt for our sins, but fear of His wrath. Yet, God does not desire to punish sin, nor is it necessary for Him to do so. He is simply waiting for us to return to Him. So then, the human dilemma is not a future punishment from God, but an unfounded fear of Him.

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<sup>483</sup>McGrath, p. 343-344.

Jesus came to show us the Father's love. He displayed this in His ministry when He taught the Word, fed the multitudes, healed the sick, etc. The ultimate expression of God's love, however, was Christ's death on the cross. He died not to satisfy God's justice or wrath, but to demonstrate God's love toward us. God's desire is that we take this demonstration of love to heart and turn to Him in repentance, faith, and love. Thus, people can overcome their unfounded fear of God and be reconciled with Him.

Abelard describes his system in the following words:

Our redemption is that supreme love manifested in our case by the passion of Christ, who not merely delivers us from the bondage of sin, but also acquires for us the liberty of the sons of God, so that we fulfill all things from love rather than from fear of Him.<sup>484</sup>

The moral example theory remains popular among liberal Christians, who seek support for their theory in the parables of the Prodigal Son and the lost sheep. In both cases, God is waiting and even seeking to restore the wanderer.<sup>485</sup>

As in the ransom theory, we can highlight both positive and negative aspects of this teaching. On the positive side, we see emphasized God's desire to restore sinners to Himself through His Son. In addition, the Father's role in salvation is spotlighted. One might be tempted to think of the Father as the demanding God of judgment in the Old Testament, while Jesus is the kind and merciful God of the New Testament. Yet, the moral example theory stresses the biblical teaching that the cross was an expression of the Father's love as well. We recall John 3:16: "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." In John 8:42, Jesus again identifies the Father as the initiator of salvation's plan: "I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me."

On the other hand, this theory ignores the clear biblical teaching of God's justice. In other words, the Scriptures unmistakably declare that the righteous Judge must receive full retribution for sins committed. Consequently, Christ's sacrifice was necessary not only to demonstrate the Father's love, but also to satisfy God's so-called "retributive justice."

Let us more clearly define the concept of "retributive justice." This means that for every transgression of the Law, a full punishment must be meted out. God never forgives sins without enforcing the prescribed punishment for them. As it is written, God will "render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev 22:12), and, "He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished" (Ex 34:7). The historian Berkhof provides a fine description of God's distributive justice, which "demands that the requirements of the law be met in every particular, and which, in case of transgression, makes full satisfaction by punishment imperative."<sup>486</sup>

Another weakness in this position is that it can be classified as a "subjective" approach to salvation. This means that Christ's death only produces a personal, subjective effect on those who learn of it. Christ's death has no "objective" value in affecting God's relationship with people by removing the sin-barrier. It only subjectively motivates people to seek the Lord. Even though Jesus example of love on the cross does indeed subjectively move us toward God, the main purpose of His redemptive sacrifice is to satisfy God's justice.<sup>487</sup>

#### **d. Moral Influence Theory**

The moral influence theory was popularized in the sixteenth century by Laelius and Faustus Socinus. In brief, they taught that Jesus' death serves as an example of devotion to God. It resonates with the teaching of Pelagius, who claimed that Adam's sin has no direct effect on his descendants. Persons are born with a will free

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<sup>484</sup>Franks, p. 145.

<sup>485</sup>Кураев Андрей. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – Р. 272.

<sup>486</sup>Berkhof, p. 186.

<sup>487</sup>Thiessen, p. 316.

from the domination of sin and are able to resist sin. By means of personal discipline and the inspiration of Christ's example, we can lead righteous lives and merit our inclusion in God's kingdom.

This theory also asserts that God requires no retribution or sacrifice for sins. He has no need to execute punishment for every transgression, but freely forgives sins out of His mercy. In addition, Jesus is not the incarnate Son of God, but merely a good teacher and example of moral living.

A person's main shortcoming is a lack of dedication to the Lord. We lack the discipline and motivation to worship and serve God with a whole heart. God is ready to forgive sins and does so without requiring a sacrifice. However, He still desires that people would serve Him and seeks an effective means to motivate us to do so.

Jesus was a special individual in that He demonstrated an exceptional degree of devotion to God, which was reflected in His teaching and manner of life. The greatest expression of His devotion, though, came when He took up the cross. His death was an expression of love for God, whom one should love with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. Through the cross, Jesus displayed this kind of love. We are called to imitate His example.

Additionally, since Jesus was a mere mortal, but not God, we all have the potential to reach the same level of devotion that He did. This is why the Scripture declares, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps" (1 Pet 2:21). If we commit ourselves to God in faith and love, following the example of Jesus, God will accept us, and we will enjoy fellowship with Him.

In summary, adherents of the moral example theory claim that through Jesus' death we are shown a magnificent model of dedication and devotion to God. This serves to motivate and inspire the Christian to imitate Christ's commitment to God.

The positive elements of this teaching include the following. It reveals Jesus' motivation for going to the cross. We typically think that the Lord went to the cross out of love for people, and that is so. Yet, the Scriptures also testify that love for the Father motivated His obedience: "...so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here" (Jn 14:31).

Nonetheless, this theory is also not above criticism. First, the Bible contradicts the teaching that Adam's sin had no effect on his offspring. Paul clearly taught in Romans 5:19, "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."

Second, Scripture clearly affirms that God is holy and has wrath against sin. He says to Ezekiel, "They have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger" (Ezek 43:8). Moreover, God is a righteous Judge and punishes every transgression: "In the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin" (Ex 32:34). Furthermore, the Old Testament sacrificial system testifies that God requires a sacrifice for sin. Therefore, the moral example theory contradicts the doctrine of God's retributive justice.<sup>488</sup>

In addition, the Bible unquestionably affirms that Jesus died for sins. We will cite only three examples. Isaiah writes, "Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa 53:6), and Paul affirms, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3), and testifies of Him, "who was delivered over because of our transgressions" (Rom 4:25).

We also note that the very passage used to support this view in reality refutes it. In 1 Peter 2:21, the apostle writes, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." Supporters of this teaching claim that this text proves that the goal of Jesus' death was simply to be an example. Yet, just a few verses later Peter writes, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24), and in the subsequent chapter, "Christ also died for sins once for all" (1 Pet 3:18). The Lord Jesus Himself claimed that He came to die for transgressors (Matt 26:28).

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<sup>488</sup>Berkhof, p. 184-185.

Another weak point in this view is its subjective nature. Subjective views of redemption only concern how the death of Christ personally affects the believer, not how it affects God. In addition, this teaching does not address human guilt and denies the deity of Christ.

#### **e. Governmental Theory**

The next theory of redemption for our consideration is the governmental theory. Unlike the previous theories, it takes into consideration God's justice. According to this teaching, God is the Ruler over creation and therefore is committed to maintain order in it. If someone sins, He will punish that individual in order to enforce His law and maintain order. If He would fail to do so, the creation would degrade into chaos.

However, the Lord also loves people and wants to save them. He is free to forgive sins if He so desires. He does not require a sacrifice for sins. He can forgive without retribution. At the same time, He must maintain order in His creation. Therefore, Jesus died in order to demonstrate the serious nature of sin. Through the cross, God shows that He is willing to punish sin. Jesus' suffering is meant as a warning to those who choose to continue in sin. If people turn from sin to God, He is ready to forgive them.

This theory proposes, then, an atypical view of God's justice. Unlike the concept of "retributive justice," justice in the governmental theory does not require a full punishment for every infraction. God punishes only to the decree that He deems necessary to maintain order in the world and prevent further transgressions. He seeks no satisfaction for sins committed, but merely seek to keep sin under control.

Of interest is the fact that the individual who promoted this theory was not a theologian, but a lawyer, Hugo Grotius, who lived about the time of the Socinus brothers. It concerned Grotius that God's righteousness was being undervalued in discussions about redemption. Therefore, he emphasized law and order in his system. In Grotius' words, "The end of every punishment is merely to maintain and exemplify order."<sup>489</sup>

Grotius supported his position by observing that governmental systems work this way – they do not punish because the infraction was a personal insult to government leaders, but merely to maintain order. Grotius also appealed to the teaching "voluntarism," according to which God's laws are not based on His nature, but on His will. He is not obligated to fully punish sin, but may punish to the decree He desires. Grotius regarded requiring full retribution for sin "irrational."<sup>490</sup>

Some final arguments supporting this theory go as follows.<sup>491</sup> We read in Romans 3:25-26 that Jesus died "to demonstrate (God's) righteousness," which is interpreted in the sense of maintaining order. Finally, adherents of the governmental theory see in the Old Testament sacrificial system not a requirement for full retribution for sin, but merely a system warning people of the consequences of sin and turning them from it.

On the one hand, we see value in the governmental theory's caution about the seriousness of sin. In addition, Grotius' system, more than the previous theories, makes an attempt to acknowledge God's justice. Yet, his understanding of redemption is still incomplete. He fails to appreciate that God does indeed require full retribution for sin and does not seek merely to control it. Through punishment, God intends not only to warn sinners, but also to satisfy His justice. The crucifixion of Jesus accomplished those goals.

Another weakness in this position is that it is a subjective view of redemption. Again, the death of Christ has no direct effect on God, but merely prompts a subjective reaction in those who hear of it. Also problematic is the question, "If God's only purpose was to warn sinners, then why was the sinless Son of God punished? Why did God not punish someone worthy of punishment?"<sup>492</sup>

#### **f. Satisfaction Theory**

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<sup>489</sup>Franks, p. 393.

<sup>490</sup>Ibid., p. 392-403.

<sup>491</sup>Boyd, p. 126, 130.

<sup>492</sup>Thiessen, p. 318.



The author of our next option, the “satisfaction theory,” was the famous 11th-century theologian Anselm, which he proposed in his work *Cur Deus Homo*, i.e., *Why God became Man*.<sup>493</sup> Anselm lived during the time of the European feudal system. At that time, people highly valued their personal honor. If someone offended another’s honor, it could result in a duel unto death. Honor was even considered more essential than law. As we shall see, Anselm’s thinking was clearly affected by the thinking of his day.

In his opinion, when persons sin, they offend the Lord’s honor. Therefore, He is required to defend His honor by punishing the offender. Yet, the relationship between God and people is such that the latter is incapable of providing satisfaction to the former. God is already worthy of all that a person may give to Him. In Anselm’s words, “He who does not return to God this honour due to Him, takes away from God what is His own and dishonours God” (*Cur Deus Homo*, 1.11).<sup>494</sup> Therefore, in order to satisfy the insult to God’s honor, one must give to God something more than all God is already due, which already consists of everything one has. Every sinner “must pay back the honour which he has stolen from God” (*Cur Deus Homo*, 1.11).<sup>495</sup>

Unlike Tertullian’s view, Anselm taught that repentance alone was inadequate to remove a person’s offense, since the good works that result from repentance are already part of the debt humans owe to God. Another complicating factor is that the Lord is an eternal being. Human works, on the other hand, are finite and therefore unable to satisfy an offense to an infinite God.<sup>496</sup>

So then, Jesus came in order to answer humanity’s offense of God’s honor. As a human being, He could represent humanity. As God, He possesses an infinite nature. As a human, Jesus was obliged to present to God a life of perfect obedience, and this He did. Since He deserved no punishment for personal sins, His voluntary death on the cross earned Him merit. Christ applied this merit to answer humanity’s offense and satisfy God’s honor. Since the Lord’s life is of infinite value, His merit can apply to all persons. Therefore, Christ’s death was not punishment from God, but the means to receive merit from Him.<sup>497</sup>

In this system, Jesus’ death has its primary effect on God – to satisfy His honor and redeem people’s offense. God is therefore ready to forgive offenses and receive us. The satisfaction theory remains the position of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>498</sup>

In his day, Thomas Aquinas added several nuances to Anselm’s satisfaction theory.<sup>499</sup> In Aquinas’ thought, Christ received merit not from His sacrificial death, but from His suffering prior to His death. Aquinas considered that death does not involve an individual’s participation and therefore cannot be worthy of merit. Suffering, though, is a heroic act deserving merit. Aquinas comments:

The passion of Christ wrought our salvation by the mode of merit; but the death of Christ could thus work nothing; for in death the soul, which is the principle of merit, is separated from the body; therefore the death of Christ wrought nothing for our salvation.<sup>500</sup>

Along with Anselm, Aquinas saw no need for Christ to satisfy God’s justice through His death. Aquinas shared the opinion of many that God can forgive sin freely without need for a retributive sacrifice. Aquinas also added the thought that the merit Christ obtained is bestowed upon the Church. The Catholic Church developed the doctrine that it was the only channel through which grace flows from Christ to the believer.

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<sup>493</sup>Eddy P. R., Beilby J. K. Enderlein S. E. Justification in Historical Perspective // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle ed, 165.

<sup>494</sup>Franks, p. 129.

<sup>495</sup>Ibid.

<sup>496</sup>Ibid.

<sup>497</sup>Ibid., p. 131-135.

<sup>498</sup>Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic Theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 172.

<sup>499</sup>Franks, p. 220-225.

<sup>500</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

The positive aspect of the satisfaction theory is its objective view of redemption. This means that Christ's death has its primary effect on God. He receives satisfaction of His honor. Also of value is an indirect recognition of the concept of "retributive justice," according to which every offense must be fully accounted for. God's honor must be fully satisfied.

On the other hand, the Bible does not teach that Christ gave God something through His death, but claims that He removed something from people – guilt. Jesus' death was not to atone for the offense of God's honor, but to satisfy the requirements of His retributive justice. We recall here Paul's words in Romans 3:25-26:

...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Note that in this passage, God is not concerned with defending His honor, but rather in manifesting His righteousness. In addition, the value of Christ's death is not in its voluntary nature, but in its substitutionary nature. We will discuss further the idea of substitution in a later section.<sup>501</sup>

We must reject Aquinas' suggestion that the sufferings of Jesus saves us, not His death. The reformer Piscator offers the following convincing refutation:<sup>502</sup> 1) If the life of Jesus saves, then His death was unnecessary, 2) this teaching contradicts Heb 9:22, and, 3) the Bible does not claim that Jesus *lived* for us, but that He *died* for us.

### **g. Teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses**

A more recent distortion of the redemptive work of Jesus can be found in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, a movement founded by Charles Russell (1852-1916). Russell was succeeded by Joseph Rutherford. Russell and Rutherford taught that Jesus was not the eternal Son of God, but a creation of God the Father (i.e. Jehovah). Jesus consequently occupies a position lower than Jehovah and has the status of a lesser "god." When Jesus was sent from heaven by Jehovah, He fully abandoned His divine attributes and brought with Him only His "life force." Only during His water baptism did He begin to recall His heavenly origin.

It was necessary for Jesus to abandon His divine nature and become a typical (yet perfect) human in order to become humanity's representative: "To be the ransom Jesus couldn't be more than a perfect man, the justice of God would not permit."<sup>503</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses consider that there must be a total correspondence between the sacrificial victim (i.e., Jesus) and those whom He represented. The human Jesus is the appropriate ransom (see 1 Tim 2:5-6; Matt 20:28).<sup>504</sup> Rutherford comments, "A perfect man now, by voluntarily going into death, would provide the corresponding price for the redemption of mankind."<sup>505</sup> It is felt that a "god-man" could not represent typical humans.<sup>506</sup> Schnell describes it in this way: Jesus "died for Adam as an exact replica of Adam."<sup>507</sup>

Moreover, Jehovah's Witnesses teach that when Jesus died, His human nature was completely annihilated (Matt 20:28).<sup>508</sup> Only by this means could His death be considered a "sacrifice." So then, Jesus did not bodily

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<sup>501</sup>Berkhof, p. 173.

<sup>502</sup>Noted in Franks, p. 353-360.

<sup>503</sup>Let God Be True. – 2nd ed. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1952. – P. 87.

<sup>504</sup>Make Sure of All Things, Hold Fast to What is Fine. – Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, 1965. – P. 255.

<sup>505</sup>Rutherford J. F. Millions Now Living Will Never Die. – Brooklyn, NY: International Bible Students Association, 1920. – P. 74-75.

<sup>506</sup>McKinney G. D. The Theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962. – P. 69.

<sup>507</sup>Schnell W. J. Into the Light of Christianity: The Basic Doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Light of Scripture. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962. – P. 165.

<sup>508</sup>Let God Be True, p. 106.

rise from the dead, since that would involve a restitution of His “annihilated” human nature. Jesus rose not physically, but spiritually.

Concerning the value of Christ’s sacrifice, the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim:

His sacrificial death opened the way for imperfect humans to have a good relationship with Jehovah and to be rescued from sin and death. Jesus’ death opens up to us the opportunity to regain what Adam and Eve lost—the prospect of living forever in perfect conditions on earth.<sup>509</sup>

Jehovah’s Witnesses emphasize redemption from physical death through the death of Jesus:

Adam passed on to all his descendants sin and its penalty, death. We need a ransom to release us from the penalty of death that we inherited from Adam.... Who could pay the ransom to free us from death? When we die, we pay the penalty only for our own sins. No imperfect man can pay for the sins of others.... Unlike us, Jesus was perfect. So he did not need to die for his sins – he never committed any. Instead, Jesus died for the sins of others.<sup>510</sup>

Finally, according to the doctrines of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus died on stake, not a cross.<sup>511</sup>

For a closer examination and refutation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teaching on the deity of Christ, see Appendix B in volume 3 of this series. In refutation of their view of redemption, we can say the following. First, we reject the proposal that Jesus needed to abandon His divine nature in order to become a sacrifice for sin. All that was necessary was for Him to become a genuine human. In fact, His divine nature and the infinite value of His divine life made it possible for the benefits of His death to apply to all people.

Second, the Bible teaches that Jesus physically rose from the dead. We defend this truth in volume 1 of this series. Third, in accordance with biblical revelation, Jesus’ death provides not only deliverance from death, but also deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. We must not undervalue any of these elements.

Finally, Jesus did not die on a stake, but on a cross.<sup>512</sup> From Matthew 27:37, we learn, “And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, ‘This is Jesus the King of the Jews.’” If Jesus was crucified on a stake, then it would have been impossible to fix the inscription above His head, but only above His outstretched arms. Moreover, John 20:25 speaks of “nails” affixing Jesus’ hands, not a “nail.” This means that there was a nail in each hand, which is more consistent with crucifixion on a cross.

## **h. Substitution Theory**

Finally, we arrive at the theory that conservative Evangelicals embrace – the “substitution theory.” According to this teaching, the righteous God requires full retribution for every sin, as He said to Moses, “He will by no means leave {the guilty} unpunished” (Ex 34:7). Therefore, we sinful humans are in danger of condemnation. Even if someone turned to the Lord and fully observed the Law from that time, he or she would still have guilt from past sins. James wrote, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one {point,} he has become guilty of all” (Jam 2:10).

However, God loves people and wants to rescue them. In His mercy, the Lord wants to save us, but in His justice, He must punish our sins. Therefore, He sent His Son to become the propitiating sacrifice for all of humanity. Christ died in our place to satisfy the justice and wrath of God against sin. So then, on the cross, Jesus carried the full weight of God’s wrath for the sins of all people. He was our “substitute.” By punishing His

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<sup>509</sup>Jesus: Why He Died / Watchtower, Apr. 2011. <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/wp20110401/jesus-why-he-died>.

<sup>510</sup>Good News from God. <https://www.jw.org/en/library/books/good-news-from-god/who-is-jesus-christ/>

<sup>511</sup>Ibid.

<sup>512</sup>Миросниченко П. Курсовая работа по книге Н.В. Порублева «Культы и мировые религии». – Омск: Сибирский Теологический Институт, 2013.

Son in our place, God can remain righteous and yet show His love for us by forgiving our sins for Christ's sake. Paul affirms that God remains "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).<sup>513</sup>

Moreover, in exchange for our sin, believers receive the gift of God's righteousness: "He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). We receive the same degree of righteousness that the Lord Jesus Himself possesses. According to 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ "became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." Unlike many other theories of redemption, the substitution theory is an objective view, where the death of Christ has its primary effect on God.

Many influential Church Fathers and the Reformers accepted the substitution theory. Even though many Fathers also held to other theories of redemption, such as the ransom theory, they nonetheless considered the cross the place of redemption, especially from death. For example, Irenaeus writes,

The Lord suffered that He might bring those who have wandered from the Father, back to knowledge... Our Lord also by His passion destroyed death, and dispersed error, and put an end to corruption, and destroyed ignorance, while He manifested life and revealed truth, and bestowed the gift of incorruption (*Against Heresies*, 2.20.3).

Athanasius holds a similar view:

He gave (His body) over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father – doing this, moreover, of His loving-kindness, to the end that, firstly, all being held to have died in Him, the law involving the ruin of men might be undone (inasmuch as its power was fully spent in the Lord's body...) (*On the Incarnation*, 8).

Moreover, Gregory Nazianzen considered that salvation was accomplished directly by Christ's sufferings and death, and Maximus the Confessor speaks of redemption from death through Jesus' death (*Questions Addressed to Thalassius*, 61).<sup>514</sup>

Hilary of Poitiers speaks more specifically of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice:

Thus He offered Himself to the death of the accursed that He might break the curse of the Law, offering Himself voluntarily a victim to God the Father... securing complete salvation for the human race by the offering of this holy, perfect victim (*Commentary to Ps 53:13*).

In the following passage, John of Damascus writes not only of redemption from death, but also from condemnation:

Since our Lord Jesus Christ was without sin... He was not subject to death, since death came into the world through sin. He dies, therefore, because He took on Himself death on our behalf, and He makes Himself an offering to the Father for our sakes. For we had sinned against Him, and it was meet that He should receive the ransom for us, and that we should thus be delivered from the condemnation (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 3.27).

Cyril of Alexandria expresses a similar thought:

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<sup>513</sup>Berkhof, p. 183.

<sup>514</sup>Gross J. *The Divination of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers* / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 225, 251.

He who knew no sin, that is Christ, has been brought under the judgment, having endured an unrighteous sentence and having suffered that which became those under the curse, in order that He who is of equal worth with the whole of humanity... might free all from the accusation of disobedience and therewith redeem the terrestrial world by His own blood (*De recta fide ad reginas*, 2.7).<sup>515</sup>

The Reformers, of course, vigorously defended the substitution theory. Luther affirms,

Here the first and principal article is: that Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, died for our sins, and rose again for our righteousness. And that He alone is the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, and that God hath laid upon Him the iniquities of us all (*Schmalkald Articles*, pars II).<sup>516</sup>

Zwingli writes,

At last, therefore, wishing to help our hopeless cause, our Creator sent, to satisfy His justice by sacrificing Himself for us, not an angel, not a man, but His own Son (*Commentarius de vera et falsa religione*).<sup>517</sup>

Finally, Calvin concurs,

Christ became human “that He might present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to the just judgment of God, and in the same flesh pay the penalty which we had incurred.”<sup>518</sup>

In defense of this theory, we can appeal to the biblical revelation of God as a God of holiness and righteousness and, therefore, He responds to sin with wrath. The Lord’s righteous character is such that He must punish every transgression. The Bible declares that Jesus came to die for sins. He Himself was the ransom to satisfy the requirements of God’s justice. Therefore, the substitution theory full accords with the biblical doctrine of God’s “retributive justice.”

We can also appeal to the Old Testament sacrificial system.<sup>519</sup> This system required the transgressor to bring a sacrifice for sin. Typically, the individual would lay his/her hand on the head of the sacrifice to indicate that the animal was the sinner’s substitute. Therefore, the death of an animal was considered a substitute for the death of the sinner. As a result, the sinner could receive forgiveness.<sup>520</sup>

In a similar fashion, the Bible teaches that Jesus Himself became the sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:11-12 states, “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.” Verse 14 continues, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.”

Our comparison of Jesus’ sacrifice with the Old Testament sacrificial system affords strong support for the claim that He died in the place of others and in this way accepted the punishment due to others. Hebrews 9:22 confirms that a sacrifice is necessary for sins to be forgiven: “And according to the Law, {one may} almost {say,} all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” We also observe that the New Testament identifies Jesus with the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). The Passover Lamb, which was

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<sup>515</sup>Franks, p. 64.

<sup>516</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>517</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>518</sup>Ibid., p. 338. Yet, Calvin incorrectly supposes that Jesus suffered not only in His body on the cross, but also after His death when His soul was in Hades (Franks, p. 342). This view is refuted in chapter 8 of this volume.

<sup>519</sup>Pecota D. The Saving Work of Christ // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 386.

<sup>520</sup>Boyd relates the objection that people brought sacrifices of food as well as animals. However, these food offerings did not serve for propitiation of sins (see Boyd, p. 128).

God's means of delivering His people from Egyptian bondage, symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ – the means of freeing us from slavery to sin.

The New Testament confirms that Jesus died as a substitute for our sins. John the Baptist announced, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Paul wrote: "He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21), "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal 3:13), and, "...having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14).

Peter joins this testimony: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24). We can appeal to the Old Testament as well, where the prophet Isaiah declares of the coming Messiah, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa 53:6).

A key to understanding the substitutionary nature of Christ's sacrifice is the use of certain prepositions.<sup>521</sup> The preposition ἀντί (*anti*) means "in the place of." An example would be Matthew 2:22, where we read, "Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of (ἀντί) his father Herod." When Jesus spoke of Himself as a ransom, this word is used: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for (ἀντί) many" (Mk 10:45).

Also significant is the use of the preposition ὑπέρ (*hyper*), which typically means "on behalf of," but can also be a synonym for ἀντί (*anti*). An example of this would be 2 Corinthians 5:15: "He died for (ὑπέρ) all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

The Fourth Gospel recounts an interesting story that relates to redemption. The Jewish leaders were trying to decide what to do with the Lord Jesus. The high priest feared that if Jesus' popularity continued to grow, it would provoke a retaliation by Rome. Therefore, he unknowingly spoke by the Holy Spirit, "'Do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.' Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation" (Jn 11:50-51). Here is a remarkable prediction of Jesus' substitutionary death made unknowingly by his chief enemy.

We must, however, address certain objections to the substitution theory. First, it seems unfair to some to transfer the sins of others to an innocent individual. We would not expect this from a just God. Did not God say through Ezekiel, "The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Ezek 18:20)<sup>522</sup>. We respond that Jesus became a substitutionary sacrifice voluntarily. The Father did not compel Him to suffer for others.<sup>523</sup> It is also improper to claim that God laid the punishment for sins on another party. God Himself, in the person of His Son, took the punishment for sins upon Himself.<sup>524</sup>

Some also object that, although the preposition ἀντί (*anti*) means "in the place of," the preposition ὑπέρ (*hyper*) does not typically carry that meaning, but usually means "for the benefit of" (see Lk 22:20; Jn 15:13; Rom 5:8; Rom 8:32; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 3:18). Therefore, verses containing that word do not support the theory of a substitutionary death.

On the other hand, there exist at least three passages of Scripture where ὑπέρ (*hyper*) must be translated "in the place of," which gives us warrant to see in the term the sense of substitution.<sup>525</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 15:3 – For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for (ὑπέρ) our sins according to the Scriptures.

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<sup>521</sup>Thiessen, p. 322.

<sup>522</sup>Noted in Boyd, p. 128.

<sup>523</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>524</sup>Pecota, p. 386.

<sup>525</sup>Thiessen, p. 322-323.

- Galatians 1:4 – ...who gave Himself for (ὕπερ) our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

Note that Jesus died “for” sins. Jesus would not have died “on behalf of sin.” He died in the place of sinners. Therefore, these verses confirm a substitutionary sense for the preposition ὕπερ (*hyper*).

2 Corinthians 5:14 – For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for (ὕπερ) all, therefore all died.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14, we read that because Jesus died for all, all died. Here again, substitution is intended. Because Jesus dies “in the place” of others, all can be said to have died in Him.

Other feel that the idea that Jesus’ death satisfies God’s justice produces a conflict within the Trinity between a demanding Father-God, and a merciful Son. In other words, the Father demands retribution, while the Son suffers for humanity. However, as was stated earlier, the Father displayed His mercy when He sent His Son to save the world (Jn 3:16). The Father was the initiator of salvation’s plan. Moreover, the Son is not only humanity’s Savior, but also its Judge (Matt 25). Therefore, the substitution theory neither introduces distortion into God’s nature, nor forces a division between Father and Son.<sup>526</sup>

Still others object that if God requires retribution for sin and that Christ’s death satisfied that need, then salvation and forgiveness are no longer acts of grace. Grace, it is thought, would extend forgiveness without cost. This objection, though, fails to recognize that God’s grace was manifest in that He initiated the plan of salvation. He was under no obligation to do so.

We also take into consideration that, in spite of the fact that retribution was required, God was not obliged to accept the sacrifice Jesus made on behalf of others. In His grace, God imputed the sins of humanity to His Son, and, in turn, imputed the righteousness of His Son to sin-tainted people. Finally, God acted in grace when He Himself became the sacrifice for sins. He fulfilled the requirements of justice Himself.<sup>527</sup>

Some may wrongly conclude that since Jesus paid the full price for sin, that all people are automatically forgiven. However, the Bible indicates that God has established conditions for receiving salvation. Jesus death profits only those who fulfill the conditions of repentance and faith (Rom 5:17).<sup>528</sup>

Nonetheless, some still insist that God could indeed forgive without a sacrifice.<sup>529</sup> It appears that Jesus did so in His earthly ministry (Matt 10:8; Lk 15:11-32) and so taught His disciples (Matt 18:23-27). In these instances, however, no mention is made about the *basis* on which God forgave. All forgiveness at any time is based on the cross. It is important to consider that even sins forgiven in the Old Testament through the temple sacrificial system, were actually forgiven retroactively by the future sacrifice of the Savior:

...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:25-26).

The final objection we will address presupposes that Jesus would have had to suffer eternal punishment to cover the sins of all people. It is clear, though, that this was not the case since God raised Jesus from the dead. We explain this by pointing out the infinite value of Christ’s life. Peter calls His blood “precious” (1 Pet 1:19). The limited suffering (i.e. physical death) of a being of infinite worth was sufficient to atone for the eternal

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<sup>526</sup>Pecota, p. 386-387.

<sup>527</sup>Ibid.

<sup>528</sup>Berkhof, p. 189.

<sup>529</sup>Noted in Franks, p. 144 and Boyd, p. 128-130.

punishment of finite people. Thiessen comments here, “A finite being cannot exhaust an infinite curse, but an infinite being can exhaust it in a few hours.”<sup>530</sup>

We can conclude that the substitution theory best fits the biblical data, which clearly shows that Christ’s death was a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world in order to satisfy God’s retributive justice. Nevertheless, the other theories we have discussed make positive contributions to our appreciation of Christ’s redemptive work. They remind us that Christ’s death: (1) was indeed an example of dedication to God for us to imitate, (2) is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us, (3) provides a warning about the serious nature of sin, and (4) liberates people from the power of the evil one.

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<sup>530</sup>Thiessen, p. 310.



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Chapter 7. Theosis (Deification)

To the evangelical mind, the idea of “becoming god” is, at best, provocative, and, at worst, heretical. In Eastern Orthodoxy, however, it is the very essence of salvation and the keystone of all theology. In this chapter, we will attempt to reflect on the Orthodox doctrine of “deification,” technically known as “theosis.” Although the entire Orthodox world embraces this doctrine, we will focus, for the most part, on its application in Russian Orthodoxy, with which the present author is most closely acquainted.

The centrality of theosis in Orthodox thought is widely recognized. Orthodox scholar Georgios Mantzaridis calls it “the ideal of Orthodoxy.”⁵³¹ Russian Metropolitan Ilarion Alfeyev considers it “the main feature of Orthodox Christology and soteriology.”⁵³² Russian Evangelical author Evgeniy Zaitsev comments, “Theosis... is the principle feature of Orthodox theology.”⁵³³ All other aspects of Orthodox theology hinge on it, as Hallonsten points out:

Deification as a doctrine is not solely about the final goal, but is conceived of as a comprehensive doctrine encompassing the whole economy of salvation... It comprises: a certain view of creation, especially of human beings; a soteriology, including the meaning of the Incarnation; a view of Christian life as sanctification connected to the Church and sacraments; and the final goal of union with God.⁵³⁴

A. Definition of Theosis

What exactly is theosis? Before attempting a definition, it is important to recognize that Orthodox believers themselves do not claim to fully understand it – they consider it one of the mysteries of God. Louth expresses it thus: “When we speak of becoming partakers of the divine nature, or of becoming God, we are speaking of what we know not, something beyond any human conception.”⁵³⁵

Orthodox believers trace this idea of mystery to the Eastern fathers. Maximus the Confessor (6th-7th c.), for example, wrote that union with God “cannot be perceived, conceived or expressed.”⁵³⁶ Eastern theologian and mystic Gregory Palamas (14th c.) explains, “For even when spoken of, deification remains unutterable: as the Fathers say, it can be identified only by those who have been blessed with it.”⁵³⁷ Gross summarizes, “None of the Greeks who employ the term *θέωσις* (*theosis*) or its equivalents give a definition of it.”⁵³⁸

Nonetheless, since it is impossible to either defend or refute a concept that has no definition, we must press on to attempt a definition in order to assess the legitimacy of this teaching. Often it is thought that

⁵³¹Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 129.

⁵³²Иларион А. Православие. – <http://www.hilarion.ru/materials/books>. – Vol. 1. – P. 398. Author’s translation.

⁵³³Зайцев Е. Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе. – Москва: Библийско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – P. 14. Author’s translation.

⁵³⁴Hallonsten G. *Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 284-285.

⁵³⁵Louth A. *The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 40. Russian theologian Vladimir Lossky echoes this idea (see Лосский В. Н. *Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и Догматическое богословие*. – Москва: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 18-19).

⁵³⁶Clendenin D. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994. – P. 130. Quotation from *Various Texts on Theology*, 4.19, in *Philokalia*, 2:240.

⁵³⁷Noted in Clendenin D. B. *Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis* // *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1994. № 37. P. 373.

⁵³⁸Gross J. *The Divination of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers* / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 272.

theosis simply means becoming like God. Keating, for example, describes it this way: “We are ‘sons and daughters in the Son’ and are defined to the degree that we are found in, and transformed into the image of, Christ himself.”⁵³⁹ Yet Orthodox literature hints at a deeper, more profound idea. There we encounter such expressions as “transformation into god” and “changing into a god.”⁵⁴⁰ Consequently, we must seek a more precise definition of theosis.

The classical expression of theosis is found in the writings of Athanasius (although Irenaeus and others anticipated it). In his famous *On the Incarnation of the Word*, the bishop of Alexandria pens the following: “He was made man that we might be made God (θεοποιηθῶμεν)” (see note below).⁵⁴¹ Throughout Church history, many Fathers repeated this phraseology.

This union with God, as Gross explains it, is not limited to simply a moral union or union of wills between God and man. It involves a union of natures that can be described as “a veritable partaking of the divine nature and of divine life.”⁵⁴²

Yet adherents of theosis are quick to point out that this union with God is not absolute, but relative. Here they draw a significant distinction in the nature of the Godhead between God’s “essence” and His “energies.” God essence is unfathomable and unknowable. It is unique only to Him and He never communicates it to His creatures. God’s energies, however, relate to how He acts in the world and reveals Himself to people. The “attributes” of God, which are employed in cataphatic theology to describe God’s nature, relate in apophatic theology only to God’s energies, but not to His essence. God’s essence is shrouded in transcendent mystery.

Theosis, then, is union with God in His energies, but not in His essence. To describe this relative union with God, adherents of theosis employ the phrase “deified by grace.” So then, in theosis a person becomes god not “by nature” (union with His essence), but “by grace” (union with His energies).⁵⁴³ John of Damascus (7th-8th c.) regards theosis as “the way of participating in the divine glory and not in that of a change into the divine being.”⁵⁴⁴ Ilarion echoes this thought, “A person, reflecting on God, does not merge with the essence of his Object of reflection, but becomes a participant in His energy.”⁵⁴⁵ The Orthodox Study Bible gives the following detailed exposition:

This does not mean we become divine by nature. If we participated in God's essence, the distinction between God and man would be abolished. What this does mean is that we participate in God's energy, described by a number of terms in scripture such as glory, love, virtue, and power. We are to become like God by His grace, and truly be His adopted children, but never become like God by nature.”⁵⁴⁶

The process of theosis is sometimes compared to the incarnation of Christ. On the one hand, the divine Son of God took upon Himself a human nature and consequently became one Divine Person with two natures: divine and human. On the other hand, the deified person is infused with divine nature and consequently becomes a human person with two natures, or in the words of Zaitsev, “a human nature, divinized, and a

⁵³⁹Keating D. A. “You Are Gods, Sons of the Most High”: Deification and Divine Filiation in St. Cyril of Alexandria and the Early Fathers. – 2008. Letter and Spirit. № 4. P. 243.

⁵⁴⁰Иларион А. Таинство веры. – Москва: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 221. Author’s translation. Also see Clendenin D. Eastern Orthodox Christianity, p. 130.

⁵⁴¹Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54. The lack of capitalization in the Greek language for the term θεός (God) in general makes it difficult to translate Athanasius here. Does he mean “God” or “god”?

⁵⁴²Gross, p. 272.

⁵⁴³Keating, p. 240.

⁵⁴⁴*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 2.12.

⁵⁴⁵Иларион, Таинство веры, p. 216. Author’s translation.

⁵⁴⁶The Orthodox Study Bible: Ancient Christianity Speaks to Today's World. – Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008. – P. 1691-1692. Quotation from Bird M. Progressive Reformed Response // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 2749-2753.

nature, more precisely divine energies, which divinize.”⁵⁴⁷ Yet an important qualification is made: Christ, an eternal *Divine Person*, took upon Himself humanity, while in theosis a *human person* is infused with divinity. Thus, the distinction between Deity and humanity is maintained.

At the same time, participation in God’s energies involves not merely a superficial association with God’s attributes, but an actual assimilation of God Himself (in His energies) into the human person. Thus, the person is truly “deified” and may consider himself or herself truly god. Adherents of theosis claim that through union with “the energies of God, one participates in His unapproachable Deity.”⁵⁴⁸

Maximus the Confessor explicates the logical consequence of such a claim. He writes, “All that God is, except for an identity in *ousia* (i.e., “essence”), one becomes when he is deified by grace,”⁵⁴⁹ and, “Then God Himself, from His side, would give Himself to man, who in accordance with the gift, that is according to grace, would possess all that God possesses by nature.”⁵⁵⁰ Lossky likewise affirms that the deified person “possesses by grace all that the Most Holy Trinity possess by nature.”⁵⁵¹

Finally, theosis concerns not only the deification of persons, but of the entire created order. According to Orthodox thought, God’s eternal plan is to deify all things in and through deified humanity. Archimandrite Nikon comments, “A person, abiding in God, must elevate all creation to theosis, for which purpose the created order received its being from God.”⁵⁵² Maximus the Confessor adds, “Man must unite all things in himself and through himself unite all things to God,” “Nothing will remain outside of God,” and “Everything will be deified – God will be everything, and in everything.”⁵⁵³

The conscientious Evangelical will immediately object that the idea of becoming God was how Satan first tempted humans and was the ambition that led to his own fall. Orthodoxy responds that the evil of Satan’s suggestion lies not in the idea of becoming god, which was God’s eternal plan for humankind in the first place, but in becoming god independent of Him. Ilarion writes in this regard, “Theosis is impossible without God, and the drive to become equal to God in contradiction to His plan indicates the most blatant pride.”⁵⁵⁴

B. Mechanism of Theosis

According to Orthodox thought, the deification of humans is made possible by the incarnation of Christ. Here we recall the maxim of Athanasius, “He was made man that we might be made God.”⁵⁵⁵

When the Eternal Logos took upon Himself human nature, Orthodoxy presupposes that He took upon Himself not his own personal human nature, but humanity in its entirety. Here the Greek Fathers likely borrowed the Platonic concept of “universals” and “particulars.” The humanity that the Son received is comparable to a “universal,” to which all the “particulars” of individual human natures are organically connected. Without this understanding of a “generic” or “universal” human nature in Christ, the process of theosis, as we shall see, is not possible.

Gregory Palamas taught, “In the person of Christ existed, in its entirety, human nature individually particularized, which, being hypostatically unified with the Logos of God, was deified and received the fullness

⁵⁴⁷Зайцев Е. Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе. – Москва: Библийско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – Р. 177. Author’s translation.

⁵⁴⁸Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрата Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – Москва: Сибирская Благозвонница, 2004. – Р. 4. Author’s translation.

⁵⁴⁹*Ambiguities*, 41. Quotation from Pelikan J. The Christian Tradition. Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago: 1974. – P. 267.

⁵⁵⁰Noted in Лосский, p. 84. Author’s translation.

⁵⁵¹Ibid, p. 52. Author’s translation.

⁵⁵²Слово об обожении, p. 69. Author’s translation.

⁵⁵³Noted in Florovsky, p. 224, 244-245.

⁵⁵⁴Иларион, Таинство веры, p. 90 (8th edition).

⁵⁵⁵Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.

of the divine energy”.⁵⁵⁶ Allister McGrath relates that Athanasius likewise affirmed, “The Logos did not merely assume the specific human existence of Jesus Christ, but that of human nature in general.”⁵⁵⁷

Having received a “representative humanity,” the incarnate Son experienced a transformation of His human nature. According to the concept of *perichoresis*, divine attributes, or more precisely the “divine energies” that were resident in Christ’s divine nature, permeated His humanity and “deified” it. Consequently, the two natures of Christ consist in His eternal divine nature and His “deified” humanity. Since Christ possess a “representative humanity,” the deification of His human nature makes possibly the deification of all humans. Thus, “He was made man that we might be made God.”

Orthodox thinkers describe theosis in terms of a “descent” of God to humans and a consequent “ascent” of humans to God. In the words of Lossky, “The descent (*katabasis*) of the Divine Person of Christ makes possible for all human persons an ascent, our *anabasis* in the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵⁸ Christ thus forms an “ontological bridge” between God and humans.

The doctrine of theosis, consequently, holds major implications for soteriology. Now, the focal point of salvation shifts from the sacrificial death of Christ to His incarnation as the nexus of His saving work. Russian Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky comments, “The entire history of Christological logic is defined by the basic idea: the Incarnation of the Word as Salvation.”⁵⁵⁹ Archdeacon Andrey Kuraev adds, “The way to healing lies in this, that Christ, receiving into His Deity our human nature, did not permit it to sin, and thus healed it in Himself.”⁵⁶⁰

Here we can make an interesting observation. Every student of church history is well versed in the Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries that resulted in the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as one Divine Person in two natures. What is less well known is that while defending orthodox Christology, the Eastern Fathers were also defending the doctrine of theosis.

According to the doctrine of theosis, the Incarnate Logos is an “ontological bridge” allowing the ascent of persons to God. Yet this mediation is possible only if Christ is fully divine and fully human in one Person. If He lacks either full divinity or full humanity, the “connection” between humanity and divinity is ruptured and theosis is impossible. If He exists not in one Person, but two, the connection between God and humans again breaks down. Therefore, by defending orthodox Christology, the Eastern Fathers were securing the human’s ascent to Deity, that is, theosis.

Russian Evangelical scholar Zaitsev shares this observation: “From this it become clear why the Orthodox Church has considered any divergence from healthy, orthodox, Christological teaching as having serious soteriological and spiritual consequences, especially for the teaching of theosis.”⁵⁶¹

Vladimir Lossky confirms,

The complicated struggle for dogma, which the Church waged for centuries, appears to us first, if we look at it from purely a spiritual point of view, to be the untiring concern of the Church in every historical epoch to provide Christians with the possibility to attain the fullness of mystical union with God... The Church affirms against Arianism the dogma that the Trinity is of one essence, precisely because the Word-Logos opens to us the way to union with Deity. If the incarnate Word is not of the same essence as the Father and if He is not truly God, then our deification is not possible. The Church

⁵⁵⁶See Mantzaridis, p. 30

⁵⁵⁷McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 351.

⁵⁵⁸Лосский, p. 273. Author’s translation.

⁵⁵⁹Quotation from Florovsky G. The Lamb of God – Scottish Journal of Theology, March 1961. – P. 16; noted in Meyendorff J. Byzantine Theology. – New York: Fordham, 1974. – P. 159-160.

⁵⁶⁰Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – P. 272. Author’s translation.

⁵⁶¹Зайцев, p. 178. Author’s translation.

condemns the teaching of the Nestorians in order to destroy the dividing wall, which in Christ Himself they wished to separate humanity from God.⁵⁶²

The Russian Orthodox publication *A Word about Theosis* cites Athanasius in this regard:

A person could not be deified if the One made flesh was not by nature the Essence of the Father, the true and personal Word of the Father. For this purpose, this union was accomplished, so that the Essence of the Godhead might combine with Himself the essence of humanity and in this way, the salvation and deification of persons might be firmly established.⁵⁶³

We will conclude with the testimony of Georgios Mantzaridis:

At the time of the great Fathers, the fact of man's deification was fully lived by the Church and, on the basis of this living experience, the Church formulated Orthodox Christology and fought the great heresies.⁵⁶⁴

C. Attainment of Theosis

Having established the doctrine of theosis, the next step for the Orthodox believer is to discover how to attain it. The first item to note is that in Orthodox teaching, theosis is achieved synergistically, that is, by means of cooperation between God and persons. Maximus the Confessor emphasizes God's contribution to the process: "No creature is capable of deification by its own nature, since it is not capable of grasping God. This can happen only by the grace of God."⁵⁶⁵

On the other hand, people are required to exert maximal effort to attain it. The primary ingredient is faith, but Lossky adds that faith must be accompanied by "fasting, watchfulness, prayer, alms and every good work done for Christ's sake."⁵⁶⁶

1. Sacraments and Relics

Orthodoxy, embracing sacramental theology, holds that physical contact with the sacramental element directly communicates God's grace to the recipient. Therefore, we are not surprised to discover that the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist communicate grace for deification. Ilarion writes, «In the sacraments, the grace of God descends on us and sanctifies our entire being – soul and flesh – communicating to it Divine nature, vivifying, deifying and edifying for eternal life."⁵⁶⁷ This means, of course, that theosis is not possible outside of the Church, which is the dispenser of sacramental grace. Lossky comments that in the Church exist "all the objective conditions" for theosis.⁵⁶⁸

John of Damascus writes the following concerning the role of the Eucharist in the attainment of theosis: "Participation is spoken of; for through it we partake of the divinity of Jesus. Communion, too, is spoken of, and

⁵⁶²Лосский, р. 10-11. Author's translation.

⁵⁶³Слово об обожении, р. 55. Author's translation. Keating confirms, "Athanasius the Great opposed the Arians because, in challenging Christ's divinity, they also destroyed the basis of man's deification" (p. 233)

⁵⁶⁴Mantzaridis, р. 127-128.

⁵⁶⁵*Questions to Thalassius on the Scriptures*, 22; from Pelikan, p. 11.

⁵⁶⁶Лосский, р. 148-149. Author's translation.

⁵⁶⁷Иларион, Таинство веры, р. 143. Author's translation.

⁵⁶⁸Лосский, р. 148. Author's translation.

it is an actual communion, because through it we have communion with Christ and share in His flesh and His divinity.”⁵⁶⁹

In Orthodox thought, grace is communicated not only through sacraments, but also through the veneration of Mary, icons, the cross, and relics of the Saints.⁵⁷⁰ Ilarion, for example, claims, “The cross is a symbol of Christ Himself and is endowed with miraculous power,” and, “We never pray to an icon itself, but we appeal to the cross as to something that can hear us.”⁵⁷¹ Mantzaridis comments on the deifying power of relics:

The veneration of the saints’ relics is based on the relation they bear to deifying grace, which, when united with the entire man, does not depart from the body after death, but remains with it, just as Christ’s divinity did not withdraw from His life-giving body at His death on the Cross, but continued to be united with it.⁵⁷²

2. Morality

All who undertake the “ascent to God” must conduct themselves accordingly. A lifestyle concurrent with theosis involves undergoing cleansing from sin, performing good deeds, and demonstrating love. Peter of Damascus (12th c.) writes, “(Commandments) make a person god because of Him, Who gave (them).”⁵⁷³ Maximus the Confessor adds, “Love makes a person god,”⁵⁷⁴ and, “Fulfillment of the commandments unites with Christ, for they are his energies.”⁵⁷⁵ Finally, we cite Gregory of Nazianzus (4th c.): “Apply your efforts not in doing evil, but in doing good, if you want to be god.”⁵⁷⁶

3. Mystical reflection

In the writings of both ancient writers and modern mystics, we encounter the connection of mystical contemplation with the attainment of deification. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, speaks of prayer, ascetic effort, mystical experience, raising the mind to God, and standing before God in prayerful, mystical contemplation.⁵⁷⁷

Rival conceptions exist of how to best attain theosis – through the sacraments or through mystical contemplation.⁵⁷⁸ Most adherents of theosis, though, will recognize all aspects of the process. Pseudo-Dionysius (6th c.), for example, recommended a three-step process for reaching deification through contemplation: cleansing, insight, and union. He also recognized, however, the need for participation in the sacramental life of the Church.⁵⁷⁹ Along with contemplation, Maximus the Confessor also emphasized holy living.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁶⁹*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.13.

⁵⁷⁰Fairbairn D. *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 1991. – P. 59.

⁵⁷¹Иларион, p. 129-130. Author’s translation.

⁵⁷²Mantzaridis, p. 72.

⁵⁷³From *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*, in *Philokalia*, 3:93.

⁵⁷⁴From *Various Texts on Theology*, 1:27-32, in *Philokalia*, 2:171.

⁵⁷⁵Taken from Florovsky, p. 243.

⁵⁷⁶Noted in Иларион, *Православие*, vol. 1, p. 401. Author’s translation.

⁵⁷⁷Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸Rybarczyk E. J. *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodox and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ*. – Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004. – P. 352.

⁵⁷⁹Gross, p. 245.

⁵⁸⁰Pelikan, p. 13.

The famous Russian monk-mystic Seraphim of Sarov and theologian Sergei Bulgakov recommend the “self-cleansing” of the believer, so that the Spirit of God might fill him or her.⁵⁸¹ Lossky considers the monastic life a useful, but not obligatory, aid to contemplation.⁵⁸²

The essence of the mystical path to theosis, unquestionably, is prayer. Mystical prayer, however, differs from the typical prayer of request to God. It is a prayer of “complete peace and rest” and the “silence of the mind” or *hesychia* and leads to a “state higher than prayer.”⁵⁸³ It is often accompanied by tears. The hesychic discipline of prayer involves constantly repeating the “Jesus prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me; Son of God, have mercy on me.”⁵⁸⁴ While thus praying the supplicant adopts a bodily posture similar to Hindu meditative practice. The desired goal of the hesychic discipline is a vision of the Light of Tabor, which is the light that engulfed Christ during the moment of His transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

4. Final Attainment

The consensus of Orthodox opinion consigns the attainment of theosis to the time of Christ’s Second Coming. Even after death, the process of deification continues. We may note two exceptions to this position. Maximus the Confessor felt that the notable Orthodox monk-mystic Simeon the New Theologian (10th-11th c.) attained theosis in this life. Simeon, on the other hand, considered theosis an eternal process without end.⁵⁸⁵

D. Defense of Theosis

In defense of the doctrine of deification, its adherents appeal both to Scriptural and historical authority. Here, we must keep in mind that for the Orthodox the historical traditions of the Church hold near equal, if not equal authority as the Scriptures – a conviction that Evangelicals do not share. We will discuss biblical support in this section and historical evidence in the next.

Starting in Genesis 1, adherents of theosis make a distinction between God’s “image” in persons and His “likeness.” Orthodox understand God’s image as a “divine element” or “spark of the divinity” in every person.⁵⁸⁶ God’s likeness, then, is the development of that image to the attainment of deification, or theosis. Ilarion explains it thus, “In creating people according to His image and likeness, God creates a being called to become god. People are god-people in their potential.”⁵⁸⁷

Next, they note several Old Testament examples where people either are named “god” or fulfill that function. For example, God says to Moses, “See, I make you as God to Pharaoh” (Ex 7:1). In a number of passages, leaders or judges of Israel are called *Elohim* (Ex 21:6; 22:8; Ps 81:6). Other passages refer to “sons of God” (Gen 6:2; Ps 2:7). The words of Christ in John 10:34 are especially significant, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” In John 17:21-22, Christ describes a union of believers with the Godhead: “... that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.”

Orthodox thinkers see hints of theosis in the teachings of Paul as well. Believers are adopted by God (Gal 3:26; 4:5; Rom 8:15; 9:26), Christ lives in them (Gal 2:20), they have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), and are being transformed into His image (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:2; 8:29). According to 2 Corinthians 8:9, Christ

⁵⁸¹Jakim B. Sergius Bulgakov: Russian *Theosis* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 250-253.

⁵⁸²Лосский, р. 17-18.

⁵⁸³Зайцев, р. 189. Author’s translation.

⁵⁸⁴Мейendorff, Byzantine Theology, р. 71; Иларион, Таинство веры, р. 195-199.

⁵⁸⁵Иларион, Богословие, р. 404.

⁵⁸⁶Мейendorff, Byzantine Theology, р. 139.

⁵⁸⁷Иларион, Таинство веры, р. 67. Author’s translation.

impoverished Himself to enrich the believer, which is interpreted in terms of the descent of God to people and the ascent of people to God. The fourth-century ascetic Marcus Eremita provides the following commentary on 2 Corinthians 8:9:

(Christ) became what we are, so that we might become what He is. The Logos became man, so that man might become Logos. Being rich, He became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become rich. In His great love for man, He became like us, so that through every virtue we might become like Him.⁵⁸⁸

Still other passages in Paul are used in support of theosis. The believer awaits “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” (Eph 1:18), which is understood as deification. In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul writes, “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit {with Him},” indicating, supposedly, an ontological union with Christ. Most significant is the claim of Peter, that the believers are “partakers of {the} divine nature” (1 Pet 1:3).

Some concluding biblical arguments are as follows. The New Testament speaks of the adoption of believers into God’s family. As adopted children, the believer can expect to share in the status of the accepting family, that is, inclusion in Deity. Hence, they are gods. Finally, as sacramentalists, Orthodox believe in the physical transformation of the elements of the Lord’s Supper into the body and blood of Jesus. If inanimate elements can share in Deity, why not humankind? Ilarion writes, “As the bread and wine of the Eucharist are presented, that is, are changed and become the Body and Blood of Christ, even so people, being joined to God, are changed and transformed.”⁵⁸⁹

E. Historical Development of Theosis

As mentioned above, in the Orthodox faith Church tradition and the teaching of the Fathers hold great dogmatic weight and may even be the determining factor in defining faith and practice. Church history provides much support for the acceptance of the doctrine of theosis, as we will now see.

The earliest evidences for the doctrine of theosis, yet still in its primitive form, are found in the second-century Fathers, the prime example being Irenaeus. In the second century, however, the Fathers understood theosis primarily in terms of immortality. That is, the characteristic of God that was most coveted was victory over death, which, as Franks notes, the Greeks considered the main enemy of humankind.⁵⁹⁰

The following excerpts from the second-century Fathers make clear this emphasis on immortality.

...the Holy Ghost reproaches men because they were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming “gods,” and of having power to become sons of the Highest (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 124).

“...so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become God” (Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, 2.27)

⁵⁸⁸Taken from Clendenin, *Partakers of Divinity*, p. 370.

⁵⁸⁹Иларион, Таинство веры, p. 221. Author’s translation.

⁵⁹⁰Franks R. S. *The Work of Christ*. – London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962. – P. 32.

For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods... For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility..." (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.38.4)

As mentioned above, Irenaeus preceded Athanasius in ascribing theosis to the Incarnation. Yet his version of Athanasius' classic formula speaks only of becoming sons of God, "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God" (*Against Heresies*, 3.19.1).

Clement of Alexandria's version reads thus, "Yea, I say, the Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God" (*Exhortation to the Heathen*, 1.1). Unlike the earlier second-century writers, however, Clement does not emphasize the aspect of immortality in theosis, but rather emphasizes the attainment of virtue.⁵⁹¹

Clement's student and successor, Origen, continued the tradition of theosis and intensified it. Zaitsev feels that "beginning with Origen, the idea of *theosis* becomes established as a fully developed category of Christian theology."⁵⁹² Origen, again, expresses theosis in terms of the incarnation:

...when they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught (*Against Celsus*, 3.28).

We have already mentioned the fundamental contribution of Athanasius to the doctrine of theosis. Gross considers theosis "the central thought of his theology."⁵⁹³ In his exposition of the teaching, Athanasius gave pride of place to the role of the Son's incarnation in the process, "For Athanasius and for all the Fathers in the period of the Ecumenical Councils, the only basis for the deification of humans was the incarnation of the Word of God."⁵⁹⁴

The champions of the Second Ecumenical Council, the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa), also championed theosis. Basil, however, was more guarded in his expression of it, "...for what is set before us is, so far as is possible with human nature, to be made like unto God" (*On the Holy Spirit*, 1.2). Basil is particularly remembered for his comparison of theosis to lowering iron into a flame. Just as the iron takes on properties of the flame, in theosis the human nature takes on properties of the divine.⁵⁹⁵

Gregory of Nazianzus expressed the doctrine more forcibly, "While His inferior Nature, the Humanity, became God, because it was united to God, and became One Person because the Higher Nature prevailed... in order that I too might be made God (correction to ANF - "God") so far as He is made Man" (*Orations*, 29.19). Ilarion notes here a distinctive feature of Gregory's understanding of theosis: "A person becomes god 'to the same degree that' God became man."⁵⁹⁶

The final Cappadocian Father, Gregory of Nyssa, introduced the concept of *perichoresis*, "...only now He Who holds together Nature in existence is transfused in *us*; while at that other time He was transfused throughout *our nature*, in order that our nature might by this transfusion of the Divine become itself divine" (*The Great Catechism*, 25).

⁵⁹¹Иларион, Православие, v. 2, p 398-399.

⁵⁹²Зайцев, p. 60. Author's translation.

⁵⁹³Gross, p. 163.

⁵⁹⁴Иларион, Православие, v. 1, p. 399. Author's translation.

⁵⁹⁵Gross, p. 192.

⁵⁹⁶Иларион, Православие, v. 2, p 398-399. Author's translation.

Another Alexandrian father of the fourth century, Cyril, expressed redemption in terms of Christ's representative humanity: "(He) carries out the work of redemption and recreation in himself, as representing in himself the new humanity."⁵⁹⁷ He also emphasized the work of the Spirit, who communicates to us divine life: "...the impartation of divine life effected in us through the agency of the indwelling Spirit."⁵⁹⁸

It is important to note, however, that the acceptance of the doctrine of theosis characterized the Alexandrian rather than the Antiochian theological school. Gross writes, "All things considered, the doctrinal climate of the school of Antioch was not very favorable to *theopoiesis*."⁵⁹⁹ One of the primary representatives of Antiochian thought, John Chrysostom, speaks only of our status as "children of God": "For He became Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that He might make the sons of men to be children of God" (*Commentary of the Gospel of John*, 11.1). Zaitsev comments on Chrysostom's theology in more detail:

(Chrysostom) describes salvation as becoming like God, which is accomplished by constant attention to good works, especially love and mercy, the source of which is Christ. Beyond that he would not go, and considered that it was inappropriate to call that "theosis," because there is no biblical warrant for that.⁶⁰⁰

In the eighth century, the theme of deification again appears, this time in the writing of John of Damascus, author of *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. The Damascene emphasized union with God not in His essence, but in His energies (although that terminology was developed later): "...becoming deified, in the way of participating in the divine glory and not in that of a change into the divine being" (2.12).

In John of Damascus, we see the concept of Christ's representative humanity more fully developed. He reasoned that since the humanity of Christ was not (contra Nestorius) an independent individual, it could serve as a representative humanity for all people.⁶⁰¹ Christ deified His human nature, which thus makes deification available to all. Zaitsev summarizes, "Since the human nature of Christ was 'saved, renewed and strengthened,' the nature of other people could be saved, renewed and strengthened, in other words, deified."⁶⁰²

The French-born Orthodox scholar John Meyendorff considered our next ancient thinker, Maximus the Confessor, the "real father of Byzantine theology."⁶⁰³ In Maximus' writings, we observe all aspects of the fully developed doctrine of theosis. First, he repeated the formula of Athanasius, thus affirming deification through the incarnation: "The Incarnate Word accomplishes the descent of God to the world and creates the possibility of movement in the opposite direction... a person becomes god by grace."⁶⁰⁴ He also affirmed the doctrine of the *perichoresis* of divine attributes to Christ's humanity.⁶⁰⁵ At the same time, union with God does not occur at the level of God's essence: «When someone is deified by grace, he becomes one with God, except for identity in *ousia* (that is, essence)" (*Book of Ambiguities*, 41).⁶⁰⁶

Simeon the New Theologian emphasized the mystical aspect of theosis. The mystical way leads to an experience of ecstasy as the person approaches union with the divine. He experiences "a sudden and conscious outpouring of the Spirit with an experience of God as light, accompanied by a gift of tears and deep compunction or contrition for sin."⁶⁰⁷ Such as person has a direct experience with the "Light of Tabor." Zaitsev

⁵⁹⁷Keating, p. 227.

⁵⁹⁸Ibid, p. 231.

⁵⁹⁹Gross, p. 216.

⁶⁰⁰Зайцев, p. 77. Author's translation.

⁶⁰¹Pelikan, p. 84-86.

⁶⁰²Зайцев, p. 86. Author's translation.

⁶⁰³From Meyendorf J. Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes. – New York, Fordham University, 1974. – P. 37.

⁶⁰⁴Florovsky, p. 227.

⁶⁰⁵Зайцев, p. 84.

⁶⁰⁶Taken from Зайцев, p. 84. Author's translation.

⁶⁰⁷Burgess, p. 3.

explains Simeon's view: "Mystical union with God takes the form of a vision of a divine brilliance according to the patter of Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor."⁶⁰⁸

Finally, Gregory Palamas (13th-14th c.) added the capstone to the doctrine of theosis.⁶⁰⁹ He more fully developed the concept of God's "energies" in distinction from His "essence." Union is possible only with the former. He also promoted the discipline of *hesychia* as a means of attaining mystical union and the vision of the "Light of Tabor," which "constitutes for him the surest evidence of his deification and the highest form of his knowledge of God."⁶¹⁰

It will surprise the Evangelical reader to discover traces of the theosis doctrine in the Western Church as well, not only in Roman Catholic theology, but also in the theology of the great Reformer Martin Luther. We encounter it in the West, though, much less frequently and in a less developed form, possibly due to, as Hallonsten explains it, the more marked distinction in Western thought between creature and Creator, nature and grace. Consequently, there was less readiness in the West to posit an "infusion" of divine grace into human nature.⁶¹¹

Although traces of this doctrine can be found in some early Western Fathers, namely Hippolytus of Rome and Hilary of Poitiers, we will focus on the views of Augustine.⁶¹² Apparently, the echo of Athanasius' pronouncement reached the shores of Carthage, for Augustine writes, "He who was God became man to make gods those who were men" (*Sermons*, 192.7),⁶¹³ and, "By being made partaker of our mortality, He made us partakers of His divinity" (*On the Trinity*, 4.2).

Augustine's faithful disciple of a later century, Thomas Aquinas, echoes his teacher's thought: "The only-begotten Son of God, wishing to make us sharers in his divine nature, assumed our nature, so that made man he might make men gods" (*Opuscula*, 57).⁶¹⁴ In another place the Angelic Doctor writes,

For the human mind and will could never imagine, understand or ask that God became man, and that man became God and a sharer in the divine nature. But he has done this in us by his power, and it was accomplished in the Incarnation of his Son" (*Commentary on Eph. 3:19*).⁶¹⁵

References to theosis, or conceptions similar to it, persist among modern Catholic writers as well. We may cite Matthias Scheeben, Jean Daniélou, Teilhard de Chardin, Emile Mersch, and Karl Rahner in particular.⁶¹⁶ The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church unequivocally affirms it:

The Word became flesh to make us "*partakers of the divine nature*": "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God." "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods." (№ 460).

As mentioned above, Luther also made mention of theosis. He did so in at least two of his sermons, one preached before his "awakening," and the other not long after.

⁶⁰⁸Зайцев, p. 89. Author's translation.

⁶⁰⁹Зайцев, p. 102.

⁶¹⁰Mantzaridis, p. 87.

⁶¹¹Hallonsten, p. 283, 286.

⁶¹²Зайцев, p. 121.

⁶¹³Noted in Franks, p. 100.

⁶¹⁴Noted in Keating, p. 235.

⁶¹⁵Ibid, p. 236.

⁶¹⁶Smedes L. B. Union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 7-8, 117; Caponi F. J. Karl Rahner: Divinization in Roman Catholicism // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions. – Madison, NJ: Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 259-273.

Just as the Word of God became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become Word. For the Word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become Word. In other words, God becomes man so that man may become God. Thus, power becomes powerless so that weakness may become powerful. The Logos puts on our form and manner (*Christmas sermon*, 1514).⁶¹⁷

For it is true that a man helped by grace is more than a man; indeed, the grace of God gives him the form of God and deifies him, so that even the Scriptures call him “God” and “God's son” (*Sermon on the Day of St. Peter and St. Paul*, 1519).⁶¹⁸

What did Calvin think of theosis? On the one hand, we see elements of theosis in his theology, namely the distinction between God's essence and His energies: “We know God not in his essence, but according to his works; God's being is incomprehensible, but his energies are revealed to creatures analogically” (*Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 1.19).⁶¹⁹ On the other hand, he falls short of fully affirming theosis, making the following qualification: “We shall be partakers of divine and blessed immortality and glory, so as to be as it were one with God as far as our capacities will allow” (*Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*).⁶²⁰

F. Prehistory of Theosis

Based on the above survey, the longevity and the pervasiveness of the doctrine of theosis, at least in the Eastern Church, cannot be challenged. Yet, a glance into the prehistory of this teaching, that is, what likely led to its acceptance among the Eastern Fathers, is very revealing.⁶²¹

In early Greek thought, elevation to Deity was a prime pursuit. Gross comments, “Throughout all of Hellenism one encounters, under the most divers forms, the idea that the supreme human happiness consists in a certain assimilation to divinity.”⁶²² Greek mythology tells of “heroes,” who received a superhuman status. Gross again comments, “Deification is increasingly understood as a reward granted for exceptional merits. And that is how it tends to take on a moral character.”⁶²³

The Greek mystery religions offered the same hope of deification.⁶²⁴ The Dionysian Mysteries promised mystical ecstasy and union with God. The Orphic Mysteries strove for the restoration of the original divine nature of the soul. In the Cybele-Attis mystery, deification is attainable through imitating the death and resurrection of Attis. In Hermetism the ultimate destiny of humans is absorption into God.

Although Greek philosophy rejected this mythological worldview, the goal of deification remained intact. According to Franks,

Due to the influence of Greek religious thought also is the identification of the communication of immortality with ‘deification’. In the history of Greek religion, the idea of deification as union with the

⁶¹⁷Noted in Vishnevskaya T. *Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – Kindle ed. 2462-2464.

⁶¹⁸Noted in Kdrkkdinen, Kindle ed. 2460-2462.

⁶¹⁹Noted in Horton S. *Traditional Reformed Response* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011 – Kindle ed. 2695-2697.

⁶²⁰*Ibid*, 2702-2708.

⁶²¹See Gross, p. 11-35; Lenz J. R. *Deification of the Philosopher in Classical Greek* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 49.

⁶²²Gross, p. 11.

⁶²³*Ibid*, p. 17.

⁶²⁴*Ibid*, p. 22-35.

God and the impartation of immortality goes back to the religion of Dionysus. Through the medium of Orphism it afterward influenced Greek philosophy.⁶²⁵

Platonic philosophy, for example, posited deification in connection with emancipation from the material world.⁶²⁶ According to Gross, this liberation “divinizes the soul in the sense that it releases it from any obscuring and restores to its original state the divine element which is in it.”⁶²⁷

A glance at the Hellenistic philosophy of Philo of Alexandria will be especially revealing. Philo promoted the idea of an “ascent” to God through the mediation of the Logos. This ascent is accomplished by the combination of mystical contemplation of the Logos and moral living, resulting in a mystical union with the Logos.⁶²⁸

Alexandria was also the birthplace of a variant of platonic philosophy named Neoplatonism, founded by Ammonius Saccas, but popularized by Plotinus (3rd c.). The cosmology of Neoplatonism posits a unifying center, the “One,” and three emanations emitting from it: Nous (Mind), World Soul and the material world. The goal of humanity is to “ascend” through the intermediate emanations and experience union with the One. This union is attained through asceticism, mystical contemplation, and moral living.

One can immediately note similarities in Neoplatonism not only with Philonic philosophy, but also with the patristic understanding of Christian deification. Highly significant is the fact that Christian deification received its greatest impulse from Alexandrian Fathers: Origen and Athanasius. Alexandria of the early Christian centuries was saturated with Neoplatonic thought.

Other writers, not only Evangelical, but also secular and Russian Orthodox, note the influence of Greek philosophy on the Eastern Fathers. Bray claims that the majority of the leading theologians of the classical period of the development of Christian dogma received a Neoplatonic education.⁶²⁹ Russian Orthodox theologian Andrei Kuraev confirms that “Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nazianzus were able to complete studies at the university at Athens (still pagan) before its closing and were able to advise their disciples to accept into their Christian walk the great pagan authors.”⁶³⁰

Concerning the Neoplatonic atmosphere prevailing in Alexandria, Copleston comments, “Neo-Platonism exercised a profound influence on Christian thinkers at Alexandria.”⁶³¹ The Historian Sahakian claims that Origen “adopted Neo-Platonism as a philosophical foundation for Christian theology.”⁶³² Concerning Athanasius, Zaitsev holds that “in his understanding of God, Athanasius was heavily influenced by Plato, Albina, Plotinus, and Proclus.”⁶³³ Sahakian summarizes, “In the last analysis, Patristic theology and philosophy were actually based upon fundamental concepts of Hellenistic thought.”⁶³⁴

An important figure in the dissemination of Neoplatonic thought in patristic theology was Pseudo-Dionysius, a pseudonymic author of the sixth century, whose works were the subject of commentaries by Maximus the Confessor. Sahakian proposes that Pseudo-Dionysius “introduced (Neoplatonism) into the Church so effectively that it remained there nine centuries.”⁶³⁵ Lossky writes that between Dionysius and Plotinus, one

⁶²⁵See Franks, p. 33.

⁶²⁶Lenz, p. 53.

⁶²⁷Gross, p. 41-42.

⁶²⁸Ibid, p. 73-77.

⁶²⁹Bray G. *The Doctrine of God*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993. – P. 33.

⁶³⁰Курьев А. *Протестантам о православии*. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – P. 51. Author’s translation.

⁶³¹Copleston F. *A History of Philosophy*. – New York: Doubleday, 1993. – P. 483.

⁶³²Sahakian W. S. *History of Philosophy*. – New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968. – P. 82.

⁶³³Зайцев, p. 62. Author’s translation.

⁶³⁴Sahakian, p. 86.

⁶³⁵Ibid, p. 85.

could observe “striking similarities.”⁶³⁶ He confirms, “Many of the holy Fathers assimilated and employed (Plotinus’ thought), bringing it to true completion.”⁶³⁷

Even today, some Orthodox writers advance the teaching of Plotinus. Archimandrite Nikon praises the philosopher: “Plotinus even more precisely taught about ‘God-likeness’ ...,”⁶³⁸ and employs Neoplatonist terminology, such as the “Eternal Mind.”⁶³⁹

In the final analysis, we must concur with Lenz:

The broad tradition of belief in deification stemming from archaic and classical Greek philosophy continues into early Christianity and points us back above all to Plato. By studying the full tradition, we see similarities of intellectual content and core ideas.... Thus, Classical Greek thought provides deep roots, essential and inescapable, for the Christian tradition.⁶⁴⁰

Powell comes to the tragic conclusion: “Much of what we think of as Christianity is Platonic philosophy.”⁶⁴¹ A more detailed examination of the influence of Neoplatonism is conducted in Appendix B of this volume.

G. Evaluation of Theosis

Although the historical foundation of theosis, as noted above, is highly suspect due to clear borrowing from Greek philosophy, especially Neoplatonism, we have yet to examine the biblical evidence supposedly supporting this theory. First, viewing the doctrine from a general, soteriological perspective, the reader will clearly see the deficient view of salvation it provides. In particular, the supposed saving work of Christ’s incarnation eclipses His sacrificial work on the cross, and, consequently, no provision is made for the justification of guilty humans. This leads to an interesting paradox – a person could become god, but still have guilt for past sins.

In addition, viewing theosis as a soteriological system, we see a clear violation of the Protestant (and biblical) principle of salvation by faith alone. In theosis, good works, receiving the sacraments, and an ascetic devotion to prayer are irreplaceable elements in the saving process.

We may also challenge the distinction made in Orthodox theology between God’s essence and His energies. Clearly, there is no biblical warrant for such a distinction. The attributes of God describe not His “energies,” but His nature and essence. The Bible does not say that God *revealed Himself* as love, but that God *is* love (1 Jn 4:16). The Bible does not teach that God *revealed Himself* as light, but that God *is* light (1 Jn 1:5). Bloesch correctly comments, “The essence of God is reflected in his attributes; the attributes, on the other hand, are manifestations of his essence.”⁶⁴² Erickson echoes this thought: “God is his essence, he is his attributes, the predicates that attach to him. When we know the attributes of God, we are truly knowing him.”⁶⁴³

The idea of God’s essence differing from His energies is challenged by the claims of Jesus Himself. John wrote of Him, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained {Him}” (Jn 1:18). Here, we note that Jesus did not reveal God’s “energies,” but the “invisible God,” that is, His essence. This is why John could claim, “We saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father,” and why Jesus could say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9).

⁶³⁶Лосский, p. 25. Author’s translation.

⁶³⁷Ibid, p. 201. Author’s translation.

⁶³⁸Слово об обожении, p. 14. Author’s translation.

⁶³⁹Ibid, p. 19.

⁶⁴⁰Lenz, p. 62.

⁶⁴¹Barry Powell. *Classical Myth*, 4th ed., p. 306; taken from Lenz, p. 60

⁶⁴²Bloesch D. G. *God the Almighty*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1995. – p. 41.

⁶⁴³Erickson M. J. *God the Father Almighty*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – p. 229.

Making a distinction between essence and energies in God presents an even greater difficulty for Christian experience. If, as some Orthodox thinkers propose, the believer, by assimilating God's energies, can potentially "possess by grace all that the Most Holy Trinity possess by nature,"⁶⁴⁴ or if it can be that "all that God is, except for an identity in ousia (i.e., "essence"), one becomes when he is deified by grace,"⁶⁴⁵ then all that is predicated of God in Holy Scripture (which, by the way, supposedly relates not to His unknowable essence, but to His revealed energies) can be actualized in the believer. The idea is preposterous, if not blasphemous.

Other writers share this concern. Historian Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "The idea of deification in the Greek fathers had run the danger of obscuring the distinction between Creator and creature."⁶⁴⁶ James Dunn comments, "I suppose it is the concern that the infinite distinction between Creator and creation is endangered which makes me so uneasy."⁶⁴⁷

Adherents of theosis attempt to soften their claims by stating that while God is divine *by nature*, the believer becomes divine *by grace*. Although this formula sounds very "Evangelical," the real meaning behind the phrase "by grace" is that humans can unite with God's energies alone, not with his essence. Uniting with the latter would make them divine "by nature."

Earlier we noted that in its most superficial form, theosis is understood as "God-likeness." However, God-likeness, as we shall now see, differs significantly from theosis. "Likeness" is sharing similar traits, but not necessarily to the same extent as they exist in the original. A person can emulate the attributes of God to the degree that it is humanly possible to do so, but he or she will never acquire those properties to the divine degree. This is "God-likeness." In this scenario, people can never consider themselves "god" in that they do not possess the divine attributes to such a degree that would qualify them for that status.

Theosis, on the other hand, is the assimilation of God's energies in the human constitution to the same degree that He possesses them. All that the human lacks for full divination is possession of the Divine Essence, which is not granted. Yet, the person possess enough of the divine nature to cross the ontological line from simple humanity to "deified" humanity, and thus consider himself or herself "god."

It is significant to note that in Scripture the believer is often call a "son" or "child" of God, but never "god" (see explanation of John 10:34 below). This observation corresponds to what we have said about the likeness-theosis distinction. As a "child" of God, we may share in His nature by demonstrating His attributes to a limited degree, but we are never given in Scripture the privilege to refer to ourselves as gods.

What about the claim of Christ, "You are gods" (Jn 10:34)? In assessing this saying, it is imperative to investigate the context. Jesus is quoting here Psalm 82, which is a psalm of rebuke for the unjust judges of Israel. They are called *Elohim* not by virtue of their exemplary behavior (remember, this is a psalm of rebuke), but by way of irony. As *Elohim*, that is, as leaders of God's people (see similar usage in Ex 21:6 and 22:8), they should walk uprightly, but they do just the opposite.

For a closer investigation of Jesus' usage of this psalm, we turn to the comments of B. B. Warfield.⁶⁴⁸ Just prior to this, Jesus claimed equality with the Father (v. 33) and is accused, correspondingly, with blasphemy. Jesus makes His defense in the following manner. If those to whom the Word of God came (the judges of Ps 82) were called *Elohim*, how can one object, if One greater than they, that is, the One the Father "sanctified and sent into the world," claims to be *Elohim*? Here, we see no hint of the deification of humans.

It is also significant that Jesus does not speak in the future tense, but in the present. He did not say, "You will be gods," which would be consistent with deification, but "You are gods" now, referring to the status of the

⁶⁴⁴Лосский, p. 52.

⁶⁴⁵Maximus the Confessor, *Ambiguities*, 41; quotation from Pelikan, p. 267.

⁶⁴⁶Pelikan J. *The Christian Tradition* – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. – Vol 1. – P. 155, 345; quotation from Bird, Kindle ed. 2762-2763.

⁶⁴⁷Dunn J. D. G. *New Perspective Response* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 2804-2805.

⁶⁴⁸Warfield B. B. *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Volume 1: Revelation and Inspiration*. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008. – P. 84.

Old Testament judges among God's people. Gross concurs, "Whatever many of the ancient exegetes may say about them, the titles of *elohim* and 'children of the Most High,' conferred here on the judges, do not thus have, in the least, the sense of a divination by an assimilation of humankind to the divine nature."⁶⁴⁹

What about 2 Peter 1:4? Does it not state there that we are "partakers of {the} divine nature?" First, we must note that according to Orthodox theology, one may not partake of the Divine Essence, only of God's energies. Yet this verse speaks of participation in the nature (φύσις - *phusis*) of God, which speaks more of His essence than of the supposed "energies" He manifests. Consequently, this verse does not support, but rather contradicts the theology of theosis.

What is the meaning of φύσις (*phusis*) here? The word itself, in this context, refers to "the natural character of an entity, *natural characteristic/disposition*."⁶⁵⁰ In relation to God, then, φύσις (*phusis*) describes His natural disposition that determines and underlies His actions and the attributes that make those actions possible.

What is key here is that Peter does not say that the believers "possess" or "assimilate" the divine nature, but are "participants" (κοινωνοὶ - *koinonoi*) in it. This corresponds to our discussion above concerning "God-likeness." By virtue of the indwelling Spirit, the believer can participate in the divine disposition and manifest those attributes that Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit."⁶⁵¹ Correspondingly, immediately after this verse Peter enumerates a list of virtues nearly identical to Paul's in Galatians 5:22-23. Starr, in his study on 2 Peter 1:4, reaches a similar conclusion: "2 Peter is not speaking in 1:4 of *apotheosis* in the sense of becoming a part of God's essence or ceasing to be human, but of the partaking in specific divine attributes, seen perfectly in Christ."⁶⁵²

In conclusion, James Dunn gives the following counsel. Even if one was to concede that 2 Peter 1:4 actually spoke of assimilating God's nature, Dunn warns: "I find myself hesitant about making too much of the theosis theme. It is rather limited as a theme in the New Testament itself, and I hesitate to build so much on a single verse within the New Testament document nearest to the edge of the New Testament canon: 2 Peter 1:4."⁶⁵³

Of the remaining verses cited earlier in defense of theosis, only 1 Corinthians 6:17 presents a significant challenge. Here we read, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit {with Him}." Comparing this verse with the previous one reveals a clear parallel: "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body {with her}? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh'." Even the same word is used for "joined" (κολλώμενος - *kollomenos*).

When a man joins himself to a harlot, they become "one flesh" not in a physical sense, but a metaphorical one. In other words, they enjoy a special intimacy with each other. In the same way, becoming "one spirit" with the Lord does not involve an assimilation of divine nature, but implies intimate spiritual fellowship with the Person of the Holy Spirit.

In addition, we need make mention of the long held tradition among the Fathers that God's image in humans differs from His likeness: the former referring to some natural, inborn characteristic, and the latter – to the moral quality of one's life. The formula "image and likeness" is clearly an example of Hebrew poetry where an identical thought is repeated twice, but is expressed in different words. Otherwise, how could one explain the instances, where "image" is used not in a natural, but moral sense (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10), and "likeness" is used not in a moral, but a natural sense (Jam 3:9)?

⁶⁴⁹Gross, p. 66.

⁶⁵⁰Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W., Gingrich F. W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian literature – 3rd ed. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 1069

⁶⁵¹It is curious to note that in the traditional Russian translation (done by the Orthodox Church) of Galatians 5:22 and similar passages, the word "spirit" is written without the capital, implying that these virtues are the product of the "being-deified" human spirit. Although the Greek text does not distinguish between "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) and "spirit" (πνεῦμα), contextual factors favor the first option, and the word is so translated by all major English translators.

⁶⁵²Starr J. Does 2 Peter 1:4 Speak of Deification? // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions. – Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 85.

⁶⁵³Dunn, Kindle ed. 2796-2798.

In conclusion, we will give special attention to the mechanism of theosis, that is, the mediatorial effect of the Son's incarnation. It is important here to note that the New Testament nowhere speaks of the incarnation as a direct means of salvation. It is never presented, as poetically pleasing as it may sound, as a "descent" of God that makes the "ascent" of people possible.

Several passages of Scripture make clear the purpose of the incarnation. Prominent among them is Hebrews 2:14-18, which we will quote in its entirety:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Of the several benefits of the incarnation to the believer mentioned here, the author says nothing about theosis. The primary purpose of the incarnation, of course, is so that Christ could be "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Thus, the focus shifts away from the incarnation as the saving act to the cross, where Christ truly accomplished salvation.

Paul also connects the incarnation with Christ's redemptive work on Calvary. He writes, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). Here again, the Son became man in order to becoming a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world.

In respect to Christ's mediatorial function, it goes unquestioned that "there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). Yet we must distinguish between soteriological and ontological mediation. The Bible clearly affirms the former, but not the latter. In other words, Christ is truly the Mediator between a holy God and sinful people (soteriological mediation), but does not serve as an "ontological bridge" between the Divine and humans natures, so that the latter can assimilate the former.

As mentioned above, the idea that Christ assumed a "generic" human nature that is somehow organically connected with the personal human nature of all people is clearly borrowed from the platonic "universals-particulars" paradigm and unsubstantiated by Scripture. Gross confirms, "The Platonic origin of this realism is hardly questionable."⁶⁵⁴

As noted earlier, proponents of theosis claim that this phenomenon is shrouded in mystery and, therefore, no one can fully define it. This claim is consistent with apophatic theology, which adherents of theosis also embrace.⁶⁵⁵ However, theosis cannot use apophatism as a shield against critical analysis. If a concept cannot be defined, then it cannot be either refuted or supported. An appeal to apophatism nullifies not only any arguments advanced against it, but also any proofs offered for it.

Finally, and possibly most devastating to the theosis doctrine, is the Chalcedonian definition of the interplay between Christ's divine and human natures, since Orthodoxy holds tenaciously to the definitions of the first seven Ecumenical Councils. Chalcedon clearly recognizes:

...Christ Son Lord Only-Begotten, recognized as being in two natures without confusion, without mutation, without division, without separation, the difference of natures being in no way suppressed

⁶⁵⁴Gross, p. 268.

⁶⁵⁵For a thorough discussion of apophatism, see chapter 1 in volume 3 of this series.

because of the union, the property of each of the natures being rather safeguarded and running towards the formation of one sole person (*prosopon*) and one sole hypostasis...⁶⁵⁶

Here we note that the natures are “without confusion, without mutation” and that “property of each of the natures being rather safeguarded.” This clearly runs contrary to the Orthodox conception of *perichoresis*, that is, the interpenetration of divine energies from Christ’s divine nature into his human nature, deifying the latter. Without this interpenetration or *perichoresis*, the theory of theosis loses all credibility and plausibility.

H. Conclusions

In conclusion, although we share with the Eastern Fathers and Orthodox believers the desire for a sanctified life and Christ-likeness, it is clear that the doctrine of theosis exceeds the expectations that Scripture allows. Here, we see demonstrated the subtle but dangerous influence of unchecked philosophical thought on Christian doctrine and the hazard of ascribing unwarranted importance to Church tradition in the formation of Christian faith and practice. We invite the adherents of theosis to return to a sound and biblically based understanding of the doctrines of salvation and sanctification.

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⁶⁵⁶Elliott M. W. Chalcedon, Council of (451) // The Dictionary of Historical Theology. – Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2000. – P. 124-125.

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# Chapter 8: The Believer's Union with Christ

## A. Introduction

In our Christian life, we often encounter personal struggles and failures, that is, we often fail to meet our expectations of what we think a Christian ought to be like. Even though we try to overcome our weaknesses and shortcomings, we frequently make the same mistakes time and time again. Why can we not attain victorious Christian living? Is it possible that something fundamental is missing in our Christian experience? Does the Word of God teach a more effective way of growing in Christ? We believe that it does through the believers' appropriation of their union with Jesus Christ.

The goal of this chapter is to expound on the biblical teaching of the believer's union with Christ, which consists of two elements: our position in Christ and Christ's presence in us. Jesus expressed it concisely in John 14:20: "...you in Me, and I in you." In this chapter, we will attempt, with God's help and based on Holy Scripture, to define the concept of the believer's union with Christ and to describe how to appropriate this truth in our personal Christian experience. We will discover that the study and application of this theme can aid us both in our spiritual lives and in our lives in general.

Very frequently, the Bible, either directly or indirectly, mentions the believer's union with Christ. Although, as Gaffin writes, "The expression 'union with Christ' does not occur in the Bible," at the same time "it fairly describes the central reality in the salvation revealed there."<sup>657</sup> We can express the same truth in more biblical terms by saying that we, as believers, are in Christ, and He is in us. The concept "union with Christ" includes not only believers' position in Him, but also His presence in them. Consequently, it is important to consider both aspects of this union. Nonetheless, since in contemporary Christianity the concept of being "in Christ" is so rarely discussed, we will direct more attention to that aspect in this chapter.

It is interesting to note that in the 2766 verses of Paul's epistles, we encounter about 150 instances where he alludes to the believer being in Christ, employing such expressions as "in Jesus," "in the Lord," "in Christ," "in Whom," or "in Him." This means that in every twenty verses of Paul's writings, he refers to this special relationship between the believer and the Lord. Besides these phrases, this concept is expressed in other terms as well, and not in Paul's works alone.

Non-biblical authors also affirm the centrality of union with Christ, not only in Paul's thought, but in general. Thomas Boston states that union with Christ is the most important, comprehensive and fundamental privilege of believers, and that all other blessings are derived from and based on it.<sup>658</sup> Ferguson feels that the concept of union with Christ "must therefore be the dominant motif in any formulation of the application of redemption and the dominant feature of any 'order' of salvation."<sup>659</sup> C. R. Campbell adds, "Virtually every aspect of the Christian life is informed in some way by the believer's union with Christ."<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>657</sup>Gaffin R. B., Jr. *Union with Christ: Some Biblical and theological reflections* // McGowan A. T. B. *Always reforming: explorations in systematic theology*. – Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. – P. 272.

<sup>658</sup>Boston T. *The complete works of Thomas Boston*. – V. 1. – P. 549.

<sup>659</sup>Ferguson S. B. *Ordo Salutis* // Ferguson S. B., Wright D. F. *New dictionary of theology*. – Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. – P. 480-481.

<sup>660</sup>Campbell C. R. *Paul and union with Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. – P. 375. Kaufman concurs (Kaufman P. *The one and the many: corporate personality* // *Worship* 42. 1968. P. 554), as well as the following: Harris M. J. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text* // *The new international Greek Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005. – P. 431; Longenecker R. N. *Paul: Apostle of liberty*. – New York: Harper & Row, 1964. – P. 169; Fung R. Y. K. *Justification by faith in 1 & 2 Corinthians* // *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 5. 1981. P. 184; Mawhinney A. *Baptism, servanthood, and sonship* // *Westminster Theological Journal*. 49(1). 1987. P. 46; Walvoord J. F. *Identification with Christ* // *Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 588; Wilbourne R. *Union with Christ*. – East Sussex: David Cook, 2016. – P. 184; Johnson M. P. *One with Christ: An Evangelical theology of salvation*. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, Kindle Ed. – P. 20; Letham R. *Union with Christ: in Scripture, history, and*

## B. Definition of “Union with Christ”

### 1. The Believer “in Christ”

As mentioned above, the most straightforward expressions of the believer’s position in Christ are the phrases “in Christ,” “in the Lord,” etc.<sup>661</sup> In order to properly define these expressions we must closely examine their usage in the New Testament. First, we note that they are used primarily by two authors: Paul and John. These two writers use these phrases differently. However, these variations of usage, in the final analysis, compliment one another.

#### a. John’s Writings

John employs this phraseology in relation not only to believers and Christ, but also to the Father and the Son. As far as the relationship between Christ and believers, John graphically represents this connection in the parable of the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-8). Just as branches grow from the vine and the vine supplies life to the branches, believers are in Christ and He is the source of their spiritual life. Therefore, believers are called to “abide in Him” (Jn 15:4; 1 Jn 2:28).

In John’s gospel, a believer’s abiding in Christ is demonstrated by bearing the fruit of that relationship: “He who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit” (Jn 15:5; also see 1 Jn 2:5-6; 1 Jn 3:24). In the book of Revelation, it states that abiding in Christ can also involve enduring suffering for Him (Rev 1:9; 14:23).

For John, union with Christ is often expressed in the idea of “knowing Christ” not in the sense of obtaining mental knowledge of Him, but as personal fellowship with Him in a spiritual union. The following example demonstrates the parallel between abiding in Christ and knowing Him: “The one who says, ‘I have come to *know Him*,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.... The one who says he *abides in Him* ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked” (1 Jn 2:4, 6). We encounter the same idea of experientially “knowing Him” in the writings of Paul (Phil 3:9-10) and Peter (2 Pet 1:3) as well.<sup>662</sup>

Furthermore, in John’s writings we witness a dramatic step. Quoting the words of the Savior, John compares the relationship between the Son and the Father with the relationship between the believer and God: “...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, {are} in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us... I in them and You in Me” (Jn 17:21, 23), and, “I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you” (Jn 14:20). This means that John relates abiding in Christ to participation in the very life of the Trinity. We must not conclude, however, that believers become divine or a part of the Trinity in essence, but rather that they may enjoy close fellowship with the Godhead comparable to that which exists between the Father and the Son, yet not at that level.

Finally, John speaks of the believer being not only in the Son, but in the Father as well: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:15-16).

#### b. In Paul’s Writings

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theology. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011. – P. 1; Austin-Sparks T. Union with Christ. – London: Witness and Testimony Publishers. – P. 6-7.

<sup>661</sup>Campbell (Campbell C. R., p. 67) and others concur.

<sup>662</sup>Macaskill sees indications of union with Christ in Peter’s epistles as well: 1 Pet 2:24; 4:1, 13 (Macaskill G. Union with Christ in the New Testament. – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. – P. 276-279).



In Paul's writings, the phrase "in Christ" may acquire various shades of meaning, and sometimes it is difficult to define these nuances. First, by the phrase "in Christ" Paul might simply mean being a Christian. For example, certain passages speak of individuals as Christians, employing the formula "in Christ" (Rom 16:7-8, 10-11, 13; Eph 6:21; Philemon 16).<sup>663</sup> Similarly, this expression can refer simply to Christian faith. For example, in the church at Corinth there were many "tutors in Christ" (1 Cor 4:15), which means that the church received much instruction in Christian faith.<sup>664</sup>

Sometimes this phrase means "for the Lord's sake." Wives submit to their husbands, slaves to their masters, and children to their parents "in the Lord," i.e., for the Lord's sake (Col 3:18, 20; 4:7; Eph 6:1).<sup>665</sup> At the same time, these instances may possess the nuance of "spiritual power from Christ." People do these things not only for the Lord, but also by His power.

We must also mention those cases where Paul uses this formula to express gratitude for what Christ has done for us. Three times he repeats the injunction, "Rejoice in the Lord," that is, for what He has done (Phil 3:1; 4:4, 10). In a similar way, Paul speaks of Jesus as the one in whom we boast (Rom 15:17; 1 Cor 1:31; 15:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Phil 1:26; 3:3).

Paul assigns still other meanings to the phrase "in Christ." It may indicate that Jesus is the object of our hope (Phil 2:19) or devotion (Eph 1:1), the source of our authority (Philemon 8; 1 Thes 4:1; 5:12; 2 Thes 3:12; Eph 4:17) or confidence (Rom 14:14; Phil 1:14; 2:24; Gal 5:10; 2 Thes 3:4; Eph 6:20), or the verification of some claim (Rom 9:1; 2 Cor 2:17; 12:19).

We are yet to examine Paul's two most frequent "in Christ" usages, which often overlap with one another: "in Christ" in the sense of "through" or "by means" of Christ, and location in the "sphere" of Christ. Let us highlight several passages that correspond to the sense "by means" of Christ.<sup>666</sup> "In Christ," i.e., "through Him," God provides forgiveness of sins and justification (Rom 3:24; Gal 2:17; Eph 4:32).<sup>667</sup> In some instances, it seems that Christ is not so much the means or instrument of God's actions as much as the agent or doer of the action Himself (see Col 4:17; 1 Cor 7:22).<sup>668</sup>

However, the expression "in Christ" most frequently refers to believers' location in the "sphere" of Christ or their "positional status" in Him. What exactly is this "sphere" of Christ? A good starting point for our understanding is 1 Corinthians 1:30, which reveals that our position or status in Christ comes from the Father and leads to certain benefits: "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and

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<sup>663</sup>Sometimes churches or brethren in general are "in Christ," that is, "Christian" (1 Thes 2:14; Gal 1:22; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1, 14; Col 1:2). Believers greet one another "in Christ," i.e., as fellow Christians (Phil 4:21; 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:12), and receive one another as such (Rom 16:2). Believers die "in the Lord," that is as Christians (1 Cor 15:18; 1 Thes 4:16). Finally, widows must marry only "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39), i.e., other Christians. In addition, 1 Corinthians 16:24, "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus," may mean "with all you Christians." In 2 Corinthians 12:2, "a man in Christ" means "a Christian." In 1 Corinthians 9:2, "You are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord," may mean "you as Christians."

<sup>664</sup>Moreover, in Colossians 2:7, Paul calls believers to be "firmly rooted" and "built up in Him," that is, in Christian faith. Furthermore, Paul speaks of his "ways" in Christian faith (1 Cor 4:17). "Babes in Christ" (1 Cor 3:1) are those yet undeveloped in Christian faith, while the "mature in Christ" (Col 1:28) are spiritually mature believers. In addition, a person can be "wise" in Christian faith (1 Cor 4:10). Also see Ephesians 4:21: "truth is in Christian faith," Philippians 4:1: "Stand firm in Christian faith," (similar in 1 Thes 3:8), and Colossians 2:6: "walk in Christian faith." Additionally, Timothy is Paul's "beloved and faithful child in Christian faith" (1 Cor 4:17). Similarly, Paul is a "father in Christian faith" for those he led to Christ (1 Cor 4:15). Also note: "Live in harmony in Christian faith" (Phil 4:2) and, "Live godly in Christian faith" (2 Tim 3:12). Finally, according to Christian faith, God's will is for us to be thankful (1 Thes 5:18).

<sup>665</sup>Believers jailed "in Christ" suffer for His sake (Eph 4:1; Phil 1:13; Philemon 23). Christian ministers serve "in Christ," that is for His sake (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 1 Cor 9:1-2; 15:58; Rom 16:3, 9, 12).

<sup>666</sup>This usage of ἐν Χριστῷ (*en Hristy*), i.e., "in Christ," functionally overlaps with the phrase διὰ Χριστοῦ (*dia Hristy*), i.e., "through Christ."

<sup>667</sup>Through Christ, God also supplies: victory (Col 2:15; 4:17), spiritual circumcision (Col 2:11), blessing (Eph 1:3; Gal 3:14), sanctification (1 Cor 1:2), grace (1 Cor 1:4-5; 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:6), ministry (1 Cor 1:5), power (Phil 4:13), glorification (2 Thes 1:12), and eternal life (Rom 6:23). Through Christ Jesus, God created all things (Col 1:16), upholds all things (Col 1:17), accomplishes His purpose (Eph 1:9, 20; 3:11), and receives glory (Eph 3:21).

<sup>668</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 73ff.

righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” In addition, in the “sphere” of Christ are located many, if not all the benefits of salvation.<sup>669</sup>

We hasten to add that, although the formula “in Christ” enjoys a great variety of usage, all these usages have certain affinities with the meaning “sphere” of Christ. On the other hand, none of the other above-mentioned meanings is able to encompass the wide range of usages of this phrase as well as the “sphere” of Christ can. Therefore, we conclude that the idea “sphere” of Christ or “position” in Him was primary in Paul’s mind.

### **c. Further Elaboration on the Concept “Sphere of Christ”**

Having examined different instances of Paul’s employment of the expression “in Christ,” we concluded that its basic sense for Paul is location in the “sphere” of Christ or “position” in Him. In this section, we will seek to clarify exactly what Paul meant by this.

#### **1) The Mystical Approach**

In the past, many liberal theologians in their reflections of the phrase “in Christ” interpreted the “sphere” of Christ in mystical terms. Wikenhauser defines mysticism as “that form of spirituality which strives after (or experiences) an immediate contact (or union) of the soul with God.”<sup>670</sup>

Although mysticism, in the positive sense of personal fellowship with God, is a natural and desired result of Christ’s indwelling the believer, the mystical approach in general exaggerates this idea and thereby introduces a serious distortion of God’s truth. In fact, in Paul’s thought personal fellowship with God relates not so much to the idea of the believer being in Christ as to Christ being in the believer.

Many trace the modern study of union with Christ to the work of the German theologian Adolf Deissmann (1866-1937). Along with others, Deissmann associated the believer’s position in the “sphere” of Christ with a mystical experience with Him in the Spirit. He understood Paul’s thought in the following way.<sup>671</sup> Although Paul acknowledged Jesus Christ as a historical person, he related to Him more as a spiritual entity comparable to the atmosphere in which people live. Life in this “atmosphere” is equated with life “in Christ.” Deissmann writes,

Christ is for Paul not a person of the past, with whom he can only come into contact by meditating on the words that have been handed from him, not a “historical” personage, but a reality and power of the present, an “energy,” whose life-giving powers are daily expressing themselves in him.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>669</sup>In particular: no condemnation (Rom 8:1), the law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2), love, grace and faith (1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:1; Rom 8:39), salvation (Phil 3:9; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 1:7, 13; Col 1:14; 2 Tim 2:10), the high calling of God (Phil 3:14), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), comfort (Phil 2:1), provision (Phil 4:19), fullness (Col 2:10), access to God (Eph 2:13; 3:12), light (Eph 5:8), resurrection (1 Cor 15:22), inheritance (Eph 1:10-11; 2:7), and many others. In this “sphere,” all of God’s promises are “Yes,” to which we say “Amen” (2 Cor 1:20). God accomplishes His election in Christ (Eph 1:4, 9). In Christ, we are seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6) and are re-created in Him (Eph 2:10). Finally, in Christ, the Church is unified (1 Cor 11:11; Gal 3:28; 5:6; Rom 12:5; Eph 2:15; 3:6; Phil 4:2). Other possible references to the “sphere” of Christ include: Rom 6:11, 23; 8:39; 1 Cor 15:18, 22; 16:19; 2 Cor 1:21; 2:14; Gal. 2:4; 5:6; Eph 2:20; 3:21; 5:8; Phil 4:7; 2 Tim 1:1, 9, 13; 2:1, 10; 3:15; Philemon 20.

<sup>670</sup>Wikenhauser A. *Pauline mysticism* / Trans. J. Cunnigham. – Friebrug: Herder, 1960. – P. 14.

<sup>671</sup>See Deissmann A. *Paul; a study in social and religious history* / Trans. W. E. Wilson. – Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1972. – P. 136-157.

<sup>672</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136.

Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) held a similar view.<sup>673</sup> Weiss believed that Jesus was liberated from His bodily condition and now exists in a purely spiritual form. He writes of Christ, “The fixed outlines of the personality had been softened and dissolved, and replaced by the idea of a formless, impersonal, all-penetrating being.”<sup>674</sup> Again, Christ is equated with the Spirit: “What is true of Christ is also true of the Spirit and the reverse.” They are “in some way identical.”<sup>675</sup>

In refutation of the mystical approach, we can highlight two main weaknesses. First, one may challenge equating Christ with the Spirit. Paul repeatedly speaks of Jesus Christ as a real historical figure and a divine Person in distinction from the Spirit.<sup>676</sup> Moreover, Wikenhauser explains that in 1 Corinthians 3:17, when it seems that Paul is equating the Spirit with Christ (“The Lord is the Spirit”), in the same verse he distinguishes the two: “The Spirit *of the Lord*.” In addition, 1 Corinthians 15:45 claims that Christ is a “life-giving spirit.” Paul does not mean that He became the Holy Spirit, but that He now dwells in a glorified, spiritual body. When in Scripture the Son is associated with the Spirit, the sense is not to equate them as persons, but to indicate their corporate work in the life of the believer.<sup>677</sup>

In summary, although the Christian experience of “Christ in us” certainly contains a subjective element that we may roughly term “mysticism” (in the sense of personal fellowship with the Lord), this feature in no way exhausts the entire concept of union with Christ and in no way justifies the exaggerated idea that Christ can be equated with the Spirit.

## 2) The Historico-Redemptive Approach

Beside the mystical approach, an alternative view exists called the historico-redemptive approach. According to this theory, our position in Christ possesses a historico-redemptive character, that is, it concerns our real participation in the historico-redemptive events in the earthly career of the Savior, who serves as our representative before the Father.

The key verse in confirmation of this approach is 1 Corinthians 1:30, where we read, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” We note that according to this verse, our position in Christ does not consist in some mystical encounter with Him, but that He *became* something for us as our representative, namely, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. So then, due to our position in Christ we are justified, sanctified, and redeemed. Paul echoes this thought in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Again we see that “in Him” we are counted righteous because He “was made” something for us – a sacrifice for sin.

In order to unpack the concept of the “sphere” of Christ in line with the historico-redemptive approach, we will employ, with some modifications, the methodology of C. R. Campbell.<sup>678</sup> We will demonstrate that the believer’s position in Christ consists of three elements: (1) the role of Christ as our representative, (2) our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life,<sup>679</sup> and (3) our inclusion in the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. We will attempt a brief resume of these three themes now, and detail them later.

In dealing with Christ’s representative role in redemption, we encounter a prominent biblical theme called “corporate personality,” which we will discuss in detail in the next section. In brief, according to this principle one person can represent an entire group before God with the result that the representative’s actions affect

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<sup>673</sup>See Weiss J. *Earliest Christianity; a history of the period A.D. 30-150* / Trans. and ed. F. C. Grant. – New York: Harper & Row, 1937. – V. 2. – P. 463-471.

<sup>674</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 465.

<sup>675</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>676</sup>For example, see Matt 28:19; Jn 15:26; 1 Cor 12:3; 6:11; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2 and many others.

<sup>677</sup>Wikenhauser, p. 84-87.

<sup>678</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 413.

<sup>679</sup>We will employ the expression “redemptive events” to indicate Christ’s death, resurrection, exaltation and Second Coming.

the entire group. In other words, God deals with an entire group as with one entity. In relation to salvation, our “corporate head” is Jesus Christ.

Letham makes an important distinction between the concepts of “representation” and “substitution,” the latter connoting “taking the place of another.” He correctly asserts that Christ’s representation of humanity before God includes an element of substitution as well. This is evident in His taking sinful humanity’s place on the cross. Yet, Christ could be our substitute only in virtue of His being our representative.<sup>680</sup>

Concerning our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life, the Bible clearly teaches that God made us participants in four events in the Savior’s earthly career: His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, and His Second Coming. In other words, the believer has died with Christ, been raised with Him, exalted with Him, and will be glorified at His appearance.

The final element of the believer’s position in Christ is participation in His Body, the Church. Being “in Christ” as individuals means being united with other believers, who are also “in Him.” Because of union with Christ, there is an intrinsic unity between all believers in Him.

Finally, C. F. D. Moule makes an important qualification that union with Christ does not mean that the believer is totally identified with Christ – this is not a “union of identity.”<sup>681</sup> Even though we stand in union with Christ, we remain individual persons. The term “corporate personality” simply indicates that Christ is our representative and that we participate in certain events in His history.

## 2. Christ in the Believer

According to Scripture, not only is the believer in Christ, but Christ is in the believer. As mentioned earlier, the apostle John especially emphasizes this aspect of union with Christ. Paul makes mention of it as well, yet not as frequently. Note the following examples:”

- It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20)
- Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27)
- If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Rom 8:10)
- ...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (Eph 3:17)
- Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? (2 Cor 13:5)

So then, both John and Paul confirm that union with Christ consists of two elements: we in Christ and Christ in us. Comparing the presence of Christ in the believer with the position of the believer in Christ, C. F. D. Moule makes the following important qualification: “The believer exists completely in Christ while Christ does not exist completely in the believer.”<sup>682</sup> In other words, the entire life of the believer in every respect is located in Christ, yet He does not manifest through any single believer the fullness of His divine glory.

Wiersbe also makes a valuable contribution to our discussion by noting that, although at times we do experience a feeling of closeness to the Lord in our personal fellowship with Him, our union with Christ is not based on feeling, but on fact. We accept the truth of His dwelling in us by faith.<sup>683</sup> Finally, Martin aptly comments that when Christ lives in and through us, “it is not a union that negates the full exercise of all my redeemed humanity.”<sup>684</sup> In other words, we do not become puppets in the hands of God, but real participants in the manifestation of His life through us.

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<sup>680</sup>Letham, p. 62-64.

<sup>681</sup>Moule C. F. D. The phenomena of the New Testament // Moule C. F. D., Ackroyd P., Filson F. V., Wright G. E. Studies in Biblical theology, 2nd series. – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1967. – P. 27.

<sup>682</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 26.

<sup>683</sup>Wiersbe W. W. Prayer: Basic training. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988. – P. 128-129.

<sup>684</sup>Martin A. N., p. 53.

All must agree that Christ Himself does not indwell the believer, but the person of the Holy Spirit.<sup>685</sup> Consequently, in the writings of Paul we see many references to the indwelling Spirit. Smedes affirms that the Spirit so closely identifies Himself with Christ that one may speak of His indwelling as the indwelling of Christ Himself: “He (the Spirit) is the functioning Christ.”<sup>686</sup> At times, the New Testament even speaks of the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of (Jesus) Christ” (Phil 1:19; Rom 8:9). In Romans 8:9-10, the phrase “Christ in you” is equated with the indwelling of the Spirit.

At the same time, Rightmire stresses that we must not fully identify the Spirit with the Son: “Paul distinguishes between Christ and the Spirit, but views the function of the latter as mediating the former to believers.”<sup>687</sup>

Some commentators go to the extreme of regarding the believer’s position in Christ as simply life “in the Spirit.” Being “in Christ” is simply living in the Spirit’s presence and in fellowship with Him. This resonates with the liberal, “mystic” view discussed previously. However, later in this volume we will demonstrate the biblical teaching of our position in Christ. It consists not in the presence of the Holy Spirit, but in the representative role of the Son and the believer’s participation in the redemptive events of His history. So then, our position in Christ does not derive from our relationship with the Spirit, but vice versa. The work of the Spirit is to actualize in our lives the benefits we enjoy in virtue of our position in Christ.

## C. Elements of the Believer’s Position “in Christ”

### 1. Christ Our Representative

We claim that our position in Christ consists of three elements: (1) the role of Christ as our representative, (2) our participation in the redemptive events of Christ’s life, and (3) our participation in the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church. The first of these elements, Christ as our representative, is based on the biblical concept of “corporate personality.” As we shall see in this section, the conception “corporate personality” was no novelty to God’s people – they experienced it throughout their history.

“Corporate personality” refers to the phenomenon, often encountered in Scripture, when God deals with an entire group as with one entity. According to this system, the fate of a representative of the group becomes the fate of the entire group. The theologian possibly championing this theory more than any other, H. Wheeler Robinson, defined it thusly: “The whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it.”<sup>688</sup>

Even the expression itself, “corporate personality,” hints at its meaning. In the world of business, individual companies can unite to form a corporation, where they combine their assets and liabilities into a single account. Thus, two entities become one. The same occurs in marriage, where two people not only unite their finances, but also adopt a common life.

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<sup>685</sup>The following support this view: J. Calvin, L. Smedes, M. Erickson, R. Gaffin, E. Clowney and many others (See Smedes L. B. *Union with Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 127-129; Erickson M. *Christian theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985. – P. 952-953; Gaffin, *Union with Christ*, p. 274; Clowney, E. P. *The Biblical theology of the Church* // Carson D. A. *The Church in the Bible and the world: an international study*. – World Evangelical Fellowship, 1987. – P. 55).

<sup>686</sup>Smedes, p. 135. A. Wikenhauser claims that in us “Christ works thru the Holy Spirit” (Wikenhauser, p. 58). Also see Moule C. D. F., p. 25.

<sup>687</sup>Rightmire R. D. *Union with Christ* // Elwell W. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 792.

<sup>688</sup>Robinson H. W. *Corporate personality in ancient Israel*. – Rev. ed. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1980. – P. 25. We must qualify, though, that the concept of corporate personality presented in this chapter differs somewhat from Robinson’s understanding. Robinson focused more on solidarity as a feature of Hebrew culture. He wrote, “The group possesses a consciousness which is distributed among its individual members and does not exist simply as a figure of speech or as an ideal” (Robinson, *Corporate personality*, p. 30). We will demonstrate, though, that this principle has its roots not in Hebrew thought or culture, but in God’s dealings with His people.

## a. Corporate Personality in the Old Testament

The Old Testament abounds with examples of this phenomenon.<sup>689</sup> In Numbers 16:27-33, we learn of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, whose families perished along with them in their rebellion. When Hiel disobeyed and rebuilt Jericho, it was not he who perished, but his sons (Josh 6:25; 1 Kin 16:34). Moreover, when Achan sinned, his entire family shared in his tragic fate (Josh 7:1-5, 24-26). The Bible records that Canaan incurred a curse because of his father's inappropriate act (Gen 9:25ff). David's sin with Bathsheba led to his son's premature death and other later calamities in his family (2 Sam 12:11-14). Gehazi's greed led to a similar result (2 Kin 5:27).<sup>690</sup>

On the other hand, according to this principle of solidarity one may not only incur undeserved retribution, but also attain undeserved blessing. For example, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received an inheritance in the promised land thanks to the faithfulness of their ancestors (see Deut 10:15; Isa 41:8). In a similar way, all the descendants of Aaron, both the godly and the ungodly, inherited the priesthood. The high priest served as representative for the entire people of God (Ex 28:11-12). In the same fashion, sons of David ascended the throne thanks to his faithfulness to the Lord. We read in Isaiah 37:35 that God will defend Jerusalem not for the sake of the leaders of that time, but "for My own sake and for My servant David's sake."

This principle of solidarity stands behind the edict in Ex 20:5-6 (Deut 5:9-10): "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." We may cite many passages in the poetic books indicating curses on the descendants of the ungodly (Ps 20:11; 37:28) and blessing for the descendants of the righteous (Ps 24:12-13; 36:25-26; 68:36-37; 101:29; 111:2-3; Prov 11:21).

The book of Hebrews introduces an interesting example of corporate personality. According to the author of Hebrews, while Levi was still unborn in the "loins" of Abraham, he paid tithes through Abraham to Melchizedek (Heb 7:9-10; see Gen 14). In this manner, the author of Hebrews argues that the priesthood of Melchizedek, who received tithes, is greater than the priesthood of Levi, who paid them.

However, we must qualify that those under corporate punishment could escape it by means of personal devotion to the Lord. This was so in the case of Rahab, who should have perished along with the other inhabitants of Jericho (Josh 2:8-14; 6:22-24).<sup>691</sup> Yet, she was delivered because she feared God. In addition, the Moabites were excluded from the assembly of Israel, yet Ruth was welcomed due to her faithfulness. Furthermore, one of the descendants of the cursed Jeroboam received mercy because "in him something good was found toward the Yahweh God of Israel" (1 Kin 14:13). Finally, some Egyptians, who heeded the warning from God, saved their possessions from the hail (Ex 9:20). Therefore, we cannot claim that corporate punishment is inevitable.

On the other hand, those who are recipients of corporate blessing may still forfeit it through personal disobedience. For example, David's dynasty ended (in Old Testament times) because it strayed from the God of Israel. In addition, the descendants of Eli were excluded from the priesthood because of their unruly lives. Reuben lost his birthright because "he defiled his father's bed" (1 Chr 5:1). Two sons of Aaron perished because of disrespect for the Lord's ordinances (Lev 10:1-2). Concerning the spiritual condition of Israel in Ezekiel's time, God said, "Even {though} these three men, Noah, Daniel and Job were in its midst, by their {own}

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<sup>689</sup>Several examples were taken from Robinson, Corporate personality; Shedd R. P. Man in community: A study of St. Paul's application of Old Testament and early Jewish conceptions of human solidarity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964; and Kaminsky J. S. Corporate responsibility in the Hebrew Bible // Clines D., Davies P. R., eds Supplemental Series of the Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, no. 196. – Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

<sup>690</sup>Many other examples exist, both in regard to Israel (2 Sam 21; 24:15-17; 1 Kin 11:12-13; 14:10-12; 2 Kin 21:1-18) and to the Gentiles (Deut 23:3-6; 1 Sam 15:2-3; Gen 20:7, 18; 27:37 with Mal 1:3-4; Est 9:6-10).

<sup>691</sup>Also of note is that by her faith, Rahab secured not only her own safety, but also safety for her family (Josh 2:12-13). However, in this case the family still needed to fulfill a condition – stay in the house during the battle (Josh 2:18-19).

righteousness they could {only} deliver themselves” (Ezek 14:14).<sup>692</sup> Therefore, it is not impossible to lose a corporate blessing.

Nonetheless, the above-mentioned exceptions do not nullify the principle of solidarity. The original status of blessing the priests, kings, and people in general enjoyed was not due to their merit, but because of the faithfulness of their ancestors. Additionally, even if some descendants lost the corporate blessing, the opportunity to obtain it still remained for future generations.

## **b. Corporate Personality in the New Testament**

By far, the most significant example of the principle of corporate personality, which affects us all, is the transmission of sin and its consequences from Adam to all his descendants. Although the rabbis in their time spoke of our union with Adam, the New Testament speaks more directly to this truth. We affirm with Robinson, “The thoroughly Hebraic contrast of Adam and Christ made by the apostle Paul... draws all its cogency from the conception of corporate personality.”<sup>693</sup>

Kaufman agrees that corporate personality “underlies the whole range of relationships, not the least of which is the Pauline teaching on the first and second Adams.”<sup>694</sup> Shedd concurs, “The whole of Paul's anthropology and soteriology is built on the Hebraic conceptions of the solidarity of the race.”<sup>695</sup> Yet, Shedd makes the important point that unlike the more selective Old Testament depictions of solidarity, Paul relates it to the entire human race.<sup>696</sup>

So then, to gain a proper understanding of humanity's solidarity with Adam and the corresponding idea of union with Christ, we must carefully examine Paul's teaching in Rom 5:12-19. Paul's primary claim here is that all of humanity is guilty and stands condemned before God because of Adam's sin. Nevertheless, all may be counted righteous through Christ:

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:18-19).

Note that through the transgression of Adam, humanity inherits guilt and condemnation, while through the obedience of Christ we can receive righteousness. Our union with Christ is similar to our union with Adam. That which Adam did affects us all, since we are in union with him. In a similar way, that which Christ did affects us as well, thanks to our union with Him. In the words of Moule, “Paul could think of Christ in the same way as he thought of Adam, as the inclusive personality of the whole race.”<sup>697</sup>

In Romans 5:12-14, Paul defends his position in the following way. Adam's sin led to his own death. Yet, after Adam, death afflicted his offspring as well who were not guilty of the only offense punishable by death – eating the forbidden fruit. Paul's conclusion: Adam's sin has consequences for his descendants as well. Thus, he is humanity's representative according to the principle of corporate personality.

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<sup>692</sup>Noted in Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 19.

<sup>693</sup>Robinson, *Corporate personality*, p. 37.

<sup>694</sup>Kaufman, p. 546.

<sup>695</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 103. Similarly, Bruce writes, “Paul was thoroughly conversant with the Hebrew concept of corporate personality, and his thought could readily oscillate on the one hand between the first man Adam and sinful mankind, and on the other hand between Christ, ‘the second man’, and the community of the redeemed” (Bruce F. F. *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963. – P. 126).

<sup>696</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 111.

<sup>697</sup>Moule C. F. D., p. 29.

At the same time, the statement “who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” implies that people commit personal sin (against conscience, for example – see Rom 2). However, only Adam’s sin in the Garden resulted in the propagation of death in the world.<sup>698</sup> Paul states this directly in verse 15, “By the transgression of the one the many died,” and in verse 17, “By the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one.”

The concluding words of verse 12 draw much exegetical attention: “And so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Many interpreters mistakenly assume that Paul is speaking here of the sins people personally commit, not of humanity’s participation in Adam’s sin. Morris insightfully points out that the use of the Greek aorist tense ἥμαρτον (*hemarton*, i.e., “sinned”) “points to one act, the act of Adam; we would expect the Greek present or imperfect tense if the apostle were thinking of the continuing sins of all people. Paul says that all sinned in Adam, not in imitating him. And it ignores the context with its strong insistence on the sin of one man (not all of us) as the cause of the trouble.”<sup>699</sup>

Morris’ view also finds support in the parallel Paul draws between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ in this passage. If people are subject to death and condemnation due to personal sin and not the sin of Adam, then we force the conclusion that justification comes not through Christ, but through personal righteousness. This claim, though, directly contradicts the essence of the gospel. In addition, verse 19 makes clear, “As through the *one man’s* disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of *the One* the many will be made righteous.” Westberg confirms, “Is righteousness reckoned to us through Christ? So is guilt reckoned to us through Adam.”<sup>700</sup>

Besides Romans 5, the New Testament contains other parallels between Adam and Christ.<sup>701</sup> For example, commentators often note the contrast in Colossians 3 and 4 between the “old man” and the “new man.” The former is the expression of the fallen Adamic nature, while the latter is the new life in Christ. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 5:27 Christ introduces the new creation, which implies a contrast with Adam and the old creation. In Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, he is even more direct – Adam and Christ are contrasted in connection with the future resurrection of the dead: “For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor 15:21-22).

Next, we claim that the system of corporate personality is “typological” in nature. Fritsch correctly defines a “type” as “an institution, historical event, or person, ordained by God, which effectively prefigures some truth connected with Christianity.”<sup>702</sup> The biblical text itself supports the claim that the relationship of Adam (and, consequently, the entire system of corporate personality) to Christ is typological in nature. In fact, in Romans 5:14 we find one of the rare New Testament usages of the Greek term τύπος (*tupos*), i.e., “type”: “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type (τύπος) of Him who was to come.” Here we see that Adam is a “type” or representation of Christ.

Therefore, the fact that Adam, as a corporate head, is a type of Christ as a corporate head, may imply that the Old Testament system of corporate solidarity itself is typological in nature as well. This is why in the Old Testament narrative God did not always punish in this way. God’s goal in corporate punishment was not to establish a new penal system, but to prepare His people conceptually to receive Jesus Christ as their corporate head in relation to salvation. It seems that as soon as God had accomplished His purpose for the system of solidarity, it began to fade out.

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<sup>698</sup>Morris L. The Epistle to the Romans. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W. B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. – P. 234.

<sup>699</sup>Morris, Romans, p. 231-232. Similarly, see Westberg G. C. The two Adams // Bibliotheca Sacra. 94. 1937. P. 40.

<sup>700</sup>Westberg, p. 40.

<sup>701</sup>See Shedd, Man in community, p. 150-159; Motyer S. Man, old and new. // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 728; Ridderbos H. Paul: an outline of his theology / Trans. J. R. De Witt. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975. – P. 64; Best E. One Body in Christ. – London: SPCK, 1955. – P. 40.

<sup>702</sup>Fritsch C. T. Principles of biblical typology // Bibliotheca Sacra 104 (1947). P. 214; cited in LaRondelle H. K. The Israel of God in prophecy: principles of prophetic interpretation. – Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983. – P. 36.



## 2. Participation in the Redemptive Events of Christ's Life

### a. The Concept's Meaning and Biblical Basis

In the previous section, we discovered that because of the principle of corporate personality we enjoy a relationship of solidarity with Christ. This means that His representative role has consequences for those who believe in Him, which we will delineate in the next section. In the present section, we will discover that this relationship of solidarity also results in the believer's real participation in the redemptive events of the Savior's career: namely, in His death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming. Tannehill expresses it this way, "Christ's death and resurrection are not merely events which produce benefits for the believer, but also are events in which the believer himself partakes."<sup>703</sup>

It is also important to emphasize that we participate in events in Christ's history *in virtue of His representative role*. Only because He is our "legal" representative do we have the opportunity to participate in His life.<sup>704</sup> In Scripture, only after one is appointed as a "corporate head" does he begin to exert an influence on those under his headship.

When the Scriptures speak of the forensic aspect of our position with Christ, we usually encounter the phrase "in Christ." This phrase usually refers to our "legal" position in Christ on the basis of which all the blessings of salvation are provided to us. When we speak of our real participation in the redemptive events of Christ's life, we generally encounter a related phrase, "with Christ." For example, Paul writes in Galatians 2:19, "I have been crucified *with* Christ."

Let us investigate further how Paul uses the construction "with Christ."<sup>705</sup> Sometimes he uses it in a conventional sense of physically being with someone. For example, after death Paul expects to be "with Christ" (Phil 1:23). The same applies to our gathering to Him at His Second Coming (1 Thes 4:17; 5:10) when He brings "with Him" the departed saints (1 Thes 4:14). More frequently, however, Paul employs the formula "with Christ" in a derived sense to refer to the believer's participation in certain events in the Savior's history. First, believers were included in the death of Jesus, that is, they were crucified with Him:

- Rom 6:6-8 – ...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him,}... if we have died with Christ
- Col 2:20 – If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world...
- Col 3:3 – For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- Gal 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.
- 2 Cor 5:14 – One died for all, therefore all died.
- 2 Tim 2:11 – It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him

It is vital to note that all of these texts speak of our participation in the death of Christ as a fact accomplished in the past. Dying with Christ is not something that we strive for, but something God has done for us by uniting us with His Son in His death. When Jesus died on Calvary, believers in Him died as well. Nevertheless, George makes the important point that participation in Christ's death in no way implies that we aid Him in His redemptive work. At the same time, we were real participants in this event.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>703</sup>Tannehill R. C. Dying and rising in Christ: A study in Pauline theology. – Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1966. – P. 1.

<sup>704</sup>See Campbell C. R., p. 351.

<sup>705</sup>See discussion in Campbell C. R., p. 220-236; Hansen G. W. The Letter to the Philippians. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 2009. – P. 88-89; O'Brien P. T. The Epistle to the Philippians: a commentary on the Greek text. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. – P. 132-134; O'Brien P. T. Colossians, Philemon // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1982. – P. 170-171; Best, p. 60-62.

<sup>706</sup>George T. Galatians // New American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. – P. 199.

Along with participation in Christ's death, the New Testament speaks of our participation in His resurrection as well. God did not leave us in the grave, but raised us together with Christ. Here is the New Testament witness:<sup>707</sup>

- Eph 2:5-6 – even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him.
- Col 2:12-13 – You were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him.
- Col 3:1 – Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above.
- 1 Pet 1:3 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In the future, we anticipate a participation in Christ's resurrection in yet another sense – through the resurrection of our physical bodies:

- 1 Cor 15:21-22 – For since by a man {came} death, by a man also {came} the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.
- 2 Tim 2:11 – It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him.
- 2 Cor 4:14 – ... knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.
- Rom 6:8 – Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

Other passages of Scripture reveal that the believer has been exalted with Christ: God “seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6), and, “put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Eph 1:22-23). So then, the present position of believers in Christ is their being seated in heaven with Christ at a place of power and authority.

The final Christ-event in which the believer participates is His revelation in glory at His Second Coming. The Bible teaches that at that time believers will be revealed with Him, i.e., they will be perfected and glorified. We read, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:4), and, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 Jn 3:2).

In summary, we affirm that the believer has died with Christ, been raised and exalted with Him, and will be revealed with Him at His Second Coming. The idea of the believer's real participation in the redemptive events of Christ's career appears in the writings of several prominent evangelical thinkers. Louis Berkhof, for example, writes, “In an objective sense (the Church) was crucified with Christ, she died with Him, she arose in Him from the dead, and was made to sit with Him in the heavenly places.”<sup>708</sup> B. B. Warfield concurs that believers died with Him on Calvary.<sup>709</sup> Martin expresses this truth especially well:

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<sup>707</sup>Although Romans 6:4 lacks the phrase “raised with Christ,” the sense is clearly implied: “As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Gaffin comments here, “The believer's continuing walk in newness of life is based upon resurrection with Christ” (Gaffin R. B. *The centrality of the resurrection*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978. – P. 47).

<sup>708</sup>Berkhof L. *Systematic theology*. – 4th ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941. – P. 448.

<sup>709</sup>Warfield B. B. *Faith and life; 'conferences' in the Oratory of Princeton seminary*. – New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1916. – P. 436.

So it is that His death is reckoned their death, His resurrection their resurrection, and His session at the right hand of the Father their session with Him. Then the Scripture says we shall be glorified together with Him.<sup>710</sup>

In light of the fact that Jesus accomplished everything necessary for our salvation and complete victory, Paul can boldly claim, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17), and, “In Him you have been made complete” (Col 2:10). The apostle John writes about the fullness of Christ, “For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). In light of the riches of our position in Christ, we better appreciate the significance of Paul’s words in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

## **b. Refutation of False Views**

Unfortunately, every clear biblical teaching becomes clouded by various incorrect views that hinder people from fully appreciating God’s truth. We will examine the more prominent of these views in respect to our participation in Christ’s history.

### **1) The Believer’s Participation in Christ’s Entire History**

One errant view on the believer’s participation is the idea that God made us participants not only in certain redemptive events in Jesus life (i.e., death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming), but in all of His history. Some assume that all that Jesus did in the course of His entire earthly life has direct influence on believers today. Correspondingly, our connection to Christ is not by virtue of His appointment as our corporate head, but by His incarnation, i.e., His taking on our humanity. Through the incarnation, it is felt that the believer has an “organic union” with the Lord and, consequently, “access” to His entire earthly history and participation in it.

Some adherents of this theory claim that we are justified before the Father as a result of Jesus’ sinless life, since we were “in Him” and participated in His sinless career. Therefore, our justification comes from our “participation in his human righteousness.”<sup>711</sup> Moreover, since we share in Jesus entire earthly experience, His obedience somehow enables and empowers our obedience as well. Lee describes Torrence’s view: “Our obedience rests upon the victorious obedience of Christ.”<sup>712</sup>

Our response to this theory is as follows. Although this view appears attractive from a logical point of view, it nonetheless lacks Scriptural support. A key verse in its refutation in Romans 5:18: “Through *one act of righteousness* there resulted justification of life to all men.” The King James Version, however, translates this verse in a way that could support the participation-righteousness view: “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”<sup>713</sup> The Greek phrase in question is δι’ ἑνὸς δικαίωματος (*di’ henos dikaiomatos*). Most translations prefer “through one act of righteousness,” instead of “by the righteousness of one,” yet the point is debated.<sup>714</sup>

An examination of context, though, clearly favors the “one act” position. Concerning Adam’s history, which is paralleled with Christ’s, only one transgression is in view: “the offense of Adam” (v. 14), “the transgression of the one” (v. 15), “one {transgression}” (v. 16), “the transgression of the one” (v. 17), “through one

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<sup>710</sup>Martin A. N. Union with Christ // Lecture series at Toronto Baptist Seminary, February 15-17, 1978. – P.29.

<sup>711</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>712</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>713</sup>Dunn also prefers this translation, although he favors the “one act” view of Romans 5 in any case (Dunn J. D. G. Romans 1–8 // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1988. – P. 283).

<sup>714</sup>See the discussion in Dunn, Romans 1–8, p. 283 and Morris, Romans, p. 238.

transgression" (v. 18), "through the one man's disobedience" (v. 19). Since the goal of the passage is to compare Adam's history with Christ's, it logically follows that justification in Christ comes not from participation in His entire history, but by His one act of obedience at Calvary.

Smedes also comments on this question in our favor: "The parallel between Adam and Christ, then, is focused on the decisive events in which each was the central figure."<sup>715</sup> Goppelt also agrees, "In each instance the single act of one as a consequence that affects the entire human race."<sup>716</sup> Additionally, the universal testimony of the New Testament concurs that Jesus redeemed us exclusively by His sacrifice of Calvary. For example, we read in Romans 3:24, "...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

We find still more support for our view in Romans 5:18. Here, Paul uses a more unusual term for "righteousness," namely δικαίωμα (*dikaïoma*). His usual term is δικαιοσύνη (*dikaïosune*), while δικαίωμα (*dikaïoma*) can refer to a "righteous deed."<sup>717</sup> This usage confirms the conclusion that a single "righteous deed" is in view, i.e., Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary.

In addition, nowhere in Scripture do we see the incarnation depicted as the determining factor for the believer's union with Christ. Paul clearly states the goal of the incarnation in Hebrews chapter 2:

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.... He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb 2:14-17).

The incarnation of the Son of God was necessary so that He could become "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." So then, the incarnation plays a key role in Christ becoming humanity's representative. Nonetheless, *only by virtue of Christ's appointment as our representative and not by the incarnation alone* does the believer qualify as a participant in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus.

We may also benefit from the research of Seifrid, who observed that the expression "in Jesus" occurs very rarely – Paul prefers the expression "in Christ." Seifrid feels that this "suggests an emphasis on the exalted status and saving role of the Messiah."<sup>718</sup> If our union with Christ derived from His incarnation, we would expect to see more references to "in Jesus" than to "in Christ." Whiting concurs, "The New Testament never speaks of the believer as being 'in Jesus' but always refers to him as being 'in Christ, 'in the Lord,' or 'in the Lord Jesus Christ.' Our union with Christ is a oneness with Him in His Messianic and Mediatorial office rather than in His manhood or earthly life."<sup>719</sup>

Therefore, the believer has the privilege to share in the redemptive events of Jesus' life not due to His taking upon Himself human nature, but by virtue of His role as humanity's representative. The incarnation was necessary, in its turn, so that Christ could become our true representative. Consequently, the believer is not a participant in all the events of Christ's history, but only in those where He was appointed our representative as indicated in Scripture, namely in his death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming.

## 2) The Teaching of Theosis

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<sup>715</sup>Smedes, p. 83-84.

<sup>716</sup>Goppelt L. Typos: The typological interpretation of the Old Testament in the New. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 129.

<sup>717</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W., Gingrich F. W. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 249.

<sup>718</sup>Seifrid M. A. In Christ. // DeRuiter K. Dictionary of Paul and his letters. No city: InterVarsity Press, 1983. – P. 433.

<sup>719</sup>Whiting A. B. The rapture of the Church // Bibliotheca Sacra. 102. 1945. P. 363.

According to some theologians, we are united to Christ to such a degree that we receive divine life from Him and can be deified. This is the doctrine of “theosis.” This theory was discussed and refuted in the previous chapter.

### **3. Participation in Christ’s Body, the Church**

Until now, we have focused our attention on the personal benefits that come to those who are in Christ. We must not fail to mention, though, the communal aspect of that union – those who are united to Christ are united to others who are also united to Him, i.e., with the Body of Christ. Campbell well states, “Union with Christ also involves the incorporation of believers into his body, temple, church... belonging to Christ means that we belong to one another.”<sup>720</sup>

Best is correct in his view that one can see in the “the Body of Christ” the concept of corporate personality – if Christ is the Head both of our corporate personality and of the Church, then the phrase “the Body of Christ” is appropriate to express our solidarity both with Him and with one another.<sup>721</sup> Clowney concurs, “Paul’s concept of the body of Christ is drawn from his doctrine of our union with Christ,”<sup>722</sup> as does Campbell, “The nature of the church... is grounded in union with Christ.”<sup>723</sup> Shedd writes similarly, “The doctrine of the Body of Christ is there for an explicit application of the Hebraic conception of corporate personality.”<sup>724</sup>

The interpretation of the “Body of Christ” metaphor has drawn much attention in scholarly circles. It occurs so often in Paul’s writings that it is difficult to call it a mere metaphor. In three passages, in fact, Paul practically equates the Body with the Church: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22-23), “He is also head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18), and, “I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church” (Col 1:24). In spite of the difficulty of precisely defining the metaphorical character of this designation, the formula “Body of Christ” brilliantly expresses the very essence of the Church, since the Church consists of born-again people who manifest together the life of Jesus Christ and accomplish together His ministry.

### **D. The Benefits of Being in Christ**

Having defined our position in Christ as being: (1) beneficiaries of His representation, (2) participants in His redemptive events, and (3) members of His Body, we can now specify the concrete blessings that come to us in virtue of this position.

Although the blessings of God are varied, Taber, along with others, reminds us that they all come to us thanks to our union with Christ: “All the blessings of God are ours by virtue of our union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. God meets every human need through the message of the Cross.”<sup>725</sup>

#### **1. Benefits Connected with His Representative Role**

Christ’s work as our representative relates our legal position or status before God. As our corporate head, He is able to occupy our place, and we in turn, as far as it is possible for humans, can occupy His. Therefore, there exist two dimensions to His representative work. On the one hand, He can take upon Himself the punishment for our sins, occupying our place of guilt before God, even though He never sinned. On the other hand, He shares with us His righteousness and His sonship. Therefore, Christ’s representative work provides

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<sup>720</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 409.

<sup>721</sup>Best, p. 106.

<sup>722</sup>Clowney, *The Biblical theology of the Church*, p. 56.

<sup>723</sup>Campbell C. R., p. 383.

<sup>724</sup>Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 165.

<sup>725</sup>Taber M. Christ – the message and the messenger // *Grace Journal*. 2(2). 1961. P. 22.

forgiveness of sins, the gift of righteousness, and adoption as God's children. In subsequent chapters (9 and 10), we will describe in detail the glorious benefits of being forgiven of our sins, justified before God, and adopted into His family.

## **2. Benefits Connected with Participation in His Redemptive Events**

Unlike Christ's role as our representative, our participation in the redemptive events of Christ's career do not result in a special *position* or status before God, but in a change in our spiritual *condition*, that is, how we live. Thanks to Christ's representative work, we obtain a special status before God (forgiven, justified, adopted), but because of our participation in His history, we experience life-transformation.

Nonetheless, as we argued earlier, our sharing in His history is possible only because of the "legal" position we occupy in Christ. Thanks to this legal status, the believer may become a partaker in certain events in Christ's life, namely His death, resurrection, exaltation, and Second Coming in glory.

Jesus not only bore the punishment for our sins in order to liberate us from guilt, but our old (sinful) self died along with Him so that we might experience liberty from sin's power and live in victory over it. God has, in fact, already accomplished the sanctification of the believer through the death of Christ (Rom 6:6-7). In addition, in Romans 7:1-4 Paul claims that in Christ believers have died to the Law and that this is a necessary step to bear fruit for God. Paul considered the Law not only powerless to justify a person, but also a hindrance to sanctification. One must be delivered from the Law to make progress in spiritual life (see Rom 6:14; 7:1-4; Gal 2:19-20; 5:1-4; 2 Cor 3:6).

Our participation in Christ's death also results in our being separated from the value systems of this world, as Paul writes, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). In addition, suffering for Christ is a certain consequence of following the Lord (2 Tim 3:12). We note, especially in John 15:18-20, that our suffering for Jesus is directly related to our union with Him. We suffer because we are in Him and are participants in His life (Rom 8:17).

The idea of "participation" concerns not only our sharing in Christ's history, but also His sharing in ours, in particular, in relation to healing from sickness and disease. The biblical testimony reads, "He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases" (Matt 8:17, from Isa 53:4). It is well accepted that Isaiah 53 in its entirety relates to the sufferings of Messiah. Matthew was acquainted with this prophecy and attributed Jesus' healing ministry to His work on the cross. Therefore, healing is yet another benefit derived from the sufferings of Messiah and therefore comprises one of the elements of our union with Christ.

According to Scripture, we receive regeneration in virtue of Christ's resurrection from the dead: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). Just as the Lord Jesus passed out of death to life, believers in Him pass out of the condition of spiritual death into a new condition – new life in Christ. At the Second Coming of the Lord, our participation in Christ's resurrection will be completed by the resurrection of our bodies and their transformation into glorified, immortal ones.

The next aspect of our position "in Christ" is being partakers in His ascension and exaltation. After His resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven, where He now resides. When He ascended, He also was exalted and became King of Kings (Phil 2:9). In other words, Jesus was exalted to the place of power and authority. Together with Him, God "seated us with Him in the heavenly {places} in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). Now, Jesus invites us to share His power and authority.

Finally, the believer will be revealed with Christ in glory at His Second Coming (Col 3:3-4; 1 Jn 3:2). At the present time, our life is "hidden with Christ." This means that, although we may enjoy many of the blessings connected with our union with Christ now, the full riches of that position are revealed only when Christ is revealed at His Second Coming. Therefore, Christ is our "hope of glory" (Col 1:27). Together with Peter, we all are partakers "of the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Pet 5:1). Additionally, Peter counsels us, "Fix your hope

completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). A great inheritance awaits us, since we are co-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom 8:17).

These benefits afforded us through our participation in Jesus’ death, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming will be objects of further study in chapters 11-16 in this volume, and in section 1 of volume 5 of this series, entitled “Hope.”

### **3. Benefits Connected with Participation in His Body, the Church**

Many practical applications flow from our inclusion in the Church, the Body of Christ. First, since all believers are united in one Body and in one union with the Head, then they must live in unity among themselves. We cannot tolerate discrimination between parties: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; also see 2 Cor 5:16; Eph 2:13-16).

Second, mutual care and concern should exist among members of the same Body. In a context addressing healthy interrelationships in the Church, Paul writes, “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if {one} member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor 12:26). In his epistle to the Ephesians, he continues the same thought: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32).

Third, each member of the Body occupies a certain place in it and is called to perform a certain function for the good of all: “...from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16; also see 1 Pet 4:10).

We will comment in more detail about life in the Body in chapters 16-17 of this volume, as well as in volume 5 of this series.

## **E. Other Important Aspects of Union with Christ**

### **1. Is the Principle of Corporate Personality Unfair?**

At first glance, it seems that the system of “corporate personality” and the corresponding systems of “union with Adam” and “union with Christ” are unjust. Adam’s transgression leads to misery for all his descendants. Christ alone is righteous, but sinners can be justified in Him.

Yet, without the system of corporate personality in place, matters would be much worse. If we began life without the inherited curse from Adam, as the heretic Pelagius taught in the fourth century, we would have no innate tendency to sin. Nonetheless, we would still have free will and the potential to sin. After our first personal sin, we would be under condemnation with no hope of redemption, since without the principle of solidarity we could receive no benefit from Christ. The absence of solidarity would affect both our relationship with Adam and our relationship with Christ. We would inherit neither sin from Adam, nor righteousness from Christ.

However, with the system of corporate personality in place, we begin life in a sinful state, having inherited guilt and depravity from Adam. Yet, by one act of faith, we can be joined to Christ and receive forgiveness and justification thanks to His representative and substitutionary work as our corporate head. Therefore, without solidarity, one transgression leads to damnation without hope of redemption, while with solidarity, one act of faith leads to justification and eternal life. We strongly prefer the second option.

### **2. Who Can Benefit from Union with Christ?**

The question arises, “Does union with Christ apply to all people, or just to believers in Jesus?” If Jesus represented *the whole* of humanity before the Father, then why would the benefits of His redemptive work not automatically apply to all? Did Paul not write, “As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom 5:18)? At first glance, it seems that both the sin of Adam and salvation in Christ have universal application.

However, the previous verse explains the matter: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). The word “receive” indicates that one benefits from one’s union with Christ only through putting personal trust in Christ. Whereas the consequences of Adam’s sin automatically transmit to his descendants, the abundance of grace is only for those who receive it.

### **3. When Will Our Union with Christ Be Fully Actualized?**

In discussing the topic of union with Christ, it is vitally important to define when one can expect to receive the benefits the Father offers us in His Son. Some aspects of this union are available immediately upon receiving Jesus, others are progressively realized in the Christian life, and still others are experienced only in eternity. In the world of theology, we encounter the phrase “already, but not yet.” This means that certain of the benefits of union with Christ are available now, but others – only in the future.

This approach corresponds to the biblical view of two eras or ages. The first is the present age, which is characterized by sin, death, and the powers of darkness. The coming age is one of perfection in the Kingdom of God. Between them, though, exists an intermediate period, in which the Christian now lives. During this stage, we experience our blessings in Christ only partially. Although believers in Jesus enjoy an abundance of grace now, they still await the consummation of God’s plan and the attainment of perfection at the end of time.

We must attempt to enumerate those benefits of being in Christ that relate to the present and those that are reserved for the future. First, we must hasten to clarify (contrary to Gaffin) that the present and future aspects of union with Christ do not correspond to “internal” (i.e., spiritual) and “external” (i.e., material) blessings – the former available now, and the latter available only in eternity.<sup>726</sup> Many “external” blessings are granted in Christ for believers today, and some “internal” benefits (such as freedom from temptation) await us only in the future.

All evangelical believers accept the biblical witness that in Christ we now have forgiveness of sins, justification before God and access to Him, adoption into His family, inclusion in the Universal Church, the gift of the Holy Spirit, authority over the devil, and participation in the sufferings of Christ. Benefits reserved for the future include physical resurrection, freedom from all temptation and affronts from the devil, and participation in the earthly reign of Messiah Jesus.

Two issues, though, remain hotly debated, namely the questions of complete sanctification in this life and physical healing from all disease. Although a thorough discussion of these topics would require writing separate volumes, we will attempt to give a brief proposal. Strictly from a biblical point of view, one may conclude that these states are theoretically possible, since the Scriptures give us high expectations for victory over sin and sickness. However, experience teaches us that their actual attainment is rarely if ever experienced. Therefore, we recommend that believers rather focus on *progress* and *improvement* in the areas of spiritual and physical health, standing on God’s promises of victory over sin and sickness. Even if their attainment is elusive, one can always rejoice in the final victory over these enemies that awaits us in eternity. In addition, separate chapters are devoted to these issues later in this volume.

### **F. How to Appropriately Union with Christ**

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<sup>726</sup>Gaffin, *The centrality of the resurrection*, p. 59-61.



Having recognized the magnificent blessings available to us in the Lord Jesus, we must next learn how to actualize these blessings in everyday life. Grudem confirms, “We also must be brought into an actual relationship with Christ through which the benefits of salvation can be applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>727</sup>

## 1. The Role of the Holy Spirit

According to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit plays an irreplaceable role in actualizing our union with Jesus Christ. The Spirit’s work is closely linked with that of the Savior in His death, resurrection, and ascension to glory. A key verse in this regard is John 16:14, where Jesus speaks of the Spirit, “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose {it} to you.”

Concerning the application of Christ’s death to the believer, we read, “If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). On the one hand, Jesus rendered our sinful nature powerless 2000 years ago through His death on Golgotha. On the other hand, the Spirit now applies this victory over sin to the believer. With the Spirit’s help, the believer can truly gain victory over the sinful nature. Similarly, although God has provided us with new life through the resurrection of Christ, the Spirit now accomplishes this spiritual renewal in us, believers. Paul writes to Titus, “He saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). Finally, although power for ministry is available through our identification with Christ in His exaltation, the Holy Spirit manifests this power through us (Acts 1:8).

Martin defends the position that the work of the Spirit is fully determined by the redemptive work of Christ and limited to those parameters. He claims, “There is no activity of the Spirit in the application of redemption apart from union with Christ.”<sup>728</sup> Rightmire agrees, “The Spirit never acts apart from Christ.”<sup>729</sup>

The Scriptures devote much attention to the work of the Spirit in sanctifying the believer. We often encounter in the Bible the combination of “sanctification” and “the Spirit” (e.g. Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11).<sup>730</sup> The Spirit lives within believers, guides them, and produces the fruit of the Spirit in them (Gal 5:22-23). Persons filled with the Spirit lead a godly life (Eph 5:18-21). They experience an internal spiritual renewal (Col 3:10). It is fair to conclude that the Spirit “activates” in the life of the believer the victory over sin that Jesus obtained through His death and the new life He provides through His resurrection.

Concerning sanctification, the role of the individual is often exaggerated. Although, as we will soon demonstrate, the human factor is indeed present and vital, Chase reminds us that the spiritual fruit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 is not the fruit of human effort, but the fruit of the Spirit, which is borne in the believer’s life “when he is living in vital union with Christ.”<sup>731</sup> Chafer adds, “The very purpose of union with Christ is that the believer may ‘bring forth fruit unto God.’”<sup>732</sup>

## 2. The Role of the Believer

On the one hand, we know that through union with Christ we have received all the benefits connected with salvation and that the Holy Spirit actualizes these blessings in our personal lives. On the other hand, this does not occur against our will, but requires our personal participation in the process.

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<sup>727</sup>Grudem W. *Systematic Theology*. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 842.

<sup>728</sup>Martin A. N., p. 11. Also see Shedd: “This resurrection life is made effective through the working of the Holy Spirit who represents Christ on earth” (Shedd, *Man in community*, p. 154).

<sup>729</sup>Rightmire, p. 792.

<sup>730</sup>White R. E. O. *Sanctification* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1053. The phrase “sanctifying work of the Spirit” in 1 Peter 1:2 refers to the work of the Spirit in drawing the unbeliever to Jesus (likewise in 2 Thes 2:13).

<sup>731</sup>Chase E. L. *Reflections of an industrial chaplain* // *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 107. 1950. P. 99.

<sup>732</sup>Chafer L. S. *Systematic theology* – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993. – V. 4. – P. 61.

The human factor in obtaining salvation's benefits, including sanctification, includes three elements, outlined in Galatians 5:19-25, namely, knowledge, faith and submission<sup>733</sup>:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The first element includes knowledge of God's will, so that we can walk in agreement with it. In verses 19-23, Paul list the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. These guidelines help us understand what is pleasing to the Lord and what is not. We gain our understanding of God's will by studying the Bible.

The second element is faith. In Galatians 5:24, we read that one must rely on Christ's finished work of salvation, which includes the crucifixion of the old, sinful nature. We can cite other passages of Scripture that emphasize the role faith in realizing union with Christ.

In discussing how union with Christ manifests in his own personal life, Paul writes, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by *faith* in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). He gives similar instruction to the church in Ephesus: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through *faith*" (Eph 3:17). In light of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, the saints in Rome must "*consider yourselves* to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Our faith becomes effective "through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake" (Philemon 6). In such an atmosphere of faith and expectation, the Holy Spirit works more freely and fully to apply Christ's redemptive work to our lives.

Martin makes another important qualification. The nature of faith is such that it is not based on subjective feelings, but on the acceptance of the truth of God's promises. He comments, "You are not to wait until you feel some kind of celestial flutter in your soul before you believe that you have been raised in Christ. This truth is addressed to faith; faith embraces it."<sup>734</sup>

Finally, Galatians 5:25 records the final step in the process of applying our union with Christ – submission: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." If we expect power from the Spirit for holy living, then we must allow Him to work in our lives and change us. Paul also stresses this aspect of sanctification in Romans 6, where we read, "Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin {as} instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members {as} instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom 6:13).

Furthermore, in light of the fact that we have died and been raised with Christ, Paul exhorts believers to "lay aside the old self" and "put on the new self" (Eph 4:22-24). It is interesting to note the parallel between this passage and Colossians 3:8-10, where Paul relates that the old man has already been put away in Christ: "You laid aside the old self with its {evil} practices, and have put on the new self" (Col 3:9-10). In one sense, the work of sanctification is already complete in Christ, and in Colossian 3, Paul speaks from that vantage point. On the other hand, the practical working out of that reality is still in process. This is what Paul emphasizes in Ephesians 4.

Therefore, M. Johnson correctly notes that union with Christ is not a call to passivity in relation to holiness: "Believers are commanded in the clearest possible terms to pursue holiness at all times and with all of their

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<sup>733</sup>It is interesting to note the same order in chapter 6 of Paul's instruction to the Romans. Victory over sin results from the same three factors: (1) knowledge, in this case that we have died with Christ (Rom 6:6), (2) faith to consider ourselves dead to sin (Rom 6:11), and active submission to the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:13).

<sup>734</sup>Martin A. N., p. 107.

persons.”<sup>735</sup> Nonetheless, if believers rely on their own zeal and determination to become holy, failure is sure to ensue. Grudem reasons likewise, “The role that we play in sanctification is both a *passive* one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an *active* one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification.”<sup>736</sup>

The following illustrations can aid us in understanding the relationship between faith and submission. When wanting to start a car, it would be foolhardy to simply sit in the driver’s seat and expect the car to drive itself. The driver must turn the key and operate the car. Likewise, it profits little to simply expect God’s intervention in our spiritual lives, while we do nothing, adopting a passive attitude toward spiritual growth.

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to stand behind the auto and attempt to push it with the key. The driver must utilize the power of the engine. In a similar way, believers can never make progress in their spiritual life relying on their own strength. One must rely on the finished work of Christ. Faith and submission harmoniously work together and complement each other.

We may suggest another illustration. To light a match, one needs two elements: a matchbox and oxygen in the air. The atmosphere may contain enough oxygen to do the job, but without a person’s participation striking the match, there will be no result. On the other hand, a person can strike the match all day, but if oxygen is somehow lacking, there will also be no result.

In a similar way, God’s power, made accessible through Christ’s redemptive work, is necessary for spiritual progress. A person, though, must apply effort and cooperate with the grace of God in Christ in a way similar to one striking a match. In addition, believers must create in their lives an atmosphere of faith, expecting the power of God to manifest, and strive for holiness within the context of that atmosphere of expectation.

Finally, we must discuss the relation of union with Christ and water baptism. Some key passages of Scripture seem to imply that a person enters into union with Christ at the moment of receiving water baptism and as a direct result of it. The topic of water baptism is covered in chapter 22 of this volume.

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<sup>735</sup>Johnson M. P., p. 136-137.

<sup>736</sup>Grudem, Systematic theology, p. 754

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## Section 2. Christ Our Representative

As we noted in our chapter on Union with Christ, certain benefits of salvation result from Christ's representation of humanity as its "corporate head." By virtue of His representative role as the corporate head of humanity, Jesus can occupy our place and we can occupy His (to the degree that it is humanly possible). Therefore, on the one hand, Christ took our place on the cross and bore our guilt to provide forgiveness of sins, although He never sinned. On the other hand, He shares with us His status of righteousness and sonship before the Father. So then, Christ's representative role provides believers with forgiveness of sins, forensic justification, and adoption into God's family. The following chapters will delineate these amazing blessings.

### Chapter 9: Forgiveness and Justification

#### A. Terminology

The Bible contains various terms that refer to forgiveness and justification. The primary Greek terms denoting forgiveness are ἄφεσις (*aphesis*), i.e., "forgiveness," καταλλαγή (*katallage*), i.e., "reconciliation," and ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*), i.e., "propitiation." Justification is expressed by the Hebrew רַצָּח (*tsadak*) and the Greek δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*).

The word ἄφεσις (*aphesis*) has several connotations. It could indicate "liberation," "release," "forgiveness," or "cancellation."<sup>737</sup> It occurs in the sense of "liberation" in Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me... to proclaim release (ἄφεσις) to the captives... to set free (ἄφεσις) those who are oppressed." Acts 10:43 provides an example of the sense "forgiveness": "Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins." The connection between these meanings is that forgiveness is "liberation" or "release" from the guilt and consequences of sin.

According to God's Word, the shedding of blood is necessary for granting forgiveness. Several biblical texts bring this out, such as Revelation 1:5 and Hebrews 9:22. What is the connection here? We must recall that the punishment for sin is death (see Ezek 18:4 and Rom 6:23). Leviticus 17 also provides insight:

Any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement (Lev 17:10-11).

Blood symbolizes death, i.e., life poured out. Therefore, through the shedding of blood, God's punishment for sin, that is, "death," is satisfied.

The term καταλλαγή (*katallage*) denotes "reconciliation" and is found three times in Romans 5:10-11 – both in verbal and nominal forms.<sup>738</sup> We read, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." The association between justification and reconciliation is plain – justification, which is a right standing before God, leads to peace with God.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 is key as well:

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<sup>737</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 155 (abbreviated BDAG).

<sup>738</sup>Pecota D. The Saving Work of Christ // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 391.

Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

An important point to notice here is that in Christ, God has already reconciled the world to Himself, that is, He has already accomplished everything necessary for justifying sinners. However, at the conclusion of this passage, Paul summons the readers to “be reconciled to God.” This indicates that persons must respond to God’s initiative and come to Him in repentance and faith to obtain forgiveness of sins and justification before Him.<sup>739</sup>

The Greek term ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*) is rendered “propitiation,” implying “satisfaction.” The question, then, arises, “Why does God need to be propitiated?”<sup>740</sup> Some answer that propitiation is necessary because God’s law has been broken and, therefore, He must receive full retribution for the transgressions. Others add that propitiation also includes satisfying God’s wrath for sin. Both ideas enjoy biblical support.

The mercy seat on the ark of the covenant is an excellent example of the idea of propitiation. The mercy seat was the place where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled to secure Israel’s forgiveness before God. It is significant to note that in Hebrews 9:5, the word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*) is used in reference to the mercy seat. In addition, the verbal form of ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*) is found in Luke 18:13 and translated there “be merciful.” In that text as well, the emphasis is on propitiation for the sinner before God.

Although the Old Testament speaks of propitiation only metaphorically, the New Testament reveals that true propitiation has come in the person of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is both the propitiatory sacrifice for sins, and the priest who offers the sacrifice. Finally, this term appears in the writings of Paul (Rom 3:25) and John (1 Jn 2:2; 4:10), where it refers to the propitiation made by the shed blood of Jesus.

The most recognized term for righteousness in the Old Testament is צַדִּיק (*tsadak*). Its original meaning was “straight.”<sup>741</sup> It describes a standard that serves to measure items. For example: “You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin” (Lev 19:36). The word “just” translates the Hebrew צַדִּיק (*tsadak*).

The Greek term for righteousness, δικαιοσύνη (*dikaïosune*), derives from the word δίκη (*dike*) meaning “punishment.”<sup>742</sup> The Greeks personified this idea in one of their gods – Dike, who represented the principle of law and order.

Often, δίκη (*dike*) implied observance of the customs of Greek society, but it could also connote virtuous living in general.<sup>743</sup> The idea of δικαιοσύνη (*dikaïosune*) differed from the Hebrew צַדִּיק (*tsadak*) in that the Old Testament required conformity not to societal expectations, but to the will of God. In Old Testament thought, righteousness was a standard based not on human tradition, but on God’s commandments. Therefore, when in the New Testament or the Septuagint we meet up with the term δικαιοσύνη (*dikaïosune*), it draws its meaning from the Hebrew term צַדִּיק (*tsadak*), i.e., conformity to Yahweh’s laws.

## B. Biblical Survey and the Intertestamental Period

### 1. Old Testament

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<sup>739</sup>Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 330.

<sup>740</sup>BDAG, p. 474.

<sup>741</sup>Brown F., Driver S. R., Briggs C. A. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Electronic Edition, Logos Bible Software. – P. 842-843.

<sup>742</sup>BDAG, p. 250.

<sup>743</sup>Schrenk G. *δικαιοσύνη* // Kittel G., Bromiley G. W. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* / Trans. Bromiley G. W. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964. – V. 2. – P. 193.



In the Old Testament, righteousness was closely connected with keeping the Mosaic Law. Yahweh spoke through Moses, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them" (Lev 18:5). God repeated this principle later in Israel's history: "I gave them My statutes and informed them of My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live" (Ezek 20:11, cf. 20:13, 21). Nehemiah repeats it again in his day "(Israel) did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live" (Neh 9:29).

The Old Testament also reveals, however, that people are incapable of attaining to perfect righteousness through the Law: "Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who {continually} does good and who never sins" (Ecc 7:20). The psalmist laments, "They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Ps 14:3), and, "Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous" (Ps 143:2). Therefore, the Lord, who desires to save people (Ezek 18:32; 33:11), must provide humanity with another way to find acceptance with Him.

It is interesting to note that from the very beginning of human history, worshipers of God practiced animal sacrifice. God received such offerings from Abel (Gen 4:4), Noah (Gen 8:20), and Job (Job 42:7-9). Sacrifices were offered not only in thanksgiving, but also for propitiation. In addition, through the offering of the Passover Lamb, Israel was spared from the hand of the "destroyer" (Ex 12:23). Each generation in Israel was obligated to observe the Passover and refrain from work during that time (Lev 23:4-8).

Eventually, Yahweh established a very comprehensive sacrificial system (Lev 1-6) and appointed priests and articles for performance of the rites (Ex 25-40). All sacrifices offered to the Lord must be without defect (Lev 3:1; 4:3; 4:32; 6:6; 14:10). Through the sacrificial system, Yahweh provided forgiveness for His people (Lev 9:7).

Within the ark of the covenant lay the Mosaic Law, and the mercy seat, which served as the place of propitiation, was placed over it (Ex 25:17-22). This meant that the symbol of redemption from sin lay between the Law, which condemned the people, and the presence of Yahweh. The cover of the ark, that is, the mercy seat, was sprinkled with blood once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29-34). Work was strictly forbidden on that day (Lev 23:26-32).

Nevertheless, the most direct reference to obtaining righteousness before God is found before the giving of the Law or the institution of the sacrificial system. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham responded to God's promise to give him offspring: "Then he believed in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." Here, righteousness came not through observance of law, but by an act of faith.

The Psalms present us with many examples of crying to the Lord for forgiveness: "Forgive our sins for Your name's sake" (Ps 79:9; cf. Ps 25:7, 11; 41:4). The psalmist also relates that God indeed forgave sin (Ps 84:3) and continues to do so: "Who pardons all your iniquities.... As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:3, 12). In light of God's mercy, the psalmist exclaims, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom Yahweh does not impute iniquity" (Ps 32:1-2).

In the writings of the prophets, we again see God's willingness to forgive the sin of His people: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Isa 43:25). Forgiveness of sins is part of the new covenant that Yahweh will make with Israel "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer 31:34, cp. Jer 33:8; Isa 33:24). The Old Testament presents forgiveness in pictorial fashion: God has "cast all my sins behind (His) back" (Isa 38:17), and, "He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19).

The prophets also speak of righteousness as a gift from God. Isaiah especially emphasizes this truth: "In Yahweh all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory" (Isa 45:25), "'Their vindication is from Me,' declares Yahweh" (Isa 54:17), and, "He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness" (Isa 61:10). Wrapping someone in a robe of righteousness is dramatized in Zechariah 3:3-5, where Joshua the priest is stripped of his "filthy garments," and clothed in "festal robes."

Also important to note is that God Himself became the righteousness of His people. Jeremiah declares, “Yahweh our righteousness” (Jer 23:6; cf. Jer 33:16). Moreover, Daniel writes that with the advent of Messiah, the time will come “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan 9:24-25).

Under the figure of the “Suffering Servant of Yahweh,” Isaiah describes how Messiah will accomplish His work of justification. He will bring both Jews and Gentiles to God (Isa 49:5-7; 52:15). He will suffer (Isa 50:6) and by means of His suffering, will provide justification: “By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11).

The prophet Habakkuk picks up on the theme of Genesis 15:6 – that righteousness comes by faith: “The righteous will live by his faith (אֱמוּנָה)” (Hab 2:4). The term אֱמוּנָה (*amunah*) typically denotes “faithfulness” and usually refers to God’s faithfulness (see Deut 32:4), but sometimes to a person’s faithfulness as well (Prov 12:22).<sup>744</sup> Therefore, it would also be proper to translate Habakkuk 2:4 as follows: The righteous will live by his faithfulness (אֱמוּנָה). This latter translation, though, differs from Paul’s quotation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11.

## 2. Intertestamental Period

After the destruction of the temple and discontinuation of the sacrificial system, the Jews needed to find another means for obtaining forgiveness of sins and justification before God.<sup>745</sup> Several methods were employed.

Some saw redemption through personal suffering. For example: “Happy is the man whom the Lord remembereth with reproofing, and whom He restraineth from the way of evil with strokes, that he may be cleansed from sin, that it may not be multiplied (*Ps Sol*, 10.1), and, “Then therefore were they chastened that they might be sanctified (*2 Baruch*, 13.10, cf. *Tobit*, 1.5; 13.2-9; *2 Macc*, 6.12-17).

Another method was by the vicarious suffering of the martyrs: “Our country was purified, they having as it were become a ransom for our nation’s sin; and through the blood of these righteous men and the propitiation of their death, the divine Providence delivered Israel that before was evil entreated” (*4 Macc*, 17.22).

Often, it was supposed that good works would justify one before the Lord. In the *Psalms of Solomon*, we read, “He maketh atonement for (sins of) ignorance by fasting and afflicting his soul, and the Lord counteth guiltless every pious man and his house” (*Ps Sol*, 3.9-10). Furthermore, the book of *Sirach* regards obedience as a substitute for sacrifice: “He that keepeth the law multiplieth offerings; he sacrificeth a peace-offering that heedeth the commandments” (*Sirach*, 35.1-2). Other alternatives were confession of sin before God (*Baruch*, 1.15-3:8; *The Prayer of Azariah*), obtaining wisdom (*1 Enoch*, 81.5-82.3; *Sirach*, 24.23-24) or awaiting God’s eschatological cleansing (*1 Enoch*, 10.20; *1QS*, 4.20-22).

The intertestamental writers also debated the question of who would be Yahweh’s instrument of bringing salvation to His people.<sup>746</sup> We hasten to mention, though, that they were expecting a political deliverance more than a spiritual salvation. Among those expected to deliver Israel were: King David (*Ps Sol*, 17), i.e., the Messiah (*4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch*), a coming priest (*Testament of Levi*, 14-18; *Ps Sol* 2.3; 8.11-13) or both together (*1QS*, 9.11; *CD*, 20.1; *1QSa*, 2.11-21; *Sirach*, 45.23-26; 47.1-11). Along with these, some expected the appearance of a coming prophet (*1QS*, 9.11; *4QTestimonia*).

Finally, in the first book of *Enoch*, we often encounter a heavenly Son of Man, who will be an eschatological judge and deliverer for Israel (*1 Enoch*, 46.1-3; 47; 48.8-10; 49.3-4; 62.2-3). Sometimes he is identified with the Suffering Servant (*1 Enoch*), but at times he is the Servant’s savior (*Wisdom Sol*, 2, 5).

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<sup>744</sup>Scott J. J. *Jewish Backgrounds of the NT*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 1995. – P. 51; Packer J. I. Faith // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 431.

<sup>745</sup>Nielsburg W. E. *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003. – P. 66-80.

<sup>746</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 93-116.

In conclusion, we will draw on the research of Donald Carson, who seeks to discover whether in the intertestamental period the Jews sought salvation through their covenant relationship with Yahweh, or through personal obedience.<sup>747</sup> He concluded that, as a rule, the Jews leaned toward the second option. The Qumran community, for example, taught that God accepts people based on their personal dedication to Him. We see the same in the books: *Joseph and Aseneth*, *The Lives of Adam and Eve*, *Tobit*, *Judith*, and the additions to Daniel and Esther. The following writings speak more of salvation through the covenant: *4 Ezra*, *Jubilees*, *2 Baruch*, and the *Apocalypse of Zechariah*, yet even in these books, one may forfeit his or her place in the covenant through personal disobedience.

### 3. New Testament

At the beginning of the New Testament era, most first-century Jews believed that salvation came through good works. Therefore, when Jesus arrived He saw the need to correct this misconception. He taught His disciples that if one seeks justification through the Law, one must perfectly observe the Law: “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses {that} of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20).

However, just as the Old Testament asserted, Jesus also affirmed that no one can perfectly keep God’s commands, but all stand in need of God’s mercy. He addresses those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous” in the following parable:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: “God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other (Lk 18:10-14).

We must underscore another instance where Jesus showed that justification by the Law was unattainable. A certain one approached Him with the question: “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” (Matt 19:16). Jesus responded that he must not only keep the whole Law, but also sell all his possessions and follow Him. When this individual went away crestfallen, Jesus shocked His disciples with the following statement:

When the disciples heard {this,} they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” And looking at {them} Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:25-26).

From the very beginning of His earthly life, Jesus was declared the Savior from sins (Matt 1:21). He announced that He would give His life “a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). During the first Lord’s Supper, Jesus revealed that He was establishing a new covenant with His disciples through His shed blood (Lk 22:20).

On the cross of Calvary, Jesus accomplished our redemption when He gave His life for the sins of the world. At the moment of His death, the Father confirmed that the sin debt was fully paid and that the way to His presence was now open: “Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt 27:51). The Good News of salvation through the redemptive work of God’s Son was proclaimed by the apostolic church (Acts 10:43; 20:28).

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<sup>747</sup>Carson D. A. Summaries and Conclusions // Carson D. A., O’Brian P. T., Seifrid M. A. Justification and Variegated Nomism. – Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001. – V. 1. – P. 505-548.

In the General Epistles, we learn more about Jesus' sacrifice. James begins by implying that justification by the Law is unattainable: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one {point,} he has become guilty of all" (Jam. 2:10). Consequently, the way to righteousness must be independent of the Law. On the other hand, James insists that justifying faith must manifest itself in good works. He appeals to the histories of Rahab and Abraham in support (Jam 2:14-26).

Peter affirms that Jesus, the Lamb of God, redeemed us by His blood (1 Pet 1:19). This was God's plan "from the foundation of the world" (1 Pet 1:20). The Holy Spirit set us apart to be sprinkled with Christ's blood (1 Pet 1:2). The work of redemption was accomplished at Calvary: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24), and, "Christ also died for sins once for all, {the} just for {the} unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

The themes of redemption and justification through Jesus' sacrifice are central in the epistle to the Hebrews. The epistle presents Jesus as a high priest who offers a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of all people (Heb 3:1; 8:1). Yet, Jesus is not only the priest, but also the sacrifice (Heb 7:27; 13:10-12). His blood cleanses from sin (Heb 1:3) and cleanses the conscience (Heb 9:13-14). His sacrifice is sufficient "once and for all" (Heb 7:27; 9:26-28).

We rejoice not only that Jesus offered His life as a sacrifice, but also that the Father received His sacrifice: "By the grace of God He might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). Through the blood of the Lamb, God shows mercy and forgives sins (Heb 9:12-15; 12:24). He no longer remembers our sins and transgressions (Heb 10:17). Consequently, we have boldness to approach the Father in virtue of the new covenant in the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb 7:19; 10:19-22).

In his epistles, Paul speaks much of the gift of righteousness. He boldly states the impossibility of obtaining right standing before God except by means of receiving the gift of righteousness: "A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 2:16). In the third and fourth chapters of Galatians, Paul insists and proves that good works and observance of the Law do not result in salvation, but only faith in Jesus Christ attains this goal. The Law was given not to justify, but to condemn (Gal 3:22).

Paul even strictly warns that those who return to the Law for justification forfeit God's grace for salvation. (Gal 5:4). Commenting on Galatians 1:8-9, Horton stresses how important this doctrine was for Paul: "Paul considered this doctrine to be so central that he regarded its explicit denial as 'anathema' – that is, an act of heresy that the Galatian church was on the verge of committing."<sup>748</sup>

Similar to what Paul wrote to the Galatians, he reminds Titus that salvation is by faith apart from works:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to {the} hope of eternal life (Tit 3:5-7).

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul reveals to what degree the Father considers us righteous: "He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 1:30, the Bible teaches, "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." In Him, believers "were washed," "were sanctified," and "were justified" (1 Cor 6:11).

The Word of God reveals that the degree of righteousness that the believer receives from God is the same degree of righteousness that God the Son Himself possesses. We receive His righteousness.<sup>749</sup> We are

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<sup>748</sup>Horton M. S. *Traditional Reformed View* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 777.

<sup>749</sup>Horton qualifies this point, stating that the righteousness that is imputed to the believer is not God's divine attribute of righteousness, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ which He attained during His life of obedience (Horton, *Traditional Reformed*

participants is a “great exchange”: Jesus takes upon Himself our sin, and we receive His righteousness. Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

Paul considered the death of Christ the heart of the gospel: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3). Redemption was accomplished by His shed blood (1 Cor 6:20; Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14, 20-22). He died for all (1 Tim 2:6; Tit 2:11; Eph 2:14-16). His death delivers us from future wrath (1 Thes 1:10; Eph 5:2). In Christ, the believer is blameless before God (Eph 1:4).

The fact that Paul so frequently addresses the question of justification demonstrates its importance in God’s salvation plan. Seifrid claims, “The repetition of an idea in varying contexts, which we have seen is the case with the theme of forensic justification, commends it as being of theological importance to Paul.”<sup>750</sup>

The most convincing case for justification by faith comes from Paul’s epistle to the Romans. In chapter 1 of that correspondence, he boldly claims, “For in (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘but the righteous {man} shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:17).

Furthermore, after Paul advances proof for the fallen and hopeless state of humanity in general, he reveals that God justifies people on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ, which is received by faith:

...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:24-26).

Paul concludes that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith and that the Law cannot justify either group. The Law plays no role in the justification of the sinner. In this way, God accomplishes His goal of eliminating human boasting and undermining human pride.<sup>751</sup>

In Romans chapter 5, Paul associates the imputation of righteousness to believers with their union with Christ. Similar to how people, in union with Adam, inherit the consequences of his disobedience, believers in Jesus receive the gift of righteousness in virtue of their union with Him.<sup>752</sup> In this context, Paul contrasts the righteousness received through Christ with the condemnation received through Adam. This means that Paul is speaking here not about righteousness in the sense of proper behavior, but in the sense of right standing with God.<sup>753</sup>

In chapter 5, we also learn that as a result of the forgiveness of sins, believers now have peace with God (Rom 5:1), that is, “reconciliation.” Paul declares, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom 5:10-11). He writes a similar message to the Corinthians: “Now all {these} things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ” (2 Cor 5:18).

However, in his teaching Paul reserves a place for understanding righteousness as right behavior: “Having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in {further} lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in

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View, 904-905). Shrenk prefers a different variation: “The righteousness of God is God’s alone; man is taken up into it and set in it” (Schrenk, v. 2, p. 203).

<sup>750</sup>Seifrid M. A. *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme*. – Leiden: Brill, 1992. – P. 263.

<sup>751</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 253, 256.

<sup>752</sup>Horton, *Traditional Reformed View*, 920-923.

<sup>753</sup>*Ibid.*, 1721-1722.

sanctification” (Rom 6:18-19). Therefore, for Paul, righteousness is both a legal status before God and a lifestyle or pattern of behavior.

Nevertheless, Paul clarifies that one can live righteously only with the help of the Holy Spirit: “...so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). Therefore, we may delineate two aspects of righteousness. On the one hand, we are “in Christ,” clothed in His righteousness. On the other hand, we receive the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and directs us into holy living.

We observe an interesting fact in comparing the terms “justification” and “righteousness” in the Greek text. Typically, we understand the English term “justification” to describe our position before God, while “righteousness” concerns our behavior. Yet, the same Greek term denotes both aspects – δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*).<sup>754</sup> Nonetheless, it is critical to distinguish these two senses of the word. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Romans. In chapters 3-5, δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*) refers to our forensic status before God, i.e., justification. In chapters 6-8, though, δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*) refers to right behavior.

This shows that God justifies us prior to our manifesting proper behavior in our practical lives. Right living is not the means to attain peace with God, but rather the result or consequence of justification received by faith. Schrenk summarizes,

Thus, without any sense of difficulty or contradiction, the thought of pardoning and forensic righteousness passes over into that of righteousness as the living power which overcomes sin.... In Paul, therefore, δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*) can denote both the righteousness which acquits and the living power which breaks the bondage of sin.<sup>755</sup>

In Philippians chapter 3, Paul points out two false views of righteousness. In the initial nine verses, he addresses the issue of legalism, where persons seek justification before God on the basis of good deeds or religious rites. In this context, Paul describes his own journey and the prestigious position he previously held in Judaism. However, he now rejects this as a means to be justified before God. The chapter ends, though, with a rebuke of a second false view – a casual attitude toward righteous living among those claiming justification by faith.

Between these opposite poles, in verses 9-16, Paul defines the proper attitude toward righteousness. He categorically insists that a person is justified by faith in Christ alone. Paul seeks to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9). At the same time, he strives in practice to be like Christ: “...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;” (Phil 3:10).

So then, Paul includes in his approach both aspects of righteousness – his position before God by faith and his conduct before God in life. At the same time, he maintains these aspects in proper order – first, the reception of the gift of righteousness, then displaying righteousness in practical living.

We will conclude our biblical survey by reviewing the teaching of the apostle John, who affirms together with other New Testament writers that salvation is not by keeping the Law since “none of you carries out the Law” (Jn 7:19). However, Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it (Jn 3:16-17; 12:47). “He who believes in Him is not judged” (Jn 3:18). John the Baptist called Jesus “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29). Christ is also the Good Shepherd, who “lays down His life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11).

In his epistles and in the book of Revelation, John continues to speak of forgiveness and redemption in Christ, who is our “Advocate with the Father” and “is the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 2:1-2). He came to “to

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<sup>754</sup>Schrenk notes that outside of Paul’s writings, the term δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσύne*) is nearly always used in the New Testament to indicate proper behavior (see Schrenk, v. 2, p. 198).

<sup>755</sup>Ibid., v. 2, p. 209-210.

take away sins” (1 Jn 3:5), and sins “have been forgiven you for His name's sake” (1 Jn 2:12). God the Father sent His Son to lay down His life for the salvation of the world (1 Jn 4:9-14). Believers are recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life (Rev 13:8; 20:12, 15). “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (Rev 22:14).<sup>756</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

The most significant aspects of our salvation, the ones that determine our eternal destiny, are the forgiveness of sins and justification. Without them, a person can have no basis for expecting to participate in the kingdom of God. We recall that our redemption from sin is directly related to the representative role of our Savior. One of the roles of a representative is to take the place of another. The Bible plainly teaches that the Son of God took our place of punishment on the cross, so that believers could receive forgiveness of sins.

Christ’s representation also results in the believer being counted righteous before God *in Him*. This is God’s act of “justification.” In light of the biblical evidence we have examined, we concur with Erickson’s definition: “Justification is God’s action pronouncing sinners righteous in his sight.”<sup>757</sup> We note here that justification is God’s pronouncement that the sinner is justified before Him. Justification, then, concerns one’s status before God.

We will revisit several thoughts mentioned above to clarify the mechanism of justification, that is, exactly how God justifies the sinner. The key passage in this regard is Romans 3:24-26, where the basis for God’s justifying act is revealed:

...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:24-26).

In order for the Lord to remain just Himself while justifying the sinner, He must somehow fully punish the sins committed by people. This He did by offering His Son as a propitiatory sacrifice. Now God, having punished sin entirely, can forgive and justify the sinner.

The mechanism of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ is clearly depicted in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where we read, “He made Him who knew no sin {to be} sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Here, we see described the great spiritual exchange of sin for righteousness. Jesus took upon Himself our transgressions and their consequences, and we receive in exchange His perfect righteousness. This is how God can declare or consider sinners righteous – they are granted the righteousness of Christ.

Thiessen comments on this “great exchange”: “The results of this union with Christ are the imputation of our sins to Him and of His righteousness to us.”<sup>758</sup> Mueller echoes this thought – justification is “the act of God by which He removes from the believer the sentence of condemnation to which he is subject because of his sin, releases him from guilt, and ascribes to him the merit of Christ.”<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>756</sup>The King James Versions reads not “those who wash their robes” (πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν), but “they that do His commandments” (ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ). Yet, the reading “those who wash their robes” boasts better textual support. The King James variant is also ruled out by comparison with Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, where John does not use the expression ποιοῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ (“they that do His commandments”), but employs the phrase τηρεῖν τὰς ἐντολὰς (“keep His commandments”). One would expect to see this latter phrase in Revelation 22:14 if John truly wrote these words (see Metzger B. M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. – London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. – P. 690).

<sup>757</sup>Erickson M. Christian theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 968.

<sup>758</sup>Thiessen, p. 370.

<sup>759</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 367.

We are all born in sin and under threat of condemnation. Yet, Jesus removed our guilt, taking upon Himself our sins. Because of the substitutionary and redemptive work of Christ, God issues to us a verdict of justified. In addition to that, He imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ. Now, we stand before God with the same measure of righteousness that His Son possesses.

Justification differs from forgiveness of sins in the following way. Forgiveness simply removes the guilt of the sinner, which does, of course, provide a type of justification resulting from the removal of guilt. However, God provides us in Christ a better foundation for a right standing before Him – the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the believer. Therefore, the justification of the Christian includes not only the removal of guilt, but also the acquisition of Christ's righteousness. This means that believers' right standing with God does not depend on or is sustained by their perfect obedience to Him in the future. The still imperfect Christian who is going through the process of sanctification is still considered perfectly righteous before God in Christ.

According to the Bible, righteous living follows after receiving the gift of righteousness. We discuss this progressive transformation of the believing individual in the chapter "Sanctification." Nonetheless, those who turn to the Lord in repentance and faith immediately receive justification and enjoy right standing with God. As in the case of Abraham, faith is credited to us as righteousness (Rom 4:22-25).

At the same time that justification occurs, the Holy Spirit enters the heart of believers to regenerate them. Thanks to the presence of the Spirit, the Christian begins to do good works, not to merit justification, but as a result of the gift of righteousness already imputed. The process of sanctification continues throughout life and will eventually lead to perfection. Yet, even before one attains that level, the believer in Jesus is already considered a righteous person before God through faith.

So then, we must understand that good works themselves do not justify a person, but rather serve as evidence that true saving faith is present in the heart. Scripture conclusively affirms that justification comes exclusively through faith in Jesus Christ. We will further discuss the nature of saving faith in chapter 20 of this volume.

## C. Historical Development

### 1. Early Church

Although the biblical teaching on justification by faith is sufficiently clear, especially in the writings of the apostle Paul, the Church Fathers poorly grasped this vital concept. We will attempt to trace the development of this departure from the biblical standard.

On the one hand, in the writings of the Church Fathers we do see frequent references to the New Testament understanding of justification by faith.<sup>760</sup> John Chrysostom (4th c.), for example, wrote, "(He) hath suffered Him that did no wrong to be punished for those who had done wrong... thereby freely bestoweth upon us those great goods which we never looked for; (for he says, that 'we might become the righteousness of God in Him')" (*Homily on 2 Corinthians*, 11.5).

We can cite Jerome (4th-5th c.) as well: "We are then righteous when we confess that we are sinners, and our righteousness depends not upon our own merits, but on the mercy of God" (*Against the Pelagians*, 1.13). Tertullian claims that faith, "should impute righteousness to those who believe in him" (*Against Marcion*, 5:3). Irenaeus concurs, "Faith towards God justifies a man" (*Against Heresies*, 4.5.5). According to Ambrose, "We are not justified by works but by faith" (*De Jacob et vita beata*, 2.2).

The earliest of Christian writers, Clement of Rome (1st c.) also expounds this view:

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<sup>760</sup>Needham N. Justification in the Early Church Fathers // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 25-54.



And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, nor by our own wisdom, or understanding, or godliness, or works which we have wrought in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever (*1 Clement*, 32).

Another early thinker sharing this opinion was Justin Martyr: “For the goodness and the loving-kindness of God, and His boundless riches, hold righteous and sinless the man who, as Ezekiel tells, repents of sins” (*Dialogue*, 47). In Origen’s words, “The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ reaches all who believe... it supplies this glory not for the sake of their merits nor for the sake of works, but freely to those who believe” (*Commentary on Romans*, 3.7.13).

Several Eastern Fathers share their views. Cyril of Jerusalem writes, “For if thou shalt believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (*Catechetical Lectures*, 5.10). Basil the Great adds, “For this is the true and perfect glorying in God, when a man is not lifted up on account of his own righteousness, but has known himself to be wanting in true righteousness and to be justified by faith alone in Christ” (*On Humility*, 22). According to Gregory Nazianzen, “He was in His own Person representing us.... He makes His own our folly and our transgressions” (*Orations*, 30.5-6).

On the other hand, from the earliest years of church history, some errant views crept into Christian theology which undermined the New Testament doctrine of justification. First, the Fathers began to require water baptism for salvation and justification.<sup>761</sup> Thus, justification was no longer by faith alone.

Second, a shift occurred in the Church’s understanding of redemption’s goal – not justification before God, but the attainment of immortality. Franks explains this trend: “The tendency to lay the chief stress on the gift of incorruption rather than on the gifts of righteousness or of faith (trust in God) marks the change experienced by Christianity in passing over from a Jewish to a Greek soil. From the very beginning of the Greek religion death is the object of supreme fear.”<sup>762</sup>

Third, Franks notes a move in the direction of moralism, especially in the works of Irenaeus. Franks claims that among the Gentiles in the Early Church, “Christianity was regarded as the knowledge of God and the law and the promise of immortality,” and, “Baptism was held to assure or communicate the gift of immortality with the forgiveness of pre-baptismal sin: for the rest of his life the Christian was under the law.”<sup>763</sup> Commenting on Werner’s critique of Irenaeus, Franks continues, “On the whole, the practical Christianity of Irenaeus, like that of the Apologists, is a moralism very different from the Pauline Christianity.”<sup>764</sup>

Scheck connects the moralism of the Fathers with Marcion’s rejection of the Old Testament as God’s Word and the God of the Old Testament as the God of Christianity. The Fathers may have felt compelled to resist this threat by stressing the moral aspects of the Christian faith.<sup>765</sup>

Horton suggests that an improper translation in the Vulgate may have misled Western Fathers in their understanding of justification. They translated the word δικαίω (*dikaioo*), i.e., “consider or pronounce righteous,” by the Latin term *justificare*, i.e., “make righteous.”<sup>766</sup>

In addition, Needham further clarifies the effect of moralism on the Fathers as follows.<sup>767</sup> He perceives in the teachings of many early Christian writers the concept of “double justification.” Water baptism supplies only

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<sup>761</sup>For example, Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, 16; Cyprian, *On Works and Alms*, 2; John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Gospel of John*, 27.1; Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 12.28 (see Needham, p. 41-42).

<sup>762</sup>Franks R. S. *The Work of Christ*. – London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962. – P. 32.

<sup>763</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>764</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>765</sup>Eddy P. R., Beilby J. K., Enderlein S. E. *Justification in Historical Perspective* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – P. 139-142.

<sup>766</sup>Horton, *Traditional Reformed View*, 881-882.

<sup>767</sup>Needham, p. 38-47, who also mentions Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.20; 4.6.

an “initial” justification, while the “final” justification is based on the believers’ behavior – did they perform the works of faith? Examine the following quotes:

Faith is effective for this, that it justifies those who approach God in their initial believing, if afterwards they remain in justification: however, without works of faith (not works of law) faith is dead (Jerome, *Commentary of the Epistle to the Galatians*).

Therefore, beloved, let not us either expect that faith is sufficient to us for salvation; for if we do not show forth a pure life... (John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Gospel of John*, 10.3).

I do not deny that sins may be diminished by liberal gifts to the poor, but only if faith commend what is spent (Ambrose, *On Repentance*, 2.9.83).

There is need of righteousness, that one may deserve well of God the Judge; we must obey His precepts and warnings, that our merits may receive their reward (Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church*, 15).

Eddy confirms our suspicion:

What does seem clear is that when the pre-Augustinian fathers wrote of the gracious, works-free nature of salvation/justification, many of them indexed this to initial justification, which itself was connected to conversion and/or baptism. Once initial justification had taken place, believers were expected to be caught up in a transformative process of growth in grace, virtue and good works.<sup>768</sup>

Augustine further developed this idea of “double justification.”<sup>769</sup> Although he affirmed that people are justified by grace through faith (*Letters*, 194.3.7; *On Rebuke and Grace*, 15.46), he did not have in mind so much a permanent forensic status before God, but forgiveness of sins and the impartation of a new nature. By means of an “imparted grace,” people can do good works that lead to their final justification. For Augustine, righteousness has more to do with people’s behavior than their status before God.

Wright comments on Augustine’s position: “Faith that fails to issue in good works is barren or dead and does not enjoy justification,” and, “Faith, which justifies without prior merit, always entails ensuring merit – the merit of good works done from faith.”<sup>770</sup>

The danger of such a teaching is that it creates the impression that one merits salvation by the “works of faith,” and that works somehow complete faith and makes one worthy of justification. On the one hand, Augustine himself recognized this danger: “For a man worketh not righteousness save he be justified: but by ‘believing on Him that justifieth the ungodly,’ he beginneth with faith; that good may not by preceding show what he hath deserved, but by following what he hath received” (*Commentary on the Psalms*, 111.3). On the other hand, he did nonetheless speak of double justification: “We have been justified, but *justitia* itself grows as we progress” (*Sermons*, 158.4.4; 158.5.5).<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>768</sup>Eddy, *Justification in Historical Perspective*, p. 123-125.

<sup>769</sup>McGrath A. E. *Historical Theology*. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. – P. 188-192; Franks, p. 29-33, 89, 100; Muller R.A. *Sanctification* // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986. – V. 4. – P. 326; Wright D. F. *Justification in Augustine* // McCormick B. L. *Justification in Perspective*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 55-72;

<sup>770</sup>Wright, p. 65-66.

<sup>771</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 66, 70.

Augustine exerted an enormous influence on future generations of the Church. McGrath affirms, “From the time of Augustine onward, justification had always been understood to refer to both the event of being declared righteous and the process of being made righteous.”<sup>772</sup>

In assessing the teaching of the Church Fathers on justification, we should note that this movement away from New Testament teaching began from the very beginning of the post-apostolic period. McGrath blames this departure on “inexactitude and occasional apparent naivety.”<sup>773</sup> In particular, in concord with the Greek worldview, emphasis fell on obtaining immortality more than on a right legal standing before the Lord. Furthermore, a strong emphasis on moralism crept into Christian teaching, which minimized the significance of God’s grace in our receiving the unmerited gift of eternal life. McGrath confirms that in the works of the Fathers, we witness a “works-righteousness approach to justification.”<sup>774</sup>

The most serious deviation, though, is that the Fathers lost (or maybe never really understood) the idea that justification was a permanent forensic position before God obtained by faith alone apart from works. They correctly taught that works indeed have a place in the Christian life. Yet, instead of teaching that faith *expresses itself* in works, they proposed that faith is *completed* by works (see chapter 20). Consequently, the Early Church reached the conclusion that until faith produces its corresponding fruit, even true faith is insufficient for salvation. This conviction led to the false teaching of double justification, which claims that our initial justification is not final.

The Church Fathers also erred in their understanding of the role of water baptism in salvation. Since baptism supposedly washed sins away, salvation was consequently understood as forgiveness of sins without the accompanying permanent right standing before God through faith. This forced the Early Fathers to come up with a method to restore one who sinned after receiving baptism – the system of confession and penance (see chapter 19).

## 2. Eastern Orthodoxy

For Catholics and Protestants, justification occupies the place of central importance among Christian dogmas. Among Eastern Orthodox, however, this doctrine is minimized and regarded only of secondary importance.

Let us listen to some leading Orthodox theologians concerning justification. Meyendorff, for example, writes, “Byzantine theology did not produce any significant elaboration of the Pauline doctrine of justification... (but) generally interpret the idea of redemption by substitution in the wider context of victory over death and of sanctification.”<sup>775</sup> From the passage, we see that Byzantine and Orthodox theology do not regard justification of primary importance. For them, salvation consists not in right legal standing with God, but in victory over death and sanctification.

Moreover, Meyendorff states, “Just as original sin did not consist in an inherited guilt, so redemption was not primarily a justification, but a victory over death.”<sup>776</sup> Here again, we see a digression from the biblical revelation. Orthodoxy does not appear to value the need to satisfy God’s justice. Lossky echoes this idea: “The error of Anselm (i.e., Catholic theology)... is that he desired to see in forensic relationships, contained in the term ‘redemption,’ an appropriate expression of the mystery of our salvation. He thought that he discovered in

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<sup>772</sup>McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 190.

<sup>773</sup>McGrath A. E. *A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. – 3rd ed. – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005. – P. 38; noted in Eddy, *Justification in Historical Perspective*, 116-117.

<sup>774</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>775</sup>Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 160.

<sup>776</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.

a forensic figure – the figure of redemption – the essence of truth,... evidence of the necessity that God must die for our salvation.”<sup>777</sup>

Here, Lossky mistakenly ascribes to Anselm the idea of a forensic redemption, when the source of that truth is actually the New Testament. Lossky is even ready to reject the salvific necessity of Jesus’ redemptive death. Again, he claims, “Is it not obvious that the Father received the sacrifice not because he required or needed it.”<sup>778</sup> Along with rejecting the redemptive value of Christ’s blood, Lossky also dismisses the necessity to satisfy God’s retributive justice: “The idea of redemption in no way implies the necessity of satisfying justice through punishment.”<sup>779</sup>

Florovsky affirms the same. Although he states, “Christ did indeed take upon Himself the sin of the world,” he continues by qualifying this position: “...but this is not to be explained by the idea of a substitutional sacrifice.”<sup>780</sup>

Kuraev also supports this opinion: “For Orthodoxy, sin is not so much guilt as it is sickness. God does not punish the sinner as a judge punishes a criminal. Here, we most likely have the relationship between a physician and a patient.”<sup>781</sup> Again, we witness a denial of the need to satisfy God’s justice. Kuraev also dismisses the redeeming power of Jesus’ blood: “Christ did not take upon Himself the legal or moral responsibility for the sins of people,” but rather “the aura of death.”<sup>782</sup>

Kuraev employs the following argument to defend his position. The prayer “Lord, have mercy” in Greek is Κύριε ἐλέεισον (*Kurie eleison*). The word ἐλέεισον (*eleison*), i.e., “mercy,” sounds similar to the word ἐλαίον (*elaion*), i.e., “oil,” which in antiquity served as a medicinal ointment. This allegedly shows that salvation consists not in forgiveness, but in healing.<sup>783</sup>

Finally, we cite Tubetsky on the Orthodox view: “Human nature, which has been internally damaged, can only be saved from within and not by an external act of redemption or sorcery.... A bank transaction of the ‘merit’ of Christ is unacceptable.”<sup>784</sup>

Mantzaridis explains the position of Gregory Palamas regarding Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>785</sup> From Palamas’ point of view, the death of Jesus plays an irreplaceable role in the process of deification. As noted earlier in chapter 8, according to the teaching of theosis, God’s plan is to communicate the deified human nature of Christ to His followers so that they could attain deification. Lossky agrees, “We must not separate redemption... from the entirety of the Divine plan – deification.”<sup>786</sup>

However, in order for Jesus to renew and deify humanity, He must pass through every stage of human life – from birth to death and resurrection. People’s sins, which were characteristic of their old nature, were annihilated by the death of the One who took upon Himself a “general human nature.” By means of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, humanity was glorified in the glorified humanity of Christ.

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<sup>777</sup>Лосский В. Н. Богословие и Боговидение / Общ. ред. Владимира Пислякова. – М.: Издательство Свято-Владимирского Братства, 2000. – Р. 278. Author’s translation.

<sup>778</sup>Лосский, Богословие и Боговидение, р. 279. Author’s translation.

<sup>779</sup>Ibid. Author’s translation.

<sup>780</sup>From Florovsky G. Collected Works of Georges Florovsky. – Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1976. – V. 3. – P. 102; noted in Nassif B. The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 47.

<sup>781</sup>Куреаев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – Р. 87. Author’s translation.

<sup>782</sup>Куреаев, р. 89-90. Author’s translation.

<sup>783</sup>Ibid.

<sup>784</sup>From the book *Смысл жизни*, р. 193, taken from Куреаева, р. 82. Author’s translation.

<sup>785</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 31-32.

<sup>786</sup>Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и догматическое богословие. – Москва: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – Р. 280. Author’s translation.

Working off the Orthodox conception of human mortality as the root of sin (see chapter 5), Rommen defends the idea that Jesus' sacrifice was not to secure propitiation before God, but rather to provide deliverance from death. This would, in turn, lead to victory over sin and the healing of human nature.

Rather than seeing the sacrifice as an attempt to assuage the offended honor of God or to silence his anger, the sacrifice is aimed at the root problem, which is the corruption of man's very nature and the inevitable result – death. Using the curse of death itself to defeat that which held humanity in its grip, Christ atones for our sins – but not by providing a payment of human debt owed to God but by assuming the consequence of our sin, namely death itself.<sup>787</sup>

Eastern Orthodox thinkers justify their neglect of the doctrine of justification by considering it only one aspect of the multifactorial biblical portrait of salvation. Lossky explains it this way:

We should not... create between God and humanity an unacceptable forensic relationship. It would be more correct to include these images into the nearly unlimited number of different images, each one of which is one aspect of an event that is inexpressible.<sup>788</sup>

We can find, then, in Eastern writings references to Christ's redemption in legal terms. For example, Athanasius writes, "But since it was necessary also that the debt owing from all should be paid again..."<sup>789</sup> Maximus the Confessor relates, "Innocent and sinless, he paid the whole debt for mankind, as if he himself were guilty," and Florovsky summarizes Maximus' thought: (In love) the Savior accepted sin and man's guilt."<sup>790</sup> We may also cite the Greek Orthodox Catechism:

For that reason our Savior offered himself in the atonement on the cross. By his human nature, he stood as the representative of the guilty; by his divine nature, he offered the ransom due to God; and being crucified for us, he satisfied the divine justice.<sup>791</sup>

All things considered, though, Clendenin correctly concludes, "In the history of Orthodox theology, on the other hand, it is startling to observe the near total absence of any mention of the idea of justification by faith. Justification by faith has received short shrift in Orthodoxy, and the most important text of Orthodox theology, John of Damascus' *The Orthodox Faith*, never even mentions the idea."<sup>792</sup> Other writers share this concern. According to Zaitsev, "The Orthodox Church teaches that salvation in essence cannot be compared to a judicial investigation."<sup>793</sup> Zankov writes in this regard:

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<sup>787</sup>Rommen E. *An Orthodox Perspective* // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 247.

<sup>788</sup>Лосский, *Очерк мистического богословия*, p. 281. Author's translation.

<sup>789</sup>*On the Incarnation*, 20.2.

<sup>790</sup>Florovsky G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Centuries* / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. – Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. – P. 236.

<sup>791</sup>Callinicos C.N. *The Greek Orthodox Catechism*. – New York: Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, 1960. – P. 29; noted in Horton M. *Response to Bradley Nassif* // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 125.

<sup>792</sup>Clendenin D. B. *Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis*. – *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1994. Vol. 37. P. 368.

<sup>793</sup>Зайцев Е. *Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе*. – М.: Библийско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – P. 22. Author's translation.

Contemporary Russian theologians almost always firmly reject a forensic, formal theory of salvation, and they cannot understand how one can ascribe to God such an anthropomorphism and attempt to represent the majestic and mysterious work of salvation in the form of a judicial process.”<sup>794</sup>

Finally, Orthodoxy shares with Roman Catholicism the understanding that only the faith that produces fruit (i.e., good works) can save a person. When the Lutheran Melancthon appealed to Jeremiah, the Patriarch of Constantinople, the latter rejected the Protestant understanding of faith, stating, “The catholic church demands a living faith, one that give witness of itself through good works.”<sup>795</sup>

The Synod of Jerusalem (1672) defined saving faith as follows:

We believe no one to be saved without faith. And by faith we mean the right notion that is in us concerning God and divine things, which, working by love, that is to say, by (observing) the Divine commandments, justifieth us with Christ.<sup>796</sup>

We also draw from the Greek Orthodox Catechism:

Faith in Christ without good works is not enough to save us. Good works by themselves are also not sufficient. Our salvation will be the outcome of a virtuous life permeated and sealed by the inestimable blood of the Only-begotten Son of God.<sup>797</sup>

In evaluating the Orthodox view, we agree with Zaitsev’s critique of this teaching. First, he claims that Orthodoxy neglects the most essential feature of our salvation – our justification before God: “The theologian must ask the question whether he actually emphasizes the most significant biblical themes, or ignores that to which the biblical authors devote their attention.”<sup>798</sup>

Mueller echoes this objection: “To justification *sola fide* all other doctrines of Scripture stand in relation of *cause* and *effect*, of *antecedens et consequens*.”<sup>799</sup> Luther said, “If we lose the doctrine of justification, we lose simply everything. Hence the most necessary and important thing is that we teach and repeat this doctrine daily.”<sup>800</sup>

We acknowledge that the Bible presents the concept of salvation in various forms and with different expressions. Yet, among them all justification stands supreme. Without it, no one can enter God’s kingdom. Additionally, Orthodoxy fails even to place justification on the same level with other biblical representations of salvation. Instead, they minimize or even dismiss this doctrine. For Orthodoxy, the primary concern of salvation is “deification,” which we discussed and refuted in chapter 7.

Second, Zaitsev correctly notes that in the Orthodox system, justification is confused with sanctification, even eclipsed by it: “In such a perspective no distinction is made between justification and sanctification.... It is one single movement, one uninterrupted process.”<sup>801</sup> The Bible, however, makes a clear distinction between them.

### 3. Roman Catholicism

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<sup>794</sup>Zankov S. The Eastern Orthodox Church. – Milwaukee, WI: Morehouse, 1930. – P. 54. Author’s translation.

<sup>795</sup>From the Epistle to the Lutheran theologians of Tubigen, noted in Pelikan J. The Christian Tradition. Vol 2, The Spirit of Eastern Christendom. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago: 1974. – P. 282.

<sup>796</sup>Robertson J. N. W. B. The Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem. – London: Thomas Baker, 1899. – P. 122.

<sup>797</sup>Callinicos C. N. The Greek Orthodox Catechism. – New York: Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, 1960. – P. 31; noted in Horton, Response to Bradley Nassif, p. 136.

<sup>798</sup>Зайцев, p. 252. Author’s translation.

<sup>799</sup>Mueller, p. 441.

<sup>800</sup>Luther’s works // Ed. J. Pelikan. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1963. – V. 26. – P. 26.

<sup>801</sup>Зайцев, p. 23.

The Catholic understanding of justification consists of the following features. When a candidate receives water baptism, God imparts righteousness, which is understood as spiritual strength, to the soul of the recipient. This impartation enables the candidate to perform good works and lead a moral life.<sup>802</sup> Therefore, "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man."<sup>803</sup> Justification "conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy."<sup>804</sup> In addition, "With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us."<sup>805</sup> From what has been said above, it is plain that for Catholics justification is not so much a judicial position before God as the impartation of a righteous nature to the recipient.

Moreover, for the good works performed in the strength of this imparted righteousness, a person receives merit from God which leads to justification in the sense of acceptance by God. At the same time, Catholics do not deny that salvation comes by "grace," since this righteousness is imparted to them as God's gift. God is the one who took the initiative to communicate this grace to them.

When someone performs good works by virtue of this imparted righteousness, he or she actually merits acceptance with God:

The merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful.<sup>806</sup>

Filial adoption, in making us partakers by grace in the divine nature, can bestow true merit on us as a result of God's gratuitous justice. This is our right by grace, the full right of love, making us "co-heirs" with Christ and worthy of obtaining "the promised inheritance of eternal life."<sup>807</sup>

No one can merit the initial grace which is at the origin of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods.<sup>808</sup>

O'Collins and Rafferty add that even though "imparted righteousness" is God's righteousness in the believer, it nonetheless remains in some sense our personal righteousness as well. Good works done by us in the strength of this imparted righteousness, not only brings God glory, but also earns us merit.<sup>809</sup>

Furthermore, this imparted righteousness does not result in justification before the Lord in a legal sense until it is manifest in a person's life. Therefore, salvation is, in fact, attained by the works performed with the aid of imparted righteousness.<sup>810</sup> We recognize here the influence of Augustine's teaching on "initial" and "final" justification. "Initial" justification is God's gift given at water baptism, while "final" justification is merited through bearing the fruit of faith, that is, good works.<sup>811</sup>

The Council of Trent, which was convened to oppose the Protestant Reformation, issued the following statement on justification: Justification is "a translation from that state in which a human being is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ

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<sup>802</sup>See Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church. № 1987-2027. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

<sup>803</sup>Ibid., № 1989.

<sup>804</sup>Ibid., № 1992.

<sup>805</sup>Ibid., № 1991.

<sup>806</sup>Ibid., № 2008.

<sup>807</sup>Ibid., № 2009.

<sup>808</sup>Ibid., № 2027.

<sup>809</sup>O'Collins G., Rafferty O. R. *Roman Catholic View* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 3041, 3084-3086.

<sup>810</sup>Noted in Berkhof L. *The History of Christian Doctrine*. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 213ff.

<sup>811</sup>Ankerberg J., Weldon J. *Protestants and Catholics: Do they now agree?* – Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1995. – P. 42.

our Savior.”<sup>812</sup> Again, we see that for Catholics, justification is not defined in forensic terms, but in terms of a spiritual condition, that is, “imparted righteousness,” which results in the performance of justifying works.

In the Catholic system, then, faith alone does not save. Only faith that has produced good works is considered true, saving faith. The Catholic writers, O'Collins and Rafferty, commenting on Trent, write, “While faith is necessary, it is not sufficient for justification, since faith must be united to love.”<sup>813</sup>

“In the *gratia infusa* man receives the supernatural strength to do such works, and thus to merit with a merit of condignity all following grace and everlasting life.”<sup>814</sup> Horton provides even more detail to the description of this view:

The first justification occurs at baptism, which eradicates both the guilt and corruption of original sin. Due entirely to God's grace, this initial justification infuses the habit (or principle) of grace into the recipient. By cooperating with this inherent grace, one merits an increase in grace and, one hopes, final justification. So while initial justification is by grace alone, final justification depends also on the works of the believer, which God graciously accepts as meritorious.<sup>815</sup>

The Catholic teaching, though, contradicts Scripture, which teaches justification by faith alone (see Gal 2:16; 3:10, Rom 3:20; 4:1-3; Lk 18:14 and others). In particular, Romans 4:22-24 specifically indicates that in justification, righteousness is not imparted to believers, but “imputed” to them. The Greek verb λογίζομαι (*logidzomai*) is used here, which means “to consider,” and carries that meaning in other New Testament texts as well (see Rom 2:26; 9:8; 2 Cor 12:6; Acts 19:27; Jam 2:23).<sup>816</sup>

The works done by virtue of “imparted righteousness” are nonetheless works. Yet, Scripture affirms that works have no place in our salvation. God justifies before a person begins to do good works. Works are not the means to attain the status of righteousness before the Lord, but merely the result or consequence of receiving justification by faith.

In support of the idea of justification as a right status before God and in refutation of justification as “imparted righteousness,” Horton appeals to the Scriptural metaphor of “clothing.” God “clothes” us in righteousness, which shows that justification is not an inner process, but an outer “covering” in the eyes of God (see Gen 3:21; Zech 3:3-5; Isa 61:10-11; Rev 21:2; Lk 15:22). On the other hand, those clothed in their own righteousness are cast out (Matt 22:1-14).<sup>817</sup>

The Lutheran theologian Mueller also repudiates the Catholic doctrine of good works leading to salvation: “Good works done for this purpose insult and mock God, who in His Word offers to all sinners through faith the entire, perfect righteousness which His beloved Son has secured for the world by His vicarious satisfaction.”<sup>818</sup>

In response to the Protestant position, the Council of Trent issued the following canons, which have never been revoked to this day:<sup>819</sup>

If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema (*Canon 11*).<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>812</sup>McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 378.

<sup>813</sup>O'Collins, 3053.

<sup>814</sup>Berkhof, p. 215.

<sup>815</sup>Horton, Traditional Reformed View, 781.

<sup>816</sup>Ibid., 972-973.

<sup>817</sup>Ibid., 1072-1116.

<sup>818</sup>Mueller, p. 420-421.

<sup>819</sup>Ankerberg, p. 45. The Catholic writers O'Collins and Rafferty, confirm that “perhaps the clearest and most systematic exposition of the Catholic theology of justification is that provided by the Council of Trent” (O'Collins, 2886).

<sup>820</sup>Ankerberg, p. 47.



If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing more than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema (*Canon 12*).<sup>821</sup>

Let us compare and contrast the two views on justification: Catholic and biblical.<sup>822</sup> According to Catholicism, in justification God *makes* the sinner righteous. According to Scripture, God *considers* or *declares* the sinner righteous as a legal standing. In Catholicism, good works are an inseparable part of the *process* of justification. In the Bible, though, good works are the *result* of a justification already received by faith. In Roman Catholic theology, justification and sanctification are *confused* and *overlapping*. Sanctification leads to final justification. Scripture teaches, however, that justification and sanctification are *distinct* from one another. A person first receives justification (the status of righteousness) as a gift from God, then the process of sanctification commences.

In 1999, a remarkable event occurred, when Catholic and Protestant leaders signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.<sup>823</sup> Both similarities and differences between the views were highlighted in this document. For example, both sides found common ground in affirming justification by grace through faith (№ 9), that Christ is our righteousness (№ 10), and that Christ's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all (№ 12).

On the other hand, one must keep in mind that the meanings of key words in these statements differ between the two parties. As we noted earlier, Catholics have their own unique understanding of "grace," "justification," and "faith."<sup>824</sup> Consequently, the Declaration brought no firm resolution to the issue.

We see, then, in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* simply a repetition of the traditional Catholic position. Justification is defined as "forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace" (№ 27). It provides us acceptance by and fellowship with God "already now, but then fully in God's coming kingdom" (№ 11). Justification requires doing good works (№ 37) "so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved" (№ 38).

Blocher brings to our attention that the Declaration never speaks of justification by faith *alone*. In addition, it does not recant from certain dogmas that contradict justification by faith alone, such as redemption from sin through penance, punishment in purgatory, or use of indulgences. Moreover, not all Lutheran confessions endorsed this Declaration. One Lutheran group accused its participants of "betrayal of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."<sup>825</sup>

Some points in the Declaration, though, may show a positive change. First, in point 10, discussing the faith of Abraham, we see mention of righteousness being imputed. Second, in point 38, we read, "justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace." Finally, according to point 25, good works, performed by a justified individual, are "neither the basis of justification nor merits it."

When this declaration was released, the Vatican admitted that it did not eliminate all the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The Vatican declared, "Eternal life is, at one and the same time, grace and the reward given by God for good works."<sup>826</sup>

In 1997, before the publication of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, another meeting was held in New York between Catholic and Evangelical theologians to discuss the doctrine of justification,

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<sup>821</sup>Ibid., p. 48-49.

<sup>822</sup>McGrath, p. 375-380.

<sup>823</sup>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

[https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/joint\\_declaration\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/joint_declaration_2019_en.pdf)

<sup>824</sup>Lane notes that some objected to the lack of clarity in the declaration's statements (Lane A. N. S. A Tale of Two Imperial Cities (119-145) // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 122-123).

<sup>825</sup>Blocher H. A. The Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 197-209.

<sup>826</sup>Taken from the official Vatican journal *L'Osservatore Romano*, 08.07.98. – P. 2; noted in Horton, Traditional Reformed View, 863-866.

called “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.” The results of this meeting were published in the document *Gift of Salvation*, which seemed to indicate a movement by Catholics closer to the Protestant understanding. We will cite the most key excerpts.<sup>827</sup>

Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God's gift, conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so.

The New Testament makes it clear that the gift of justification is received through faith.

We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).

On the other hand, this document did not renounce such doctrines as salvation through the sacraments, the mediatorial role of the priesthood, or punishment in purgatory.<sup>828</sup>

#### 4. Protestantism

The Reformation introduced a fundamental alteration in the Church's understanding of justification. The main impetus for this change came from Martin Luther.<sup>829</sup> He defended the position that justification does not concern the inner condition of the believer or communicate “imparted righteousness,” but has to do with the individual's legal status before God.

Luther made famous several key ideas. He termed the righteousness that we receive from God “foreign” and “passive.” “Foreign righteousness” means that this righteousness is not ours, but God's. It is imputed to us, or reckoned to our account, through faith in Jesus. Christ confers on us His own righteousness. The idea of “passive righteousness” refers to the fact that a person does nothing to acquire this gift except to believe in Jesus. Attaining righteousness is not the result of personal effort, even with the aid of “imparted righteousness.” It comes exclusively as God's gift in Christ.

At the same time, we make the qualification that Reformation theology does not deny that God imparts a righteous nature to the believer. Yet, this “internal righteousness” is not equated with “justification,” which is purely a forensic status before God. “Imparted righteousness” belongs to the process of sanctification, not justification.

Another famous formulation from Luther reflecting his view of justification is that believing individuals are *simul peccator et justus*, i.e., “at the same time both sinners and righteous.” In their behavior, they still sin, yet in respect to their position before God, they are righteous in Christ. Likely the most well known of Luther's expressions are *sola scriptura* (only Scripture), *sola gratia* (only grace), *sola fide* (only faith), and *solus Christus* (only Christ). These phrases define the guiding principles of Reformation faith. Justification comes exclusively by grace without any human merit and is received by faith in Christ alone apart from good works.

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<sup>827</sup>Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative // Christianity Today. – Dec. 7, 1997. P. 34ff.

<sup>828</sup>David Cloud, [http://www.wayoflife.org/index\\_files/evangelicals\\_catholics\\_confusing\\_gift\\_of\\_salvation.html](http://www.wayoflife.org/index_files/evangelicals_catholics_confusing_gift_of_salvation.html)

<sup>829</sup>Trueman C. Martin Luther and Justification // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 73-97.

Nevertheless, Luther stressed the need for good works, yet insisted that they are not necessary for justification and do not serve as its basis. Since believers are in Christ, they are partakers of God's nature, which will find expression in good deeds. Believers are motivated to obey God by love for Him.<sup>830</sup>

Finally, we note that Luther's sacramental views complicate his views on justification. If people are justified by faith alone, that what role can sacraments play in attaining salvation? Unfortunately, Luther never really reconciled this inconsistency in his theology.

McKelway points out certain departures from Reformation principles in the teachings of Melanchthon, Luther's follower and successor. He taught that justifying faith is perfected by works, which approaches the Catholic position. As a result of Melanchthon views, debates ensued among Lutheran theologians as to the nature of saving faith.<sup>831</sup>

John Calvin, of course, also embraced Reformation faith, but like Melanchthon, at times seemed to divert from it.<sup>832</sup> On the positive side, Calvin taught that God imputes or credits to believers righteousness as a gift of His grace through faith. He insisted that justification before God is not based on works.<sup>833</sup> He furthermore clarified that true faith is accompanied by good works. He aptly states, "It is faith alone which justifies, but the faith which justifies is not alone."<sup>834</sup> On the negative side, Calvin claimed that even though justification and sanctification are separate acts of God, sanctification takes place "in the context of justification."<sup>835</sup> In addition, he speaks not only of imputed righteousness, but also of imparted righteousness.

Consequently, Calvin was ready to allow, along with Augustine, the idea of a "double justification." The initial justification comes by faith, while the final one is based on the life record of the believer. McKelway comments on Calvin's views:

Sanctification is not only a state, it is a process in which life is rendered, by divine assistance, more and more consistent with the righteousness imputed to it in Christ. Such a life can be judged by God as righteous – it is justified.<sup>836</sup>

In spite of the inconsistencies and digressions in the early reformers' teachings, Luther's sacramentalism, Melanchthon's misunderstanding of the nature of faith, and Calvin's "double justification," these great men of God recovered for the Church the basic elements of the biblical doctrine of justification. McGrath summarized the major premises of a "mature" protestant understanding of justification:<sup>837</sup>

(1) Justification involves a *forensic declaration* of righteousness that effects a change in *legal status before God*, as opposed to a process that actually makes one righteous.

(2) There is a clear conceptual difference between justification ("the act by which God declares the sinner to be righteous") and either regeneration or sanctification (the actual "internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit").

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<sup>830</sup>Wübbornhost K. Calvin's Doctrine of Justification // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 112.

<sup>831</sup>McKelway A. J. The Systematic Theology of Faith: A Protestant Perspective // Lee J. M. Handbook of Faith. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 181.

<sup>832</sup>See McKelway, p. 176-182; Wübbornhost, p. 99-118.

<sup>833</sup>Wübbornhost, p. 103

<sup>834</sup>Bromiley G. W. Faith // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 2. – P. 272.

<sup>835</sup>Wübbornhost, p. 114.

<sup>836</sup>McKelway, p. 179.

<sup>837</sup>Noted in Eddy, Justification in Historical Perspective, 176-181.

(3) Justifying righteousness is understood as an external, ‘alien’ righteousness, graciously *imputed* to the Christian through the act of faith.

We can briefly survey views on justification by several other thinkers.<sup>838</sup> John Wesley held to the Reformation teaching of imputed, forensic righteousness and the distinction between justification and sanctification. A unique feature of his teaching, though, was that justification is based on two factors. First, God looks on believers as being in Christ and clothed with His righteousness. Second, He looks within believers to see the righteous nature that is in them by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. So then, God considers the believer in Jesus righteous on the basis of these two factors taken together.

Anabaptists rejected the teaching of justification as a forensic status received by faith, fearing that it would lead to a neglect of moral living. Liberal theologians completely lost the concept of the need for propitiation before the Lord. They feel that we simply need to develop our human potential.

Finally, we must mention the view of E. P. Sanders, author of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.<sup>839</sup> Sanders advanced the thesis that salvation begins by faith, but is preserved by works. In other words, after believing in Jesus, believers are made right with God. However, in order to maintain that status, they must perform good works. James Dunn and N. T. Wright also support this view. This teaching is known as “covenantal nomism.”<sup>840</sup>

Sanders’ theory works off the model of Israel’s experience. According to Sanders, Abraham initially received from God the gift of righteousness. Later, though, God gave Israel the Law as a means to stay in covenant with Him. He required obedience as a condition to remain in covenant relationship. Similarly, faith in the redemptive work of Christ only provides an initiation into relationship with the Lord and the experience of salvation. In order to continue in that relationship and experience full justification, believers must obey God and perform good works.

Adherents of covenantal nomism posit that the problem with first-century Judaism was not that they misunderstood the relationship between faith and works, but rather that: (1) they rejected Messiah, (2) they boasted in their status as Jews, and (3) they required the Gentiles to keep the ceremonial Law of Moses. Therefore, Paul’s goal in his teaching on justification was not to insist on justification by faith alone, but rather to correct these distortions. Exponents of this view even deny that justification plays a central role in Paul’s theology.

Dunn accepts the concept of “double justification,” according to which believers will stand judgment based on the works they have done through faith. The question of their final justification will be settled only at the judgement. Dunn writes, “For Paul, full/final salvation is in some degree conditional on faithfulness.”<sup>841</sup> Bird concurs, “We must highlight that good works really are good and are necessary for salvation.”<sup>842</sup>

Teachers in this movement at times ascribe a unique definition to the word “righteousness.” For them, it can denote faithfulness to one’s covenant with God, rather than a right standing with Him in a legal sense. So then, the concepts “righteousness” or “justification” mean observing the requirements of the covenant. In addition, they understand the phrase “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17 to mean God’s attribute of righteousness expressed in His deeds and covenant, and not as the gift of righteousness that believers receive by grace.<sup>843</sup>

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<sup>838</sup>Eddy, Justification in Historical Perspective, 232-288

<sup>839</sup>Eddy P. R., Beilby J. K., Enderlein S. E. Justification in the Contemporary Debate // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 526-767.

<sup>840</sup>“Nomism” comes from the Greek word νόμος (*nomos*), i.e., “law.” The phrase “covenantal nomism” means observing the Law in the context of the covenant.

<sup>841</sup>Dunn J. D. G. New Perspective View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – P. 200.

<sup>842</sup>Bird M. F. Progressive Reformed View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 1623-1627.

<sup>843</sup>Bird defends this position by appealing to other features of God’s character mentioned in this context: His power (1:16), wrath (1:18; 3:5), judgment (2:2-3, 5), kindness (2:4), truth (3:7), and faithfulness (3:3). See Bird, 476-478.

However, a closer examination of this theory reveals some serious distortions and deviations from biblical revelation. First, Paul affirms that works play no role in a person's justification. From the book of Galatians, we learn that the Law does not justify: neither before conversion (2:16), nor after conversion (5:4; 3:3). Paul teaches in Romans 1:17 and 11:19-20 that justification comes exclusively by faith.

We also challenge covenantal nomism's interpretation of Romans 1:17. The phrase "the righteousness of God" refers not to God's attribute of righteousness (requiring a subjective genitive), but God's gift of imputed righteousness (employing a genitive of source). Horton advances several convincing arguments in support of this claim.<sup>844</sup> First, in the same verse we read, "The righteous {man} shall live by faith." This shows that God's righteousness is not in view, but the believer's righteousness received by faith. Second, verse 17 describes the essence of the gospel, the "good news." The gospel is "good news" because through it God grants the gift of righteousness.

Furthermore, in his letter to the Galatian congregations, Paul clearly explains the purpose of the Law. It was not given to maintain right relationship with the Lord, as Sanders suggests, but to demonstrate human sinfulness and inability to obey God. The goal of the Law was to lead persons to the righteousness of faith, of which Paul speaks in Galatians 3:17-24.

Romans 2:13 is also a key verse in this discussion. Defenders of covenantal nomism claim that Gentile believers were keeping the Law and thereby meriting their salvation.<sup>845</sup> Yet, if one examines the context of this verse, it becomes plain that Paul's goal here is not to show that Gentiles are justified by the Law, but to show that the Law condemns everyone as sinners, so that all will turn to Christ to receive mercy and redemption.

Moreover, Paul's teaching directly contradicts the covenantal nomism position that Abraham received only an initial justification through faith, but that final justification comes from obedience. Romans 4:1-6 reveals that Abraham received full justification by faith alone apart from works:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Additionally, Paul addresses this issue in Galatians 3:17-18 as well. Here, he specifically rejects the suggestion that God's covenant with Abraham is somehow continued with observance of the Mosaic Law.<sup>846</sup> We read,

What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

It is also worth mentioning that in Paul's day, some were concerned that his teaching might lead to neglect of morals (see Rom 3:7-8; 6:1-2; Acts 21:21). If, as it is supposed, Paul taught "covenantal nomism," then no one would have accused him of this.<sup>847</sup> We also note that Paul reproved the Jews of his day not only for ethnic pride, but also for their inflated self-confidence of being able to keep God's Law (see Rom chps. 2, 3, 7).

The system of covenantal nomism reminds one of the Catholic teaching in the Middle Ages that the Reformers so vigorously opposed and which prompted the Reformation. Thus, this teaching is clearly at odds with Reformation and Protestant faith.

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<sup>844</sup>Horton, Traditional Reformed View, 923-939.

<sup>845</sup>Bird, 1499-1524.

<sup>846</sup>Horton, Traditional Reformed View, p. 204-206.

<sup>847</sup>Bird, 1129-1130.

Similarly, Gundry “sees much greater discontinuity between Paul and Judaism. In his estimation, for Palestinian Judaism, works are both a sign of and a condition for staying in; whereas for Paul, works are only evidential of, not instrumental for staying in, with faith being the necessary and sufficient condition of staying in as well as getting in.”<sup>848</sup> The Lutheran Piper also gives a firm response. He feels that we must “treat the necessity of obedience not as any part of the basis of justification, but strictly as the evidence and confirmation of our faith in Christ, whose blood and righteousness is the sole basis for justification.”<sup>849</sup>

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<sup>848</sup>Noted in Eddy, Justification in the Contemporary Debate, 622.

<sup>849</sup>Piper F. Future of Justification, p. 110, noted in Eddy, Justification in the Contemporary Debate, 644.

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## Chapter 10: Adoption

In virtue of the believer's position "in Christ" and His role as our representative, the believer may participate in Christ's sonship to the degree that it is humanly possible. According to Scripture, our adoption into God's family is connected with our union with Christ. We cite Ephesians 1:4-5 in this regard: "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself." Galatians 4:4-5 claims the same: "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Believers in Jesus Christ are God's children, members of His family. True believers are God's children in two senses: (1) they are born again and therefore "partakers of the divine nature" (see chapter 14), and (2) they are adopted into God's family. In a later chapter devoted to the new birth, we will discuss what exactly that experience involves and how it benefits us. In this chapter, though, we will investigate the idea of "adoption" and the benefits flowing from it.

Interestingly, John and Paul underscore different aspects of our status as God's children. John emphasizes the new birth, while Paul devotes more attention to adoption. These different emphases in no way contradict or exclude one another. Paul's goal in stressing adoption is to show God's gracious action toward us in accepting us into His family, which He was in no way obligated to do. When John stresses new birth, he emphasizes the new character that believers obtain. As reborn children of God, we should reflect the character of our Heavenly Father.

Davis contrasts Paul's perspective not only with John's, but also with the apostle Peter's: "While John and Peter prefer the picture of regeneration to portray the Christian adoption, Paul has characteristically chosen a legal image."<sup>850</sup> Bromiley, taking into consideration both aspects, claims that in Christ we have both the status of God's children (adoption), and the character of God's children (new birth).<sup>851</sup> Rees agrees that the new birth relates to the "moral quality of the Christian experience," while adoption addresses a "concrete relation of man to God."<sup>852</sup> Lidgett feels the same, associating adoption with obtaining status and privilege. He also notes, however, that Paul's doctrine of adoption does not exclude the involvement of the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6).<sup>853</sup>

### A. Adoption as a Legal Status

As noted above, Paul focuses in his writings on the judicial act of adoption, which results in a definite legal status before God. We were formerly members of another family, but the Lord has adopted us into His. To describe this judicial act, Paul employs the word *υιοθεσία* (*huiothesia*), meaning "adoption" and which is found in all the New Testament only in his writings.

Adoption was commonly practiced in Greco-Roman culture. Paul's audience, then, was well acquainted with this idea. Unlike the Hebrews, the Greeks and Romans adopted freemen, not slaves. The adoptive father was even allowed to purchase children from their natural parents. In the Roman legal system, although adopted children possessed certain rights, they nonetheless came under the authority of their adoptive father

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<sup>850</sup>Davis P. H. Adoption // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 25.

<sup>851</sup>Bromiley G. W. *The Unity and Disunity of the Church*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958. – P. 49.

<sup>852</sup>Rees T. Adoption // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 54-55.

<sup>853</sup>Lidgett J. S. *The Fatherhood of God in Christian Truth and Life*. – Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902. – P. 20.

and their position was little better than a slave.<sup>854</sup> Adoption could also be considered an act of grace since the adoptive father was the initiator of the process.<sup>855</sup>

However, Rees hesitates to ascribe all these features of Greco-Roman adoption to Paul's use of the metaphor.<sup>856</sup> Although the secular understanding of adoption may shed some light on Paul's usage, we have to distinguish Paul's use of υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*) from the secular one.

Let us examine passages where Paul refers to this concept, employing the term υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*). Ephesians 1:4-5 reads, "...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption (υιοθεσία) as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Here, we learn that adoption was God's plan from eternity past and that it is accomplished through Jesus Christ. God's motive in adopting us was love.<sup>857</sup>

Next, we cite Galatians 4:1-5:

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (υιοθεσία).

Rees sees in this passage various aspects of civil adoption.<sup>858</sup> First, the child receives an inheritance after the death of the parent. The sense of "redemption" is also present, in that the adopted child was purchased from another family. Unlike the Roman system, however, Rees notes that adoption by God cannot be characterized as a bondage to slavery. More in line with adoption in Hebrew (and even Greek) culture, our adoption by God is characterized by freedom. Jesus is the key player in this process, who identified with our position under the Law, released us from the status of a slave, and made possible our adoption as children of God.

Paul continues, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal 4:6-7). As a result of our adoption in Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. Although in the convert's experience, adoption and new birth happen simultaneously, from a "legal" point of view, adoption logically precedes regeneration and is the basis for it. Additionally, in virtue of our adoption by God, we await an inheritance from Him.

Romans 8:15 is another key verse: "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption (υιοθεσία) as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption (υιοθεσία), who gives us confidence in our relationship with the Father and makes possible intimate fellowship with Him. Verse 16 confirms this: "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God." In other words, the Spirit provides subjective confirmation of our status in God's family. Therefore, adoption involves a transition from a position of slavery to one of freedom in the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:23, we observe another use of υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*): "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for {our} adoption (υιοθεσία) as sons, the redemption of our body." Adoption, then, has a future aspect – the redemption of the body. God's salvation affects the whole person, including inheriting a glorious, immortal

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<sup>854</sup>Davis, p. 25.

<sup>855</sup>Rees, Adoption, v. 1. p. 54.

<sup>856</sup>Ibid.

<sup>857</sup>Davis, p. 25.

<sup>858</sup>Rees, Adoption, v. 1, p. 54.

body. In addition, according to Romans 8:19-21, the material world will experience liberation from futility at the same time, creating conditions favorable to God's adopted children.<sup>859</sup>

We can combine the various senses of Paul's use of υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*) in the following summary. God's plan from eternity past was to adopt believers in Jesus, whose redemptive death made this adoption possible. When persons turn to the Lord, they are liberated from the status of a slave and become children of God. The "Spirit of adoption," the Holy Spirit, comes into the heart to give Christians the assurance of their acceptance into God's family. At the coming of the Lord in glory, believers receive the full measure of their inheritance, including a glorified, resurrected body.

Finally, along with Brown, it is worth noting that the idea of adoption was not foreign to God's Old Testament people, since Yahweh had received them to Himself. Correspondingly, Paul once employs υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*) in relation to Israel: "...who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons" (Rom 9:4).<sup>860</sup>

## B. The Fatherhood of God

Of all the titles that Holy Scripture ascribes to God, the one most fitting to depict His relationship to His people is "Father." Jesus Himself taught us to pray "Our Father."<sup>861</sup> In Lidgett's opinion, "To speak of God as 'the Father,' therefore, sums up the highest and fullest knowledge of Him,"<sup>862</sup> and, "It is possible to take every other conception of the relations of God to men which can be offered, from the lowest to the highest, and to find all subsumed under the Fatherhood."<sup>863</sup>

Conn adds that this metaphor describes a "unique interaction that would be difficult to communicate in the more formal vocabulary of a doctrinal statement." Fatherhood is "a richly textured metaphor that evoke(s) from us not only an intellectual, but also an emotional response."<sup>864</sup> The value of this metaphor, unlike others like "shepherd," is that it never grows old. In every culture and every generation, it remains relevant.<sup>865</sup>

At the same time, every metaphor has its limits. God, of course, does not physically give birth. In addition, children eventually become independent of their parents. Yet, no one can live without God. Finally, our relationship with the Lord is much closer than our relationship with an earthly father.<sup>866</sup>

We must note that God is "Father" not only in relation to people, but also from eternity. This is due to the relationships within the Trinity. Lidgett comments, "Fatherhood, then, is the determining relationship within the Godhead."<sup>867</sup> At the same time, one must keep in mind that this does not involve "essential inferiority (or) subsequent or created existence in regard to the Son."<sup>868</sup>

Jaane adds an intriguing thought to our discussion.<sup>869</sup> Fatherhood implies "source" or "origin."<sup>870</sup> This coincides with an ancient conception of the Trinity, that the Son is eternally "begotten" by the Father, and that the Spirit eternally "proceeds" from the Father (see an evaluation of this view in volume 3, chapter 8).

Jaane also notes that God is Father not because He occupies that position, but because of His nature:

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<sup>859</sup>Ibid., v. 1, p. 55.

<sup>860</sup>Brown W. E. Adoption // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 11.

<sup>861</sup>Robison J. Knowing God as Father. – Fort Worth, TX: LIFE Outreach International, 1996. – P. 8.

<sup>862</sup>Lidgett, p. 321.

<sup>863</sup>Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>864</sup>Conn C. P. Fathercare: What it Means to be God's Child. – Waco, TX: Word, 1983. – P. 15.

<sup>865</sup>Ibid.

<sup>866</sup>Lidgett, p. 297-298.

<sup>867</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>868</sup>Ibid.

<sup>869</sup>Jaane D. Father // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 2. – P. 285.

<sup>870</sup>The metaphor of God as Father extends beyond its application to people. He is the "Father of lights," i.e., its source (Jam 1:17).

God is father, not by independent decision, but in His very nature and being. God is not love because He loves; He loves because He is love. God is not a father because He has a son; He has a son because He is a father.<sup>871</sup>

Scripture also uses the metaphor “mother” in reference to the Lord (see Matt 23:27; Ps 130:2; Isa 66:12-13). In addition, God expects from His “children” qualities that correspond to that position, like simple faith, wonder at His works, expectation of good, and obedience.<sup>872</sup>

## 1. In Creation

Some hold the view that based on the facts that: (1) God is “Father” by His very nature, and (2) that He created all things, He is therefore Father of all creation and all of humanity. Blekkink comments, “By virtue of creation God is the Universal Father – of nature, of nations, of spirits, and of man in particular.”<sup>873</sup> Angels, in fact, are called “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).<sup>874</sup>

Jaane expresses this thought in the following way:

Since the created world has its source in God the Creator, it shares in the power and glory of God and is thus a revelation of its Maker. Man, too, has his origin in God, and as the image of his Father he shares in the nature of his Father.<sup>875</sup>

The following proofs are offered for this theory.<sup>876</sup> First, in Luke’s genealogy, Christ’s lineage traces back to Adam, who was the “son of God” (Lk 3:38). We recall that God created Adam and Eve “after His image” (Gen 1:26). Second, Paul states that from the Father “every family in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Eph 3:15). So then, He is the “archetypical father.”<sup>877</sup> Moreover, some authors ascribe the parable of the Prodigal Son not to wayward Christians, but to all people, who, in virtue of being created by God, are His children.

Furthermore, since God possesses the quality of “father” eternally, one would expect Him to hold such a relationship to all that He created. He is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). As the Heavenly Father, He bestows favor on all created things (Jam 1:17; Matt 6:25-30). Conn notes that in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus often says “our Father.” He suggests that Jesus was addressing not only His disciples, but all those present at the event, which would imply that God’s fatherhood extends to all people.<sup>878</sup> The following verses are also notable:

- ...one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:6).<sup>879</sup>
- Some of your own poets have said, “For we also are His children.” Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man (Acts 17:28-29).

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<sup>871</sup>Jaane, v. 2, p. 286.

<sup>872</sup>Conn, p. 26-37, 66-67.

<sup>873</sup>Blekkink E. J. – The Fatherhood of God. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1942. – P. 30.

<sup>874</sup>Cameron W. J. Father, God as // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 439.

<sup>875</sup>Jaane, v. 2, p. 285.

<sup>876</sup>Blekkink, p. 30-32; Lidgett, p. 317; Conn, p. 33-42.

<sup>877</sup>Conn, p. 39.

<sup>878</sup>Ibid., p. 33

<sup>879</sup>The best manuscripts (P75 & A B C) lack the word “you (all),” which one sees in the King James Version (see Metzger B. M. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. – 2nd ed. – London; New York: United Bible Societies. – P. 536).

Moreover, Jesus is thought to be the ideal model of the sonship of all humanity.<sup>880</sup> Since His incarnation reflects the perfect expression of human nature, His sonship is supposedly the sonship of all people. For this reason, it is felt that He called Himself the “Son of Man.” Similarly, Lidgett argues that the Son establishes “the fundamental lines and the spiritual possibilities of all humanity.”<sup>881</sup> At the same time, the special status of Jesus Christ in relation to the Godhead is not denied. He is the Son of God both in a divine sense and as a model for us.

Based on the points mentioned above, supporters of the theory of God’s universal fatherhood conclude that sonship is the natural condition of humanity before God.<sup>882</sup> God’s predetermined plan for humanity is to “bring many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10).

Salvation, then, is understood as the “completion of creation.”<sup>883</sup> Salvation involves recognizing God’s fatherhood, as Lidgett states, “We do not make the Fatherhood, but recognize it and respond to it. And in that recognition is our salvation.”<sup>884</sup> The new birth, then, is the restoration of a person’s natural potential for sonship.

In support of this theory, it is noted that Jesus spoke with an unbeliever (the Samaritan woman) about the “Father” (Jn 4:19-21). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called the people to “be sons of your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:45). In other words, they are to occupy the position that is already theirs by right.

However, this theory does not propose that unbelievers in Jesus are saved or enjoy the status of God’s children in the full sense. The Scriptures speak of unbelievers as children of the devil (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:10) and children of wrath (Eph 2:3). Rees feels that such people have lost the “reality” of sonship, but not the “potential.” Like the Prodigal Son, they may always come home.<sup>885</sup>

Furthermore, Rees writes that Paul “conceives man outside Christ as morally an alien and a stranger from God, and the change wrought by faith in Christ makes him morally a son and conscious of his sonship; but naturally he is always a potential son because God is always a real father.”<sup>886</sup>

Conn also affirms that all persons are God’s children in a “general sense,” but they must still be born again in order to experience God fully.<sup>887</sup> Similarly, Lidgett writes that sonship “is completely realized only in believers in Christ.”<sup>888</sup> Barker confirms that “sonship” in the sense of “creature” differs from how the New Testament employs the concept, and that “it is in Christ alone, and by faith in Him, that God’s purpose is worked out in them and they have their sonship.”<sup>889</sup>

Finally, Jaane correctly affirms that we must distinguish God’s so-called “universal fatherhood” from the pantheistic conception that creation is an emanation from God. The Lord does not “give birth” to creation in the sense that it is part of His being. He created all things from nothing, distinct from Himself.<sup>890</sup>

## 2. In the Old Testament

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<sup>880</sup>Conn, p. 46-66.

<sup>881</sup>Lidgett, p. 322.

<sup>882</sup>Ibid., p. 20-48.

<sup>883</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>884</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>885</sup>Rees T. Children of God, Sons of God // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 647-648.

<sup>886</sup>Rees, Adoption, v. 1, p. 55.

<sup>887</sup>Conn, p. 9.

<sup>888</sup>Lidgett, p. 322.

<sup>889</sup>Barker G. W. Children of God, Sons of God // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 1. – P. 648.

<sup>890</sup>Jaane, v. 2, p. 285.

If we accept that, due to His role as Creator, God can be considered (in a certain sense) the Father of all created things, He is even more so a Father to His Old Testament people, Israel. In comparison to creation, “Israel stands in a unique relation to God.”<sup>891</sup>

However, Blekkink correctly observes that the Old Testament underscores God’s sovereignty more than His fatherhood.<sup>892</sup> Lidgett supposes that initially it was necessary for Yahweh to display His authority and righteousness so that subsequently his fatherhood would not “sink to naturalism and sentimentality.”<sup>893</sup>

Stein makes note of the fact that in the Old Testament, we see a tendency to avoid the father metaphor. He considers that Old Testament writers feared association of the God of Israel with the so-called “fertility religions.”<sup>894</sup> Nonetheless, the Old Testament does reveal God as Father. We shall highlight some instances.

First, the father-metaphor is used to show that Israel belongs to Yahweh.<sup>895</sup> Israel had this status even during its time of captivity in Egypt: “When Israel {was} a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” (Hos 11:1). God spoke to Pharaoh by Moses, “Thus says Yahweh, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I said to you, “Let My son go that he may serve Me.”’” (Ex 4:22-23). Moreover, Israel maintained this position throughout its history: “David said, ‘Blessed are You, O Yahweh God of Israel our father, forever and ever’” (1 Chr 29:10). Through Isaiah, Yahweh spoke to the sons of Jacob, “You are Mine” (Isa 43:1).

The special position of Israel before Yahweh afforded them a close relationship with Him. Isaiah writes about the love of the Father for His people, “You are precious in My sight,... you are honored and I love you” (Isa 43:4). This close relationship is expressed in other metaphors, such as (1) husband: “Your husband is your Maker, whose name is Yahweh of hosts” (Isa 54:5); “You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.... {As} a young man marries a virgin, {so} your sons will marry you; and {as} the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, {so} your God will rejoice over you” (Isa 62:3-5), and (2) mother: “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you” (Isa 49:15); “You will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you” (Isa 66:12-13).<sup>896</sup>

As a good father, Yahweh promises to care for Israel. We witness this particularly during Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, “where you saw how Yahweh your God carried you, just as a man carries his son” (Deut 1:31). His care for His people finds expression in still another metaphor – the shepherd (see Ps 28:9; 77:20; 80:1; 100:3; 95:7; Isa 40:11). The most inspiring and well known depiction of God our shepherd is contained in Psalm 23:

Yahweh is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of Yahweh forever.

In addition, God shows special fatherly care for the orphan. He is “a father of the fatherless” (Ps 68:5).<sup>897</sup>

Due to God’s promise to care for His people, Israel, the latter find themselves in a position of dependence on Him, as Isaiah writes, “For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us. You, Yahweh, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name” (Isa 63:16).

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<sup>891</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 647.

<sup>892</sup>Blekkink, p. 34.

<sup>893</sup>Lidgett, p. 141.

<sup>894</sup>Stein R. *Fatherhood of God* // Elwell W. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 247.

<sup>895</sup>See Davis, p. 25; Frost R. *Our Heavenly Father*. – Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1978. – P. 22.

<sup>896</sup>Rees, v. 1, p. 647.

<sup>897</sup>Stein, p. 247.

Along with the blessings that flow from the position of sonship, responsibilities ensue as well. As God's children, Israel was called to behave accordingly: "You are the sons of Yahweh your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead" (Deut 14:1).<sup>898</sup> Israel must honor the Lord (Mal 1:6) and not act unfaithfully toward one another (Mal 2:10).<sup>899</sup> Yahweh is to Israel both a provider and a nurturer.<sup>900</sup> For example, He taught His people to trust Him during their journey through the wilderness: "Thus you are to know in your heart that Yahweh your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son" (Deut 8:5). Israel must be as clay in Yahweh's hands (Isa 64:8).

Unfortunately, God's Old Testament people seldom fulfilled the responsibilities of sonship.<sup>901</sup> The sons of Israel were "faithless sons" (Jer 3:14, 22) and "rebellious children... false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of Yahweh" (Isa 30:1, 9). They "neglected the Rock who begot (them), and forgot the God who gave (them) birth" (Deut 32:18). God said of them, "Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me" (Isa 1:2; cf. Jer 3:19-20). It came to the point that God refused to acknowledge the nation of Israel as His children: "{They are} not His children, because of their defect; {but are} a perverse and crooked generation" (Deut 32:5; cf. Jer 3:3-4).

Consequently, several passages of Scripture identify only faithful followers of Yahweh as His children:

- Then those who feared Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh gave attention and heard {it,} and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Yahweh and who esteem His name. "They will be Mine," says Yahweh of hosts, "on the day that I prepare {My} own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him (Mal 3:16-18).
- Just as a father has compassion on {his} children, so Yahweh has compassion on those who fear Him (Ps 103:13).

Cameron makes the following comment: "He is the Father of the God-fearing among the nation rather than of the nation as a whole."<sup>902</sup>

However, in the future all Israel will be included in the number of Yahweh's children.<sup>903</sup> Hosea prophesied, "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered; and in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, '{You are} the sons of the living God'" (Hos 1:10). We can consider this restoration to be the fulfillment of God's original intention for Israel: "With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn" (Jer 31:9).

Along with Israel and its "faithful remnant," the sons of David are considered Yahweh's sons in a special sense.<sup>904</sup> At first, this status was conferred upon Solomon (1 Chr 28:6), but then extended to all the descendants of David, especially the Messiah, who will build the temple of God (2 Sam 7:13) and will rule the whole earth (Ps 2:8; 89:27).

Finally, in Genesis 6 we discover that the "sons of God" went into the daughters of men. Who are these "sons of God?" We addressed this question in chapter 3 of this volume.

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<sup>898</sup>Cameron, p. 439.

<sup>899</sup>Blekkink, p. 31-32.

<sup>900</sup>Cameron, p. 439.

<sup>901</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 647; Robison, p. 43.

<sup>902</sup>Cameron, p. 439.

<sup>903</sup>See Lidgett, p. 139; Jaane, v. 2, p. 284-286.

<sup>904</sup>Davis, p. 25.



### 3. In the Intertestamental Period

It will interest us to discover the understanding of fatherhood among the intertestamental writers. Stein notes that in imitation of the Old Testament, writers hesitated to employ this metaphor during this period. Nevertheless, he draws our attention to several passages.<sup>905</sup>

The Apocrypha offers some insights. The righteous person “vaunteth that God is his father” (*Wis. Sol.*, 2.16). In chapter 14 of this work, the author appeals to God in prayer as “Father” (14.3). Tobit exclaims, “Because he is our Lord, and he our God, and he our Father” (*Tobit*, 13.4). Similarly, Sirach prays to God, “O Lord, Father, and God of my life, abandon me not to their counsel” (*Sirach*, 23.4; cf. 51.14).

We draw from the pseudepigraphic literature as well. Like Sirach, Eleazer also addresses God in prayer as “Father” (*3 Macc.*, 6.2, 6). We read in the same work, “But the Jews... with crying that would not be silenced, all called with tears on the almighty Lord and ruler of all power, their merciful God and father” (*3 Macc.*, 5.6-8).

Concerning the “star of Jacob,” we read, “And the heavens shall be opened unto him, to pour out the spirit, (even) the blessing of the Holy Father” (*Testament of Judah*, 24.2). When the righteous priest comes, “The heavens shall be opened, and from the temple of glory shall come upon him sanctification, with the Father’s voice as from Abraham to Isaac” (*Testament of Levi*, 18.6).

Cameron makes the helpful observation that in these quotations (except, possibly, for *3 Macc.*, 5.4), the passages speak of certain faithful individuals as God’s children, not of Israel in general.<sup>906</sup> In addition, the following texts, which do speak of entire Israel as God’s children, apply to the eschatological period:

- And their souls will cleave to Me and to all My commandments, and they will fulfil My commandments, and I will be their Father and they shall be My children. And they all shall be called children of the living God (*Jubilees*, 1.24-25).
- All shall know that I am the God of Israel and the Father of all the children of Jacob, and King on Mount Zion for all eternity (*Jubilees*, 1.28).

The final instance we will cite is Abraham’s blessing on Jacob: “And may the Lord God be a father to thee and thou the first-born son, and to the people alway” (*Jubilees*, 19.29).

### 4. In the New Testament

Unlike the Old Testament witness and the works of the Second Temple Period, the New Testament abounds with references to God’s fatherhood and the sonship of believers. This is especially notable in the Gospels, where mentions of God as “Father” occurs twice as often as in all the other New Testament writings combined. The Gospel of John leads in this respect, with 111 references to God as “Father.” The Synoptic Gospels record 65 cases.<sup>907</sup>

Paul calls God “Father” more than 40 times and uses this title in blessings (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3), glorifications (Rom 15:6), thanksgivings (2 Cor 1:3; 1 Thes 1:2-3), prayers (Col 1:12), exhortations (Eph 5:20), and expressions of faith (1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6).<sup>908</sup>

The New Testament reveals that God’s eternal plan is to adopt us (Eph 1:5). His desire is to “lead many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). God “deals with you as with sons” (Heb 12:7). All creation waits with anticipation for the revelation of the children of God (Rom 8:19-21).<sup>909</sup> Rees comments, “The whole course and destiny of

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<sup>905</sup>Stein, p. 247.

<sup>906</sup>Cameron, p. 439.

<sup>907</sup>Cameron, p. 439; Stein, p. 247.

<sup>908</sup>Stein, p. 247.

<sup>909</sup>Lidgett, p. 91.

creation is for the ‘revealing of the sons of (G)od.’”<sup>910</sup> In the words of Lidgett, God’s fatherhood for believers in Christ determines “the whole spirit, conduct, and conditions of their life.”<sup>911</sup>

According to New Testament teaching, God is Father first and foremost in relation to His eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Christ has a distinctive relationship with the Father, as He Himself said, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?” (Jn 14:10), and, “O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You” (Jn 17:25).<sup>912</sup>

Since the Lord Jesus possesses a perfect consciousness of His relationship with the Father, He is qualified to serve as the archetypical Son, who is able to inspire us to live in the light of our privileged position before the Father as well. The New Testament associates our sonship with His, since He became “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29) and, consequently, “He is not ashamed to call (us) brethren” (Heb 2:11).<sup>913</sup> God’s goal is to make us “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29).

However, we must clarify that our status as children of God fundamentally differs from Christ’s sonship. Jesus occupies a unique position in relation to God the Father. He is the “only-begotten Son” and enjoys a distinctive relationship with the Father, being Himself God.

It is interesting to note that Jesus never equated His position with the Father with that of His disciples. He never used the phrase “our Father” in a way that included both the disciples and Himself. We recall that He said to Mary Magdalene, “Go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’” (Jn 20:17). Note that Jesus did not say “our God” or “our Father,” but “My Father and your Father,” and, “My God and your God.” He thus distinguished His status as the Son of God from the status of His disciples.

Stein makes the same observation from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Concerning the disciples, He states, “your Father” (Matt 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6), while in relation to Himself – “My Father” (Matt 7:21; cf. Matt 10:32-33). Stein concludes, “His ‘Sonship’ was different from that of his followers. He was by nature the Son; they were ‘sons’ through adoption.”<sup>914</sup> Cameron adds that Christ “was aware of standing in an intimate and unparalleled relation” with the Father and that He was the “sole mediator between God and humans” (Matt 11:27).<sup>915</sup>

In His capacity as the “archetypical son,” and “only mediator,” Jesus becomes the only and unique way to adoption into God’s family. Although the New Testament at times hints at God’s universal fatherhood (see above), in most cases it reserves that designation for believers in God’s eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Cameron writes,

While accepting the teaching of the OT that all persons are children of God by creation and receive his providential kindness (Matt. 5:45), (Jesus) also taught that sin has brought about a change in people, necessitating rebirth and reconciliation to God.<sup>916</sup>

Rees adds the comment that the New Testament teaching of sonship differs from the Old Testament teaching in that the former view is independent of physical descent or nationality: “Through Christ men and women of all races and nations may now be the children of God.”<sup>917</sup>

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<sup>910</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 648.

<sup>911</sup>Lidgett, p. 18.

<sup>912</sup>Frost, p. 23-24; Lidgett, p. 52-53.

<sup>913</sup>Lidgett, p. 75, 91, 292.

<sup>914</sup>Stein, p. 247.

<sup>915</sup>Cameron, p. 439.

<sup>916</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>917</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 647.

Since people do not become God's children (at least in the fullest sense) by virtue of creation, the New Testament invites all to join God's family through faith in Christ (Gal 3:26; 1 Jn 5:1).<sup>918</sup> One must be born again (Jn 3:3) to become God's child (Matt 18:3).<sup>919</sup>

The biblical idea of sonship is characterized by freedom, not bondage (Rom 8:15). God's children have "boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Eph 3:12). Rees writes, "With this free union of love with God there comes a sense of power, of independence of circumstances, of mastery over the world, and of the possession of all things necessary that befit the heirs of God."<sup>920</sup>

Since God is Father, the New Testament not infrequently speaks of His fatherly love for His children.<sup>921</sup> He is "merciful" (Lk 6:36), "knows what you need before you ask Him," (Matt 6:8), gives "what is good to those who ask Him" (Matt 7:11), and "has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). In addition, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:30), and, "It is not {the} will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish" (Matt 18:14).

Our heavenly Father is the model for holiness (1 Pet 1:15; Matt 5:48) as well as love (Matt 5:45; Lk 6:36; Eph 4:32). Paul summarizes, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph 5:1).

## 5. In Church History

To summarize the Church's teaching on God's fatherhood, we will rely on the work of Lidgett and the writings of some eminent Christian thinkers.<sup>922</sup> The topic of God's fatherhood was addressed often, yet from different vantage points.

Clement of Rome, for example, focuses on the Father's kind disposition to believers: "The all-merciful and beneficent Father has bowels [of compassion] towards those that fear Him, and kindly and lovingly bestows His favours upon those who come to Him with a simple mind" (*1 Clem.*, 23). God is a "gracious and merciful Father, who has made us partakers in the blessings of His elect" (*1 Clem.*, 29). Clement also mentions the universal aspect of God's fatherhood: God is "the Creator and Father of all worlds" (*1 Clem.*, 35).

The writer "Barnabas" also speaks of the Father's kind disposition to us: "We ought therefore, being possessed of understanding, to perceive the gracious intention of our Father; for He speaks to us, desirous that we, not going astray like them (the Jews)" (*Barn.*, 2).

Similar to Clement of Rome, Tatian refers to God as the universal Father: "He is invisible, impalpable, being Himself the Father of both sensible and invisible things" (*Address to the Greeks*, 4). Justin Martyr approaches this theme as well when He calls God the "God the Father of all" (*1 Apol.*, 12). Justin gives more attention, though, to God's attributes: He is "the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues" (*1 Apol.*, 6). For Justin, the title "Father" reflects "His good deeds and functions" (*2 Apol.*, 6).

Irenaeus treats the topic in a similar way. On the one hand, in His role as Creator, God is Father of all: "He is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, the only Father, alone containing all things, and Himself commanding all things into existence" (*Against Heresies*, 2.1.1); "...being alone is truly God and Father, who both formed this world, fashioned man" (2.28.1); and, "they should call the Maker of this universe the Father, who exercises a providence over all things" (3.25.1). On the other hand, Irenaeus also emphasizes the Father's attributes – the Father is a God of righteousness (3.25.2-3).

Origen, in turn, describes the various relationships of the Members of the Trinity with humans. The Holy Spirit sanctifies people, the Son gives them reason, and the Father is the source of their being: "They derive their existence from God the Father" (*De Principiis*, 1.3.8). In this way, Origen also affirms the universal nature of God's fatherhood.

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<sup>918</sup>Lidgett, p. 58-59, 77.

<sup>919</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 647-648; Conn, p. 21-22.

<sup>920</sup>Rees, *Children of God*, v. 1, p. 648.

<sup>921</sup>Lidgett, p. 52ff.

<sup>922</sup>Lidgett, p. 144-270; Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

Unlike those thinkers mentioned above, Athanasius understands God's fatherhood more in relation to the believer's position in Christ. Furthermore, he links believers' sonship with the theme of deification.

Over time, the Western Church began more and more to emphasize God's sovereignty and marginalize His role as Father. We can include Augustine and Aquinas in this number. Similarly, the Reformers also devoted little attention to God's fatherhood. They preferred other metaphors, such as God the warrior or king. In addition, God is not the Father of all, but only of believers in Jesus. Calvin writes,

For with what confidence could any man call God his Father? Who would have the presumption to arrogate to himself the honour of a son of God were we not gratuitously adopted as his sons in Christ? (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.36).

For believers, then, God's fatherhood implies His merciful and tender care for us. Calvin also writes, "Hence he both calls himself our Father, and is pleased to be so called by us, by this delightful name relieving us of all distrust, since nowhere can a stronger affection be found than in a father. Hence, too, he could not have given us a stronger testimony of his boundless love than in calling us his sons" (*Ibid.*).

### **C. Benefits of our Sonship**

Without doubt, the fatherhood of God means for us that He is compassionate toward us and cares for us, as it is written: "Just as a father has compassion on {his} children, so Yahweh has compassion on those who fear Him."<sup>923</sup> Therefore, we may expect to find in God's Word how the Lord expresses His fatherly care for us. We will discover that we may have intimate fellowship with Him, that he trains us in His ways, that we benefit from His provision and protection, and that we can anticipate both answers to prayer in this life and a glorious future inheritance. In this section, we will delve into the revelation of these marvelous expressions of God's father-heart toward His children.

#### **1. Fellowship with God**

Throughout biblical history, the true people of God have valued the privilege of fellowship with the Lord and access to His presence. Adam and Eve enjoyed direct fellowship with their Creator. Enoch "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen 5:24). Moses also enjoyed close fellowship with God, with whom he spoke "face to face" (Num 12:8).

The people of Israel in general also enjoyed a special relationship with Yahweh. Moses declared, "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is Yahweh our God whenever we call on Him?" (Deut 4:7). In addition, the psalmist calls the sons of Israel "a people near to Him" (Ps 148:14). He also rejoices that God is "my portion" (Ps 142:5).

The experience of God's presence is gloriously described in the following passages: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever" (Ps 16:11); "I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake" (Ps 17:15); "You make him joyful with gladness in Your presence" (Ps 21:6); "They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; and You give them to drink of the river of Your delights" (Ps 36:8). However, in Old Testament times holiness was required to enjoy God's presence (Ps 15; 140:13; Zech 14:6-7), as well as humility (Ps 138:6; Isa 57:18; 66:2).

Nearness to God is well expressed in the New Testament in Galatians 4:6, where we read, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (cf. Rom 8:15-16). We encounter in this verse the expression "Abba." The respected scholar Gerhard Kittel describes the significance

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<sup>923</sup>Lidgett, p. 303.

of this term: “This Aramaic word is a familiar term for ‘father’; it is also a title for rabbis and a proper name, but is almost never used for God.”<sup>924</sup>

In prayer to God the Father, Jesus calls Him “Abba” (Mk 14:36). Although this is the only text in Jesus’ sayings that contains this appellation, it was likely His typical address to Him. In other texts, though, we encounter in Jesus’ prayers the typical Greek word for father, i.e., *πάτερ* (*pater*).<sup>925</sup> Kittel explains, “Jesus probably used *abbá* for God not only in Mk. 14:36 but also whenever the Gk. *patér* occurs. It denotes childlike intimacy and trust, not disrespect.”<sup>926</sup> According to Galatians 4:6, however, not only Jesus has the right to address the Father as “Abba,” but His followers do as well.

Since children in Israel addressed their fathers as “Abba,” some feel the best English equivalent for this term is “daddy.” Stein challenges this claim, since not only did small children use this address, but older children and adult children did as well.<sup>927</sup> Nevertheless, since children tend to enjoy a close relationship with their father even in adulthood, we can conclude that the use of “Abba” implies intimate familial ties. Robison asserts that such a relationship provides “a safe environment” and “intimacy and trust.”<sup>928</sup>

Frost, then, sees two sides to our relationship to God. On the one hand, God is “Daddy” to us, that is, we enjoy closeness and intimacy with Him. On the other hand, we also enjoy a more “mature,” responsible relationship with Him as “Father.”<sup>929</sup>

## 2. The Father’s Nurture

As a good Father, God nurtures and trains His children. The Old Testament is full of examples where Yahweh sought to teach Israel His ways. The Law of Moses was to fulfill that function. The word *Tora* (תּוֹרָה), in fact, means “instruction.”<sup>930</sup>

However, when God’s people violated the Law and strayed from Him, He nonetheless attempted to restore them to Himself. He warned them through the prophets (2 Kin 17:13), sent various afflictions (1 King 17:1), inflicted with sickness (Ps 38:3-4), and raised up enemies against them (2 Kin 13:3). His goal in all this was not to exterminate His people, but to correct them: “Yahweh has disciplined me severely, but He has not given me over to death” (Ps 118:18), and, “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Isa 48:10).

God’s discipline of His children is only for a season: “For in a very little while My indignation {against you} will be spent and My anger {will be directed} to their destruction” (Isa 10:25), and comfort will follow: “‘Comfort, O comfort My people,’ says your God. ‘Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed, that she has received of Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins’” (Isa 40:1-2).

The psalmist finds much value in God’s discipline. This theme is repeated several times in Psalm 119: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word” (v. 67); “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes” (v. 71); and, “I know, O Yahweh, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me” (v. 75).

The New Testament follows along the same lines. God’s children are expected to behave in a certain way.<sup>931</sup> Jesus Himself described God’s children as those who love their enemies (Matt 5:44-45) and seek peace

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<sup>924</sup>Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 2.

<sup>925</sup>Stein, p. 247.

<sup>926</sup>Kittel, p. 2.

<sup>927</sup>Stein, p. 247.

<sup>928</sup>Robison, p. 13.

<sup>929</sup>Frost, p. 58.

<sup>930</sup>However, as noted in chapter 8 of volume 2, God knew from the beginning that Israel (and humanity in general) would not be able to keep the Law and, in the end, it would serve not as a method of spiritual training, but as a cause for accusation.

<sup>931</sup>Conn, p. 33; Lidgett, p. 75; Rees, Children of God, v. 1, p. 648.

(Matt 5:9). Paul writes on this theme, “...so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). Moreover, God’s children imitate their Father (Eph 5:1) and are led by His Spirit (Rom 8:14).

The apostle John lays heavy stress on this aspect of our adoption. God’s children practice righteousness (1 Jn 3:10), walk in love (1 Jn 4:7), do not sin (1 Jn 5:18), and overcome the world (1 Jn 5:4). Peter warns, “If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay {on earth}” (1 Pet 1:17).

It is interesting to note that the Scriptures sometimes speak of adoption as an established fact, but sometimes as a future event. An example of the first is 1 John 3:1, where we read, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and {such} we are.” On the other hand, the Bible at times seems to make adoption conditional on attaining victory over sin (see 2 Cor 6:17-18; Rev 21:7). This does not contradict the earlier statements of our acceptance into God’s family now, but serves as a confirmation that our adoption as sons and daughters found expression in our practical lives.

The main term to describe God’s action of spiritual nurture is παιδεύω (*paideuo*), or in the nominal form παιδεία (*paideia*). This term has a wide spectrum of meaning, including “instruction” (Tit 2:12; Acts 7:22; 22:3), “reproof” (2 Tim 2:25; 2 Tim 3:16; Eph 6:4), and “discipline” (Rev 3:19; 1 Tim 1:20; 1 Cor 11:32; Lk 23:16; 23:22; 2 Cor 6:9). All these meanings are interrelated. Sometimes instruction requires reproof and discipline, and reproof and discipline are done for the purpose of instruction and nurture.

A key passage expounding on the theme of God’s nurturing is Hebrews 12:5-11, where the words παιδεύω (*paideuo*) and παιδεία (*paideia*) are found eight times and are translated “discipline”:

...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by him; for those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom {his} father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplin'd us for a short time as seem'd best to them, but He {disciplines us} for {our} good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

The Bible records several means by which the Lord may discipline His children. His preferred method is through His Word (2 Tim 3:16). God desires that His people would keep His Word without the need for Him to resort to other measures. However, in order to stir some on to obedience, He may employ other methods: (1) He can send difficulties (Hag 1:9) or illness (1 Cor 11:30), (2) the Church may apply various means of discipline (1 Cor 5:13), or (3) believers could pass away prematurely because of disobedience (1 Cor 11:30).

When God punishes believers’ disobedience, His goal is correction. Hebrews 12 confirms this: “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v. 11).

Finally, some writers comment that nurture and the discipline that sometimes results from it is administered in the context of family, that is, in the context of our position as God’s children. Frost and Conn assert that we become responsive children in an atmosphere of love.<sup>932</sup> Lidgett states that God’s methods may include discipline, but His motive is love and His goal is fellowship.<sup>933</sup>

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<sup>932</sup>Frost, p. 105.

<sup>933</sup>Lidgett, p. 288.

### 3. The Father's Provision

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus clearly revealed that the Father is interested in our material well-being. He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven... give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). Furthermore, Scripture contains not a few references that confirm that truth, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Beginning with the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:29),<sup>934</sup> God always provided His people with every necessity. Even under unfavorable conditions, God miraculously provided for His own. He took care of Jacob during a famine (Gen 47), gave Israel food in the wilderness (Ex 16), and fed Elijah during a drought (1 Kin 17).

The Psalms often pick up the theme of God as Provider: "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps 145:16), He "gives food to the hungry" (Ps 146:7), and "satisfies you with the finest of the wheat" (Ps 147:14). "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek Yahweh shall not be in want of any good thing" (Ps 34:10), but "in the days of famine they will have abundance" (Ps 37:19).<sup>935</sup> The psalmist testifies from personal experience, "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread" (Ps 37:25).

In addition, Jesus Himself instructed His disciples to rely on God's provision and care:

Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Paul echoes this thought in this marvelous promise from the Lord: "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). Conn confirms, "The foundation of a happy life is the knowledge that we matter to God. We are His children, and He wants good things for us, even to the point of becoming actively involved in the everyday affairs of our lives."<sup>936</sup>

The Bible talks not only of God providing our needs, but also of His desire that we prosper. The Old Testament relates the history of many wealthy people who served the Lord: Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, and others. Noah "was the greatest of all the men of the east" (Job 1:3). Abraham "was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold" (Gen 13:2). It is written of David, "David became greater and greater, for Yahweh of hosts {was} with him" (1 Chr 11:9). In Solomon's day, we learn that he "made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamores in the lowland" (2 Chr 1:15).

Furthermore, according to the Mosaic Law, obedient Israel could expect great prosperity (Lev 26; Deut 28). The psalmist prays that God would prosper His people (Ps 144:12-15) and believes that God "satisfies your years with good things" (Ps 103:5), that we will "see the goodness of Yahweh in the land of the living" (Ps 27:13), and that "goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life" (Ps 23:6).

The New Testament does not lack references to God's desire to prosper His people. The apostle John wishes that believers would "in all respects... prosper and be in good health" (3 Jn 2). Paul declares that God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17) and that God "is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed" (2 Cor 9:8).

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<sup>934</sup>Robison, p. 47.

<sup>935</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>936</sup>Conn, p. 54.

Although God is ready to meet all our material needs, the Bible also warns Christians not to rely on one's wealth (1 Tim 6:17; Matt 6:24), and that the love of money can be a hindrance to spiritual life and bring much grief (1 Tim 6:9-10; Matt 19:24). Believers must always look to God as the source of well-being.

The Bible exhorts us to be content with what we have. Paul learned "to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil 4:11). The epistle to the Hebrews instructs us, "{Make sure that} your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you'" (Heb 13:5). Conn comments, "A loving God might well keep those doors closed if He knows that we are not spiritually mature enough to handle the tough choices which material success brings."<sup>937</sup>

To benefit from God's provision involves fulfilling certain conditions. The Old Testament reveals that God prospers the righteous: "For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O Yahweh, You surround him with favor as with a shield" (Ps 5:12), and, "No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps 84:11; cf. Ps 92:12). Solomon revealed the secret of his father David's success, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You" (1 Kin 3:6). Solomon's dedication to Yahweh also led to his success (1 Kin 3:13).

Correspondingly, prosperity comes to those who fear God: "O fear Yahweh, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek Yahweh shall not be in want of any good thing" (Ps 34:9-10), and, "How blessed is the man who fears Yahweh.... Wealth and riches are in his house (Ps 112:3; cf. Ps 128:1-4). Those who honor God's Word enjoy the same promise: "...his delight is in the law of Yahweh... in whatever he does, he prospers" (Ps 1:3; cf. Josh 1:8), as well as those who honor God's kingdom (Matt 6:33).

Those who are righteous and fear God fulfill the condition for prosperity of obedience: "If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land" (Isa 1:19; cf. Lev 11; Deut 28). Once God exclaimed, "Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!... I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you" (Ps 81:13-16).

Other factors lead to the prosperity of God's people. To prosper, one must work: "The hand of the diligent makes rich" (Prov 10:4; cf. Ecc 5:19; 2 Thes 3:12).<sup>938</sup> Paul even commanded the church, "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either" (2 Thes 3:10).

A guiding norm for prosperity is the principle of giving and receiving. The Bible abounds with references to the connection between giving and receiving material blessing. Some key ones are as follows:

- The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered (Prov 11:25)
- Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, {and} running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return (Lk 6:38)

This giving can be directed to God (Prov 3:9-10; Mal 3:10), the poor (Isa 58:7-11; Ps 41:1-3; Prov 19:17), or parents (Eph 6:2-3). In every case, the giver can expect material blessing. A fine example of this principle in practice is when a widow provided for God's prophet with what was left of her food and received an abundance in return (1 Kin 17:10-13).

Related to the principle of giving and receiving, the Bible also teaches the principle of the "cycle of prosperity." First, we must understand that Scripture exhorts those who have something to give to share their blessings with others: "Instruct those who are rich in this present world... to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (1 Tim 6:17-18). Paul also explains that believers work and earn wages not for themselves, but in order to have the means to bless others (Eph 4:28). After embracing these truths, we go

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<sup>937</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>938</sup>Robison, p. 47.



on to the main passage outlining the “cycle of prosperity” – 2 Corinthians 9:8: “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”

We note that, first of all, God is ready to meet all our needs. Believers never need to question whether God will provide for them as He promised: “...so that always having all sufficiency in everything....” Second, God promises not only to fulfill our needs, but also to financially bless us beyond our needs. He does so, so that we “may have an abundance for every good deed.” Finally, it is important to keep in mind that this passage is found in a context of giving. This means that only those who give can expect to receive God’s provision and participate in this “cycle of prosperity.”

We can now outline the “cycle of prosperity.” Out of obedience to the Lord, Christians give of their resources to bless His kingdom and others in need. God then responds by returning to the giver even a greater abundance, according to the promise “he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6; also see Lk 6:38). So then, the more someone gives, the more this individual will receive, and the more this individual receives, the more he or she is enabled to give. This is the “cycle of prosperity,” which actually is a spiral, leading to ever-increasing prosperity for the purpose of ever-increasing generosity.

#### **4. The Father’s Protection**

As a loving Father, God guards His children. Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father, “Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13).

The Old Testament narrative recounts not a few instances of God protecting His people. We recall the time when God protected Jacob from his offended brother Esau (Gen 33). In Egypt, not one of the plagues that troubled the Egyptians came near the Israelites (Ex 7ff). In the wilderness, God sent “an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared” (Ex 23:20).<sup>939</sup> When Israel was preparing for the conquest of Canaan, Yahweh guarded the two spies sent out to survey the land (Josh 2). As a reward for attendance at the required feast days, God promised His people, “No man shall covet your land” in their absence (Ex 34:24).

Going on to David’s time, we observe that God granted him divine protection as well. A notable instance was when David and his men recovered all their persons and property after being raided by a hostile tribe (1 Sam 30:18-19). In addition, God sheltered David from Saul’s hand many times (1 Sam 19ff). It is not surprising that David, upon reflection, glorified God:

Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my savior, You save me from violence. I call upon Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies (2 Sam 22:2-4).

We can highlight other remarkable instances of God’s protection. When Ahaziah sent soldiers to take Elijah, fire came down from heaven and consumed them (2 Kin 1). Elijah’s protégé, Elisha, also enjoyed supernatural security. When the king of Aram sent an army to seize him, God struck them with blindness so that they did not recognize him (2 Kin 6).

Most of the passages extolling God as Protector are found in the book of Psalms. Many times, the psalmist calls upon God to protect him from enemies.<sup>940</sup> However, we also find in the Psalms concrete promises of God’s protection. We will list a few examples:

- In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For You alone, O Yahweh, make me to dwell in safety (Ps 4:8).

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<sup>939</sup>Robison, p. 48-49.

<sup>940</sup>See Ps 22, 31, 43, 54, 71, 80, 107, 140-141 and many others.

- The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them (Ps 34:7).
- God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea (Ps 46:1-2).
- He permitted no man to oppress them, and He reproveth kings for their sakes: "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm" (Ps 105:14-15).
- Yahweh keeps all who love Him (Ps 145:20).

This theme is most powerfully explicated in two famous Psalms: Psalms 91 and 121:

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to Yahweh, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, {But} it shall not approach you. You will only look on with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. For you have made Yahweh, my refuge, {Even} the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down. "Because he has loved Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him {securely} on high, because he has known My name. He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With a long life I will satisfy him and let him see My salvation" (Ps 91).

I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come? My help {comes} from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Yahweh is your keeper; Yahweh is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. Yahweh will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. Yahweh will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever (Ps 121).

The Psalms also ascribe to the Lord several titles and designations that reflect His role as our Protector. He is our fortress (18:2), rock (18:31), hiding place (32:7), refuge (46:1), stronghold and shield (144:2).

Isaiah also contributes several inspiring texts about God's protection. Through him, Yahweh gives those returning from exile words of comfort and assurance:

- When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you (Isa 43:2).
- Yahweh will go before you, and the God of Israel {will be} your rear guard (Isa 52:12).
- No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their vindication is from Me," declares Yahweh (Isa 54:17).

The New Testament continues the theme of God our Protector, yet focuses more on it in a spiritual sense. Nonetheless, we witness several instances in the earthly ministry of Jesus when He was guarded from attack by enemies (Lk 4:29-30; Jn 10:39). Jesus' life, in fact, was under threat from the time of His birth, yet the Father delivered Him from Herod's power (Matt 2). No one could harm Jesus before His appointed time (Jn 7:30, 44). All the armies of heaven were always at His disposal: "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and

He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt 26:53). At the same time, Jesus never put His Father to the test (Lk 4:9-13).

We also recall the instance when Jesus guarded His disciples from a storm at sea. In fact, He wondered at their unbelief (Matt 8:24-27). After His ascension, His disciples continued to enjoy God's protection. He delivered the Twelve from prison (Acts 5), Peter from death (Acts 12), Paul from the bite of a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-6) and shipwreck (Acts 27). In the final case, God granted protection to all who travelled with Paul as well. We keep in mind, of course, that in the book of Acts followers of Jesus suffered persecution, sometimes to the point of death (Acts 7, 12). Yet, we understand that the Church is called to share in the sufferings of Christ, that is, persecution for the faith.

In light of our survey above, we can claim that believers can fully rely on God's protection in a physical sense. Yet, in life experience we do see believers experiencing tragedy. We discuss this difficulty in our chapter on the "Problem of Evil," in chapter 19 of volume 3. What about God's promise to guard us spiritually? Does that mean that believers can never fall away? This topic is also covered in volume 3, chapter 18.

## **5. Answers to Prayer**

As a loving and caring Father, God answers the prayers of His children. However, the issue of answered prayer is multifactorial and complex. Therefore, we must carefully examine this doctrine and its implications for practical Christian living.

Prayer is a necessity for all. Whenever we meet up with difficulties and challenges in life, the best solution is to appeal to a Higher Power for help, i.e., to our Heavenly Father. The psalmist provides us with a good pattern to follow: "In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, for You will answer me" (Ps 86:7), and, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord" (Ps 77:2). The book of Psalms abounds with examples where the psalmist turns to Yahweh in prayer. This is true for the remainder of the narrative of Scripture as well.

In prayer, people express their deepest feelings to the Lord: all their grief, all their pain. Again, the psalmist is an example: "I cry aloud with my voice to Yahweh; I make supplication with my voice to Yahweh. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him" (Ps 142:1-2), and, "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Yourself from my supplication.... My heart is in anguish within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me" (Ps 55:1-5).

The Lord invites His people to come to Him with their needs and problems. God's people pray for protection in travel (Ez 8:21-23), for rain (Zech 10:1), for protection from temptation (Lk 22:40), for workers for the harvest (Matt 9:38), for success in ministry (Acts 13:3), and for many other things. Solomon summarizes the limitless scope of God's care:

If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, if there is blight or mildew, if there is locust or grasshopper, if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities, whatever plague or whatever sickness {there is}, whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own pain, and spreading his hands toward this house, then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men (2 Chr 6:28-30).

In Solomon's experience, we witness one of the most remarkable invitations in Scripture, when the Lord promised him "Ask what {you wish} Me to give you" (1 Kin 3:5). Jesus gave a similar promise to His disciples: "Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be {granted} you" (Mk 11:24; cf. Matt 21:22), and, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you" (Jn 16:23; cf. Jn 14:14). The Gospels also remind us that the Lord knows our needs before we even ask Him (Matt 6:8).

However, it is misguided to think that prayer is appropriate only in times of trouble. In all the generations of God's people, His worshipers have sought Him in prayer and enjoyed fellowship with Him. Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan 6:10). Anna the prophetess "never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers" (Lk 2:37). The apostles in Jerusalem devoted themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The elders of the church in Antioch "were ministering to the Lord and fasting" (Acts 13:2). Paul references his prayer life (Rom 1:10; Eph 1:16; Philemon 4). Even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, often secluded Himself for prayer (Lk 5:16). Many use the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for personal prayer (Matt 6:9-13).

Prayer concerns not only personal needs, but also involves intercession for others. Scripture provides multiple examples of prayer for others: Job for his "friends" (Job 42:8-9), Moses for Israel (Ex 32:30-32) and Miriam (Num 12:11-13), David for his dying son (2 Sam 12:16-17), Nehemiah and Daniel for the remnant of Judah (Neh 1; Dan 9), Jesus for His disciples (Jn 17), the saints for the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:5), Paul for the churches (Col 1:3), etc. In addition, Christians pray not only for their friends, but also for their enemies (Lk 6:28).

The Bible calls us to support one another in prayer. Jesus gave us the powerful promise, "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven" (Matt 18:19). Paul requested prayer support from the congregations that he founded (2 Cor 1:11; Phil 1:19).

We deeply desire to pray effectively. God promises to answer the prayers of His children, but requires certain conditions. First, prayer must be in accordance with His will (1 Jn 5:14). Consequently, believers need to discern, as far as possible, the will of God in every request they make. The revealed Word of God is our best guide to know the Father's will. We recall the words of our Lord Jesus: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (Jn 15:7).

Additionally, God's Word not only instructs us in God's ways, but summons us to put them into practice: "...{that} your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you" (Jn 15:16; cf. 1 Jn 3:22). We find the same exhortation in the Old Testament: "The eyes of Yahweh are toward the righteous and His ears are {open} to their cry" (Ps 34:15), and, "Yahweh is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth" (Ps 145:18). It is stated even of God's Son, "He was heard because of His piety" (Heb 5:7). Scripture promises, "Delight yourself in Yahweh; and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4).

Another irreplaceable element is faith. Those who pray must expect God's answer to their requests. Scripture abounds in exhortations to faith, of which we will highlight just a few. Jesus taught, "All things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matt 21:22), and, "All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be {granted} you" (Mk 11:24). John combines the element of faith with praying in God's will: "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us {in} whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 Jn 5:14-15). Finally, James reveals how doubt can hinder effective prayer:

But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord (Jam 1:6-7).

The Bible also insists on fervency in prayer (Jam 5:16). Half-hearted prayer will likely go unanswered. The Bible gives us inspiring examples of prayer with feeling: Elijah (1 Kin 18:42-44), Hezekiah (Isa 37:14-20), Nehemiah (Neh 1:4), Mordecai (Est 4:1-3), and others. Once when Jesus prayed, His sweat even became blood (Lk 22:44). Paul equates pray with labor (Col 4:12).

Perseverance is also a necessary component. The Lord told two parables to encourage His disciples to persevere in prayer (Lk 11:5-13; 18:1-8). In another place, Jesus promised, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matt 7:7). The use of the Greek present imperative in this verse indicates perseverance in repeated asking. Bartimaeus displayed tenacity and captured the Lord’s attention as a result (Mk 10:46-48). If the answer to prayer does not come immediately, believers must continue to stand in faith expecting God’s intervention.

Another key component to effective prayer is humility. God “is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5). An angel announced to Daniel that his humility hastened the answer to his prayer (Dan 10:12). Therefore, we value the counsel of Ecclesiastes: “Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God” (Ecc 5:2).

Finally, prayer must be made in the name of Jesus. The Lord Himself insisted on this rule (Jn 16:24). Prayer in Jesus’ name serves as a recognition by the party in prayer that our access to God’s throne is made possible only through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note that the Bible often narrates examples where those in prayer give God “reasons” why He should answer their prayer, as if they are thereby “convincing” Him to act. For example, in Psalm 74 the psalmist, in asking for Israel’s deliverance, appeals to Yahweh’s reputation among the Gentiles: “Arise, O God, {and} plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You all day long. Do not forget the voice of Your adversaries, the uproar of those who rise against You which ascends continually” (v. 22-23; cf. Num 14:13-16; 2 Kin 19:19). The psalmist also appeals to God’s reputation among believers (Ps 69:6).

Moreover, to further “motivate” God to answer prayer, His people sometimes appeal to the history of Israel and the Lord’s covenant with them: “Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old, which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; {and} this Mount Zion, where You have dwelt” (Ps 74:2), and, “They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand” (Neh 1:10). Other appeals are to: God’s faithfulness, “Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?” (Ps 89:49; cf. 2 Chr 20:7-12), His love, “Answer me, O Yahweh, for Your lovingkindness is good; according to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me” (Ps 69:16; cf. Num 14:19), and His righteousness, “O Yahweh my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?” (1 Kin 17:20).

Another factor that can increase effectiveness in prayer is fasting. Even though the Bible gives no direct command to fast, it records many instances where God’s people fasted and received results. Daniel, for example, prayed with fasting before receiving His revelation of the coming of Messiah (Dan 9). Esther called for a three day fast that God would grant her favor before the king (Est 4:16). Jehoshaphat along with all Israel sought the Lord in prayer and fasting when threatened by Moab and Ammon (2 Chr 20).

Fasting was a New Testament practice as well. Jesus Himself fasted for forty days before His temptation in the wilderness (Lk 4:2). Leaders of the church in Antioch prayed and fasted before they commissioned Paul and Barnabas on their mission (Acts 13:3). In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul recommended a temporary abstinence from marital relations as a type of fast.

Two final “ingredients” for effective prayer, which are no longer practiced among God’s people, are offering sacrifices and making vows. The Old Testament records several instances where offering a sacrifice contributed to effectiveness in prayer (e.g. 1 Sam 10:8; 2 Sam 24:25). However, making sacrifices is inappropriate for Christ’s Church. The singular sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient. Concerning vows, we will address that question in chapter 10 of volume 5.

As we have seen, some factors may aid effective prayer, but other factors may hinder it. Sin is the main hindrance: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, Yahweh will not hear” (Ps 66:18). Isaiah declares the same: “So when you spread out your hands {in prayer,} I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood” (Isa 1:15).<sup>941</sup>

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<sup>941</sup>Also see Job 35:9-12; 1 Sam 28:6-16; Prov 15:8, 29; 21:27; Mic 3:4; Lam 3:8.

Demonic forces can delay answers to prayer. Such was the case with Daniel, who waited for 21 days while angels battled (Dan 10:12-14). Lack of respect for God (Mal 1:8-9) or one's wife (1 Pet 3:7) can also present a problem. Jesus specifically directed His followers to forgive others when praying (Mk 10:25; cf. 1 Tim 2:8). In a practical sense, fatigue can interfere with prayer, as when the disciples fell asleep instead of praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:45).

Jesus gave further instruction about prayer in His Sermon on the Mount – do not pray for show (Matt 6:5-6) or pray with meaningless repetition (Matt 6:7).

The biblical testimony and the experience of God's people demonstrates that God not only promises to answer prayer, but actually does answer. He answered the request of Abraham's servant and led him to Rebecca (Gen 24). He had mercy on rebellious Israel thanks to Moses' prayer (Num 11:2-3). The Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer for healing (2 Kin 19:20). In answer to prayer, He blessed Zechariah and Elizabeth with a child (Lk 1:13). We can cite many other examples.

Although we often question why God does not always answer quickly (Ps 60, 88), those who persevere prove Him faithful. God does not only answer prayer, He gives peace to our hearts and minds when we make known our requests to Him (Phil 4:6-7).

Even though the Bible gives no specific instruction on bodily position in prayer, it will interest us to note how people in the Bible prayed. Sometimes they stand (1 Kin 8:22) and sometimes they kneel (1 Kin 8:54; Dan 6:10; Eph 3:14). They may lift their hands (1 Kin 8:38, 54; Ps 143:6; 1 Tim 2:8) and lift their eyes to heaven (Mk 6:31; 7:34). Concerning the time to pray, the psalmist preferred morning prayer (Ps 5:3; 88:13). Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan 6:10). Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer (Acts 3:1).

To whom should we pray? In general, the Bible instructs us to pray to God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ (Jn 16:23). However, we also see indications of prayer to Jesus Himself (Acts 7:59; 2 Cor 12:8-9).<sup>942</sup> A key passage here is John 14:13-14: "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do {it}."

Finally, along with making requests to the Father, it is always appropriate to give thanks. The Bible both gives us specific instruction in this regard, and presents concrete examples of this behavior. Again, we appeal to Daniel: "He continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God" (Dan 6:10) and Paul: "(I) do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention {of you} in my prayers" (Eph 1:16).

We will return to the topic of prayer in volume 5 of this series.

## 6. The Inheritance of the Saints

As children of God, believers in Jesus can expect to receive an inheritance. The Greek word used to describe this derives from the root κληρώ (*kleroo*) and appears in the biblical text in various forms. The inheritance is granted not only to God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ (Matt 21:38; Heb 1:2), but also to those who through Him have been adopted into the family of God (Gal 4:7; Rom 8:17; Eph 1:11).<sup>943</sup>

We can further clarify this theme. First, we must recognize that the believers' inheritance is not based on their personal merit, but on God's grace (Gal 3:18; 4:30; Heb 6:12; 9:15-17). In spite of the fact that believers are God's children and consequently heirs of God, this in no way means that God "owes" them something. All that we receive from God comes by grace.

Second, the Scriptures teach that Christians enter into their full inheritance only after the resurrection from the dead (1 Cor 15:50). Part of our inheritance, in fact, is a glorified body. Third, unlike Hebrew and Ancient Near Eastern traditions, both men and women are heirs (1 Pet 3:7). Lastly, God's Word warns that one can forfeit the inheritance by returning to a life of sin (Gal 5:21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Eph 5:5; Acts 20:32; Col 3:24).

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<sup>942</sup>Bloesch D. G. *God the Almighty*. – Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1995. – P. 192.

<sup>943</sup>Robison, p. 38.

Finally, although the Bible does not give a precise description of what this inheritance consists of, we know that it is rich and glorious (Eph 1:18). Paul makes the amazing statement, “The world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you” (1 Cor 3:22).<sup>944</sup> All of creation “waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19).<sup>945</sup>

Our inheritance is conceptually linked to the ideas of “life,” “eternal life,” and “salvation.” (1 Pet 1:4; 3:7, 9; Rev 21:6; Matt 19:29; Mk 10:17; Lk 10:25; 18:18; Eph 1:14). These ideas are therefore synonymous. In addition, the inheritance is also associated with the Kingdom (Rom 4:13; Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 15:50). The Bible reveals that believers will reign with Christ. God’s children are destined to “inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5).

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<sup>944</sup>Lidgett, p. 76.

<sup>945</sup>Rees, Children of God, v. 1, p. 648.

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## Section 3. Participation in Christ's Death, Resurrection, Exaltation

In section 2, we discovered that because of the principle of corporate personality, we stand in a relationship of solidarity with Jesus Christ. This means that His representative role furnishes us with certain benefits: forgiveness of sins, justification, and adoption. In this section, we will learn how this relationship of solidarity also made possible our real participation in the redemptive events of Christ's life. According to Scripture, our union with Christ includes participation in His death, resurrection, exaltation, and the revelation of His glory at His Second Coming.

Our participation in the death of Christ entitles us to certain blessings, which are discussed in the subsequent chapters, in particular: sanctification (chp. 11), physical healing (chp. 12), and sharing in His sufferings (chp. 13). Although some may not consider sharing in Christ's suffering to be a "blessing," nonetheless this remain an essential part of our participation in His death. Through Jesus' resurrection, believers in Him receive a new birth in this age (chp. 14), and in the age to come – a resurrected, glorified body (vol. 5, chp. 2). Participation in His exaltation provides supernatural power for effective ministry (chp. 15) and authority over the devil and all the powers of evil (chp. 16). Finally, when Christ appears, our life in Him will be fully manifest. We will reserve discussion of this final, eschatological element until volume 5 of this series.

### Chapter 11: Participation in Christ's Death - Sanctification

#### A. Terminology

The Hebrew and Greek terms used for sanctification are קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*), טָהָר (*taher*), and ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*). The Hebrew term קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*) is rarely used in a secular sense – usually in a religious one. Therefore, its basic meaning is hard to decipher. Nonetheless, it probably denotes "separation." The Old Testament conventionally employs it to describe something especially set apart for Yahweh. Typically, קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*) relates to physical items, for example, objects associated with the tabernacle.

The term קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*) has a wider application, though, than just to items of worship. It refers also to the behavior expected of God's people. Sanctification implies a certain type of behavior, namely, separation from sin. God called His people "chosen." He chose them to belong exclusively to Him. Moses said to Israel, "You are a holy people to Yahweh your God; Yahweh your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6).

Another Old Testament term related to sanctification is טָהָר (*maxap*). Its primary meaning is "to cleanse." Like the word קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*), it applies both to the cleaning of items, and to purity in moral behavior. The following verses illustrate this second usage:

- Create in me a clean (טָהָר) heart, O God (Ps 51:10).
- Then I will sprinkle clean (טָהָר) water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse (טָהָר) you from all your filthiness and from all your idols (Ezek 36:25).

The Greek term that corresponds to the Hebrew קֹדֶשׁ (*kodesh*) is ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*). The original usage of this word was to describe an item that instilled fear. Therefore, its verbal form originally meant, "to recoil." Another meaning assigned to ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*) was "clean." Therefore, we see cohesion between the Greek and Hebrew conceptions of holiness. In both systems, the idea of "holiness" indicated something special or unique, something that one cannot flippantly approach.

#### B. Survey of Biblical Teaching

##### 1. Old Testament

From the beginning of creation, God called people to holiness. He gave the first humans a commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in order to provide them an opportunity to express their love for and trust in Him through an act of obedience. Before He destroyed the earth with a flood, He showed favor to Noah, who was “a righteous man, blameless in his time” (Gen 6:9). Later in time, Yahweh chose Abraham and commanded him, “Walk before Me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1).

When God called Israel to Himself, He called them to be a people separated unto Him. Through Moses, He commanded, “You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God” (Lev 20:7; cf. 19:2; 11:44-45). Furthermore, we read, “You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel” (Lev 22:32). Yahweh’s name is holy (Lev 20:3; cf. 1 Chr 16:10; Ps 105:3). Throughout the Old Testament, He is known as the “Holy One of Israel” (2 Kin 19:22; Ps 71:22; Isa 1:4; etc.).<sup>946</sup>

Since Israel belongs to the Lord, they bear His name. It was possible, then, for Israel to misrepresent Him. God is jealous for his name and therefore said to His people, “So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am Yahweh. You shall not profane My holy name” (Lev 22:31-32). Those who belong to the Lord must abstain from sin, since they bear the Lord’s name.

Moreover, God’s presence dwelt in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a holy place, that is, a place set apart for Yahweh. In it was a special chamber, the “Holy of Holies,” the place of God’s manifest presence. There were special garments for the high priest, which no one else could wear. There were also special objects used only for worship in the tabernacle. A certain part of the harvest was set apart for the Lord, which no one else could partake of. A holy anointing oil was prepared that could not be used for secular purposes.

In Numbers chapter 16, we read of some Levites who desired to become priests. They therefore burned incense before the Lord, and the Lord struck them down. God then commanded, “As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered sheets for a plating of the altar, since they did present them before Yahweh and they are holy” (Num 16:38). That which is presented to the Lord becomes holy to Him. God takes care to distinguish that which belongs to Him from that which belongs to others. In other words, He makes a distinction between what is holy and what is profane (i.e., common).

The establishment of the Old Testament sacrificial system also reflects God’s holiness. Israel could not approach a holy God without the high priest offering sacrifice for them. The highest expression of the sacrificial system was the Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies to make propitiation for the sins of God’s people (Lev 16-17).

Holiness among God’s people also involved observing the Law, both in its moral and in its ceremonial aspects. Regarding the latter, the Torah abounds in commands concerning kosher foods, care for the tabernacle, rules for the priesthood, etc. Abstaining from leaven after Passover symbolized a purging from sin (Ex 13:6-7). Observing feast days and paying tithes reminded the people that they belonged to Yahweh (Lev 27:30).<sup>947</sup>

Muller provides the following helpful commentary on the purpose of the ceremonial law:

Such formal or ritual consecration should be viewed as a religious or “pre-ethical” stage in the development of the concept of personal human holiness or sanctification.... The sense of distinction between the sacred and the profane and the need for formal separation from the profane in order to serve the holy God precede and ultimately provide the foundation for an ethical understanding of separation from the world or worldliness to divine service.<sup>948</sup>

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<sup>946</sup>Muller R.A. Sanctification // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. – V. 4. – P. 321.

<sup>947</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 322.

<sup>948</sup>Ibid.

Another important aspect of holy living for God's Old Testament people was separation from the surrounding Gentile nations. Yahweh feared that close ties with Gentiles could lead to moral and ritual degeneration, resulting in apostasy from true faith: "Watch yourself that you make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst" (Ex 34:12; cf. Josh 23:13; Ex 23:33; Deut 7:16).

God's people committed themselves to obey the Law: "All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!" (Ex 19:8). However, Israel demonstrated the opposite – disobedience to the Law from the very first day. The Law revealed their fallen human nature and inability to obey God. They needed to experience a "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 30:6), which became available only in the future.

In the Old Testament historical books, obedience was required to enjoy covenant relationship with Yahweh: "O Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no god like You in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and {showing} lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart" (2 Chr 6:14). The leaders of God's people were no exception. God said concerning Solomon: "I will establish his kingdom forever if he resolutely performs My commandments and My ordinances, as is done now" (1 Chr 28:7).

In the Old Testament poetical books, God continues to exhort His people to holy living. The way to God is a way of holiness (Ps 24:3-6; 15:1-5). He summons His people to obey, "You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep {them} diligently," (Ps 119:4) in order to receive blessing (Ps 25:12-13; 125:4; 119:165). Disobedience leads to ruin (Ps 125:5; Prov 21:16). So then, Israel must guard their hearts (Prov 4:23) and refrain from sinning (Prov 4:14-15).

However, the poetical books also indicate that God is ready to aid His people in attaining sanctification. He instructs Israel through His Word (Ps 119:9, 11; Ps 1:1-3) and also helps them to fulfill it (Ps 119:32-45, 117, 173-175). The psalmist appeals to Yahweh for strength to resist sin (Ps 19:14; 36:11; 119:29).

Finally, the prophets continually reprove God's people and urge them to forsake lawlessness and idolatry, to return to Yahweh, and to keep His covenant and His Law: "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa 55:7). In this way, Israel will inherit a blessing from the Lord: "If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land" (Isa 1:19, cf. 26:7; 33:15-16). Yet, "if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword" (Isa 1:20).

The prophets, however, also hold out hope for a future spiritual renewal of Israel, more so than in any other section of the Old Testament. Through Isaiah, God promises, "I have seen his ways, but I will heal him" (Isa 57:18). Jeremiah predicts, "I will heal your faithlessness" (Jer 3:22), and, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it" (Jer 31:33).

The most striking promise of Israel's future sanctification is found in the prophetic writings of Ezekiel. Yahweh states, "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them (Ezek 11:19-20). This theme repeats later in Ezekiel's prophecy:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezek 36:25-27; cf. 29, 33).

White concisely summarizes the Old Testament teaching on holiness:

Thus God is holy; "separate" from nature, other gods, and sinners; unapproachable except by mediation and sacrifice (Isa. 6:3-5). Men and women "sanctify" God by obeying his commands (Lev. 22:32; Isa.

8:13; 1 Pet. 3:15). Israel *is* inherently holy, separated by God from “the peoples” to be his own. Yet Israel must *become* holy, by obedience, fit for the privilege allotted her.<sup>949</sup>

## 2. New Testament

Since the Lord Jesus lived in a transition period between the old and new covenants, He appealed in His teaching on holiness to both the Old Testament and His personal authority. The classic example of this combination of factors is found in His Sermon on the Mount, especially in chapter 5. There, Christ cites the Mosaic Law, and even intensifies it, applying it to the internal life of His hearers. To our amazement, He concludes this section by saying, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

Jesus often warned about the dangers of sin. Employing a hyperbole, He cautions His disciples, “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you” (Matt 18:8). He relates the degree of dedication He expects of His followers: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mk 8:34). We see the same call to radical discipleship in Mark 10:21, where the Lord charges a certain rich man, “Go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” Muller comments,

Thus Jesus’ preaching issues a clear call to a decision for God, for the kingdom and against the world, that marks the basic fact of the separation of all those who belong to God from the profane, the sinful, and the demonic.<sup>950</sup>

Luke especially emphasized the choice between God and riches. For example, only in this Gospel do we find the following words of Christ: “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life” (Lk 21:34). Along with Matthew, Luke challenges his audience with the words, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Lk 16:13; cf. Matt 6:24)

The book of Acts continues the theme of the holiness of Christ’s Church. God punished Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit by striking them dead (Acts 5:1-10). Because of this, “Great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things” (Acts 5:11). At the same time, Paul assures the Church that God does not leave the believer to struggle with sin alone, but empowers by His Word (Acts 20:32). Sanctification is accomplished through faith in Christ (Acts 26:18).

The General Epistles put special emphasis on the holiness of believers. The epistle of James, for example, is full of exhortations concerning practical Christian living and obedience to the Lord. Along with this, James charges his readers to “keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jam 1:27). In his brief epistle, Jude warns about moral lassitude in the Christian life. Nonetheless, he gives us the assurance that God “is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 24).

Peter also comments on the theme of sanctification. In 1 Peter 1:15-16, he cites Leviticus 19:2: “Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all {your} behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Since believers have “purified (their) souls” (1 Pet 1:22), they must put away sin (1 Pet 2:1, 11) and live for righteousness (1 Pet 2:24). In his second epistle, Peter encourages believers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). In chapter 1 of this epistle, Peter details the process by which a person progresses in sanctification (2 Pet 1:2-11).

Finally, the author of Hebrews exhorts his audience to “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us” (Heb 12:1) and to “press on to maturity” (Heb 6:1). He teaches that believers should strive

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<sup>949</sup>White R. E. O. Sanctification // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1051-1053.

<sup>950</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 323.

for holiness wholeheartedly (Heb 12:4), and the sanctification that is necessary to “see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). For this reason, God disciplines His people “so that we may share His holiness” (Heb 12:10).<sup>951</sup>

At the same time, the author of Hebrews acknowledges that believers in Jesus already possess the status “holy” (Heb 3:1). Throughout his epistle, the author speaks of sanctification as an accomplished fact: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). Jesus, “(sanctified) the people through His own blood” (Heb 13:12, cf. 9:13-14; 10:14, 29). White explains that the author is referring to “status, not character.”<sup>952</sup> Muller summarizes sanctification in the epistle to the Hebrews as “the objective consecration of believers effected in and through Christ’s sacrifice.”<sup>953</sup> In addition, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the active role of Christ in this process. He is the “author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2) and “He who sanctifies” (Heb 2:11).

We find the most highly developed treatment of the topic of sanctification in the writings of the apostle Paul. First, he confirms that God indeed calls believers to holiness. God has “saved us and called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim 1:9) and “called us... in sanctification” (1 Thes 4:7). God’s will is our sanctification (1 Thes 4:3).

Believers must present themselves as children of the light (1 Thes 5:4-8). They must live “worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27), “worthy of the calling” (Eph 4:1), and “worthy of God” (1 Thes 2:12), bearing the fruit of righteousness (Phil 1:11), especially love (Gal 5:13-14).<sup>954</sup> They are being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ (Col 3:10; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).<sup>955</sup>

Commenting on Paul’s writings, White notes that sanctification is a holistic process, involving spirit, soul, and body. Christians must dedicate their bodies to the Lord (1 Cor 6:13), be renewed in their minds (Rom 12:2), and cleanse their spirits (2 Cor 7:1). In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Paul affirms that these three aspects of human nature are undergoing the process of sanctification. White concludes, “Paul did not think of holiness only in physical terms.”<sup>956</sup>

As we mentioned in our survey of Hebrews, Paul points out that sanctification has two aspects: sanctification as a position and sanctification as a process. Because of our position in Christ, believers are already holy before God. Jesus “became to us... sanctification” (1 Cor 1:30), and we “were sanctified... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).<sup>957</sup> Correspondingly, Paul calls Christians “holy” (Col 1:2). He assigns that designation even to believers in Corinth, whose behavior did not always line up with that status (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). So then, although believers in Christ are still going through the process of sanctification, their holy status before God derives from their position in Christ.

The key passage in Paul, and likely of all Scripture, that succinctly unfolds the process of sanctification is Philippians 2:12-13: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure.” Here, we encounter both sides of the process: the divine side and the human side. Sanctification is a joint effort between God and His people. Muller comments:

In every aspect of their ethical holiness or newfound righteousness Christians are to recognize that not they themselves, certainly not their own work or their own will, but God working in them is the source of their holiness or righteousness.<sup>958</sup>

From God’s side, Paul teaches that He already accomplished our sanctification through the death of Jesus. Paul states in Romans 6:6, “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with {Him}, in order that our body of

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<sup>951</sup>Mullen B. A. Sanctification // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 712.

<sup>952</sup>White, p. 1052.

<sup>953</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 324.

<sup>954</sup>White, p. 1052.

<sup>955</sup>Ibid.

<sup>956</sup>Ibid.

<sup>957</sup>Ibid.

<sup>958</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 323.

sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” Note that our sinful nature has already be done away with through Jesus’ death.

The believer has already been circumcised by the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-13; Rom 2:28-29; Phil 3:3). Circumcision in the Old Testament served as a symbol of the sanctifying power of Christ’s death. Other passages also speak of Christ’s death as a means of deliverance from sin’s power. Colossians 3:3 reads, “For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” When Jesus died, the believer died with Him to sin. Galatians 5:24 also speaks of the death of Christ as the means for deliverance from the power of sin: “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” This deliverance from sin’s power took place at the moment of Christ’s death.

We may draw still more examples from Paul’s epistles. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, he teaches, “One died for all, therefore all died.” In some miraculous way, God joined us with Christ in His death so that His death became our death and provides us with deliverance from sin’s power. Galatians 2:20 proclaims the same: “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Finally, Paul writes to Timothy, “If we died with Him, we will also live with Him” (2 Tim 2:11). Murray comments, “No fact is of more basic importance in connection with the death to sin and commitment to holiness than that of identification with Christ in his death and resurrection.”<sup>959</sup>

Johnson comments on a commonly held misconception of sanctification, “Sanctification is sometimes thought of as our response to the saving work of Christ rather than as an integral part of that work. Similarly, we often conceive of our holiness as rooted in our attempt to manifest our gratitude to God for forgiveness, rather than as a manifestation of our new life in Christ.”<sup>960</sup> In other words, believers are powerless to sanctify themselves. It is accomplished only by virtue of identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Sanders summarizes Paul’s teaching about our co-crucifixion with Christ and the resulting deliverance from the power of sin: “By *sharing* in Christ’s death, one dies to the power of sin or to the old aeon, with the result that one belongs to God.... The transfer takes place by *participation* in Christ’s death.”<sup>961</sup>

According to Paul, along with our participation in Christ’s death, the Holy Spirit plays an integral role in our sanctification. We frequently see the Holy Spirit mentioned as an active participant in this process (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11).<sup>962</sup> The Spirit lives within believers, leads them, and produces through them spiritual fruit (Gal 5:16-23). People filled with the Spirit lead godly lives (Eph 5:18-21) and experience inner renewal (Col 3:10). We may confidently assert that the Spirit “activates” in the lives of believers the victory over sin that Jesus accomplished by His death.

Having, then, examined the divine side of sanctification, we inquire as to the human side. Paul teaches that leading a godly life, first of all, comes from knowing the will of the Lord. Therefore, he prays that the church would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:9-10).

Second, one must display active faith in the completed work of Christ for deliverance from the power of sin. One must embrace the truth that Jesus already obtained for us victory over the sin nature. Galatians 2:20 reads, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the {life} which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Romans 6:11 repeats this thought, “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Faith is the attitude of heart that considers oneself a victor over sin in Christ. We again encounter this truth in Ephesians 3:16-17: “...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened

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<sup>959</sup>Murray J. Definitive sanctification // Calvin Theological Journal. 2. 1967. P. 13.

<sup>960</sup>Johnson M. P. One with Christ: An Evangelical theology of salvation. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, Kindle ed. – P. 116.

<sup>961</sup>Taken from McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 340.

<sup>962</sup>White, p. 1053. By the expression “sanctified by the Spirit” in 1 Peter 1:2, the apostle has in mind the work of the Spirit to “separate” or draw an unbeliever to Christ. The same meaning is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” We note that Christ dwells and expresses His life in a heart of faith.

This attitude of faith requires us to alter our thinking. Romans 8:5-6 is insightful here: “Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh...” A “fleshly” person reflects on his or her own ability to live a holy life. This approach, however, leads to certain failure. Unlike the “fleshly” individual, the spiritual person sets their minds on “the things of the Spirit,” that is, relies on the intervention of the Holy Spirit and is aware of the victory over sin that is available in Christ. This idea is confirmed in Romans 12:2, where we learn that we are transformed by “the renewal of our minds,” and also in Ephesians 4:23, where we read that a key element for victorious living is being “renewed in the spirit of your mind.”

Third, the human will must take part in the process of sanctification. In Romans 12:1, Paul forcefully speaks of total devotion to the Lord: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, {which is} your spiritual service of worship.”<sup>963</sup> Moreover, he insists on laying aside one’s old lifestyle (Eph 4:22; Col 3:8-9) and of “exercising” godliness (1 Tim 4:8; 1 Cor 9:25-27; Phil 3:13-14).<sup>964</sup> Believers “perfect holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). They “sow” to the Spirit (Gal 6:8), submitting to Him (Rom 6:10).

When we compare Colossians 3:9-12 and Ephesians 4:22-24, we discover an interesting fact. In the former text, Paul writes that believers have already “laid aside the old self with its {evil} practices, and have put on the new self.” Here, he is speaking from the vantage point of our union with Christ. In Him, our sanctification is already complete. We accept this by faith. On the other hand, Ephesians 4:22-24 reads, “Lay aside the old self... and put on the new self.” Now, the apostle speaks from the point of view of our present experience. Even though in Christ, believers have already laid aside the old self, one must make application of this truth in practice, which requires the participation of the human will in submission to the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the role of the Law in the process of sanctification, it is curious to note that Paul considers that the Law does not only lack the power to justify, but also is unable to sanctify. In Romans 7:1-4, Paul claims that in Christ believers have died to the Law and that this is a necessary step in order to bear fruit for God: “Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God” (v. 4). Paul considered the Law not only powerless to justify a person, but also a hindrance to sanctification. One must be delivered from the Law to make progress in spiritual life (see Rom 6:14; 7:1-4; Gal 2:19-20; 2 Cor 3:6).

Paul further explains his position in chapter 7 of his epistle to the Romans. He assures us that the Law is indeed holy and spiritual. The problem is, though, that people, in their sinful state, cannot keep it (v. 7-23). The nature of sin is such that when one hears a commandment, sin immediately produces a resistance to it. This is why Paul claims, “The power of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56).<sup>965</sup>

According to Paul’s teaching, sanctification is achieved not by observing the Law, but by life in the Holy Spirit. Immediately after discussing peoples’ failure to keep the law and the need for deliverance from it (Rom 7), he introduces the theme of life in the Spirit (Rom 8). He specifically speaks of this contrast in Galatians 5:18: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” For a more complete discussion of the role of the Law in the life of the believer, see chapter 8 in volume 2 of this series.

We must note that deliverance from the Law does not justify an immoral lifestyle. In order to motivate people for godly living, however, Paul usually appeals to other principles besides the Mosaic Law: the principle of love (Rom 13:8-10; 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:6), the leadership of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16-18; Rom 8:4, 14), the imitation of God (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 4:32), union with Christ (Rom 6:2, 11; Col 2:20; 3:3), the teachings of Jesus (1

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<sup>963</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 323.

<sup>964</sup>White, p. 1052.

<sup>965</sup>Nonetheless, we can qualify this claim by stating that the power of the law to threaten and execute punishment may curb sinful tendencies to a point. Most likely, this is what Paul is intending to say in 1 Timothy 1:8-10 (cf. Rom 13:1-7). See Schreiner T. R. *The Commands of God* // Hafemann S. J., House P. R. *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. – P. 89.

Cor 7:10; Acts 20:35) and the apostles (1 Cor 14:37; 2 Thes 3:14). The Law of Moses is occasionally appealed to as supplemental to these principles (Rom 13:8-10; Eph 6:2-3).

Finally, since sanctification involves our participation, Paul warns that Christians can fall away during the process of sanctification: “We also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor 6:1; cf. 1 Cor 10:1-12). On the other hand, Paul’s writings also abound in promises that God will aid and support the believer in this process: “{For I am} confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6), and, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely.... Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thes 5:23-24; cf. 1 Cor 1:8-9). Paul personally held fast to this confidence (2 Tim 4:18).

We find the final contribution to the New Testament teaching on sanctification in the writings of the apostle John. Chapter 17 of John’s Gospel contains Jesus’ prayer for His disciples – that the Father would “keep them in Your name” (v. 11) and “keep them from the evil {one}.” Jesus Himself “was keeping them in Your name” (v. 12) and sanctified Himself “that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth” (v. 19). Similar mentions of Christ’s keeping power are found in John 6:39 and 10:28-29.

John emphasizes sanctification even more so in his epistles. He characterizes true believers in Jesus as those who walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7) and in the truth (2 Jn 4). They strive for victory over sin (1 Jn 2:1). They practice righteousness (1 Jn 3:7) and abstain from sin (1 Jn 3:6). Nonetheless, John acknowledges that believers are still undergoing the process of sanctification (1 Jn 1:8; 2:1) and stresses the importance of confessing sins to the Lord (1 Jn 1:9).<sup>966</sup>

Unlike Paul, John says less about how exactly the believer attains holiness, except for following Christ’s example (1 Jn 2:6) and preparing for future glory (1 Jn 3:3). This eschatological hope can motivate to holy living, as well as the fear of being put to shame at His coming (1 Jn 2:28). At the same time, though, in John’s Gospel, Jesus is pictured as the vine that supplies the branches (i.e., His disciples) with life-giving nourishment to grow spiritually.<sup>967</sup>

Finally, the book of Revelation deals with sanctification in the first three chapters, where Jesus addresses the churches of Asia Minor with various instructions and rebukes to stir them on to holy living and spiritual victory. He promises rich rewards to the “overcomers.”

## C. Conclusions

### 1. The Meaning of Sanctification

In light of our survey of the biblical material on the topic of sanctification, we may come to several conclusions. As was noted above, sanctification is both a positional status in Christ and the process of transformation into His likeness. So then, in a certain sense, the justified believer is already holy even before beginning the process of sanctification. Christ is the believer’s sanctification.

On the other hand, one must not neglect the practical side of sanctification, accomplished with the aid of God’s Holy Spirit. Muller provides this apt summary: “In one sense believers are consecrated to God and blameless before Him because of the work of Christ, but in another sense they must still be perfected in the day of Christ.”<sup>968</sup>

Therefore, after receiving God’s gift of justification, believers begin the sanctification process, through which they are transformed into Christ’s image. Erickson confirms, “Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making him or her actually holy.”<sup>969</sup> Mueller echoes the same thought, “In its

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<sup>966</sup>Walvoord J. *The Augustinian-Dispensational Perspective // Five Views on Sanctification*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – P. 219.

<sup>967</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>968</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 324.

<sup>969</sup>Erickson M. *J. Christian Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 980.



narrower, or strict, sense, sanctification denotes the inward spiritual transformation of the believer, which follows upon, and is inseparably joined with justification.”<sup>970</sup>

The process of sanctification incorporates two interrelated aspects: overcoming sin and being transformed into Christ’s image. Paul highlights both of these aspects:<sup>971</sup>

- Overcoming sin: “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).
- Transformation into Christ’s image: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

They are juxtaposed in Ephesians chapter 4:<sup>972</sup>

- Overcoming sin: “Lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit” (Eph 4:22).
- Transformation into Christ’s image: “Put on the new self, which in {the likeness of} God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:24).

In the following excerpt, White contrasts these two aspects, stressing the second:

Sanctification is not primarily negative in the NT, “keeping oneself unspotted,” not mainly self-discipline. It is chiefly the outflow of an overflowing life within the soul, the “fruit” of the Spirit in all manner of Christian graces (Gal. 5:22–23), summed up as “sanctification.”<sup>973</sup>

The process of sanctification is a joint effort involving both God and the Christian. Philippians 2:12-13 brings this out well: “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure.” On the one hand, believers must “work out their salvation,” that is, actively participate in striving for holiness. On the other hand, God “wills” and “works” to enable the believer to succeed in the task.”<sup>974</sup>

Let us detail God’s work in sanctification. First, as indicated above, the New Testament clearly testifies that victory over sin has already been provided through the death of the Savior, who destroyed the power of sin on the cross. The work of the Holy Spirit is closely associated with the saving work of the Son through His death, resurrection and glorification. The Spirit actualizes in the life of believers what Jesus accomplished for them through those events.

In particular, the Spirit delivers to Christians the victory over sin that Christ secured on the cross: “If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13). On the one hand, Jesus already annihilated our sinful nature 2000 years ago (see Rom 6:6). Now, the Spirit applies the grace of Christ to believers. With the help of the Spirit, believers can “put to death the deeds of the body” in practice. Correspondingly, the New Testament often refers to sanctification by the Spirit, who renews, leads, strengthens, corrects, and realizes sanctification in the lives of Christians.

God’s part in the work of sanctification also includes the Father’s loving discipline. The classic passage in this regard is Hebrews 12:5-11, where we learn, “Those whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:6). In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul also refers to the discipline of the Lord:

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<sup>970</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 384.

<sup>971</sup>Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 379.

<sup>972</sup>Mueller, p. 387-388.

<sup>973</sup>White, p. 1053.

<sup>974</sup>Thiessen, p. 389.

“When we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world” (v. 32), which God sometimes administers through the agency of the Church (1 Cor 5:3-5).

The human side of this process, consisting of three elements, is detailed in Galatians 5:19-25:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

The first element is knowledge of God’s will, which is necessary in order to know how to conduct oneself. Toward that end, Galatians 5:19-23 lists the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. In this way, Paul enlightens his readers how to live and please the Lord.

The second element is active faith by the person being sanctified. Believers must rely on what Christ has done to provide salvation for them, including the destruction of their sinful nature (v. 24). Mullen expresses this truth well, “Though God sanctifies by grace, human beings are responsible to appropriate God’s grace by faith. Faith is ‘the’ means of sanctifying grace,” and, “A believer grows in sanctification by living according to his or her new identity” in Christ.<sup>975</sup>

We may cite other authors supporting this view:

Thus, growing in grace is an increasing living *outside of myself*, living *upon* Christ. It is looking to Him for the supply of *every* need.... The more the heart is occupied with Christ, the more the mind is stayed upon Him by trusting in Him (Isa. 26:3), the more will faith, hope, love, patience, meekness, and all spiritual graces be strengthened and drawn forth into exercise and act to the glory of God.”<sup>976</sup>

Victory over all the power of the evil one is not by human works or self-effort but on the basis of the believer’s faith in his position in Christ.... It is believing that we are “in Christ” that alone routs the devil.... Realizing we are what we are “in Christ” (Rom 6:1-10) and reckoning upon our wondrous position of union (Rom 6:11) is the ground and the source of our power over the devil and his hosts.<sup>977</sup>

All acceptable obedience comes from the soul’s union with Christ.<sup>978</sup>

Verse 25 reveals the final step in this process – submission: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” If we are expecting power from the Spirit to live holy lives, then we must allow the Spirit to work in our lives and change us.

However, if believers rely on their own strength to attain holiness, they will inescapably fail. This is why Paul cautions against reliance on the Law for sanctification (Rom 7). The Law paradoxically stimulates the “flesh” and strengthens sinful impulses. The primary goal of the Law was to lead sinners to the place of desperation and hopelessness so that they would trust in the Lord and not in themselves, leading to an attitude of humility before Him.

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<sup>975</sup>Mullen, p. 712.

<sup>976</sup>Pink A. W. Regeneration or the New Birth. – Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications. – P. 35.

<sup>977</sup>Unger M. F. Biblical Demonology. – Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1952. – P. 220-222.

<sup>978</sup>Boston T. The Complete Works, 1:549; taken from McGowan A. T. B. Justification and the ordo salutis / McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 157.

Mueller well describes the relationship between the Law and faith: “While the Law reveals sin (mirror)... the power to accomplish sanctification and do good works comes alone from the Gospel.”<sup>979</sup> Knowledge of good and evil alone (from the Law) does not result in life transformation, as is evident in the moral failure of God’s Old Testament people. Only the gospel can provide the power to make progress in spiritual life.

The following illustrations can aid us in understanding the relationship between faith and submission. When wanting to start a car, it would be foolhardy to simply sit in the driver’s seat and expect the car to drive itself. The driver must turn the key and operate the car. Likewise, it profits little to simply expect God’s intervention in our spiritual lives, while we do nothing, adopting a passive attitude toward spiritual growth.

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to stand behind the auto and attempt to push it with the key. The driver must utilize the power of the engine. In a similar way, believers can never make progress in their spiritual life relying on their own strength. One must rely on the finished work of Christ. Faith and submission harmoniously work together and complement each other.

We may suggest another illustration. To light a match one needs two elements: a matchbox and oxygen in the air. The atmosphere may contain enough oxygen to do the job, but without a person’s participation striking the match, there will be no result. On the other hand, a person can strike the match all day, but if oxygen is somehow lacking, there will also be no result.

In a similar way, God’s power, made accessible through Christ’s redemptive work, is necessary for spiritual progress. A person, though, must apply effort and cooperate with the grace of God in Christ in a way similar to one striking a match. In addition, believers must create in their lives an atmosphere of faith, expecting the power of God to manifest, and strive for holiness within the context of that atmosphere of expectation.

Finally, we recall that asceticism has no value as a means of attaining holiness. We discussed this issue in detail in chapter 5 of this volume, in the section on “Distortion of God’s Plan.”

## **2. When is Sanctification Completed?**

Previously in this chapter, we have discussed how to obtain victory over sin and lead a holy life. The question remains, though, as to when we can expect to secure this victory – in this life, or only after death. John Wesley and his followers advanced the thesis that Christian perfection was possible while still on the earth. We will investigate this claim later in this section and conclude that sanctification is a process that continues throughout the Christian life. For the time being, we will draw a parallel between progress in sanctification and Israel’s conquest of Canaan.

It is curious to note that when God commanded His people to conquer the Promised Land, He spoke thus: “You shall *take possession* of the land and live in it, for I *have given* the land to you to possess it” (Num 33:53, also see Josh 1:3; 6:1; 8:1; 10:8). So then, even before Israel entered into the Land of Promise, they already possessed it. Similarly, in Christ, we already possess victory over sin in virtue of the fact that our old nature was crucified with Him so that through His death, sin’s dominion over us would come to an end.

Furthermore, God specifically determined the boundaries of Israel’s inheritance in Canaan: “I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River {Euphrates} (Ex 23:31). However, the land was already occupied by strong cities and peoples, even giants. Israel needed to take possession of the land gradually, overthrowing one city at a time. Sanctification occurs in the same way. Step by step, believers wage war against their vices and increasingly gain victory over them.

It is interesting to note that Israel took total possession of their inheritance only during the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Kin 4:21). Until that time, much of their territory was still occupied by the Canaanites. Can we not expect a similar experience? The Bible promises that when our “David” appears, i.e., Jesus Christ, we will attain perfection: “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”

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<sup>979</sup>Mueller, p. 390.

(1 Jn 3:2). The final aspect of our union with Christ consists of our glorification at the revelation of His glory: “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory” (Col 3:4).

### 3. The Relationship between Sanctification and Justification

A question that troubles many is the relationship between justification and sanctification. In other words, are we justified by faith alone, or must we do a certain number of good works or reach a certain level of holiness to attain to eternal life? For a resolution of this dilemma, we refer the reader to chapter 20 on “Faith” for a detailed discussion.

## D. Historical Survey

Throughout the course of church history, different schools of thought have arisen concerning the sanctification of believers. The goal of this section is to describe and evaluate these different views in light of the biblical revelation.

### 1. Early Church<sup>980</sup>

Early Christian teachers did not develop a comprehensive theology of sanctification, but nonetheless they laid great stress to the need for holy living. They focused on the three central Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. Polycarp, for example, spoke of “the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbor, ‘is the mother of us all’” (*Philippians*, 3.2).

In a similar way, Ignatius emphasized the importance of love: “None of these things is hid from you, if ye perfectly possess that faith and love towards Christ Jesus which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end is love. Now these two, being inseparably connected together, are of God” (*Ephesians*, 14.1). We can also cite the letter of Clement of Rome to the church in Corinth, where he eloquently praises the virtue of love (chps. 49-50). Muller summarizes that the early Fathers “clearly expect a striving toward perfection grounded in the grace of God and described in terms of the three greatest gifts of the Spirit,” that is, faith, hope, and love.<sup>981</sup>

Later in the Early Church period, the Church began making a distinction between “ordinary” Christians and those who aspired to a higher level of godliness. The “ordinary” believers were held to a lower standard. Cyprian and Ambrose determined that the common believer should observe the Ten Commandments, while the more “advanced” would aspire to love, even for one’s enemies. This later group included monks and clergy (see Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, 1.11.36-37).

Contrary to this, others insisted on holiness or even moral perfection from all Christians. Montanists, for example, emphasized separation from the world to such a degree that they refused to interact with people in society. The Church in general, however, rejected Montanism.

Gnostics claimed that through special “mystical” revelation, their adherents could find deliverance from all vices and attain perfection. Clement of Alexandria, though, refuted this view. He argued that only Jesus attained perfection in this life. His disciples must wait until death for total deliverance. Although Clement rightly rejected Gnosticism, nevertheless, his disciple Origen introduced distortions into the Christian understanding of sanctification, namely, ascetic practices.

In the fourth century, Pelagius began to teach that people are not subject to inherited depravity from Adam and are able to live righteous lives in their own strength. Augustine opposed and refuted his teaching. In

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<sup>980</sup>Material from Muller, v. 4, p. 324-326.

<sup>981</sup>Ibid. v. 4, p. 324.

his teaching, Augustine recognized that sanctification requires the intervention of God's grace. He made famous the saying, "Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt" (*Confessions*, 10.40). Unlike Pelagius, Augustine claimed that fallen humans cannot do good. Muller writes, "At the heart of Augustine's personal spirituality was the experience of divine grace regenerating the will and rendering it capable of doing the good."<sup>982</sup> Augustine was ready to admit that Christians, in theory, could reach moral perfection in this life, since nothing is impossible for God. At the same time, he doubted that anyone actually attained it.

Evaluating the Early Church's teaching, we can state the following. In line with biblical teaching, the early Fathers correctly taught that the cardinal Christian virtues are faith, hope, and love (1 Cor 13:13). However, from the earliest Christian writers, we see a neglect of the believer's union with Christ, which provides the grace that enables the believer to overcome sin and live righteously. From Augustine's time, though, the Church began to place more emphasis on the role of God's grace in sanctification.

Moreover, although the Church rightly rejected false views on sanctification, such as Montanism, Gnosticism, and Pelagianism, it improperly created a distinction between "ordinary" and more "advanced" believers in Christ. The Bible makes no such distinction, but calls all Christians to the same moral standard. Even though James 3:1 hints at a double standard, it is misguided to teach that only "advanced" believers should strive to excel in the virtue of love (see Jn 13:35). Finally, the tendency in early Christianity toward asceticism is also a deviation from the truth of God's Word. Chapter 4 of this volume reveals the inadequacy of this approach.

## 2. Middle Ages and Catholicism<sup>983</sup>

A primary feature of the Western understanding of sanctification in the Middle Ages was the idea of "sanctifying grace." Working off Augustine's teaching of the need for grace in sanctification, leading Catholic theologians Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas proposed that through water baptism, God gives the recipient so-called "sanctifying grace," which enables the newly baptized to grow in holiness and produce spiritual fruit (see *Sentences*, 1.17; *Summa Theo.*, i/2, q. 113).

For Catholics, this impartation of sanctifying grace is equated with justification. This diverges from the biblical and Protestant view. Catholics see justification not as the imputation to sinners of a right standing with God, but rather as an impartation to sinners of a righteous nature, which enables them to perform good works leading to salvation.

Concerning the degree of sanctification available in this life, Aquinas held to three levels of perfection. Only God attains to the first level. Believers can enjoy the second level, but only after death. In this life, they can attain only to level three, which is "perfection in love, according to which all words, all thoughts, all the affections of the soul, and the whole strength or power of the individual, are referred to God and willingly subjected to God."<sup>984</sup>

Nevertheless, Aquinas doubts that every Christian can reach this third level. Therefore, he embraced the Early Church's view of two types of Christians – ordinary and exceptional. The former must keep the commandments, while the later pursue perfection through good works and abstinence from worldly fancies. This "higher path" is for monks and clergy.

White provides a summary of the Catholic view:

In the apostolic church, the essence of sanctification was a Christlike purity; in the patristic church, withdrawal from the contaminations of society. This hardened, in the medieval church, into asceticism (a dualistic misapplication of Paul's athleticism). This involved a double standard: "sanctity" and

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<sup>982</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 325.

<sup>983</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 326-327.

<sup>984</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 327.

“saintliness” came to be applied only to the “religious” person (priest, monk), whereas a lower attainment, compromising with the world, was tolerated in the “ordinary,” “secular,” or “lay” Christian.<sup>985</sup>

Finally, we must not fail to mention the role of sacraments in Catholic theology. As mentioned above, water baptism supplies “imparted” grace that enables obedience. Other sacraments, especially the Eucharist, also impart grace and strength for overcoming sin and living for the Lord.

In assessing the Catholic approach, we heartily affirm the need for God’s grace in sanctification. Yet, we take issue with the Catholic practice of confusing sanctification with justification. In addition, we challenge the teaching that the new birth is effected through water baptism. Finally, the Early Church’s distinction between different “classes” of Christians, which Aquinas endorsed, is refuted earlier in this chapter.

### 3. Eastern Orthodox

In Eastern Orthodox thought, human nature was initially created good. The goal of sanctification is to restore that original moral condition, and then to take humanity beyond that to the level of the divine (i.e., deification). Sin is, then, foreign to true human nature.<sup>986</sup>

However, people themselves are unable to make themselves holy. God’s grace is mandatory.<sup>987</sup> In this regard, the Orthodox teaching coincides with Catholic dogma. Unlike Catholicism, though, the “grace” that effects sanctification is not merely spiritual power that enables obedience, but an impartation to believers of God Himself in His so-called “uncreated energies,” which results in their deification.<sup>988</sup> Therefore, the goal of sanctification for Orthodoxy is to become god, or, more precisely, to be deified through participation in God’s uncreated energies (see chapter 8).

The Orthodox view of sanctification derives from its understanding of the nature of sin, which we discussed in chapter 5 of this volume. Let us briefly recap this view. The Orthodox consider that people do not inherit depravity from our forefather Adam, but only mortality.<sup>989</sup> Mortality is what leads to sinful behavior. Because people fear death, they focus more on earthly things than on heavenly ones. Behavior, in turn, follows after our thought processes. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve reflected more on spiritual/heavenly concerns and consequently conducted themselves in submission to the Lord. After death entered the world, people became engrossed in affairs connected with their earthly survival. As a result, vices like passion, fear, sorrow, anger, hatred, etc. entered the human experience.<sup>990</sup>

Correspondingly, Nikon claims that our problem is that the “mind... has become enslaved to irrational passions.”<sup>991</sup> He also writes, “Just like the soul longs for future pleasures, the body longs for present and temporary pleasures.”<sup>992</sup> In the words of Maximus the Confessor, “Having become a transgressor and mixing his rationality with sensuality, people acquired a passionate drive to know sensual things.”<sup>993</sup> Mantzaridis adds,

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<sup>985</sup>White, p. 1053.

<sup>986</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 62.

<sup>987</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 63.

<sup>988</sup>Зайцев Евгений. Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе. – М.: Библейско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – P. 97-98.

<sup>989</sup>It is proposed that clothing Adam and Eve in animal skins symbolizes their receiving mortality (Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрата Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – М.: Сибирская Благовонница, 2004. – P. 60).

<sup>990</sup>Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974 – P. 145.

<sup>991</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 38. Author’s translation.

<sup>992</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 40. Author’s translation.

<sup>993</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 60. Author’s translation.

“Man, subject to corruption and death, is constantly spurred on to sin and becomes a slave to it.”<sup>994</sup>  
Meyendorff describes human nature as “bound by mortality, inevitably sinful.”<sup>995</sup>

The Orthodox view is also expressed in the following excerpts:

The necessity of satisfying the needs of the body... lead to “passions,” for they present unavoidable means of temporary survival.... There is indeed a consensus in Greek patristic and Byzantine traditions in identifying the inheritance of the Fall as an inheritance essentially of mortality rather than sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality.<sup>996</sup>

From the “old Adam,” through his natural birth, man inherits a defective form of life – bound by mortality, inevitably sinful, lacking fundamental freedom from the “prince of this world.”<sup>997</sup>

The Orthodox tradition of Saint Marcus Eremita does not feel that people participated in Adam’s sin: “We are passed down by inheritance not transgression, but death.”<sup>998</sup>

The path to victory over sin, then, in Orthodox thought, is not deliverance from sin through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ on the cross, but through the victory over death that He secured through His resurrection. Kuraev writes, “We consider that Christ came in order to rise from the dead (1 Pet 3:21). We are saved not by the death of Christ, but rather that in Him death lost its power.”<sup>999</sup> After people are delivered from their fear of death, they can then turn their attention to heaven and conduct themselves accordingly.

In addition, since sin is rooted primarily in physical passions, aroused by death, the key to victory over sin lies in suppression of bodily necessities, i.e., in overcoming passions by acquiring the quality of *apatheia*, i.e., “impassibility.”<sup>1000</sup> One should embrace ascetic cleansing not only from “all that is... sinful,” but also from “all sensual and mental images.”<sup>1001</sup>

Let us qualify this point. On the one hand, Orthodoxy rejects the teaching that matter is in itself evil. Nikon comments here:

The ascetic struggle is waged not against matter, but against the unnatural, contra-natural. Bodily necessities are not killed off, but their improper use. Using created things is not forbidden, but their abuse.<sup>1002</sup>

On the other hand, since the material world and bodily necessities distract from spiritual things, abstaining from bodily desires has practical value.

Mantzaridis, looking at this question from the vantage point of Gregory Palamas, adds necessary elements to our discussion. In agreement with what has already been said, he connects sin with attachment to the physical: “Man loves the world because he loves his own body, while a love of the spirit generates love for God,”<sup>1003</sup> and, “The source of passions is the concern for the flesh.... Excessive satisfaction of bodily desires

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<sup>994</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 63.

<sup>995</sup>Meyendorff, p. 193.

<sup>996</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>997</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>998</sup>Марк Подвижник, Нравственно-подвижнические слова. – Троице-Сергиева Лавра, 1922. – Р. 111; from Кураева А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – Р. 83. Author’s translation.

<sup>999</sup>Кураев, p. 91. Author’s translation.

<sup>1000</sup>Florovsky G. Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Centuries / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. – Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. – Р. 241-242.

<sup>1001</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 44-45. Author’s translation.

<sup>1002</sup>Ibid., p. 40. Author’s translation.

<sup>1003</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 71.

breeds the passions.”<sup>1004</sup> Nonetheless, he still believes in the essential goodness of the physical: “The body is good.... What is evil, and should be considered the child of sin, is concern for the body.”<sup>1005</sup>

Therefore, one should withdraw for contemplation of God and develop a spiritual mindset in order to obtain a higher level of morality and spirituality. This is best accomplished through the monastic life: “By restricting even the proper use of God’s gifts, the monk mourns for the misuse of these gifts by Adam, which expelled man from Paradise, and concentrates himself on preparing for the age to be,”<sup>1006</sup> and, “The stillness of the desert provides man with the fittest atmosphere for pursuing his work of concentration and self-awareness.”<sup>1007</sup>

We need to include still another consideration. A key to Orthodox thinking is distinguishing “nature” and “person,” both in regard to God and to humans. They even propose the existence of two wills in people: the natural will, which corresponds to “nature,” and a gnostic will, which corresponds to the person. The first was initially oriented toward God, but was weakened by the Fall. The second appeared only at the time of the Fall and enables individuals to make free decisions in spite of their weakened condition.<sup>1008</sup> Correspondingly, the war against sin is waged on two levels: in human nature, and in the individual person.

The victory over sin accomplished by Christ addresses only the sanctification of human nature since He allegedly took upon Himself not each individual person, but only the so-called “general human nature” (see chp. 8, “Deification”). This victory must be actualized in the individual person by personal effort with the aid of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1009</sup> Lossky claims, “The work of Christ applies to human nature.... The work of the Holy Spirit applies to the human person.”<sup>1010</sup>

This “personal effort” includes repentance, grieving, humility, prayer, and fasting. In order to gain victory in this struggle, one must “apply all powers of the soul to the reasoning powers as the reflection of the Divine powers contained in them.”<sup>1011</sup> Victory is secured by a «genuine turning to God in lifelong repentance, faith, and love.”<sup>1012</sup> Receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, plays a vital role in obtaining the divine “energies.”

In repudiation of this system, we note that the Bible teaches that the human dilemma lies not in persons’ physical condition or in distractions made by it, but rather in the sinful nature of the human heart:

- For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders.... All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man (Mk 7:21-23).
- The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9).

Even some Orthodox theologians concur that we indeed inherit from Adam a sinful nature.<sup>1013</sup>

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<sup>1004</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>1005</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>1006</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>1007</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>1008</sup>Мейендорф И. Введение в святоотеческое богословие. Минск: Лучи Софии, 2007. – P. 324; Nassif B. The Evangelical Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 73.

<sup>1009</sup>Florovsky, p. 238.

<sup>1010</sup>Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и догматическое богословие. М.: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 125. Author’s translation.

<sup>1011</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 7, 42. Author’s translation.

<sup>1012</sup>Rommen E. An Orthodox Perspective // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 248.

<sup>1013</sup>See Palachovsky V., Vogel C. Sin in the Orthodox Church and in the Protestant Churches / Trans. C. Schalderbrand. – New York: Desclee, 1966. – P. 9-10; and Callinicos C. N. The Greek Orthodox Catechism. – New York: Greek Archdiocese of North and South America, 1960. – P. 23. Noted in Horton M., response to Bradley Nassif // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 123.



Moreover, although Eastern Orthodoxy officially adheres to the goodness of the material world, yet in practice it treats it as something that hinders spiritual development. This is why Orthodox teachers laud the monastic life and ascetic practices. However, the Bible plainly teaches that suppression of legitimate bodily desires does not aid in overcoming sin (see discussion in chapter 5, in the section on “Distortion of God’s Order”).

In addition, the goal of sanctification is not deification. We made this clear in chapter 7 of this volume. The Bible also does not support the concept of God’s “uncreated energies” (see chapter 1 in volume 3).

## 4. Protestantism

### a. Lutheranism

Lutheran theology places emphasis on justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Consequently, sanctification is seen to play a secondary role in God’s plan. Holy living is the result of the justification received by grace through faith.

Lutherans teach that one is both justified and sanctified by faith in Christ: “Sinners (are) declared just and holy (sanctified) by faith alone in what Jesus has done.”<sup>1014</sup> Moreover, “True sanctification, then, is simply trusting that God has taken charge of the matter.”<sup>1015</sup> One of the manifestations of the old nature, possibly the most prominent, is when someone attempts to add something to the requirements for salvation. Therefore, Christians must “die to the possibility of contributing to righteousness by deeds.”<sup>1016</sup>

On the other hand, true believers are zealous for good works, yet without abandoning their position of justification by faith alone. God’s commands in Scripture are “means by which believers open their lives to the transforming grace of God.”<sup>1017</sup> Luther himself wrote much about the power of the Spirit transforming the lives of Christians.

Luther’s disciple and successor, Philip Melanchthon, devoted more attention to the doctrine of sanctification. He wrote, “The keeping of the law should begin in us and increase more and more” (*Apology*, 2.136).<sup>1018</sup> Thus, Melanchthon deviated from Luther’s thought, claiming that Christians cooperate with God in obtaining righteousness. As a result, debates arose among Lutheran theologians concerning the place of good works in God’s salvation plan. They resolved the issue with the publication of the *Formula of Concord*, which determined that justification is independent of the Law or good works, yet good works are the necessary results of regeneration.<sup>1019</sup>

Along with this, the *Formula of Concord* underscored three functions of the Law: (1) containing and suppressing sinful behavior in society, (2) conviction of sin in unbelievers, leading to their conversion to Christ, and (3) spiritual guidance for believers.<sup>1020</sup>

In our assessment of the Lutheran view, we concur with the emphasis on the independence of justification from good works. In this way, the Reformers restored a fundamental evangelical truth, lost by the Early Church and the Church of the Middle Ages. Lutherans also correctly claim that good works follow justification and do not serve as a means of salvation, but the result of a salvation already secured by faith.

On the other hand, a weakness in the Lutheran position is the claim that sanctification is merely “trusting that God has taken charge of the matter.” In truth, it involves transformation of the believer’s nature.

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<sup>1014</sup>Noted in Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 148.

<sup>1015</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>1016</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1017</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>1018</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 328.

<sup>1019</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1020</sup>*Formula of Concord*, 6.1-4; <http://bookofconcord.org>

## **b. Reformed Faith**

Reformed faith, based on the teachings of John Calvin, in many ways overlaps with Lutheran theology.<sup>1021</sup> First, unlike Catholic doctrine, Reformed faith does not confuse the issues of justification and sanctification, but appropriately keeps them separate. People are justified by faith alone. Sanctification comes as a result of imputed righteousness. Moreover, Christ, in His redemptive work, has already accomplished positional sanctification for believers (Heb 10:10, 14; 1 Cor 1:2). In addition, Reformed faith acknowledges the believer's union with Christ (see chapter 6). In Christ, believers' sinful nature has already been vanquished and they acquire victory over it through faith.

On the other hand, this victory over sin secured by Christ is progressively actualized in the lives of believers through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians must submit themselves to the Spirit. At the same time, there is no place in this process for human boasting, since God produces this life-transformation. Additionally, the good works performed with the power of the Spirit do not merit a person's salvation. We inherit God's kingdom through faith.

Unlike the Orthodox position, Reformed faith rejects the idea that God communicates to believers some type of "divine energies" that transform their lives. God adds nothing to the human constitution, but rather renews the believer's already existing human nature to produce behavior coinciding with the will of God.

Reformed faith diverges from the Catholic view in that it rejects the claim that the standard of holiness for ordinary believers can differ from the standard expected from more "advanced" believers. Unlike Methodist teaching (see below), Reformed faith debunks the claim that Christian can reach perfection in this life.

In evaluation of the Reformed position, we affirm its basic postulates, which are well supported by Scripture. We especially applaud the Reformed stand on the role of union with Christ in the sanctification of believers.

## **c. Pietists, Methodists, and Pentecostals**

Among Protestant denominations that arose during and after the Reformation, some stressed personal holiness in the lives of believers more than others. Such groups feared that emphasis on justification by faith alone could lead to neglect of Christian morals. Among such groups are the Pietists and Methodists.

Pietists separated from Lutherans who believed that only partial sanctification was attainable in this life and taught that believers would always struggle with sin, often unsuccessfully. Pietists emphasized the development of Christian character more than right doctrine. They insisted, "Regeneration ought to lead to the practice of holiness and to an intimate personal relationship with God."<sup>1022</sup> They believed in being led by inner guidance and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in their hearts for defining and demonstrating holy living.

John Wesley, though, advanced a more substantial theology of sanctification, including the claim that believers can attain perfection in this life. He identified this experience with the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 30:6).<sup>1023</sup> At the same time, Wesley supported the Evangelical view that justification comes through faith in Jesus alone, and that sanctification was a separate work of God.<sup>1024</sup>

Here, we must clarify that in Wesley's opinion, "perfection" does not mean that believers will never err, but rather that they will never intentionally sin. They may still commit sins of ignorance. According to Wesley,

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<sup>1021</sup>See Boyd, p. 152-155; Muller, v. 4, p. 327-328; Heokema A. A. The Reformed Perspective Five Views on Sanctification // Five Views on Sanctification. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – 237 p.

<sup>1022</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 328.

<sup>1023</sup>Boyd, p. 161.

<sup>1024</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 329.

Christians may attain perfection in love, but not necessarily in knowledge. In other words, the “perfected” Christian will always be guided by right motives.<sup>1025</sup>

In Wesley’s words, perfection is when we have “so entire a love to [God], that you may love nothing but for his sake.”<sup>1026</sup> A person receives by faith God’s grace of sanctification in one moment of time, but after this begins “a gradual dying to sin and growth in grace and finally leads to a time at which the believer is perfected in love by God.”<sup>1027</sup> The process of sanctification requires “vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of the commandments... in denying ourselves and taking up the cross daily.”<sup>1028</sup> Even though he acknowledged that the Law did not justify, Wesley nonetheless felt that it was useful in the pursuit of holiness.<sup>1029</sup>

Wesley thought that Christians may reach perfection at any moment of time, but this usually occurs at the moment of death.<sup>1030</sup> Reaching perfection in this life does not mean that this condition will necessarily be permanent. It can be lost. In addition, even after attaining perfection, a believer can still grow in grace.<sup>1031</sup>

Wesleyans appeals to Scripture for support. Jesus charged His disciples, “Be perfect” (Matt 5:48). Paul prayed for the Thessalonian church, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely” (1 Thes 5:23). John taught, “No one who abides in Him sins” (1 Jn 3:6), and Paul expected that “the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4).

Even the Old Testament hints at complete victory over sin. Psalm 130:8 reads, “He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” God promised His people through Ezekiel, “I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.... I will save you from all your uncleanness” (Ezek 36:25, 29). Again, appealing to Paul: “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). Of note is that Paul uses the word “perfecting” here. Finally, God’s goal for the Church is to “present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27), i.e., to perfect her.<sup>1032</sup>

How does Wesley suppose that a person attains sanctification? It comes not by human effort, but by the work of God’s Spirit (Rom 9:28). Believers, though, must exercise active faith in God’s intervention in their lives. Finally, when the Lord reveals sin in believers’ lives, they need to repent of it.

Some followers of Wesley stressed, even more than their founder, sanctification as a momentary experience. They also expected that, after receiving this sanctifying experience, the believer would be able to live above sin. This differs from Wesley’s teaching about a progressive experience of sanctification. In order to receive this special impartation of grace, these followers of Wesley taught one must earnestly seek it through prayer.<sup>1033</sup> They sometimes termed this experience the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1034</sup> This movement became known as the “holiness movement.”

However, many subject the teaching of Christian perfection to the following critique. Paul, a mature and experienced believer in Jesus, declined to claim that he had reached perfection: “Not that I have already obtained {it} or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12).

In Philippians 1:6, we learn that God continues His sanctifying work “until the day of Jesus Christ.” So then, it seems improper to expect the completion of that process until that time. Yet, even before that time, departed believers are spoken of as “the spirits of {the} righteous made perfect” in heaven (Heb 12:22-23).

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<sup>1025</sup>Jenney T. P. Holy Spirit and Sanctification // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 457.

<sup>1026</sup>Wesley, J. Works, XI, 368; taken from Muller, v. 4, p. 329.

<sup>1027</sup>Wesley, J. Works, XI, 402; taken from Muller, v. 4, p. 329.

<sup>1028</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 329.

<sup>1029</sup>Dieter M. E. The Wesleyan View // Five Views on Sanctification. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – P. 25-27.

<sup>1030</sup>Wesley, J. Works, XI, 429; taken from Muller, v. 4, p. 329.

<sup>1031</sup>Dieter, p. 13-14.

<sup>1032</sup>Other Scriptures in support: Matt 6:13; 22:37; Jn 17:20-23; Eph 3:14-19; Lk 1:69-75; Tit 2:11-14; 1 Jn 4:17 (Dieter, p. 15).

<sup>1033</sup>It is thought that the following Scripture passages point to this sanctifying experience: Phil 2:5; Eph 4:22-24; 2 Cor 7:1; 2 Cor 10:5; Heb 12:1; 1 Cor 3:1; Col 1:28; 1 Thes 3:10; 1 Jn 3:8; Jn 8:34-36 (Dieter, p. 32-33).

<sup>1034</sup>Dieter, p. 42.

Concerning 1 John 3:6, we must consider that when John writes, “No one who abides in Him sins,” he employs the Greek present tense verb, which can indicate progressive or repeated action. Consequently, John may have in view not that Christians never sin, but that they do not lead a sinful lifestyle.

White comments on Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect,” that the Greek adjective τέλειος (*teleios*) does not necessarily mean “sinless,” but could mean reaching one’s goal, completion, or maturity.<sup>1035</sup> The Lord Jesus, then, may not be calling His disciples to sinless perfection in this life, but rather to spiritual maturity. Muller, commenting on Philippians 3:15, concurs that when Paul uses the word τέλειος (*teleios*) in this passage, “he most certainly does not mean an absolute perfection, like the divine perfection, but rather a maturity in faith.”<sup>1036</sup>

We object to the teaching of the “holiness movement” that through a single experience of “entire sanctification,” a person’s sinful nature can be eradicated so that this individual never sins again. The apostle John warns against such a teaching: “If we say that we have no sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). If people are convinced that they can never sin again, then when they do inevitably sin, they will not be able to admit it, but will deceive themselves into thinking that they have not. Hence, “the truth is not in them.”

The Bible contains many references to spiritual growth and exhortation to Christian maturity, which clearly indicates that sanctification is not a momentary experience but an ongoing process. For example, Peter writes, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). Furthermore, Philippians 1:9 reads, “This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.” In addition, in Hebrews 12:14, we read, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” In this verse, we encounter the verb διώκετε (*diokete*), i.e., “pursue,” which, as a Greek present imperative, communicates progressive or continuous action. In other words, we continually pursue holiness.

On a historical note, the views of the holiness movement are directly connected with the launching of the Pentecostal movement. The earliest Pentecostals advanced the teaching of three separate experiences with the Holy Spirit. People begin their walk with the Lord through the new birth, by virtue of which they become children of God. Then, one must receive complete sanctification through a crisis experience in prayer. Only then is one ready to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit for spiritual power in ministry.

Later in the history of the Pentecostal movement, some adherents began to teach that there were only two special experiences with the Holy Spirit: the new birth and the baptism in the Spirit. Sanctification was seen as a progressive experience rather than as a crisis experience. Consequently, there exist to this day two trajectories in Pentecostalism: proponents of three experiences with the Spirit, and proponents of two experiences. We affirm the two-experience Pentecostal view as being most consistent with Scripture.

The well-respected Pentecostal theologian Stanley Horton supports the “two-experience” view.<sup>1037</sup> His theology also incorporates some elements of the Keswick teaching (see below), which emphasizes the redemptive work of Christ as the source for victorious Christian living. Horton feels that sanctification is realized progressively and reaches its culmination only after death. He also asserts that sanctification depends in part on the participation and effort of believers.

In the early years of their movement, Pentecostals followed certain practices of the holiness movement, such as strictly abstaining from tobacco, alcohol, gambling, theater, card playing, sports, cosmetics, immodest dress, etc. Holiness was often closely associated with such external behaviors. We caution, though, that an overemphasis on external indicators of holiness can distract from the more vital internal changes of the heart (Matt 23:25-26). In addition, some of the holiness “taboos” appear extreme.

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<sup>1035</sup>White, p. 1053. Also see Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer, W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 995-996 (abbreviated BDAG).

<sup>1036</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 323.

<sup>1037</sup>Horton S. The Pentecostal Perspective // Five Views on Sanctification. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – 237 p. His teaching faithfully represents the position of the Pentecostal denomination the Assemblies of God.

#### d. Keswick

A unique and quite revolutionary approach to sanctification was advanced at the end of the 19th century in Keswick, England.<sup>1038</sup> In that city, a yearly conference was held (and is still held, with modifications) on the theme of sanctification. The conference was founded by Thomas Harford-Battersby, pastor of St. John's Anglican Church in Keswick, along with the Quaker Robert Wilson. The movement that arose from the Keswick meetings is called the "Higher Life Movement."

The "Higher Life Movement" is a combination of Reformed theology and the enthusiasm of early Methodism. In line with Reformed theology, Keswick taught that believers have already died with Christ to sin (Rom 6), and in the strength of their union with Christ, Christians can gain victory over sin. Unlike the holiness teaching, though, the sin nature is not eradicated, but its power to control us is destroyed by the death of Christ.

The Higher Life Movement emphasizes obtaining victory over sin, provided by Christ, through faith. Christians must totally abandon all hope for achieving holiness by personal effort and trust entirely on the grace provided through the death of the Savior. Keswick asserts that believers need a crisis experience which consists of a step of personal abandon and reliance on Christ. Boyd describes this crisis:

...a total surrender to God, acknowledging that the natural self cannot overcome sin, and a resting-faith in Christ, who conquered sin.... The surrender constitutes an abandonment of self-effort and a reliance by faith on the indwelling Holy Spirit.<sup>1039</sup>

After believers abandon their self-reliance, they are ready to embrace the completed work of Christ on their behalf. From that time on, they stand in faith for total victory over sin. In this "atmosphere of faith," the Holy Spirit finds room to work effectually in their lives and apply the benefits of Christ's redemptive work for their sanctification.

Sanctification by faith is associated with the concept of Sabbath. Boyd comments on this, "Resting-faith in the provisions of Christ's death and resurrection is the key to victory over sin and a life of godliness."<sup>1040</sup> McQuilkin adds, "Faith is thus the key to appropriating God's provision for successful Christian living.... As we continue to trust God the Holy Spirit, the means of grace become operative in our lives."<sup>1041</sup> The Keswick teaching does not hold that people attain perfection in practice during this life. Nonetheless, adherents of this view expect to make great strides in that direction.

The Keswick view recognizes three stages in the sanctification of believers. First, upon conversion to Christ, they are counted "holy" in Him, that is, they acquire positional sanctification before God. Second, they undergo the progressive process of life-transformation leading to victory over sin and development of Christian character. Third, sanctification reaches completion in the future when believers are glorified. Also notable is that sanctification by faith does not lead to passivity in moral living. Believers take active part in the process by submitting to God. Nonetheless, emphasis is placed on gaining victory through faith.

Our assessment of the Keswick teaching is mainly positive, since it coincides with the biblical revelation which we have outlined earlier. Especially valuable is the focus on the believer's union with Christ, which Scripture reveals to be the means by which God has destroyed the power of death. We also applaud the movement's expectation to see great progress in sanctification in this life through this union, and the central place it allots to the role of faith in attaining victorious living.

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<sup>1038</sup>See Boyd, p. 156-159; McQuilkin J. R. *The Keswick Perspective // Five Views on Sanctification*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987. – P. 152-182; Muller, v. 4, p. 330; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick\\_Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick_Convention).

<sup>1039</sup>Boyd, p. 157-159.

<sup>1040</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>1041</sup>McQuilkin, p. 167.

The only real criticism to offer is the supposed need for a “crisis experience” to initiate this process, which we do not observe in Scripture. We apprehend this truth progressively over time (see Eph 1:18-19a) in the same way that we progressively appropriate the grace that sanctifies.

#### **e. Word of Faith**

In the contemporary Church, an unbiblical view on sanctification, advanced by the Word of Faith movement, is gaining acceptance by many. It derives from the teaching of Kenneth E. Hagin, whose anthropology is expressed in the oft-quoted phrase, “*Man actually is a spirit. He has a soul, and he lives in a body.*”<sup>1042</sup> Hagin considered that 2 Corinthians 5:17 describes the rebirth of the human spirit. The passage reads, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

According to this view, when persons are born again, their spirits become perfect. The human body is the seat of the sinful human nature. Hagin equates the biblical idea of the sinful nature, or the “flesh,” with the human body. He writes, “That nature he has to deal with is the fleshly nature. It is his body which has not yet been redeemed.”<sup>1043</sup>

So then, the spirit is on God’s side, while the body sides with sin. The third part of peoples’ tripartite nature, the soul, determines their behavior. Hagin claims, “*If we don’t get our minds renewed with the Word of God, the MIND will side with the BODY against the SPIRIT.*”<sup>1044</sup> Sanctification, therefore, involves suppression of the physical.

However, the striking resemblance of this teaching with the basic tenets of Greek dualistic philosophy (mind is good, matter is evil) makes this view suspect. Sanctification is not a battle between spirit and body, but a conflict between the entire person (spirit, soul, and body) and sin.

In addition, the human spirit does not become perfect through the new birth. 2 Corinthians 7:1 makes clear that born-again Christians must still cleanse themselves “from all defilement of flesh and spirit.” Additionally, according to 1 Thessalonians 5:23, our spirit, soul, and body are still undergoing the process of sanctification.

Finally, it is misguided to equate the sinful human nature with the physical body. Galatians 5:19-21 reveals that the “works of the flesh” include vices that do not originate in the body, such as envy, anger, divisions, etc. We also recall Jesus’ word from Mark 7:21-23: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries.... All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

#### **f. Liberals**

We will conclude our investigation of the doctrine of sanctification with a brief glance at the views of some prominent liberal theologians and philosophers.<sup>1045</sup> Immanuel Kant, for example, advanced the idea of the “categorical imperative,” which refers to an inner sense people have of how they should behave. Kant claimed that since no one perfectly satisfies this categorical imperative, there must exist life after death so that this drive can be satisfied.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was not so much interested in rules for ethical conduct as he was in developing an attitude of dependence on the Lord. For him, this attitude of dependence constituted the heart of human religious experience. Sanctification, in general, consists in overcoming an attitude of independence from God.

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<sup>1042</sup>Hagin K. E. *Demons and How to Deal with Them* – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1987. – P. 4.

<sup>1043</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>1044</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>1045</sup>Muller, v. 4, p. 330.

Victory over this vice is accomplished in the context of the Church and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells it.

Albrecht Ritschl felt that the essence of sanctification was strict observance of ethical norms and the establishment of God's kingdom on the earth. Along with Schleiermacher, Ritschl taught that sanctification is realized in the context of the Church, in which the Holy Spirit is present and active.<sup>1046</sup>

However, although these three systems address some aspect of sanctification (Kant – conscience, Schleiermacher – feeling, Ritschl – behavior), none of them provide a comprehensive view of the Christian concept. In addition, we affirm with Scripture that the reason no one fulfills the “categorical imperative” is that humans are born with a sinful nature.

Furthermore, although these authors acknowledge the need for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, they fail to recognize the fundamental role that the redemptive work of Christ plays in putting to death the “old man,” and imparting new life to believers. Moreover, Ritschl undervalues the role of faith in attaining spiritual victory. Schleiermacher does emphasize faith, but he fails to propose and define a substantial ethical system for judging right from wrong.

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<sup>1046</sup>See Ritschl A. Justification and Reconciliation. – Engtr, 1902. – P. 605. Taken from Muller, v. 4, p. 330.

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<http://bookofconcord.org>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick\\_Convention](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keswick_Convention)

## Chapter 12. Participation in Christ's Death - Healing

During His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated His victory over sickness and death through the miracles of healing He performed. The Bible records that He healed many afflicted with disease among the people. The question arises, however, "To what degree can we in the Church today expect victory over sickness and disease?" Let us investigate the biblical teaching on divine healing

### A. Causes of Illness

Where does sickness come from?<sup>1047</sup> According to Scripture, the main reason is the Fall of humanity into sin. In the apostle Paul's words, "Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Since sickness is a manifestation of the power of death, we can confidently conclude that illness in general terms traces back to the sin of Adam in the Garden and the consequences that resulted from it.

This thesis finds confirmation in the observation that before the Fall, there was no disease (see Gen 1:31). Additionally, sickness is also absent in the New Creation (Rev 21:4). So then, sickness is present and active in the world only during the period of the Fall, in which we now live. Also notable is that in one instance, Jesus connected physical healing with the forgiveness of sin (Matt 9:1-8), thereby showing the association between the two.

Aside from the general effect of the Fall on humanity, some sickness is caused by personal sin. Both the Old and New Testament testify to this. Miriam was struck with leprosy when she and Aaron challenged Moses' leadership (Num 12:9-10). Uzziah experienced the same when he dared to enter the temple of the Lord (2 Chr 26:16-19). Jehoram suffered illness due to his forsaking the God of Israel (2 Chr 21:15-19). The psalmist relates, "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin" (Ps 38:3).<sup>1048</sup> The book of Deuteronomy also enlightens us on this principle: "Yahweh will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed" (Deut 28:27; cf. v. 35, 59-61).

In the New Testament, Paul reveals that believers can suffer due to disrespect for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:29-30). We also note instances where God directly afflicted someone because of disobedience, such as Zechariah (Lk 1:20), Elymas (Acts 13:11), and Herod (Acts 12:23). During the Great Tribulation, illness will be a method of divine punishment (Rev 16:2).<sup>1049</sup> In Jn 5:14, Jesus Himself suggests that sickness could arise from personal sin: "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."

Therefore, God can use physical illness to punish and correct. Therefore, James recommends to believers that along with prayer for healing, "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed" (Jam 5:16).

Moreover, sickness can occur due to demonic influence. In Luke 13:11, we read of a woman having a spirit of infirmity. Matthew 9:33 speaks of a demon causing muteness. We also recall Job's illness inflicted by Satan (Job 2:5-7).

Common sense compels us to acknowledge that neglect or improper treatment of the body can lead to disease as well. The Old Testament actually proscribed specific hygienic laws that promote health (see below).

Finally, we consider Jesus' encounter with the man born blind. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus responded, "{It was} neither {that} this man sinned, nor his parents; but {it was} so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (Jn 9:2-3). Jesus revealed two

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<sup>1047</sup>Purdy V. Divine Healing // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 558-559.

<sup>1048</sup>Cottle R. E. Healing, Gifts of // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 2 – P. 647.

<sup>1049</sup>Ibid.

things in His answer. First, not all sickness comes from personal sin. Second, God may not always reveal the cause of a disease, but rather He may reveal what He intends to do about it (cf. Jn 11:4).<sup>1050</sup>

## B. Divine Healing in the Word of God

### 1. Old Testament

In surveying the biblical teaching on healing, it is remarkable to note its consistency. In every period of biblical history, we encounter God's promises to deliver His people from illness. The first recorded instance of prayer for healing is found in Gen 20:17-18, where God healed the household of Abimelech in answer to Abraham's prayer.<sup>1051</sup> God gave the first promises of healing to Israel through Moses on condition of Israel's obedience:

- I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, Yahweh, am your healer (Ex 15:26).
- I will remove sickness from your midst. There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days (Ex 23:25-26).
- Yahweh will remove from you all sickness; and He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt which you have known (Deut 7:15).

Duffield and Van Cleave correctly observe that in the above-cited passages, the Lord did not give temporary promises to specific individuals, but established a general principle that, one might assume, still remains in force. They also note that in Exodus 15:26, we encounter one of the "compound" names of God, namely יהוה רפּאָך (*Yahweh-rofexa*, or "Yahweh your healer"), which is given to reveal a certain aspect of Yahweh's relationship with His people – He is their healer.<sup>1052</sup>

We see a concrete fulfillment of these Old Testament promises in the case of Caleb, who at the age of 85, claimed to be "as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me" at age 40 (Josh 14:11). Moses experienced the same, passing away at the age of 120: "His eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated" (Deut 34:7).

It is also worthy of mention that during Israel's wandering in the wilderness, God provided healing for them from the bite of poisonous serpents (Num 21:7-9), which, in turn, served a symbol or "type" of redemption in Jesus (Jn 3:14). Other examples of Yahweh's healing grace include: healing of Miriam (Num 12:12-15) and Namaan (2 Kin 5), Job's restoration to health (Job 42:10), lengthening Hezekiah's life (2 Kin 20), and resurrecting both the son of a widow (1 Kin 17:17-24) and the son of the Shunammite (2 Kin 4:18-37).<sup>1053</sup>

The Psalms also celebrate the Lord's faithfulness in healing His people: "Who heals all your diseases" (Ps 103:3), and, "He sent His word and healed them" (Ps 107:20).

Moreover, God promises, "No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent" (Ps 91:10). Even if tragedy should strike the righteous, "Yahweh delivers him out of them all" (Ps 34:19).<sup>1054</sup> Yahweh especially promises health to those who help the poor (Ps 41:1-3).<sup>1055</sup> Aside from these general promises, we note a concrete instance when the psalmist received healing from the Lord (see Ps 16:10).<sup>1056</sup>

God also promises to bless those of advanced age: "The righteous man will flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of Yahweh, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

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<sup>1050</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1051</sup>Duffield G. P., Van Cleave N. M. Foundations of Pentecostal Theology. – Los Angeles, CA: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983. – P. 374.

<sup>1052</sup>Ibid., p. 375, 378.

<sup>1053</sup>Ibid., p. 375, 377.

<sup>1054</sup>Ibid., p. 375.

<sup>1055</sup>Cottle, v. 2, p. 647.

<sup>1056</sup>Ibid.

They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green” (Ps 92:12-14). Their “youth is renewed like the eagle” (Ps 103:5).

In the Proverbs of Solomon, God promises those who diligently apply themselves to His Word “health to all their body” (Prov 4:22). Jeremiah addressed Yahweh as his healer: “Heal me, O Yahweh, and I will be healed” (Jer 17:14). Isaiah relates that at the time of Jerusalem’s restoration, “no resident will say, ‘I am sick’” (Isa 33:24).

## 2. New Testament

The New Testament confirms our impression that God’s will is to heal the sick. Healing characterized the earthly ministry of Christ (see Lk 4:38-40; 7:21-22).<sup>1057</sup> He healed various types of sickness: a withered hand (Mk 3:3-5), a flow of blood (Mk 5:21ff), blindness (Lk 18:35-42), lameness (Mk 2:12-12), dropsy (Lk 14:1-6), leprosy (Lk 17:11-14), fever (Mk 1:30-31), and many others. He displayed His authority over death by raising the dead (Matt 9:22-25; Lk 7:11-15; Jn 11).<sup>1058</sup>

It is also interesting to note how Jesus performed healing. Sometimes He healed with a word (Matt 8:13; cf. Acts 14:10), and sometimes through laying on hands (Mk 6:5; cf. Acts 9:17-18). At times, healing came after casting out a demon (Matt 9:32-33). In special cases, He used saliva for healing (Mk 7:33; 8:23). Sometimes healing power was released to those who touched His garments (Matt 14:36; cf. Acts 19:11-12). Similarly, the book of Acts records that once God even healed through the shadow of Peter (Acts 5:15-16; also see 19:11-12).

It is important to note that Jesus never refused healing to anyone who asked Him. Many instances specifically record that He healed everyone (Matt 4:23; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:14, 36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Lk 6:18-19). Peter testified, “He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).<sup>1059</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave see great significance in this fact:

It is a remarkable thing, and one worthy of a great deal of consideration, that Jesus healed every one who came to Him, or who was brought to Him, for healing.... One would have expected that, if it is not God’s Will to heal all who come to Him for healing in the Church age, there would have been some suggestion of this in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>1060</sup>

The New Testament not only relates cases where Jesus healed all, but also gives a specific example when He expressed His desire to heal. A leper approached Him with the words, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” Jesus’ response: “Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed’” (Mk 1:40-41). One can hardly dispute Purdy’s conclusion: “If anything stands out about Jesus’ view of sickness, it is that He is against it. It contradicts His will.”<sup>1061</sup>

Jesus often required faith of those requesting Him for healing (e.g., Mk 5:34-36; Matt 9:28; Jn 5:8-9; 11:40). Paul also underscored the importance of faith, when he fixed his gaze on a man lame from birth and saw “that he had faith to be made well” (Acts 14:9). When Jesus encountered someone with such faith, He rejoiced to see it (Matt 8:5-13; 15:22-28). We also note instances in Scripture where Jesus or His disciples could

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<sup>1057</sup>The New Testament mentions 21 instances where Jesus healed the sick (Moo D. J. Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel // Trinity Journal. 1988. Vol. 9. P. 193).

<sup>1058</sup>Heidenreich observes that most of Jesus’ miracles were performed on chronically ill people. He reaches the incorrect conclusion, though, that people should just tolerate acute illnesses since they profit them in the end. In his opinion, such illnesses are a gift of love wrapped in pain (Heidenreich A. Healings in the Gospels. – Edinburg, Floris Books, 1980. – P. 25-28).

<sup>1059</sup>It is interesting to compare two cases that seem inconsistent. In Luke 5:17, we read, “The power of the Lord was present to heal,” which may imply that it was not always in manifestation. On the other hand, when the woman with hemorrhage touched the garment of Jesus, His power immediately flowed into her (Mk 5:27-29), which seems to imply that His power was always available to the touch of faith.

<sup>1060</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 381-382.

<sup>1061</sup>Purdy, p. 566.

not heal because of people's unbelief (Mk 6:5-6; Matt 17:19-20).<sup>1062</sup> We add that once Jesus asked a man whether he wanted to be healed (Jn 5:6). Evidently, the problem here was not Jesus' unwillingness to heal, but the man's lack of readiness to receive it.

Commenting on the need for faith in healing, White writes, "Even with Jesus himself visibly present, no healing was possible except 'according to your faith'" (Matt 9:29).<sup>1063</sup> Although White correctly stresses the vital role of faith in Christ's healing ministry, Harrison qualifies this by saying, "In some healings the matter of faith on the part of the sick seems to have been ignored completely in the spontaneity of Christ's response," for example, in Mk 1:31; Lk 7:12-15; 13:11-13; 14:4; 22:51.<sup>1064</sup>

In addition, in the Acts of the Apostles Jesus' healing ministry continued in the Church. Even before Jesus departed, the disciples were sent out to heal (Matt 10:8).<sup>1065</sup> The ministries of Peter (Acts 3:1-10; 9:32-41) and Paul (Acts 14:8-10; 19:11-12; 20:9-12; 28:8-9) are especially remarkable in this regard. Yet, the ministry of healing was not limited to them, but God used others as well, like Stephen (Acts 6:8), Phillip (Acts 8:5-8), and Ananias (Acts 9:17-18).<sup>1066</sup>

In some cases of the apostles' ministry, God healed everyone in need of it (Acts 5:16; 19:11-12; 28:9). White responds, "As the disciples shared the healing work in the earlier years, so the church continued to do so through the apostolic age."<sup>1067</sup>

Possibly the most significant point in this discussion is God's promise to the *Church* concerning healing:

- Is anyone among you sick? {Then} he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed (Jam 5:14-16).
- Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers (3 Jn 2).

Some may argue that God's plan for healing in the Old Testament or the ministry of Jesus may not apply in the Church age. Yet, we see here a specific indication that the Lord plans to continue His healing ministry in the Church. We can confidently conclude, then, that God's attitude toward sickness and healing has not changed.

Daniel Hayden objects to this interpretation.<sup>1068</sup> He feels that James is speaking of emotional healing from discouragement, not physical recovery. He advances the following arguments in support. First, this is the only instance in the epistles addressing prayer for healing. If it was an established principle, then it would appear in other places as well. Second, a previous context (Jam 5:7-11) speaks of perseverance in suffering, not deliverance from it. Third, the ill person here is not calling for those with gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:28), but for the elders, who typically deal with spiritual problems (Gal 6:1).

Furthermore, Hayden draws our attention to several key words in the text. In the phrase, "Is anyone among you sick," we have the verb ἀσθενέω (*astheneo*). Its basic meaning is "weakness." Of its 20 occurrences in the New Testament, 14 times it refers to weakness of the soul, especially so in the epistles (see Rom 14:1-2; 1 Cor 8:11-12). In the phrase, "The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick," we encounter the

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<sup>1062</sup>Chappell P. G. Heal, Healing // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 539.

<sup>1063</sup>White R. E. O. Heal, Health // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 329.

<sup>1064</sup>Harrison R. K. Heal // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 2 – P. 646.

<sup>1065</sup>White, p. 328.

<sup>1066</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 384.

<sup>1067</sup>White, p. 329.

<sup>1068</sup>Hayden D. R. Calling the Elders to Pray // Bibliotheca Sacra. 1981. Vol. 138. P. 258-265.

participle form of the verb κάμνω (*kamno*), i.e., “sick,” which occurs in the New Testament only here and in Hebrews 12:3, where it deals with the believer’s struggle against sin.

In addition, Hayden comments on the use in verse 16 of the verb ἰάομαι (*iaomai*), i.e., «heal». In Hebrews 13:3, this term refers to spiritual strengthening. Moreover, the mention of forgiveness of sins in this context corresponds with the idea of weakness of soul. Regarding the anointing with oil, Hayden considers this a means of supporting a spiritually weak individual (see Lk 7:38, 46; Matt 6:17). Finally, following this passage, James introduces the example of Elijah, who was “a man with a nature like ours” in the sense that he struggled with temptation as we do. Consequently, Hayden concludes that this passage is addressing emotion/spiritual problems and not physical ones.

E. William Male responds critically to the “soul sickness” interpretation of James 5.<sup>1069</sup> First, in the Bible in general anointing with oil is connected with prayer for physical healing. The apostles employed it in their ministry of healing (Mk 6:13).

Furthermore, although the term ἀσθενέω (*astheneo*) is frequently used in relation to emotional or spiritual weakness, it can mean physical illness as well. Male notes that it is employed when someone is in critical physical condition, even near death (see Lk 7:2; Jn 11; Acts 9:37; Phil 2:26-27). In addition, in Jam 5:13-14 three specific groups of people are highlighted: the “suffering,” the “cheerful,” and the “sick.” The first two groups are likely experiencing emotional stress or joy, while the third group is dealing with physical issues. In conclusion, Male asks the rhetorical question, “Should God have wanted to give us specific instructions for anointing and praying for the ill, how could He have said it more plainly than He has in James 5:13–16?”<sup>1070</sup>

We may add some thoughts to Male’s critique. When James mentions Elijah, the issue is not his spiritual or mental weakness, but his faith in prayer, which James insisted is necessary in prayer for healing. Additionally, in most cases in the New Testament the word ἰάομαι (*iaomai*), i.e., “to heal” (Jam 5:16), refers to physical recovery.

Furthermore, it is erroneous to claim that the general context of James chapter 5 supports Hayden’s position. The immediate context prior to the one we are examining does not deal with suffering, but with making an oath. One of the characteristics of James’ epistle is that it freely moves from one topic to another, often with no clear connection between the different contexts.

Finally, the “prayer of faith” mentioned in James 5:15 corresponds to Jesus’ requiring faith of those who came to Him for healing.<sup>1071</sup> Douglas Moo comes to the correct conclusion that this passage “resembles very closely narratives of physical healings in the gospels.”<sup>1072</sup>

An important aspect in the study of healing is the presence and activity of gifts of healing in the Church (1 Cor 12:9, 28-30). Unfortunately, the Bible does not discuss in detail the action of this gift. Nonetheless, we may assume that, like all spiritual gifts, this one also operates by the initiative of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:11). Many feel that this gift manifests spontaneously and unpredictably, which distinguishes it from receiving healing by personal faith. Here, God takes the initiative to manifest a gift of healing, and faith on the part of the recipient is not essential.

The final question we will ask the New Testament writers is why God heals? First, it is an expression of the Lord’s love (Matt 14:14). Second, any miracle, including divine healing, serves to confirm the gospel (Heb 2:3-4). Third, divine healing demonstrates the power of God and brings Him glory (Jn 9:3; 11:4, 40).<sup>1073</sup> Fourth, healing displays the nature of God’s Kingdom. Healing is one of the signs that the Kingdom has come in power (Lk 4:18; Matt 10:7-8; 11:4-6). Finally, the miracles of Jesus serve to confirm His deity (Jn 5:36).<sup>1074</sup>

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<sup>1069</sup>Male E. W. “Divine Healing” according to James 5 // Grace Journal. Vol 1. № 2. 1960. P. 23-30.

<sup>1070</sup>Male, p. 26.

<sup>1071</sup>Chappell, p. 539.

<sup>1072</sup>Moo, p. 206.

<sup>1073</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 394.

<sup>1074</sup>Osborn T. L. Healing the Sick. Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1992. – P. 22.

## C. Healing and the Redemptive Work of Christ

Our survey of healing must include a study of its relation to the sufferings of Messiah. Matthew 8:16-17 is most enlightening in this regard: “When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. {This was} to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ‘He himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases.’” Verse 17 is a quotation from Isaiah 53:4: “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.”

Isaiah chapter 53 concerns the crucifixion of Messiah. Both Isaiah and Matthew testify that Messiah took upon Himself not only our sins, but our sicknesses as well. Therefore, victory over sickness was accomplished on the cross. In Isaiah’s words:

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised.... Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.... All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him (Isa 53:3-6).

The word “grief” in the above text translates the Hebrew *חַלִּי* (*hali*). “Sorrows” is a translation of the Hebrew *מַחֲוֹב* (*mahov*). The word *חַלִּי* (*hali*) nearly always refers to sickness or a wound in the body.<sup>1075</sup> The meaning “wounded soul” is very rare, appearing only in Ecclesiastes 5:16; 6:2. So then, we conclude that in Isaiah 53, Messiah takes upon Himself (on the cross) our physical ills.

Concerning the term *מַחֲוֹב* (*mahov*), in most cases it is difficult to determine its exact meaning from context – it may refer to healing of soul as well as body.<sup>1076</sup> One clear example exists of physical healing (Job 33:19), and one of healing for the soul (Ecc 1:18). Therefore, although the usage of the term *מַחֲוֹב* (*mahov*) cannot serve as confirmation of our thesis, neither does it contradict it. However, since the phrases “our griefs He Himself bore,” and “our sorrows He carried” are in parallel, it is very likely that *מַחֲוֹב* (*mahov*) connotes physical healing as well.

Harrison gives this helpful summary:

Christ’s atonement not merely took away human sin (Jn. 1:29) but brought sickness and disease within His saving work as well. If this identification of the Servant with the crucified Lord is correct, it is entirely proper to see in the cross a basis for physical as well as spiritual healing.<sup>1077</sup>

Peter cites Isaiah 53 in 1 Peter 2:24, “By His wounds you were healed.” We recognize that the context of 1 Peter 2 speaks of the salvation of the soul, not of healing for the body. It appears, then, that Peter relates Isaiah 53:4-5 primarily to spiritual salvation. This corresponds to the Septuagint translation, which also relates this passage to spiritual salvation. In the Septuagint, instead of the words “our sicknesses He Himself bore” contained in the Hebrew text, we read οὗτος τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει, i.e., “Our sins He bore.” Peter begins verse 24, in fact, with these words. Still, Peter’s application of Isaiah 53:4-5 to spiritual salvation does not nullify its original meaning in relation to physical healing.

## D. Sickness among God’s People

<sup>1075</sup>See Deut 7:15; 28:59, 61; 1 Kin 17:17; 2 Kin 1:2; 8:8-9; 13:14; Isa 1:5; 38:9; Jer 6:7; 10:19; Hos 5:13; Ps 40:4; 2 Chr 16:12; 21:15-19.

<sup>1076</sup>See Ex 3:7; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8; Ps 32:10; 38:17; 69:26; Ecc 2:23; Lam 1:12, 18; 2 Chr 6:29.

<sup>1077</sup>Harrison, v. 2, p. 645.

We must turn now to examine another facet of the question – the experience of God’s people in regard to divine healing. We encounter examples where not everyone received healing, both in Scripture and in our personal experience.

In 2 Kings 13:14, for example, Elisha “became sick with the illness of which he was to die.” Additionally, King Asa “was diseased in his feet” (1 Kin 15:23), the prophet Ahijah “could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age” (1 Kin 14:4), and Hezekiah nearly died of a disease, but was subsequently healed (2 Kin 20).

Isaac was also afflicted with poor vision (Gen 27:1, 19-23), as was the priest Eli (1 Sam 3:2). Jacob had a limp (Gen 32:31).<sup>1078</sup> Unlike Caleb and Moses, when David aged, he could no longer engage in battle (2 Sam 21:15-17). Finally, the Old Testament relates several cases of barren women: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Anna, Elizabeth. Yet, in the end, they were all enabled to miraculously conceive.

The classic example of sickness in the Old Testament narrative concerns Job. Yahweh allowed Satan to afflict him with sore boils for, apparently, a long period of time. However, in this case as well, God eventually restored his health (Job 42:10).

The New Testament records that during his first missionary journey, the apostle Paul became ill (Gal 4:13).<sup>1079</sup> Epaphroditus was sick to the point of death (Phil 2:27). Nonetheless, God healed him. Yet, it is curious for Paul to write that God “had mercy on him,” as if Paul was not certain as to whether Epaphroditus’ recovery was the Lord’s will for all or a special act of mercy. Moreover, in 1 Tim 5:23 Paul speaks of Timothy’s frequent stomach ailments. Paul also left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim 4:20). What happened to Trophimus afterward is not known.

Likely, the most debated passage concerning divine healing is 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, where Paul relates about his “thorn in the flesh.” Was this an illness that Jesus refused to heal?

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me – to keep me from exalting myself. Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor 12:7-9a).

“Thorn” is a translation of the Greek term σκόλοψ (*skolops*). In the Septuagint, it can carry its basic definition of a physical thorn (Hos 2:6; Sirach 43:19), or it can have a metaphorical meaning of oppression from surrounding nations (Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24). If Paul was operating on this metaphorical meaning, then the word “thorn” would connote the persecution and suffering he encountered in his gospel ministry.

This interpretation finds support in the context surrounding this passage. The following verses contain the term “weakness” three times in association with such experiences as “insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ’s sake.”

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses (ἀσθενεία), so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses (ἀσθενεία), with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak (ἀσθενεία), then I am strong (2 Cor 12:9b-10).

The term “weakness” is the Greek ἀσθενεία (*astheneia*). It can denote: “sickness,” “physical limitation,” or “inadequacy,” sometimes in a moral sense.<sup>1080</sup> Looking at the context of our passage, the most appropriate

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<sup>1078</sup>Hejzlar P. Two Paradigms for Divine Healing. – London: Brill, 2010. – C. 69.

<sup>1079</sup>Duffield and Van Cleave assume that Paul recovered, otherwise he could not have conducted such an active ministry as described in his epistles. In addition, when listing his difficulties, Paul does not mention illness (see 2 Cor 11:23-33). See Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 411.

<sup>1080</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 142 (Abbreviated BDAG).



definition is “physical limitation,” since in his own strength, Paul could not cope with all the difficulties which he encountered in his work for the Lord.

Acts 20:23 also confirms our thesis, where the Lord spoke to Paul about coming persecutions: “The Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.” This seems a clear parallel to Paul speaking about his “thorn in the flesh.”

We also find support in the absence of the preposition ἐν (*en* – “in”) before the phrase τῇ σαρκί (*te sarks* – “the flesh”). If Paul had intended to indicate his physical body, he likely would have inserted the preposition “in” to specify the location of the “thorn.” Without the preposition, the translation is less definite and a literal rendering would yield, “Thorn in relation to the flesh.” This could indicate a metaphorical meaning for σὰρξ (*sarks*), i.e. “flesh,” in the sense of “life experience.”<sup>1081</sup>

Because of the above-mentioned findings in this section, many conclude that it is not always God’s will to heal the sick. We will look in detail later at the teaching of some proponents of this view. In anticipation of that discussion, we will cite here the Catholic view, which expresses this position well: “But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God,”<sup>1082</sup> and, “Even the most intense prayers do not always obtain the healing of all illnesses.”<sup>1083</sup> The reason is:

Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.<sup>1084</sup>

The Evangelical scholar Douglas Moo affirms this position as well. Speaking in general terms, he feels that salvation of the soul is available in this life and salvation of the body – in the next when our bodies are redeemed (Rom 8:23). For the present, we “groan” in our mortal bodies anticipating that day.<sup>1085</sup>

## E. Value of Medical Therapy

The most common recourse for healing in the world has been and continues to be medical intervention. The Bible mentions the use of medical approaches as well.<sup>1086</sup> The Torah relates that God’s people were to observe certain hygienic and other practices that promote good health. Harrison mentions the following:<sup>1087</sup> observing a day of rest (the Sabbath), circumcision, and taboos on adultery, incest, homosexuality and intercourse during menstruation.

Other regulations included taboos on touching corpses and eating blood, fat, or pork. Food and water were kept away from contact with unclean animals. Excretions were to be covered up and done outside the camp (Deut 23:13). Certain laws were in place concerning leprosy (Lev 13-14), childbirth (Lev 12), and various emissions from the body (Lev 15).

Exodus 21:19 hints at medical remedies employed in ancient Israel. Jeremiah mentions physicians in Jeremiah 8:22, as does Jesus in Luke 4:23. Luke himself was a physician (Col 4:14). Treatment options included balsam (Jer 8:22), a cake of figs (Isa 38:21), oil (Isa 1:6; Lk 10:34), and wine (Lk 10:34; 1 Tim 5:23).<sup>1088</sup> Proverbs 17:22 reads, “A joyful heart is good medicine.”

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<sup>1081</sup>Noted in Moo, p. 200-201.

<sup>1082</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1505. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>1083</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1508.

<sup>1084</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1501.

<sup>1085</sup>Moo, p. 202-203.

<sup>1086</sup>White, p. 328.

<sup>1087</sup>Harrison, v. 2, p. 643-644.

<sup>1088</sup>Cottle, v. 2, p. 647-648.

Nonetheless, the references to medical interventions in Scripture are few. The Bible, in fact, insists that Yahweh is the source of healing. Asa violated this principle when “he did not see Yahweh, but the physicians” (2 Chr 16:12). Harrison believes that Asa’s case involved not only a lack of trust in the Lord, but the type of medical therapy he sought in those days – it was typically connected with superstition and magic. Therefore, he concludes,

Contemporary Near Eastern medicine posed a real threat to Israel’s faith because the Sinai covenant demanded that the nation trust in God alone for healing, not in human skills, magic, or superstitious practices.<sup>1089</sup>

Hejzlar summarizes the biblical view on medicine as follows.<sup>1090</sup> He recognizes that, on the one hand, the Bible says relatively little of natural means of healing. The reason for this is the focus on Yahweh as the Healer of His people. In addition, divine healing was a sign of His presence and activity among His people. On the other hand, the Bible does not speak negatively about medicine. Even the proponents of healing by faith (see below) recommend employment of natural means of healing until full recovery. Hejzlar concludes by saying that Scripture does not forbid medical care, but also does not recommend it. Divine healing, rather, is emphasized and medical intervention is practically edged out of the picture.<sup>1091</sup>

Finally, Duffield and Van Cleave rightly comment that modern medical care in no way eliminates the need for supernatural healing. Modern medicine is far from being able to cure all diseases.<sup>1092</sup>

## F. Healing in Extrabiblical Contexts

### 1. Antiquity

We will briefly comment on how the ancients viewed healing.<sup>1093</sup> Egypt hosted a fully developed medical system including physical examination, diagnostics, and therapy. Nonetheless, a strong undertone of superstition and magic accompanied the system. In Babylon, illness was associated with the activity of demons. Therefore, exorcism was thought necessary to heal disease.

### 2. Intertestamental Period

The intertestamental books of *Sirach* and *Tobit* touch on both medical treatment of disease and supernatural healing.<sup>1094</sup> Regarding natural means of therapy, we read,

Cultivate the physician in accordance with the need of him. For him also hath God ordained. It is from God that the physician getteth wisdom, and from the king he receiveth gifts. The skill of the physician lifteth up his head, and he may stand before nobles. God hath created medicines out of the earth, and let not a discerning man reject them (*Sirach*, 38.1-4).

And the angel said unto him, “Open the fish, and take out its gall and the heart and liver and put them by thee, and cast away the inwards; for its gall and heart and liver are for an useful medicament” (*Tobit*, 6.5, cf. 11.7-12).

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<sup>1089</sup>Harrison, v. 2, p. 645.

<sup>1090</sup>Hejzlar, p. 226, 236-239.

<sup>1091</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>1092</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 409.

<sup>1093</sup>Harrison, v. 2, p. 641-642.

<sup>1094</sup>Nickelsburg W. E. *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. – P. 72-73.

On the other hand, the book of Enoch ascribes healing to the activity of angels rather than to medical intervention (1 *Enoch* 10.7; 40.9). In the intertestamental times, sickness was sometimes thought to be the result of demonic activity (*Tobit* 3.7-8; *1QapGen ar* 20). Finally, according to some rabbis, Messiah will bring healing to the world.<sup>1095</sup>

### 3. Church History

#### a. Early Church and Middle Ages

Documents from early Church history abound with references to cases of divine healing well after the apostolic period ended. Some examples include:<sup>1096</sup>

Justin Martyr (2nd c.): And now you can learn this from what is under your own observation. For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs (2 *Apology*, 6).

Irenaeus (2nd c.): Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come: they see visions, and utter prophetic expressions. Others still, heal the sick by laying their hands upon them, and they are made whole. Yea, moreover, as I have said, the dead even have been raised up, and remained among us for many years (*Against Heresies*, 2.32.4).

Tertullian (3rd c.): The clerk of one of them who was liable to be thrown upon the ground by an evil spirit, was set free from his affliction; as was also the relative of another, and the little boy of a third. How many men of rank (to say nothing of common people) have been delivered from devils, and healed of diseases (*To Scapula*, 4).

Origen (3rd c.): And some give evidence of their having received through this faith a marvellous power by the cures which they perform, invoking no other name over those who need their help than that of the God of all things, and of Jesus, along with a mention of His history. For by these means we too have seen many persons freed from grievous calamities, and from distractions of mind, and madness, and countless other ills, which could be cured neither by men nor devils (*Against Celsus*, 3.24).

Both the third century Clement of Alexandria (*Letters*, 12) and the fifth century Theodore of Mopsuestia (*Life of Christ*) add their testimony of miracles and healings in their day. Cottle cites even later reports of supernatural healing in church history: "Gifts of healing, however, have never been totally absent from the Church's life. Francis of Assisi, Luther, Wesley, the Waldenses, the early Moravians, the Quakers, and others

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<sup>1095</sup>White, p. 328.

<sup>1096</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 385-386.

have experienced these gifts intermittently throughout church history.”<sup>1097</sup> Concerning the Moravians, Count Zinzendorf (18th c.) wrote:

We have undeniable proofs thereof. In the healing of maladies in themselves incurable, such as Cancer, Consumption, and when the patient was in the agonies of death, all by means of prayer of word.<sup>1098</sup>

John Wesley, who witnessed many miracles in his gospel ministry, gives the following accounts:<sup>1099</sup>

When Mr. Shepherd and I left Smeton, my horse was so exceedingly lame that I was afraid I must have lain by too.... I was thoroughly tired, and my head ached more than it had done for some months.... I then thought, “Cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or without any?” Immediately my weariness and headache ceased, and my horse’s lameness in the same instant. Nor did he halt any more either that day or the next.

The three first days my head ached more or less all day long, and I was half asleep from morning till night. The third day, on Wednesday, in the afternoon, my memory failed almost entirely. In the evening I sought my remedy in prayer. On Thursday morning my headache was gone. My memory was as strong as ever.

Cottle comments on the disappearance of spiritual gifts in Church History,

The operation of these gifts gradually diminished, due, no doubt, to the growth of ecclesiasticism and asceticism. The ritual of the Church became formalized and impersonal while the ascetic temper relegated physical healings to a relatively insignificant place. In fact, pain and sickness were sometimes considered to be the indispensable ministers of God to the soul.<sup>1100</sup>

Hejzlar believes that another reason for the disappearance of healing gifts was that in the Middle Ages, people expected miracles to happen only in the lives and ministries of those later to be canonized as Saints. He also relates that many Reformers poorly supported this idea. Luther did not believe in divine healing until his comrade Melanchthon was healed through his own prayer. Calvin taught, “The gift of healing disappeared with the other miraculous powers which the Lord was pleased to give for a time, that it might render the new preaching of the gospel forever wonderful.”<sup>1101</sup> He also thought that God predestines people’s physical condition – whether they will be well or sick.<sup>1102</sup>

## **b. The Sacrament of Extreme Unction**

In the course of Church history, a practice developed among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox known as “Extreme Unction.” The rite is intended for the sick, particularly before death. It is not so much a prayer for physical recovery, as it is a resignation to one’s fate and preparation for death.<sup>1103</sup>

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<sup>1097</sup>Cottle, v. 2, p. 648.

<sup>1098</sup>Bost A. History of the United Brethren, v. 1, p. 17, from Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 386.

<sup>1099</sup>Wesley J. The Journal of John Wesley. – Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1951. – Chapter 7.

<sup>1100</sup>Cottle, v. 2, p. 648.

<sup>1101</sup>Calvin J. Institutes of the Christian Religion. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997. – 4.19.18.

<sup>1102</sup>Hejzlar, p. 48-50.

<sup>1103</sup>However, the Catholic Church insists, “Notwithstanding this evolution the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1512).

In the West, Peter Lombard (1096-1160) and Thomas Aquinas (1125-1274) especially developed this idea. Lombard called it a “sacrament.” The Council of Trent (1543) decreed that the Church should perform this sacrament only before death.<sup>1104</sup>

In his commentary of Catholic theology, Hill enlightens us on this departure from the biblical norm for praying for the sick.<sup>1105</sup> The Church prayed less for the sick for several reasons. It undervalued people’s physical health, often considered illness a punishment for personal sins, and associated miracles more with veneration of Church relics than with prayer.

However, during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) changes took place with this practice. The original meaning of the sacrament was restored – prayer for physical healing.<sup>1106</sup> In addition, Holy Communion was considered a means to receive healing.<sup>1107</sup>

According to official Catholic doctrine, Extreme Unction can bring both spiritual and physical benefit: “This assistance from the Lord by the power of his Spirit is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul, but also of the body if such is God's will.”<sup>1108</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists the following effects the sacrament can provide:

- the uniting of the sick person to the passion of Christ, for his own good and that of the whole Church;
- the strengthening, peace, and courage to endure in a Christian manner the sufferings of illness or old age;
- the forgiveness of sins, if the sick person was not able to obtain it through the sacrament of Penance;
- the restoration of health, if it is conducive to the salvation of his soul;
- the preparation for passing over to eternal life.<sup>1109</sup>

We are intrigued (and alarmed) by the first point. It is claimed that receiving Extreme Unction is “a participation in the saving work of Jesus,”<sup>1110</sup> and, as Paul wrote, fills up “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church.”<sup>1111</sup> Our sufferings for Christ add nothing to His redemptive work (see chp. 13, section A).

The corresponding Orthodox practice gives emphasis to spiritual restoration. Meyendorff writes:

Healing is requested only in a framework of repentance and spiritual salvation, and not as an end in itself. Whatever the outcome of the disease, the anointing symbolized divine pardon and liberation from the vicious cycle of sin, suffering, and death, in which fallen humanity is held captive.<sup>1112</sup>

The Orthodox writer Shmeman describes the rite as follows:

The genuine healing of an individual does not consist of a renewal – a temporary one! – of his physical health, but in an actual change in his *perception* of sickness, suffering and death itself.... The goal of this sacrament is an alteration in one’s own understanding and acceptance of suffering and sickness, in one’s acceptance of them as a gift of the sufferings of Christ.<sup>1113</sup>

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<sup>1104</sup>Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic Theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 168, 364.

<sup>1105</sup>Ibid., p. 168, 364.

<sup>1106</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>1107</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1509.

<sup>1108</sup>Ibid., № 1520.

<sup>1109</sup>Ibid., № 1532.

<sup>1110</sup>Ibid., № 1521.

<sup>1111</sup>Ibid., № 1508.

<sup>1112</sup>Meyendorff J. Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes. – New York, Fordham University, 1974. – P. 199.

<sup>1113</sup>Taken from Илариона, А. Таинство Веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 166. Author’s translation.

Metropolitan Ilarion concurs:

The anointing with oil connects the ill person with the sufferings of Christ, makes the illness itself become a salving and healing measure against spiritual death. Many saints accepted the illnesses sent to them with thanksgiving as an opportunity to escape eternal torment.<sup>1114</sup>

On the other hand, other Orthodox writers value the rite for physical healing.<sup>1115</sup> In his book *The Orthodox Doctrine of the Apostolic Eastern Church*, Potessaro writes, "Unction is a solemn ceremony, in which the priest anoints the sick with oil, and prays that God may heal him, and forgive him his sins."<sup>1116</sup>

### c. Modern Views

Aside from the Catholic and Orthodox rites, we encounter an entire spectrum of views on divine healing among Evangelicals. On the one hand, some categorically reject the idea that divine healing is present in the Church today. Others claim that this blessing is for all believers. Other seek to occupy a middle position between them.

As just mentioned, the conviction exists among some Evangelical believers that the operation of divine healing ended after the apostolic age. Therefore, in our day one must not expect supernatural healing from the Lord. Supporters of this view defend their position in the following manner.<sup>1117</sup> Jesus gave the ministry of healing to His immediate disciples (along with another 70), not to believers in general. The book of Acts records that *apostles* performed miracles of healing: "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people" (Acts 5:12). Paul stated that miracles were "signs of a true apostle" (2 Cor 12:12). In addition, just as God gave New Testament revelation only in the first century, He displayed miraculous power only in that period as well.

However, convincing arguments overthrow that opinion.<sup>1118</sup> First, James 5:14-16 speaks of healing in the Church apart from apostolic ministry. Second, according to 1 Corinthians 12:28, God gave gifts of healing to the entire Church. We have no reason to assume that He would withdraw that grace from His people.

In addition, the claim that only apostles performed healing in the first century is false. The book of Acts shows others participating in miracle ministry, including healing the sick, namely, Phillip, Stephen, and Ananias (Acts 6:8; 8:7; 9:17-18). Furthermore, we agree with this group that miracles are given to confirm the gospel (Heb 2:4), but argue that the gospel is still in need of supernatural confirmation today. How does the unbelieving world of today differ from that of the first century?

Moreover, we affirm that the healing of the sick is a manifestation of the coming Kingdom of God. If God's Kingdom is being manifest in the Church today, then one would expect the signs of its appearing to be present as well, including divine healing. Finally, this position contradicts the multitude of testimonies by Christians, both in church history and today, of God's supernatural interventions in their personal lives in the area of physical healing.

Next, we need to discuss the healing movement in the Church that began in the late 19th century and continued on into the 20th as well. Certain teachers discovered that Jesus took upon Himself on the cross both our sins and our sicknesses.<sup>1119</sup> Consequently, God's will is to heal all believers in this life. Along with this, a number of prominent healing ministries arose, namely those of Smith Wigglesworth, John G. Lake, F. F.

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<sup>1114</sup>Ibid., p. 167. Author's translation.

<sup>1115</sup>Demetrakopoulos G. H. Dictionary of Orthodox Theology. – New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1964. – P. 103; Potessaro G. (Ed.) The Orthodox Doctrine of the Apostolic Eastern Church. – New York, NY: AMS Press, 1969.

<sup>1116</sup>Potessaro, p. 156.

<sup>1117</sup>Noted in Moo, p. 194-195.

<sup>1118</sup>Some of these points taken from Moo, p. 196-197.

<sup>1119</sup>Hejzlar, p. 80-81.

Bosworth, Mary Baker Eddy, A. B. Simpson, and John Alexander Dowie. This healing movement resurged in the 1940's and 1950's among such notables as William Branham, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, T. L. Osborn, and others. What did these healing evangelists teach about divine healing.<sup>1120</sup>

As a rule, they strongly believed that Christians can live healthy lives. God's will is healing for all. God "does not show partiality," including the question of who should receive healing. God's will is made known in His Word, which teaches healing for all. Jesus does not change (Heb 13:8). He came to "do the will of Him who sent Me." (Jn 6:38), which includes bodily healing. What Jesus did in the first century, He is ready to do now as well. Kenneth Hagin boldly claims,

I am fully convinced... that it is the plan of Our Father God, in His great love and in His great mercy, that no believer should ever be sick; that every believer should live his full lifespan down here on this earth; and that every believer should finally just fall asleep in Jesus.<sup>1121</sup>

It is claimed that there is no benefit in being sick. Disease enslaves the sufferer, drains the resources of the Church, and becomes burdensome to those who must care for the ill. God receives no glory from illness. In Scripture, sickness is assigned such inglorious designations as "bondage" (Lk 13:16) and "oppression by the devil" (Acts 10:38). In support of healing for all, proponents cite Isaiah 53, which teaches that Messiah's redemptive work included provision for healing and was completed on the cross,. Therefore, all that remains is to receive the provision of healing. In addition, Hebrews chapters 8-9 teach that believers in Christ are in a better covenant than Old Testament saints were. Yet, even in the Old Testament, God promised healing.

It is also argued that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The body, then, should be healthy as a fit temple for God's Spirit. God's plan of salvation includes the whole person: spirit, soul, and body. Moreover, if sickness is God's method for spiritual training, then why do we seek help from medical science? Are we not thereby undermining God's spiritual work in our lives? Equating sickness with the sufferings of Christ is inappropriate. The latter consist only in sufferings connected with Christian living or ministry (see 2 Cor 11:23-25).

In this view, the key to receiving healing from the Lord in faith expressed in words, i.e., one must confess one's healing. More people would receive healing if the healing message was preached. Without the Word, faith will be lacking (Rom 10:17). Osborn writes,

Whenever healing is preached with its full benefits for *all*, and people give heed to the word preached, faith is *always* imparted and people are *always* healed. This method *never* fails. Faith never fails.<sup>1122</sup>

Therefore, Osborn counsels believers to walk in faith regarding divine healing:

We may accept the evidence of our senses as true in *natural things*; but in *spiritual things*, when this evidence contradicts God's Word, then we ignore our senses and believe what the Word of God says.<sup>1123</sup>

People do not receive healing not only by lack of good teaching on the subject, but other factors may interfere as well, such as personal sin, unforgiveness toward others, lack of perseverance in faith, and neglect of one's health. Additional aids to healing include prayer in agreement with others (Matt 18:19), anointing with

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<sup>1120</sup>See Osborn T. L. Healing the Sick. – Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1959; Hagin K. E. Seven Things You Should Know About Divine Healing. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church. – 71 p.; Hagin K. E. The Key to Scriptural Healing. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1986. – 30 p.; Hejzlar.

<sup>1121</sup>Hagin, Seven Things, p. 21. It is interesting to note that Hagin passed away just in this manner on September 19, 2003, at age 86.

<sup>1122</sup>Osborn, p. 21-22.

<sup>1123</sup>Ibid., p. 109-110.

oil (Jam 5:14), and partaking the Lord's Supper. It is thought that the broken body of Christ, represented in the bread of communion, can provide physical healing.

This teaching also recognizes the manifestation of gifts of healing, where the Holy Spirit takes initiative to impart to the ill person healing virtue. Hagin comments on this special healing anointing:

One can be anointed, as God wills, with healing power to minister healing. And *when that person lays hands on the sick in obedience to this spiritual law, the contact of those anointed hands will transmit God's healing power to the sick*. The believer also has to exercise faith for this Law of Contact and Transmission to work. The woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9) is an example of this.<sup>1124</sup>

Some submit this teaching to the following criticisms. First, they accuse it of expecting too much from God in this life. The phrase "hyper-realized eschatology" is used, meaning that things reserved only for the future Kingdom are expected to manifest at the present time.<sup>1125</sup> Second, this system overburdens the sick person in requiring them to acquire faith in order to obtain healing.<sup>1126</sup> Third, lack of success in receiving healing can lead to deep disappointment and disillusionment, not only in healing, but in the Lord Himself. In addition, it seems that faith has center stage, not God. God is not allowed to be sovereign in His actions in regard to healing the sick.

Hejzlar voices the objection that Hebrews chapter 11 lists Old Testament heroes who exercised faith, but did not receive the promise. They expressed their faith in perseverance. He also points to the lessons learned from life experience, which make it problematic to take an extreme position on healing.<sup>1127</sup>

A third approach to healing was championed by the Catholic priest Francis Macnutt.<sup>1128</sup> Macnutt practiced so-called "soaking prayer." The minister of healing must pray long and frequently for the sick individual until he or she recovers. He points to the instance where Jesus prayed with persistence for a blind man (Mk 8:22-25). Macnutt concludes that some diseases are harder to cure by prayer than others.<sup>1129</sup> Therefore, the quantity of prayer must increase. In this system, "faith" finds expression not so much in receiving a promise of healing as in consistency in prayer and seeking God.

Although Macnutt recommended praying with high anticipation of a positive result, he denies that all will be healed. He feels that the Lord may withhold healing in order to accomplish a greater goal in the life of the sick person through illness (e.g. Gal 4:13).

However, we have difficulty finding in Scripture sufficient justification for "soaking prayer," which Macnutt also admits. In nearly all cases of healing in the Bible, the sufferer received healing through faith and recovered immediately.

Another approach to healing features the ministry and teaching of Charles Farah.<sup>1130</sup> For him, claiming that God will heal everyone is a presumptuous one, since the Bible contains no such promise. Complete healing awaits us when God's Kingdom appears. Farah considers the doctrine of divine healing a mystery: "Healing is related to the mystery of the Kingdom of God,"<sup>1131</sup> and, "Healing is such a complex business that no one but God really has the answers."<sup>1132</sup>

In Farah's opinion, the ill person (or the one praying for that individual) must receive a specific promise from the Spirit that it is God's will to heal in that instance. Only then can one have confidence to anticipate a miracle. When that special word from the Lord comes, supernatural faith arises, which is necessary to receive

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<sup>1124</sup>Hagin, Seven Things, p. 51-52.

<sup>1125</sup>Moo, p. 198.

<sup>1126</sup>Hejzlar, p. 107.

<sup>1127</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>1128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1129</sup>Macnutt acknowledged that this is the only case of its kind and may yield different interpretations.

<sup>1130</sup>Farah C. Jr. From the Pinnacle of the Temple. – Plainfield, NJ: Logos. – 243 p.

<sup>1131</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>1132</sup>Ibid., p. 13.



the miracle. Even if the Bible promises healing, Farah objects that such a mechanical approach to God results in Him being “bound to the words of a book and (He) becomes the captive of His Word rather than its Creator.”<sup>1133</sup>

Hejzlar holds to a similar view.<sup>1134</sup> He cites Romans 8:23 as evidence that believers will share in the suffering of this life, including disease. The examples of healing in the Gospels and Acts are simply foretastes of the coming Kingdom, but we have no guarantee of healing at the present time.

Along with Farah, Hejzlar reasons that special faith is needed to receive a miracle of healing, but that this kind of faith comes only as God wills it. Some early healing preachers shared this conviction as well, such as A. B. Simpson, Charles. S. Price, and R. A. Torrey. Unlike Hejzlar, though, Simpson taught that God is ready to give this special faith to all who ask Him.

In evaluation of the view of Farah and Hejzlar, we object that they undervalue the authority of God’s written Word and thereby are in danger of undermining the faith of the Church in the Bible. The truth is that God is indeed “bound” by His Word. It is His self-expression. He always acts consistent with what He says. In addition, Farah’s appeal in his book to many instances of failed healings demonstrates that he bases his convictions more on personal experience than on biblical revelation.

## G. Conclusions

In conclusion, we freely acknowledge that the doctrine of divine healing is hard to clearly determine and remains a “painful” question. However, in light of all the evidence cited above, it would be difficult to deny that God indeed provides healing through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and that it is available to all believers today.

At the same time, we must seriously consider the experience of the Church and individual believers where the biblical promises of healing for God’s people are not always realized. Attempting to consider both sides of the question, Vernon Purdy writes:

The will of God, normally, is that the believer be healthy. This does not mean believers don’t get sick. We live in a fallen world. Sickness does not mean we are poor excuses for Christians. The believer can trust God for basic needs being met, health being one of them. Can God use sickness in our lives? Absolutely, but He revealed himself in the ministry of Jesus Christ as a God of healing and restoration.<sup>1135</sup>

In an attempt to embrace all sides of the question, we will propose the following approach for obtaining divine healing. First, in light of the promises of God in Scripture concerning healing, the ill person can pray with confidence for divine healing and receive it by faith. Second, it is advisable to have others agree in prayer (Matt 18:19) and to receive prayer from church leaders (Jam 5:14-15). Receiving ministry from those with proven gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9) is also coveted. Third, according to 1 Corinthians 11:30-32 and James 5:16, one must confess sin that may have resulted in the sickness.

Fourth, one should actively resist the temptation to discouragement or disillusionment if the healing does not manifest immediately or only partially. Just as sickness is an attack against the body, discouragement is a satanic attack against the soul and should be vigorously resisted. Fifth, one should avail oneself of medical support until full recovery occurs.

Finally, the ill person should anticipate our future bodily resurrection at the Coming of Christ, “Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil 3:21). If for some

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<sup>1133</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>1134</sup>Hejzlar, p. 66-67.

<sup>1135</sup>Purdy, p. 581.

reason the individual does not obtain healing in this life, that person will certainly enjoy ultimate victory through the resurrection. One way or another, we win!

In addition, we agree with Duffield and Van Cleave that a person can lose a healing received.<sup>1136</sup> They suggest two ways this can happen: personal sin (see Jn 5:14) and doubt (see Matt 14:30). Therefore, they recommend that those who have received divine healing maintain an atmosphere of faith, praise God for the healing received, tell others about the miracle, read the Word, develop faith for healing, and walk in obedience to the Lord and serve Him.

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<sup>1136</sup>Duffield, Van Cleave, p. 401-403.

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Chapter 13. Participation in Christ's Death - Suffering for Christ

A. Suffering for Christ and the Believer's Union with Him

Suffering for Christ is a certain consequence of following the Lord. Jesus, in fact, alerted His disciples to this inevitability: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before {it hated} you.... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (Jn 15:18-20). Mark records the following challenge from our Lord: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mk 8:34). Jesus invited His disciples to "drink the cup that I drink," and "be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized" (Mk 10:38).

Paul also teaches this principle: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). He also claimed that we are "fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}" (Rom 8:17). In a similar fashion, the apostle John, while in exile on Patmos, considered himself a "fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance {which are} in Jesus" (Rev 1:9).

We note, especially in John 15:18-20, that our suffering for Jesus is directly related to our union with Him. We suffer because we are in Him and, therefore, are participants in His life. Union with Christ involves participation both in His glory and in His sufferings. As Berkhof writes, "His sufferings are, in a measure, reproduced and completed in the lives of his followers."¹¹³⁷ Campbell concurs, "Since Christ suffered, believers will inevitably follow him in his sufferings."¹¹³⁸ Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:17: "...fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with {Him} so that we may also be glorified with {Him}."

We will examine Paul's teaching in Colossians 1:24 in more detail. He writes, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Here, we must not understand Paul's statement to "fill up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" as referring to Paul's sufferings having redemptive significance.¹¹³⁹ Christ accomplished our redemption alone. Paul is working off the principle of union with Christ and claiming that the Church receives a certain "quota" of suffering, which it is appointed to endure. In his sufferings, Paul is "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" in the sense of filling up a certain measure of this "quota" of suffering.

We find a confirmation of this thesis in Revelation 6:10-11, where the martyrs ask, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" The Divine answer: "Until {the number of} their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also." It appears that a certain amount of suffering is assigned to the Church, which is fulfilled both by the martyrs and by other believers as well.

It is interesting to compare Jesus' sufferings with those of Stephen, with whom we can draw a parallel. Both were tried before the Sanhedrin and were accused of blasphemy. Both were slandered by false witnesses. Both Jesus and Stephen were driven from the city. Both spoke of the "Son of Man": Stephen saw Him in a vision, while Jesus claimed to be Him. Both prayed that God would receive their spirits. Both Stephen and Jesus forgave their enemies. It is very unlikely that these parallels happened by chance. They were recorded to show that believers, after the model of Stephen, are sharers in Jesus' sufferings.

We can draw a parallel between Christ's sufferings and those of Paul as well. Both came to Jerusalem and encountered opposition there. Both were tried before the Gentiles after having been arrested by unbelieving

¹¹³⁷Berkhof L. Systematic Theology. – 4th ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1941. – P. 453.

¹¹³⁸Campbell C. R. Paul and union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. – P. 380.

¹¹³⁹In this regard, Wikenhauser comments that in describing the "afflictions of Christ" in Colossians 1:24, Paul employs the term *θλίψις* (*phlipsis*), which is never used in relation to Jesus' redemptive sufferings (Wikenhauser A. Pauline mysticism / Trans. J. Cunningham. – Frieburg: Herder, 1960. – P. 160). Also see Bouttier M. Christianity according to Paul / Trans. F. Clarke // Moule C. F. D. Studies in Biblical Theology – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966. – P. 82-83, who calls Paul's sufferings not "redemptive," but "eschatological."

Jews. Both expressed the desire to do God's will through suffering. The Roman authorities sought to release them both. These similarities may also be subtle indicators that believers share in Jesus' sufferings.

We must make another clarification. When we speak of suffering for Jesus, we mean those trials that are directly connected with our life of Christian discipleship and service. The following passages make that clear:

- But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Pet 4:13-14).
- For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ... For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came {to us} in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life (2 Cor 1:5-8).

Therefore, it is improper to speak of the general tribulations that all people experience as suffering for Jesus. Lenski agrees, "It is a mistake to call all our suffering a cross.... The cross is that suffering alone which results from our faithful connection with Christ."¹¹⁴⁰ The Lutheran theologian Mueller also concurs, "It is only the Christian who is said to bear a cross, and this indeed as he exercises his Christian calling in the world."¹¹⁴¹

On the other hand, Tannehill notes an exception to this rule. In Romans 8:17-23, it seems that Paul connects suffering for Christ with the general suffering in the world.¹¹⁴²

B. Conflict between God's Kingdom and the World

Few who are acquainted with Scripture would challenge the claim that it paints a picture of this present age as one of conflict between two great (although unequal) spiritual powers, God and Satan. Their respective kingdoms are repeatedly contrasted with one another in Scripture, reflecting their mutual antagonism and incompatibility (see Col 1:13, Eph 6:12-13; Matt 12:25-28).

This spiritual conflict involves people as well, who either belong to "the kingdom of God," or the "domain of darkness" (Col 1:13). John writes, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19). Jesus came into the world as light into darkness, polarizing humankind into those who "receive Him" and those who "do not receive Him" (Jn 1:4-11). The latter belong to the κόσμος (*cosmos*), the anti-god system that dominates fallen people, who lie in the power of Satan, the "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4).

Scripture clearly confirms the spiritual dichotomy that Augustine later indicated by the terms "The City of God" and "The City of This World." We will now trace the historical development and manifestation of this phenomenon, giving special application to the question of martyrdom.

In this section, we will pursue two goals: (1) to demonstrate that humanity is and always was polarized between the City of God and the City of the World; (2) to show that in this great drama, the people of God usually play the role of the oppressed and persecuted. This drama will unfold as we survey the history of persecution and martyrdom in biblical times and Church history. We will discover that at different times certain groups especially typify and represent the City of God and the City of the World.¹¹⁴³

¹¹⁴⁰Lenski R. C. H. The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel. – Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1943. – P. 624.

¹¹⁴¹Mueller D. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 424. Macaskill reasons the same (see Macaskill G. Union with Christ in the New Testament. – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013. – P. 246).

¹¹⁴²Tannehill R. C. Dying and rising in Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology. – Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1966. – P. 114.

¹¹⁴³This chapter follows the tradition of the Reformation martyriologists, who also sought to show continuity between various persecutions of God's people. It especially resembles the work of Lutheran martyriologist Ludwig Rabus, who traced persecution back to Cain and Abel. See discussion in Boudin H. R. Les martyrologes protestants de la réforme. Instruments de propagande ou

1. Cain and Abel

Those who have reflected on biblical history and the history of humanity often trace the contrast between good and evil persons back to the account of Cain and Abel (including Abel's "replacement," Seth). Beginning with these individuals, humanity is commonly divided into the "wicked" and the "righteous," of whom these brothers serve as prototypes.

In the Genesis account, there are suggestions that moral character was associated with physical lineage. We note that in the seventh generation from Adam, Lamech (from Cain) kills a man, whereas Enoch (from Seth) walks with God. Although Genesis 6:1-4 is a difficult passage, a number of scholars understand the "sons of God" to represent the godly descendants of Seth, while the "daughters of men" are from the wicked line of Cain.¹¹⁴⁴

The Cain versus Abel/Seth contrast, however, is usually applied allegorically to represent the "wicked" and the "righteous" in general, and is witnessed by the New Testament. First of all, we note that in Hebrews 11 Abel is presented as an example of faith, while Jude describes sinners of his day as having "gone the way of Cain" (Jude 11). In Matthew 23:35 (par. Luke 11:51), Abel is listed first among the righteous sufferers of Old Testament fame.¹¹⁴⁵ More notable is John's usage of Cain as the prototype of those who persecute believers (1 John 3:12-14).

Dodd describes this key passage as follows: "The two primeval brothers become representatives of the evil world over against the family of God. As Cain hated Abel to the point of killing him, because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous, so the pagan world hates Christians, and for the same reason; because of the inherent opposition of wickedness to goodness."¹¹⁴⁶ Grayston concurs: Cain "represents the world which kills, or threatens to kill, Christians."¹¹⁴⁷ Delitzsch writes, "Cain is the representative of the class of men which is ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ (1 John iii. 12), and Abel is the representative of the Church, which is hated by the world and persecuted even unto blood."¹¹⁴⁸

This Cain-Abel/Seth typology was common during the intertestamental period. In 4 Maccabees 18.11, as in Matthew 23:35, Abel is listed first among righteous sufferers. Jubilees 4.2-5 applies Cain's curse to him who "smites his neighbor treacherously." The Testament of Benjamin declares, "Until eternity those who are like Cain in their moral corruption and hatred of brother shall be punished with a similar judgment."¹¹⁴⁹

Philo offers by far the most developed Cain-Abel/Seth typology. In his *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain*, Cain represents those who commit "everything to the mind," while Abel represents those "attributing to God all the consequent work of creation as his own" (v. 2). Every detail of the story of Cain and Abel, from their occupations to the order their names, have significance for Philo in respect to the contrast of good and evil. In his *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, he writes that men

documents de témoignage?" // Marx J. Sainteté et martyre dans les religions du livre, in Marx J. Problèmes d'histoire du Christianisme, ed. Jacques Marx, no. 19. – Brussels: University of Brussels, 1989. – P. 71.

¹¹⁴⁴Adherents include Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and, among modern commentators, Kenneth Matthews (see Matthews K. A. Genesis 1-11:26 // Clendenen R. E. The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 329). Josephus also links character to lineage: "The posterity of Cain became exceeding wicked, every one successively dying one after another more wicked than the former," while Seth left "children behind him who imitated his virtues" (*Ant.* 1.66, 68); Quotation from Whiston W., ed., The Works of Josephus. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1987. – Page number not noted.

¹¹⁴⁵These passages, however, do not refer to Cain and Abel in a typological sense, since other characters are listed in the contexts as examples of good and bad behavior as well.

¹¹⁴⁶Dodd C. H. The Johannine Epistles // Moffatt J. The Moffatt New Testament Commentary. – London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1946. – P. 82.

¹¹⁴⁷Grayston K. The Johannine Epistles // Clements R. E., Black, M. New Century Bible Commentary. – London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984. – P. 111.

¹¹⁴⁸Delitzsch F. A New Commentary on Genesis, vol. 1 / Trans. Sophia Taylor. – Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, n.d. – P. 184.

¹¹⁴⁹*Testament of Benjamin*, 7.5. Citation taken from Kruse C. G. The Letters of John // Carson D. A. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 241.

“who love virtue and piety.. may be classed under Seth as the author of their race” (v. 42), while Cain’s race shows “a life of plotting, and cunning, and wickedness, and dissoluteness” (v. 43). Philo devotes an entire work to the theme, *That the Worse Are Wont to Attack the Better*, claiming that self-lovers like Cain “never cease struggling against them (God-lovers like Abel) with every kind of weapon, till they compel them to succumb, or else utterly destroy them” (v. 32, parenthetical insertion mine).¹¹⁵⁰

Among the church fathers, Cyprian claims that Abel “initiated martyrdom.”¹¹⁵¹ Later in Church history, the Anabaptists also recognized the contrast between the two sons of Adam, attributing to Cain the “first attack of the Serpent,” and to Abel the “first advance in the direction of Christ.”¹¹⁵² In more modern times, Delitzsch comments, “A chasm is now established within humanity itself between two kinds of seed, one man placing himself on the side of the seed of the woman, the other upon that of the seed of the serpent.”¹¹⁵³

We recognize, too, that the conflict between Cain and Abel went beyond human factors and motives. It was not simply the record of ancient tensions between “pastoral and agricultural ways of life,”¹¹⁵⁴ or even the result of Cain’s jealousy toward Abel. As Hamilton notes, “Cain was not acting totally independently”; his action “was an external manifestation of the grip that Satan had on his life.”¹¹⁵⁵ In like manner, higher forces motivate the conflict between the “moral descendants” of these two brothers to this day.

2. Israel and the Descendants of Ham

We encounter the next Old Testament representations of the conflict between the kingdoms of God and Satan among the sons of Noah. Immediately after the Flood obliterated the dichotomy between the descendants of Seth and Cain, a new rivalry appears – the descendants of Ham versus the descendants of Shem. From Ham descended three great enemies of pre- and early-monarchical Israel: Mizraim (Egypt), son of Ham; Canaan, son of Ham; and the Philistines, descendants of Mizraim. We will give particular attention to the first two of these.

The conflict between Israel and Egypt,¹¹⁵⁶ as described in the first part of the book of Exodus, is well documented. In light of our proposed paradigm, it is not difficult to assign the role “The City of This World” to Egypt, the oppressor of God’s people. The “Evil City” is even more clearly represented by Pharaoh, especially in his dramatic confrontation with Moses and Aaron, representatives of “God’s City.” The narrator of Exodus also reveals that this conflict was not merely between mortals, but had a “cosmic” dimension as well. The last plague God sent on Egypt was directed not only toward Pharaoh and his subjects, but against the “gods of Egypt” as well (see Exod 12:12).

Earlier in the canon, in Genesis 12 Canaan is cursed to be the servant of his uncles as a result of his father Ham’s sin. Thus, the “cursed” race of Cain is replaced by the “cursed” race of Canaan.¹¹⁵⁷ Later on in the narrative, the descendants of Shem are traced to the patriarchs of Israel, while the descendants of Canaan include “the Jebusite and the Amorite and the Girgashite and the Hivite” (Gen 10:16-17), Israel’s enemies during the years of conquest (Josh 3:10). The repeated warnings in the Pentateuch against associating with the Canaanites accentuate the moral and spiritual distinction between the two groups. Matthews provides this helpful observation:

¹¹⁵⁰Quotations from Judaeus Philo. *The Works of Philo* / Trans. C. D. Yonge. – Rev. ed. – Philadelphia, PA: Hendrickson, 1995. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

¹¹⁵¹Cyprian, *Epistles*, 55.5.

¹¹⁵²Stauffer E. *The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom* // *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19. 1945. P. 190.

¹¹⁵³Delitzsch, p. 184.

¹¹⁵⁴Speiser E. A. *Genesis* // Albright W. F., Freedman D. N. *The Anchor Bible*. – New York: Doubleday, 1962. – P. 31.

¹¹⁵⁵Hamilton V. P. *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* // Harrison R. K. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990. – P. 244.

¹¹⁵⁶Material suggested by Graham Cole in reviewing this chapter.

¹¹⁵⁷Matthews notes the parallel between the curse of Cain (Gen 4:11) and the curse of Canaan (Gen 9:25). See Matthews K. A. *Genesis 1-11:26* // Clendenen R. E. *The New American Commentary*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1996. – P. 423.

Israel understood the contrast between the godly seed of Seth and that of Cain, whose descendants founded an expanding urban civilization marked by godlessness. Israel saw itself as the godly seed in the earth, chosen by the Lord, but it too faced the “Cains” and “Canaans” of its times who had built up its towers and cities opposing the Hebrews seeking refuge in the land.¹¹⁵⁸

This distinction, not only with the Canaanites but also with all pagan nations, was evident in the rite of circumcision. In the Old Testament we frequently see that non-Israelites are generalized under the derogatory rubric “the uncircumcised” in connection not only with their physical condition, but also with their moral degradation.

The conflict between the descendants of Shem and Ham is consistent with our unfolding biblical picture of the division between the “City of God” and the “City of This World,” and further depicts the greater conflict raging between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and the persecution of the former by the latter.

3. Israel and Its Prophets

During the time when Israel was less threatened by her Canaanite neighbors, another dichotomy between true servants of God and servants of Satan came to the forefront – the conflict between Israel and her prophets.¹¹⁵⁹ The people of Israel, in rebellion against God, become persecutors of the prophets. Thus the people who had been distinguished from the surrounding nations by the rite of circumcision are themselves considered “uncircumcised” (Jer 9:25-26), thus indicating their change of allegiance from the City of God to the City of This World. This tension between people and prophet, of course, dates back to the beginning of Israel’s history when the people contended with Moses. Yet, it was during the time of the monarchy, when prophetic activity was at its height, that this antagonism reached the point of active persecution of the prophets.

We must acknowledge that the distinction is not technically between the people of Israel and their prophets, but rather between the general population and the righteous remnant, which the prophets publicly represented.¹¹⁶⁰ Consequently, we can find references to righteous suffering outside of the writings or experience of prophets. Bromiley notes, “The Psalms, too, are full of pleas to God made by those who suffer persecution because of their faithfulness to God and His commandments (e.g., Ps 119:84–87, 150, 157, 161).”¹¹⁶¹

We could also mention Ps 44:22, which is applied in Rom 8:36 to persecution,¹¹⁶² and Ps 69:7-9, where the psalmist also suffers “for Your sake.” The Psalms contain many references to the wicked seeking to slay the righteous (Ps 10:2; 37:12, 32; 64:5; 94:21). Some references refer to persecution of God’s people in general:

¹¹⁵⁸Ibid., 187.

¹¹⁵⁹Tertullian also recognizes the persecution of the prophets as a continuation of the Cain-Abel conflict: “As soon as God has begun to be worshipped, religion has got ill-will for her portion. He who had pleased God is slain, and that by his brother.... ungodliness made the object of its pursuit, finally, that not only of righteous persons, but even of prophets also” (Tertullian, *Scorp.*, 7). Fischel concurs, “The whole history of the prophets from Abel on seems to be linked by a chain of genuine and exemplary martyrdoms.” See Fischel H. A. Martyr and Prophet // *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 37. 1947. P. 274.

¹¹⁶⁰Elijah is reminded of this. See Rom 11:3-4.

¹¹⁶¹Bromiley G. W. Persecution // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986. – V. 3. – P. 772.

¹¹⁶²Although Calvin and others date Psalm 44 during the Maccabean persecutions, others convincingly argue that the Psalm simply records Israel’s quest to understand their defeat in battle when they had done nothing to deserve it. Nonetheless, even in the latter proposal the element of persecution is preserved in that Israel’s suffering was in part because of the Gentiles’ hatred of their religion. See VanGemeren W. A., Ross A. P., Wright J. S., Kinlaw D. F. *Psalms-Song of Songs* // Gaebelein F. E. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991. – V. 5. – P. 337, 441; Briggs C. A., Briggs E. G. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Psalms* // Driver S. R., Plummer A., Briggs C. A. *The International Critical Commentary*. – Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906. – P. 376, 381; Anderson A. A. *The Book of Psalms* // Clements R. E., Black, M. *New Century Bible*. – London: Oliphants, 1972. – V. 1. – P. 337, 341.

For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, and those who hate You have exalted themselves. They make shrewd plans against Your people, and conspire together against Your treasured ones. They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (Ps 83:2-4).

We also consider that David, the author of many psalms, suffered persecution at the hands of Saul and provides a sterling example of the persecuted believer.

In addition, not only is righteousness found outside of the prophets, but iniquity is also found among them. Bright notes the division between true and false prophets in Israel.¹¹⁶³ The account of Micah in 1 Kings 22 demonstrates this contrast between true and false prophets. Yet, since the dichotomy is most frequently depicted in Scripture by the simple "prophet versus people" or "prophet versus king," we will employ this scenario to illustrate our point.

We must also acknowledge that during the monarchical period, Israel was not always in a backslidden state and that prophets arose only periodically, "in times of national crises, whether in the form of national apostasy or in the form of imminent war."¹¹⁶⁴ Thus, the picture of a constant, ongoing struggle between people and prophet is somewhat artificial. Yet the conflict between them was frequent enough that Stephen could make the sweeping accusation that the Jews "are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" (Acts 7:51-52). Similarly, Jesus rebukes Jerusalem, which "kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her" (Matt 23:37). Thus, we are justified in including the "Israel versus prophet" scenario in our unfolding persecution paradigm.

The Old Testament abounds with examples of Israel rejecting its prophets. Before the fall of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, Scripture records how God's people refused to heed the prophets' voice.

Northern Kingdom: Yet Yahweh warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets {and} every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments".... However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in Yahweh their God (2 Kin 17:13-14).

Southern Kingdom: Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent {word} to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they {continually} mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets (2 Chr 36:15-16).

The personal experience of some prophets, who suffered at the hands of evil kings, confirms this testimony: Hanani (2 Chr 16:7-10), Amos (Amos 7:10-13), and especially Jeremiah (Jer 11:19-20; 20:1-2; 32:1-5).

In connection with the persecution of the prophets, a difficult question arises, "How many of the prophets were actually killed for their message?" The New Testament seems to indicate that many, if not all, eventually experienced martyrdom.¹¹⁶⁵ Baumeister comments, "In Jesus' day the idea was in circulation that not just this prophet or that but all prophets had died a violent death as a result of what they had done."¹¹⁶⁶ Generally, commentators object that this is an exaggeration based on accounts of prophetic suffering in Jewish

¹¹⁶³Bright J. Jeremiah // Albright W. F., Freedman D. N. The Anchor Bible. – New York: Doubleday, 1965. – P. xx-xxi.

¹¹⁶⁴Pobee J. S. Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul // Chilton B. D. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series. no. 6. – Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1985. – P. 27.

¹¹⁶⁵See Matt 21:33-40 (par. Luke 20:9-19); Matt 22:1-14, 23:29-39 (par. Luke 11:47-51, 13:34-35); Acts 7:52; Heb 11:37; and 1 Thess 2:15. Gilliard strenuously, but unconvincingly argues that in 1 Thessalonians 2:15, Paul had "Christian prophets" in view. See Gilliard F. Paul and the Killing of the Prophets in 1 Thes. 2:15 // Novum Testamentum. 36. 1994. P. 259-270.

¹¹⁶⁶Baumeister T. Martyrdom and Persecution in Early Christianity // Concilium. 163. March 1983. P. 6.

midrash,¹¹⁶⁷ which was supposedly popularized in the Early Church to show that the Jews had killed not only the prophets but the Messiah as well.¹¹⁶⁸ Pobe claims, “Clearly at this point the prophet-martyr motif has moved from the realm of sober history to that of theology.”¹¹⁶⁹

We do note that in the Old Testament, only two instances of a prophet being killed are recorded. The first is found in Jer 26:20-23 where Uriah the prophet is slain with the sword by King Jehoiakim. This incident is mentioned in passing during Jeremiah’s trial after his arrest for preaching against Jerusalem.¹¹⁷⁰ Like Jeremiah, he had preached judgment against Judah; but, unlike Jeremiah, he had perished as a result.¹¹⁷¹ The second is in 2 Chr 24:19-25, where Zechariah the priest is stoned by order of King Joash after rebuking the king’s apostasy.¹¹⁷²

Other passages record prophetic deaths. We read, for example, how Jezebel killed the Lord’s prophets (1 Kgs 18:4, 13, 19:10, 14; 2 Kgs 9:7). Montgomery calls this “the first, although indirect, reference to a systematic persecution of the sons of the prophets.”¹¹⁷³ It also implies an “organized prophetic resistance” to Baal worship.¹¹⁷⁴ In addition, two other key Old Testament passages strongly imply a more widespread killing of prophets in Israel. First, in Nehemiah 9 the people’s prayer of confession acknowledges that Israel “killed Your prophets who had admonished them” (Neh 9:26).¹¹⁷⁵

One has to admit, with Clines, that “the factual basis for this generalization is slender as far as our evidence goes,” but we need not conclude with him that “it may be rhetorical heightening of Israel’s rejection of the prophetic word.”¹¹⁷⁶ The New Testament confirms the acknowledgment in Nehemiah 9:26 that Israel consistently resisted prophetic ministry and persecuted the prophets (see verses listed earlier). It appears, then, that sufficient persecution took place to warrant this generalization.

¹¹⁶⁷See, for example, Schoeps H. Die jüdischen Prophetenmorde // Symbolae Biblicae Upsalienses. 2. 1943. P. 1-22; Amaru B. H. The Killing of the Prophets: Unraveling a Midrash // Hebrew Union College Annual. 54. 1983. P. 153-180; Baumeister T. Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums // Kötting B., Ratzinger J. Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie. – Münster: Aschendorff, 1980. – P. 6-7.

¹¹⁶⁸Schoeps, p. 22; Amaru, p. 153.

¹¹⁶⁹Pobe, p. 28.

¹¹⁷⁰Bright objects, not to the historicity of this event, but to its timing in the reign of Jehoiakim since Jeremiah’s trial occurred early in this king’s reign. He also argues that this is a later insertion since it apparently contributes nothing to the argument at hand. See Bright, p. 172. On the other hand, Holladay defends the integrity of the text based on strong linguistic evidence. See Holladay W.J. Jeremiah 2 / Ed. P. D. Hanson // Moore F. Hermeneia. – Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989. – P. 109.

¹¹⁷¹Holladay notes that the *hitpa’el* “prophesied,” used of Uriah in verse 20, is elsewhere used in Jeremiah for false or “mad” prophets (14:14, 23:13, 29:26) and concludes that Uriah was simply “a contemporary of the narrator” who “made prophetic claims” and “nothing at this point is implied about the rightness or wrongness of his message.” See Holladay, Jeremiah 2, p. 109. One can respond that “nothing else in the passage supports Holladay’s interpretation of the *hitpa’el* form as an indication that Uriah was prophesying falsely. In fact, the *nif’al* of the same verbal root is used in the second half of the verse. R. Wilson’s explanation of the *hitpa’el* of נבא as ‘act the way prophets act’ is appropriate here (R. Wilson, *Prophecy*, 335–36).” From Keown G., Scalise P. J., Smothers T. G. Jeremiah 26-52 // Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 1995. – P. 29.

¹¹⁷²Although Zechariah is not called a prophet in Scripture, his prophetic rebuke resulted in his death, and he is recognized as a prophet by the rabbis (see *Lam. R.* 2.4, 4.16). Also notable is his being “clothed” with the Spirit (v. 20), a phrase that “refers to the exercise of a prophetic gift” (Selman M. J. 1 and 2 Chronicles // Wiseman D. J. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. – Leicester: IVP, 1994. – P. 455). Some feel his designation as a prophet may have arisen due to the confusion in the Jewish and early Christian literature (and apparently also in Matthew 23:35) of this Zechariah with Zechariah the son of Berechiah (Zech 1:1), Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah (Isa 8:2), and even Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. See discussion in Amaru, p. 167-169.

¹¹⁷³Montgomery J. A. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings / Ed. Gehman H. S. // Driver S. R., Plummer A., Briggs C. A. The International Critical Commentary. – Ediburg: T. & T. Clark, 1951. – P. 299.

¹¹⁷⁴Gray J. I and II Kings // Wright G. E., Bright J., Barr J., Ackroyd P. The Old Testament Library. – Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963. – P. 347.

¹¹⁷⁵Kidner correctly observes that although this accusation corresponds chronologically in the prayer of Nehemiah 9 to the times of the judges, it projects a perspective on the prophets beyond that time. See Kidner D. Ezra and Nehemiah. // Wiseman D. J. The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. – Leicester: IVP, 1979. – P. 112.

¹¹⁷⁶Clines D. J. A. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther // Clements R. E., Black M. New Century Bible Commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984. – P. 197.

The second key passage is found in Jeremiah 2:30. Here again, a hostile attitude towards God's prophets, resulting in their execution, is described.¹¹⁷⁷ We read:

In vain I have struck your sons;
They accepted no chastening.
Your sword has devoured your prophets
Like a destroying lion.¹¹⁷⁸

Various emendations to Jeremiah 2:30 have been suggested. Jerome and Duhm, following the Septuagint, feel the "sword" is God's punishment of false prophets – if they were true prophets, we would read "My prophets" instead of "your prophets."¹¹⁷⁹ Yet, McKane responds, "We should suppose that the second person plural suffix emphasizes Israel's responsibility for the treatment meted out to these prophets."¹¹⁸⁰ Hoffmann suggests another emendation, "In vain have I smitten *my children* (בני to בניכם) that have received no correction. *My sword* hath devoured *you* (בכם to נביאיכם) like a destroying lion," noting that lions are usually punishment from God in Jeremiah (Jer 4:7, 5:6, 49:19, 50:17), as is the sword (Jer 12:12, 14:13, 15, 18, 25:16, 29, 47:6), and that the verb שחח ("destroy") is often used for punishment of the people (Jer 5:10, 13:7, 9, 14, 14:10, 18:4, 36:29).¹¹⁸¹ One would prefer to see, however, some textual confirmation for an emendation of such significance.

We must also consider whether non-canonical sources have any historical value for indicating prophetic martyrdoms. The *Lives of the Prophets*, a Palestinian Jewish work (with "Christian expansions") of the 1st century A.D., describes the violent death of several Old Testament figures.¹¹⁸² According to the *Lives*, Isaiah was sawn in two by Manasseh,¹¹⁸³ Micah the Morashtite was thrown from a cliff by Joram, Amos was beaten to death by the son of Amaziah, Jeremiah was stoned by Jews in Egypt,¹¹⁸⁴ and Ezekiel was killed by the Jewish leadership in exile.¹¹⁸⁵

In addition to these more substantial claims, an eleventh century midrash by Hadarshan lists Shemiah and Ahijah the Shilonite as prophetic martyrs. Shemiah was apparently slain by King Baasha of Israel, and Ahijah by King Abijah of Judah. However, historical discrepancies in these accounts and weak support in the rabbinic literature make Hadarshan's claims suspect.¹¹⁸⁶ A Jewish legend of even more questionable historical value depicts Hur as a martyr, having died for opposing the Golden Calf.¹¹⁸⁷

Heb 11:37 provides some substantiation for these non-canonical accounts: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two,... they were put to death with the sword." Schoeps feels that these plural verbs are poetic and not

¹¹⁷⁷Jeremiah may have had in view here the pogrom of Manasseh recorded in 2 Kgs 21:16. See Keown, Scalise, Smothers, p. 183; Bright, p. 16. Josephus also accuses Manasseh, "Nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them" (*Ant.* 10.3.1, in *Works of Josephus*, 269).

¹¹⁷⁸Septuagint: "In vain I struck your children; you accepted no instruction. A sword has devoured your prophets as a destroying lion, and you were not afraid." Rahlfs A., ed. Septuaginta. – Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979. – CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, WA.: Logos Research Systems.

¹¹⁷⁹Cited in McKane W. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah // Emerton J. A., Cranfield C. E. B. – Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1986. – P. 51.

¹¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹¹⁸¹Hoffmann Y. Jeremiah 2:30 // Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. 89. 1977. P. 20. Supported by Holladay. See Holladay, Jeremiah 1, p. 106-107.

¹¹⁸²See Torrey C. C., ed. The Lives of the Prophets. – Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1946. Schoeps gives the "pre-expanded" *Lives* a B.C. date. See Schoeps, p. 9-10.

¹¹⁸³This account is also described in *b. Sanh.* 103b and other Talmudic references (as per Schoeps, p. 7), reported in the pseudepigraphical *Martyrdom of Isaiah*, possibly alluded to in Hebrews 11:37, and endorsed by Origen in his *Com. on Matt.* 10.18.

¹¹⁸⁴See *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* 9; Endorsed by Tertullian in *Scorp.* 8.

¹¹⁸⁵Also in *Visions of Paul*, p. 49.

¹¹⁸⁶Amaru, p. 154-66.

¹¹⁸⁷*Lev R.* 10.3; *Exod R.* 41.7, 48.3; *b. Sanh.* 7a.

to be taken literally. He simply sees here references to the deaths of Zechariah and Jeremiah (stoned), Isaiah (sawn in two), and Uriah (slain with the sword).¹¹⁸⁸ This assumption appears reasonable. At the same time, this means that Hebrews confirms the execution of Isaiah and Jeremiah as historical and makes more plausible the assumption that not all prophetic deaths are recorded in the canon.

Admittedly, we do not find many *concrete* cases of the killing of a prophet in the canonical Scriptures. Yet, the additional and more general references to prophetic deaths, both canonical and non-canonical, listed above are substantial. In addition, I would consider the New Testament references to the frequent killing of prophets in Old Testament Israel to be reliable and not simply an uncritical acceptance of unhistorical Jewish midrash. I would share with Origen (*Com. on Matt.*, 10.18) the conviction that New Testament authors accepted as historical some of the non-canonical accounts of prophetic deaths, such as those mentioned in the *Lives of the Prophets*. Their inspired endorsement of this tradition validates, in general, its historicity. Thus, we can embrace the “Israel versus prophet” theme not only as a legitimate continuation of our persecution paradigm, but also as a significant intensification of it, more closely approximating classical martyrdom.

4. Israel and the Gentile Empires

The period of the monarchy ends with both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel going into exile, introducing the next stage of Israel’s history – its domination by Gentile Empires. As noted by Fischel, the depiction of the prophet as martyr continued to develop in this period, only under different conditions: “The course of events also preserved and soon gave prominence to the idea of the prophet-martyr who suffers under a *foreign* tyrant.”¹¹⁸⁹ Now, the contrast is not so much righteous Israel against backslidden Israel, but rather a united Israel against pagan oppressors.¹¹⁹⁰

This period of persecution actually preceded Israel’s return to Palestine. When the Jews were under Persian rule, Haman attempted to annihilate God’s people because of his hate for Mordecai (see the book of Esther). When the Jews returned to the Promised Land, their enemies tried to hinder the temple’s reconstruction (Esther 4-5) and the restoration of Jerusalem’s walls (Neh 4-6).

Even before the dawning of this epoch, God had been preparing His people to face this new challenge. The Book of Daniel not only predicts the coming Seleucid persecution, but also provides prototypes of righteous suffering – Daniel and his three companions.¹¹⁹¹ Many have noted the pedagogical value of the Book of Daniel in preparing God’s people for suffering.¹¹⁹² Chapters 3 and 6 lay the foundation in describing how God is able to deliver his people from persecution. In chapters 11 and 12, however, God’s people are massacred: “Daniel and

¹¹⁸⁸Schoeps, p. 21.

¹¹⁸⁹Fischel, p. 272.

¹¹⁹⁰As in the previous section, this generalization must also be qualified – there were evil Jews abusing their secular authority to oppress their fellow countrymen. See 2 Maccabees 3-5, for example. Consequently, the Qumran community portrayed the conflict at this time as between false and true Israel. See discussion in Goppelt L. *A Commentary on 1 Peter* / Trans. J. E. Alsup., Ed. F. Hahn. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993. – P. 131.

¹¹⁹¹Pobee cites many intertestamental and rabbinic references to Daniel as the “ideal” martyr: *1 Macc*, 2.60; *4 Macc*, 13.9, 16.3, 21, 18:13; *Jos. Ant.* 10.260-63; *Gen R.* 34; *b. Ab. Zar.* 8b. The three Hebrew youths are also mentioned in *b. Sanh.* 93a; *b. Ab. Zar.* 3a; *Ta’am* 18b; *Pes.* 118a, 94a; *1 Macc*, 2.5; *4 Macc*, 13.9, 16, 21, 18:12; *Cant. R.* 7.8; *Pal. Targumim Gen* 38.25. See Pobee, p. 14. Although many assert that the events of Daniel 3 and 6 never took place, we affirm with Leupold that we must respect the historicity of these stories since “a purely fictional deliverance is small comfort to one confronted by a factual peril of death. Solid words of God or solid facts alone avail under such circumstances.” Leupold H. C. *Exposition of Daniel*. – No city: Wartburg, 1949; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1969. – P. 133 (pages citations are to reprint edition).

¹¹⁹²See Porteous N. W. *Daniel* // Wright G. E., Bright J. Barr J., Ackroyd P. *The Old Testament Library*. – Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965. – P. 55; Collins J. *Daniel* // Cross F. M. *Hermeneia*. – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993. – P. 194, 402; Baldwin J. G. *Daniel* // Wiseman D. J. *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* – Leicester: IVP, 1978. – P. 66; Kellermann U. *Das Danielbuch und die Märtyrertheologie der Auferstehung* // Henten J. W. van *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie* – Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989. – P. 57-58.

his friends had been delivered by unusual divine interventions and death, but the warning here is that this will not always be the case.”¹¹⁹³

Since God’s ability to deliver has already been established, it is implied that a greater purpose is being worked out in allowing these later saints to perish. This is confirmed by the frequent references to “time” in the latter chapters of Daniel: “The period of time in which the temple is defiled and the righteous are oppressed is predetermined, established according to the divine timetable. The individual righteous person is at the mercy of the larger historical designs of God.”¹¹⁹⁴

The eventual deliverance of the martyrs is promised, however, through the resurrection of chapter 12.¹¹⁹⁵ Collins summarizes, “There is an evident parallel here with the stories in Daniel 3 and 6, but there is also a profound difference. The apocalyptic vision no longer entertains the hope for miraculous deliverance in this life. The hope for salvation is beyond death.”¹¹⁹⁶ Kellerman sees a literary transition occurring in the book of Daniel from the typical “salvation history” of the Old Testament, where salvation equals deliverance (Daniel 3 and 6), to the “martyr history” of intertestamental times, where salvation equals resurrection (Daniel 11 and 12).¹¹⁹⁷

Another important feature of the Book of Daniel is how earthly persecutions reflect the greater heavenly conflict. One can note, for example, the many references to angels and evil “princes” in the book of Daniel. The same is noted in intertestamental writings as well. Wintermute summarizes the thinking of Jubilees: “The hostility between Israel and the surrounding nations may be seen as a conflict between good and evil.”¹¹⁹⁸

The predictions of Daniel 11 and 12 find partial fulfillment in the persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C., as recorded in the Maccabean literature. In *2 Maccabees* 4-14, we read of numerous killings of Jews who would not compromise their faith, with special attention on the martyrdom of Eleazar (6:18-31) and the seven brothers (7:1-42).¹¹⁹⁹ These same martyrdoms receive further elaboration in *4 Maccabees*.¹²⁰⁰

Besides the actual cases of persecution in the intertestamental period mentioned above, we may note how an intertestamental writer, the author of the *Book of Enoch*, in symbolic (and supposedly prophetic) form depicts the age-old conflict that we have been describing in this chapter. In *1 Enoch* 85-90, the struggle between the true people of God and their enemies is pictured sequentially as: (1) a black and red bull (Cain and Abel); (2) twelve white sheep among wolves (Israel in Egypt); (3) sheep and other animals (Israel in Canaan during the time of the judges); (4) sheep against sheep (backslidden Israel against the prophets); and (5)

¹¹⁹³Baldwin, p. 196. Porteous notes that the qualification “and if not” in chapter 3 already prepares the reader for this possible outcome. See Porteous, p. 55.

¹¹⁹⁴Smith B. Suffering // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 751.

¹¹⁹⁵Porteous, p. 55. Collins, not respecting the historicity of Daniel, goes so far as to suggest that the deliverances of chapters 3 and 6 metaphorically represent the future resurrection of chapter 12 (Collins, p. 194).

¹¹⁹⁶Collins, p. 402

¹¹⁹⁷Kellermann, p. 57-58.

¹¹⁹⁸Wintermute O. S., ed. and trans., *Jubilees* // Charlesworth J. H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. – Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985. – V 2. – P. 48. Pobee lists other reference to “the cosmic battle” such as *Song of Three Youths* 26; *Est* 10:7, 11:6; *Ps Sol.*, 2.29; and when Satan entices Manasseh to kill Isaiah in the *Martyrdom of Isaiah*. See Pobee, p. 46.

¹¹⁹⁹Another death during the Maccabean period is recorded in the *Testament of Moses*, chapter 9, where Taxo and his sons flee to the wilderness to escape persecution and die there. Still another is described in *Gen R.* 65.22 where Joseph Meshitha refused to enter the temple to plunder it for the Syrians and was sawn in two.

¹²⁰⁰Hadas defends the historicity of these events, feeling the varying accounts among rabbis (*Lam R.* 1.50; *b. Gittin* 57b; *Seder Eliyahu R.* 29) reflect independent historical sources. The rabbis, however, tell only the story of the seven brothers and, when time is indicated, locate the story in the time of Hadrian. See Hadas M. ed. and trans. *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* // Zeitlin S. *Jewish Apocryphal Literature*. – New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953. – P. 99-100, 133. Bowersock claims to see literary evidence that these accounts are later insertions into *2 Maccabees*. See Bowersock G. W. *Martyrdom and Rome*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995. – P. 11-12. Thus, although the accounts of Eleazar and the seven brothers are likely historical, there is some uncertainty as to exactly when they occurred.

shepherds against the sheep (heathen empires oppressing Israel). This all leads to an eventual apocalyptic judgment where the sheep are finally rescued.

The history of Israel and her predecessors gives us grounds to conclude that the dichotomy between the City of God and the City of This World clearly extends back to the first human family. Although at times this dichotomy was represented by parties within Israel itself, to a large degree the nation of Israel was the representative of God's kingdom.

5. The New Testament Church and the Jews

The coming of Christ causes an even more radical polarization of the Cities of God and of this World. He comes as "light into the darkness," and even brings division between members of one family (Matt 10:34-36).

The Gospels record how Jesus was ever conscious of His inevitable clash with evil. Even at the height of His ministry's popularity, He began to prepare His disciples for the suffering He was about to endure (Mark 8:31). Jesus experienced rejection from all sides. His neighbors and acquaintances in Nazareth sought to kill Him (Matt 13:53-57). The inhabitants of Gadarenes, where He delivered a man from demons, asked Him to depart from their region (Matt 8:34). Even before His sufferings, His disciples abandoned Him (Matt 26:56). To our amazement, His most ardent opponents were the religious leaders of His day.

Even though the suffering of Christ was preordained by God for our redemption, we should not confuse the ultimate cause of Christ's suffering, the plan of God, with its effective means – the opposition of Satan and the world. The positive and redemptive results of Christ's death in no way minimize the intensity of the spiritual conflict that brought it about (Luke 22:53). Thus the crucifixion of Christ presents us with yet another, and likely the most extreme example of the world's opposition to and rejection of God. In Stauffer's words, "The death of the Messiah is the climax of the persecution of all the saints."¹²⁰¹

Jesus did more than oppose the kingdom of this world; He called others to join His side. Those who responded, though, would be subject to the same rejection that He Himself endured. This rejection, as we will soon see, will initially come from the Jews, the previous representatives of the City of God.

The Synoptics provide us with numerous examples of the fate of Jesus' disciples.¹²⁰² We may begin with the so-called "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13, the atypical character of which has prompted much discussion among exegetes.¹²⁰³ Here, among various end time predictions, Jesus forecasts future tribulation and persecution for his followers (Mark 13:9-13, par. Matt 24:9-14 and Luke 21:12-19). These very same warnings of rejection are also found in Matthew 10:16-22 (par. Luke 12:11-12), and there apply to the upcoming preaching ministry of the twelve disciples.¹²⁰⁴

Another, more cryptic indication that the disciples' witness would be accompanied by rejection is Mark's placement of the account of John the Baptist's martyrdom between Jesus' sending of His disciples and their

¹²⁰¹Stauffer, p. 180.

¹²⁰²Among the Synoptic evangelists, Matthew emphasizes persecution the most, followed by Mark. Luke, through some apparently redactional moves, somewhat "softens" the persecution scenario. See discussion of Luke in Beck B. B. *"Imitatio Christi"* and the Lucan Passion Narrative // Horbury W., McNeil B. *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 34-35, 46; and Dehandschutter B. *La persecution des chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres* // Kremer J. *Les Actes des Apôtres: Traditions, redaction, théologie*. – Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium. № 48. – Leuven: Leuven University, 1979. – P. 542.

¹²⁰³The length and prophetic nature of the discourse appears atypical for Mark's depiction of Christ. However, Collins dismisses the theory that chapter 13 was a later insertion to explain the delay of the Parousia. See Collins A. Y. *The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13* // Segbroeck F. V., Tuckett C. M., Van Belle G., Verheyden J. *The Four Gospels*, 1992. – Leuven, Belgium: University Press, 1992. – V. 2. – P. 1141-1152.

¹²⁰⁴Noted by Lindars B. *The Persecution of Christians in John 15:18 – 16:4a* // Horbury W., McNeil B. *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 51. Luz insightfully notes that after the instructions for ministry in Matthew 10, there is no record of the Twelve going out to preach – the discourse is meant for the entire church. See Luz U. *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* / Trans. J. B. Robinson. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. – P. 77.

return (Mark 6:7-32). According to Edwards, “The sandwich structure draws mission and martyrdom, discipleship and death, into an inseparable relationship.... whoever would follow Jesus must first reckon with the fate of John.”¹²⁰⁵

Not only ministry, but even discipleship can result in persecution. In Mark 8:34-37 (par. Matt 16:24-26 and Luke 9:23-25), Jesus depicts Christian discipleship “in terms of suffering and persecution.”¹²⁰⁶ Plummer observes that these words are preserved nearly verbatim in all three gospels, concluding, “We may believe that it was regarded as one of the chief treasures among Christ’s remembered Sayings.”¹²⁰⁷ Many observe that the mention of the cross in this passage, while not exclusively referring to martyrdom, strongly implies it.¹²⁰⁸

The Synoptics also stress the continuity between the suffering of the prophets and that of the disciples, further reinforcing our persecution paradigm. Gundry observes how the disciples will be rejected like the prophets “who were before them” (Matt 5:12).¹²⁰⁹ This puts them “in the true succession of God’s faithful servants.”¹²¹⁰ In Matthew 23:29-36, Jesus further elaborates on the persecution of the prophets, predicting also the future rejection of the disciples He is sending “in the same role.”¹²¹¹ Cunningham, after his exhaustive review of persecution in both Luke and Acts, reaches the same conclusion: “The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God’s prophets.”¹²¹²

The Fourth Gospel also clearly depicts the moral/spiritual dichotomy we have been describing in this chapter. Here it is seen in the contrasting metaphors of light and darkness, above and below, life and death. In the Gospel of John, Jesus comes into the world as light into darkness, which the darkness unequivocally rejects (John 1:5-10). Only those chosen out of the world become partakers of the light, and the consequence for this exodus from the world is to receive its hatred and rejection (John 15:18-25). This antagonistic relationship with the world can have fatal consequences for the disciples (John 16:2). In particular, this appears to be Peter’s destiny (John 21:18-19).¹²¹³

¹²⁰⁵Edwards J. R. *The Gospel according to Mark*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002. – P. 189. Similar conclusion in France R. T. *The Gospel of Mark* // Marshall I. H., Hagner D. A. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. – P. 246.

¹²⁰⁶Telford W. R. *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* // Dunn J. D. G. *New Testament Theology*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999. – P. 219. O’Neill wrongly concludes that the teaching about taking up the cross was “restricted in application to a limited number of followers and was not meant for all.” He himself recognizes that Luke writes about taking up the cross “daily,” and Mark records how Jesus addresses the crowd with this challenge as well (O’Neill J. C. *Did Jesus Teach That His Death Would Be Vicarious as Well as Typical?* // Horbury W., McNeil B. *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981. – P. 11, 16). France writes, “Their inclusion in the audience asserts that the harsh demands of the following verses apply not only to the Twelve but anyone else who may wish to join the movement.... This is not a special formula for the elite, but an essential element in discipleship” (France, Mark, p. 339). A similar conclusion is found in Lane W. L. *The Gospel According to Mark* // Bruce F. F. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974. – P. 306.

¹²⁰⁷Plummer A. *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1914; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982. – P. 206.

¹²⁰⁸See Lane, p. 307-308; Gundry R. H. *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 200; and Lenski, p. 645. Additionally, Lenski correctly observes, “The cross is that suffering which results from our faithful connection with Christ,” not any kind of suffering, as is popularly understood (*ibid.*, p. 644).

¹²⁰⁹Gundry, p. 74.

¹²¹⁰France R. T. *The Gospel According to Matthew* // Morris L. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. – Leicester: IVP, 1985. – P. 112.

¹²¹¹France, Matthew, p. 330.

¹²¹²Cunningham S. *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* // Porter S. E. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series*. № 142. – Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997. – P. 14, 290.

¹²¹³Peter’s martyrdom is recorded by Tertullian (*Scorp.* 15) and Eusebius (*Ecc. Hist.* 3.1.2). The basic historicity of the event is endorsed, among others, by Cullmann. See Cullmann O. *Peter: Disciple—Apostle—Martyr* / Trans. F. V. Filson. – London: SCM, 1953. – P. 152. The text in John also appears to confirm the record that he was crucified. Many have responded convincingly to the objection that John 21:18 simply describes Peter in old age after a long life of Christian service. See Haenchen E. *John 2: A Commentary of the Gospel of John, Chapters 7-21* / Trans. R. W. Funk. Ed. R. W. Funk and U. Busse // *Hermeneia*. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984. – P. 226-32; and Beasley-Murray G. R. *John* // Hubbard D. A., Barker G. W. *Word Biblical Commentary*. – Waco, TX: Word, 1987. – P. 408-409. Potter relates, along with that of Peter, the traditions regarding the martyrdoms of Philip, Matthew, James the Just, Matthias,

The Book of Acts demonstrates, from beginning to end, not only the successful expansion of gospel preaching, but also the consistent rejection and hostility of the unbelieving world.¹²¹⁴ As Cunningham writes, “Persecution is an almost omnipresent plot device in Luke’s second volume.”¹²¹⁵

In nearly every chapter of this narrative, the Church is encountering resistance and rejection. In chapters 4-5, the apostles are arrested. In chapters 6-7, they stand before the Sanhedrin and are eventually beaten. After this, the entire church is subject to persecution (8:1-3), especially at the hands of Saul (9:1-5). In chapter 12, Peter and James are arrested and the latter is martyred. During their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas met with opposition (13:5-8; 14:15-16, 19). The same occurred during Paul’s second trip (16:22-24; 17:13-15) and his third (Acts 19:9, 23-40). The final chapters of Acts record Paul’s imprisonment (21-28).

Thus, as the story of the Acts unfolds, we see repeated trials, imprisonments, and the first Christian martyrdoms of Stephen and James. It is “through many tribulations” that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).¹²¹⁶ Here (as well as in Acts 9:16) we see the “particle of necessity” (δεῖ) in connection with Christian suffering.¹²¹⁷ The apostle Paul testifies that in every city “bonds and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:23). We note that the Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison – an omen for the future destiny of the Church.

Beyerhaus observes, “From her origin to her perfection, it is central to the very nature of the faithful Church to be hated and persecuted by the world.”¹²¹⁸ Similarly, Royal concludes, “Persecution of Christians was not an odd occurrence, but the normal course of affairs in a world where good and evil are in competition with each other for our ultimate allegiance.”¹²¹⁹

The persecution of the saints was not only the experience of the Early Church, but also a topic discussed in the New Testament epistles. Paul states, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). He enlightens the congregation in Philippi, “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Peter also affirms, “You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps” (1 Pet 2:21). John adds, “Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you” (1 Jn 3:13).

It is curious to note that not infrequently persecution would arise for reasons other than religious. The Jewish religious leaders hated Jesus because of jealousy over the popularity of His ministry (Mk 15:10). Paul and Silas encountered persecution in Philippi because they cast a demon out a girl who was bringing money to her masters by practicing divination (Acts 16:19-21). Citing the Old Testament, Daniel was persecuted because he “began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps” (Dan 6:1-5). These examples are an indication of the action of evil spirits in persecution. The devil would incite people against the Church for personal reasons, but his real motive was to stop the spread of the gospel.

The New Testament implicates the Jews as those primarily responsible for the opposition to Christianity in its early years.¹²²⁰ Frend concurs that one could characterize the initial conflict as a “fratricidal clash between

Andrew, Mark, Simeon, Bartholomew, Thomas, Luke, Simon the Canaanite, Timothy and Barnabas. See Potter F. L. *Martyrs in All Ages*. – Waukesha, WI: Metropolitan Church Association, 1907. – P. 13-24.,

¹²¹⁴Petersen, because of the tight literary structure of Acts, rejects its historicity, feeling the author is simply relating a theology of persecution in narrative form. See Petersen N. R. *Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics* // Via D. O. *Guides to Biblical Scholarship*. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1978. – P. 90-91. Yet, a structuring of historical information does not automatically invalidate its historicity. In addition, Gaventa writes, “Lukan theology is intricately and irreversibly bound up with the story he tells and cannot be separated from it. An attempt to do justice to the theology of Acts must struggle to reclaim the character of Acts as a narrative.” See Gaventa B. R. *Toward a Theology of Acts* // Interpretation. № 42. 1988. P. 150.

¹²¹⁵Cunningham, p. 287.

¹²¹⁶Cunningham rightly notes that this passage is located in a context of persecution and therefore refers “to the prospect of persecution for the sake of the faith of the disciples, and not to general troubles and trials of humanity” (Ibid., p. 245-246).

¹²¹⁷Noted by Rapske B. *Opposition to the Plan of God and Persecution* // Marshall I. H., Peterson D. *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998. – P. 247.

¹²¹⁸Beyerhaus P. P. J. *God’s Kingdom and the Utopian Error*. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992. – P. 163.

¹²¹⁹Royal R. *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century*. – New York, NY: Crossroad, 2000. – P. 5.

¹²²⁰Not all Jews, of course, rejected Christ; His first disciples were all Jewish. Yet, this is not an improper generalization, since the New Testament itself, as we shall see, characterizes the Jews as enemies of the Early Church. The New Testament does this not to indict

rival groups of Jews,” in which “the Roman authorities were only indirectly concerned.”¹²²¹ It is the “Jews” who cry for Christ’s execution before a pagan Roman governor who had hoped to release Him (John 19:7-12). Peter’s arrest also pleases the “Jews” (Acts 12:3). The “Jews” are constantly stirring up the Gentiles against Paul’s ministry (Acts 13:50, 14:2, 19, 17:5, 13, 18:12) and plotting to put him to death (Acts 9:23, 20:3, 19, 21:11, 27, 23:12). It is the Jews who “both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out” (1 Thess 2:15). They are the allegorical Ishmael, “born according to the flesh,” who persecutes Isaac, born “according to the Spirit” (Gal 4:29). Zumstein writes,

*The opposition to the Word is the unbelieving Jews, personified notably by the Sanhedrin.... these are not only the Jews of Jerusalem, but of the whole Empire (6:9).... the chosen people, disseminated through the whole inhabited earth, find their unanimity not only by rejecting the Word, but also by persecuting its messengers.*¹²²²

Besides the biblical record, Jews reportedly killed Christians during the Bar-Cocheba revolt.¹²²³ In addition, in the late first century A.D. a rabbinic anathema, the Eighteenth Benediction or *Birkath ha-Minim*, was issued against the “Minim,” who are generally identified with followers of Jesus.¹²²⁴

Several authors have strenuously argued that the Jews waged no *persistent*, organized persecution against believers in the Messiah. Parks¹²²⁵ attempts to document that Jews actively opposed Christianity only in the first century. In reviewing the earliest of the *Acta Sanctorum*, he notes that although the Jews still had hostile feelings toward the church during the Roman persecutions, cases of actual Jewish-led persecution were rare. He interprets the initial persecutions by the Jews documented in Acts as simply their attempt to rid the synagogues of Christian influence.

Hare¹²²⁶ also asserts that the Jews killed few Christians, and that these suffered from mob-violence, not from a judicial decision.¹²²⁷ He attributes the killings of James, son of Zebedee, to Herod alone, and that of James the Just to a “personal vendetta” by a jealous high priest. Matthew, according to Hare, was reacting in his gospel to the failure of the mission to Israel and their rejection of the gospel when indicting the Jews for persecuting the faith.

We may accept the assertion that soon after the New Testament period the Jewish persecution lessened. A new player, as we will soon see, represented the domain of darkness after this time – the Roman Empire. During the New Testament period, however, the consistent biblical witness reviewed above should not be

every ethnic Jew, but to depict the nation of Israel as the prime antagonist of God’s kingdom at this time, that is, as the “City of This World.”

¹²²¹Frend W. H. C. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*. – Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965. – P. 154.

¹²²²Zumstein J. *L’Apôtre comme martyr dans les actes de luc* // *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie*. № 112. 1980. P. 375. My translation.

¹²²³Herford feels the Jewish killing of five disciples, recorded in *b. Sanh.* 43a, took place during the revolt, but asserts that outside of this time the Jews undertook no other formal persecution of Christians. See Herford R. T. *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* // *Library of Religious and Philosophical Thought*. – Clifton, NJ: Reference Book, 1966. – P. 90-94. Hare also acknowledges the Jewish killing of Christians at the time of Bar-Cocheba, but argues that it was political and not religious – the Christian’s lack of participation in the war was considered treasonous. See Hare D. A. R. *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* // *Black M. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series*. № 6. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1967. – P. 38.

¹²²⁴The Benediction reads, “For the renegades let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarens and the *minim* perish as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.” From Barrett C. K. *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*. – London: S.P.C.K., 1956; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1961. – P. 167 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹²²⁵See Parks J. *The Conflict of the Church and Synagogue*. – Cleveland, OH: Meridian, 1961. – P. 132, 137-41, 149.

¹²²⁶See Hare, p. 20-22, 30-34, 125-129, 164-166.

¹²²⁷He claims a dual tradition of Stephen’s martyrdom, arguing that the “judicial-execution” tradition (Acts 6:12-7:1) is unhistorical, and the “mob-lynching” tradition (Acts 7:54-58) is historical.

undervalued. The Bible faithfully portrays unbelieving Israel of New Testament times as the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9), aggressively opposed to Christianity. During this period, they represented “The City of This World,” the primary antagonist of the “City of God.”

6. The Early Church and Rome

Although the Scriptures, giving their inspired interpretation of history, provide us with the most authoritative basis for establishing a “persecution paradigm,” a brief glance at church history can provide further confirmation, as did our glance at intertestamental times.

After the New Testament period, Christianity sufficiently distanced itself from Judaism (geographically, ethnically, and doctrinally) so that the latter ceased to be its major threat. In its place, the Roman Empire became the main agent of persecution in the West.¹²²⁸ Allard reports that in the years before Constantine, the Church underwent persecution about half of that time.¹²²⁹ Workman characterizes the persecution more as “intensive” than “extensive,” with a significant escalation from the mid-second century. At times, the number of deaths per day could average from one hundred (as per Eusebius) to five thousand (as per Jerome).¹²³⁰

Early on, believers began to record and compile various individual accounts of martyrdom – the *Acts of the Martyrs*. Modern scholars have carefully investigated these records for historical accuracy. In an extensive work entitled *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Herbert Musurillo summarizes twenty-eight martyr accounts he feels to be reliable.¹²³¹ Timothy Barnes focuses on martyrdoms before A.D. 250 and endorses a number of those listed by Musurillo, while challenging the historicity of others.¹²³² E. C. E. Owen also defends the historicity of many accounts, appealing for support to accurate dates, proper judicial procedures, proper use of terms, and the general absence of the supernatural, except for extraordinary faith.¹²³³

Among the most popular and controversial of the *Acts* is the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, the supernatural elements of which have aroused skepticism, especially among those with anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions.¹²³⁴ Although some may challenge the *Acts* historicity on the grounds of its similarity to Jewish and pagan martyr accounts, van Henten aptly defends the thesis that the similarities are likely due to common experience and not literary dependence.¹²³⁵

Conflict with Rome, according to Healy, was inevitable and totally irreconcilable: “Since Christianity struck at the very existence of the pagan creeds and cults and sapped the foundations of political and social life, the hostility it provoked came from such causes and was of such a nature that it could never cease until such time as Christianity had triumphed over the established order or had itself been annihilated.”¹²³⁶ In addition to this, however, we must affirm with Frend that the struggle was ultimately “cosmic,” not political, against Satan, not Rome: “The persecution they were suffering was the sure precursor of the time of Antichrist which in turn would usher in the Millennium of the Saints.”¹²³⁷

¹²²⁸In the East, Christians suffered as well. An estimated 190,000 Christians were martyred in Persia by the fifth century. See Chandler A., Harvey A. Introduction // Chandler A. *The Terrible Alternative: Christian Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century*. – London: Cassell, 1998. – P. 7.

¹²²⁹Allard P. *Ten Lectures on the Martyrs* / Trans. L. Cappadelta. – London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907. – P. 80-81. Traditionally ten great persecutions under Rome are listed. See Augustine, *City of God*, 18.52.

¹²³⁰Workman H. B. *Persecution in the Early Church*. – 2nd ed. – London: Charles Kelley, 1906. – P. 200-203.

¹²³¹Musurillo H. *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. – Oxford: Oxford University, 1972. – P. xii.

¹²³²Barnes T. Pre-Decian *Acta Martyrum* // *Journal of Theological Studies*. № 19. 1968. P. 509-531.

¹²³³Owen E. C. E., ed. *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs*. – Oxford: Clarendon, 1927. – P. 13.

¹²³⁴See comments in Owen, p. 17; and Lefkowitz M. P. The Motivations for St. Perpetua’s Martyrdom // *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. № 44. 1976. P. 418.

¹²³⁵Van Henten J. W. *The Martyrs as Heroes of the Christian People* // Lamberigts M., Van Deun P. *Martyrium in Multidisciplinary Perspective*. – Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University, 1995. – P. 303-313.

¹²³⁶Healy P. J. *The Valerian Persecution*. – Boston, MA: Mifflin and Company, 1905. – P. 2.

¹²³⁷Frend, p. 15, 20.

Beyond reflection on the persecutions themselves, our persecution paradigm is supported by writers who lived during this period as well. Lesbaupin relates that the Church Fathers in general viewed persecution as the normal fare for God's people. He summarizes Hippolytus, for example, as teaching that "the church should be poor, without possessions, and in permanent conflict with the world."¹²³⁸ This opinion was still voiced even after the cessation of hostilities. Straw, summarizing Gregory the Great, writes that from Abel "endurance of persecution distinguishes God's elect throughout time: their defining essence lies in suffering and sacrifice."¹²³⁹

The most celebrated work of this period on this topic is Augustine's *City of God*.¹²⁴⁰ Beginning from Genesis 1, Augustine sees a separation of good from evil when light (good angels) was separated from darkness (evil angels) (11.19). Augustine then argues that Cain, with his descendants, "belonged to the city of men," while Abel, with his descendants, "belonged to the city of God." (14.1). He then contrasts Shem, "of whom Christ was born in the flesh," with Ham, who signifies "the tribe of heretics" (16.2). Consequently, "Genuine godliness had survived only in those generations which descend from Shem through Arphaxad and reach to Abraham" (16.10). After tracing the City of God to the nation of Israel, Augustine begins to make a distinction between carnal Israel and true Israel; these sides are personified in Saul and David. Finally, the Jewish nation is divided between those who accept Messiah Jesus and the "wicked Jews" who do not (Book 17). During the post-apostolic age, persecutors and heretics represent the City of This World. Antichrist is to usher in the final persecution (Book 18).¹²⁴¹

7. Protestants and Romans Catholics during the Reformation

The Church enjoyed a time of relative peace during the Middle Ages (although one wonders how faithfully it represented the City of God at this time). The Reformation, however, introduced unprecedented conflict within confessing Christianity. This period of time resembles the monarchical age in Israel, when the opposition was not from an "outside" agent, but between true members of God's people and nominal ones.

Gregg reports that about 4400 Protestants were martyred in the sixteenth century.¹²⁴² The events of this period were recorded and interpreted in martyrologies. The most notable protestant versions were written by Ludwig Rabus (Lutheran), Jean Crespin (Reformed), Adriaen Cornelis van Haemstede (Reformed), John Foxe (Anglican), and Thielemann J. van Braght (Anabaptist). Boudin basically confirms the historicity of these accounts, arguing that although the goal was to gain support for their cause, this does not necessarily imply gross falsification of facts. If significant distortions of the historical facts were written to near contemporaries of the events, the martyrologies would have immediately been discredited.¹²⁴³

Haemstede is credited with being the first to link the sufferings of the Protestants with that of the Early Church, and even that of the Old Testament prophets.¹²⁴⁴ He felt that "the true Church has always been a suffering, and often a persecuted, remnant, existing among a fallen people repeatedly."¹²⁴⁵ Rabus traced the

¹²³⁸Lesbaupin I. *Blessed Are the Persecuted* / Trans. R. R. Barr. — Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983. — P. 45-46.

¹²³⁹Straw C. *Martyrdom and Christian Identity: Gregory the Great, Augustine, and Tradition* // Klinghohn W. E., Vessey M. *The Limits of Ancient Christianity*. — Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999. — P. 255. Straw cites *Mor.* 3.17.32; *Homelias in Hiezechielem* 2.3.16; and *Hom. Ev.* 2.38.7.

¹²⁴⁰Roberts A. Donaldson J. eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. — Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886-1889. CD-ROM edition, Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

¹²⁴¹In spite of Augustine's allegorizing, he is generally accurate in his construal.

¹²⁴²Gregory B. S. *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*. — Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1999. — P. 6.

¹²⁴³Boudin, p. 73-74.

¹²⁴⁴In the French Reformation, the Huguenots also saw themselves in continuity with the early martyrs. See Roberts P. *Martyrologies and Martyrs in the French Reformation: Heretics to Subversives in Troyes* // Wood D. *Martyrs and Martyrologies, Studies in Church History*, № 30. — Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. — P. 221.

¹²⁴⁵Pettegree A. *European Calvinism: History, Providence, and Martyrdom* // Swanson R. N. *The Church Retrospective. Studies in Church History*, № 33. — Suffolk: Boydell, 1997. — P. 238, 240.

history of martyrdom back to Abel, including the Maccabean martyrs as well.¹²⁴⁶ The Protestant martyrologists also “canonized” medieval non-conformists such as the Waldenses and Lollards in response to the Catholic charge that Protestants were reintroducing their heresies. The Protestants, with some qualifications, gladly identified with these “medieval martyrs,” since they provided yet another link in the ongoing chain of persecution of the true, “suffering” church.¹²⁴⁷

As we have consistently noted in other periods, the Protestant martyrologists also acknowledged the “higher level” conflict. Rabus and Foxe, for example, both claimed that the true struggle during the Reformation was between God and Satan.¹²⁴⁸ Van Braght saw two great distinct “congregations and churches, the one of God and from heaven, the other of Satan and from the earth.”¹²⁴⁹

Not only the martyrologists, but the Reformers themselves also taught along the lines of the persecution paradigm we are presenting here. Luther felt that the Church “had always been persecuted” and “would be persecuted to the end of the world.”¹²⁵⁰ In Luther’s words, “Those who have the true Word of God must suffer for it.”¹²⁵¹ Luther also says, “Nor is there any better proof that the Protestants are the true Church than the stranglings, drownings, and hangings inflicted upon them, as the Cross on their Lord.”¹²⁵² Persecution is their “*criterion of faithfulness*.”¹²⁵³ Luther also recognized the cosmic nature of the struggle – the persecutions were authored by Satan.¹²⁵⁴ In like manner, Calvin felt persecution to be a mark of the true church. Therefore, “To suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake is a singular comfort.”¹²⁵⁵ He always saw himself as part of a minority, even when he headed Geneva.¹²⁵⁶

The Anabaptist theology of martyrdom was integrally tied with their strong dualistic view of history as an ongoing conflict between the kingdoms of darkness and light.¹²⁵⁷ According to the Anabaptists, “The path of martyrdom” marks the way “of the people of God through history.”¹²⁵⁸ This history traces back to Abel and includes the Jewish intertestamental martyrdoms as well.¹²⁵⁹ They also see persecution as satanically inspired: “The hatred which raged against the head of all martyrs is not only the hatred of the children of this world against the people of God but the very hatred of Darkness against the Light.”¹²⁶⁰

Nonetheless, my attempt to cast Reformation Protestants as the persecuted, “true” church, the representatives of the City of God, is complicated by the fact that about three hundred English Catholics also perished at Protestant hands,¹²⁶¹ as did many Anabaptist martyrs. Gregg’s work *Salvation at Stake* describes this time as a period of confusion, where rival doctrinal claims were supported by rival martyrdom claims.

¹²⁴⁶Kolb R. *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation*. – Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1987. – P. 60.

¹²⁴⁷See Cameron E. *Medieval Heretics as Protestant Martyrs* // Wood D. *Martyrs and Martyrologies*. *Studies in Church History*, № 30. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. – P. 188-191.

¹²⁴⁸See Knott J. R. *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993. – P. 84-89.

¹²⁴⁹Van Braght T. J. *Martyr’s Mirror* / Trans. J. F. Sohm. – Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing, 1951. – P. 21.

¹²⁵⁰Comment on Luther’s thought by Bagchi D. *Luther and the Problem of Martyrdom* // Wood D. *Martyrs and Martyrologies*. *Studies in Church History*, № 30. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. – P. 211.

¹²⁵¹Luther M. *What Luther Says* / Ed. E. M. Plass. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1959. – V. 2. – P. 1005.

¹²⁵²From Luther’s Works (WA 51.484), cited in Matheson P. *Martyrdom or Mission? A Protestant Debate* // *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*. № 80. 1989. P. 155.

¹²⁵³Fischer D. *La Notion du martyre dans la théologie de Luther* // *Etudes théologiques et religieuses*. 57. 1982. P. 515. Italics original. My translation.

¹²⁵⁴Stange D. C. *A Sketch of the Thought of Martin Luther on Martyrdom* // *Concordia Theological Monthly*. № 37. 1966. P. 640; and Kolb R. *God’s Gift of Martyrdom: The Early Reformation Understanding of Dying for the Faith* // *Church History*. № 64. 1995. P. 408.

¹²⁵⁵Pettegree, p. 252.

¹²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹²⁵⁷See Friedman R. *The Theology of Anabaptism* // Wenger J. C. *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*, № 15. – Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1973. – P. 41.

¹²⁵⁸Stauffer, p. 187.

¹²⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 188-190.

¹²⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 191.

¹²⁶¹Gregory, p. 6.

Christians of various confessions “died for their fidelity to Christ, but they disagreed about what it meant to be a Christian.”¹²⁶² Both sides claimed that their martyrs validated their cause.

Since both sides could claim martyrs, attempts were made to distinguish true from false martyrs. Features like the manner in which they died, their social or education status, and the eventual fall of their persecutors were used as distinguishing marks. Yet, apparently none of these criteria was convincing: “Catholic and Protestant have died with equal constancy in defense of their creed.”¹²⁶³ As Gregg writes, “Attempts to find non-doctrinal criteria for telling true from false martyrs were hesitant and ultimately unsuccessful.”¹²⁶⁴ Consequently, “Martyrdom began and ended with divergent views of Christian truth.”¹²⁶⁵

Doctrinal differences between Lutheran and Reformed also cloud the picture of a united front against medieval Catholicism, the representative of the City of This World. According to Gregg, the writings of martyrologists tend to imply a “unity that Protestants themselves knew did not exist.”¹²⁶⁶ In addition, contrary to expectations, the primary Reformers were spared martyrdom. Luther struggled not only with this fact, but also that “heretic” Anabaptist martyrs met death with great bravery.¹²⁶⁷ Swiss Calvinists also struggled with the political success they enjoyed in their domains and continually sought to “reinvent themselves as a minority.”¹²⁶⁸ After the Reformation period proper, the confusion further increased as to who was really “on God’s side” as Separatists and other non-conformist groups suffered at the hands of the (now protestant) Church of England.¹²⁶⁹

These observations appear to challenge my application of the “Protestant verses medieval Catholic” scenario to our persecution paradigm. Yet, several things can be said in defense. First, the Catholic martyrs numbered about one tenth of the Protestant martyrs. Although this does not excuse the Protestants’ ill treatment of Catholics, we see here a greater bent toward violence from the Roman side. That the Catholic martyrs perished in England is also significant in light of Henry VIII’s *Act of Supremacy*, which made it treason to refuse an oath acknowledging him as head of the Church of England.¹²⁷⁰ Clearly the issue was political loyalty as much as or more than religious conviction. One could also easily question the authenticity of Henry’s personal Christian faith.

Concerning the persecution of Anabaptists, it has been noted, “The most blood was shed in Roman Catholic countries.”¹²⁷¹ Cornelius reports, “In Tyrol and Goerz... the number of executions in the year 1531 reached already one thousand; in Ensisheim, six hundred. At Linz seventy-three were killed in six weeks.”¹²⁷² By comparison, in Zwingli’s Zurich, where the Anabaptist movement began, there were only six Anabaptist executions from 1527 to 1532.¹²⁷³ Luther “expressed his dissent from the harsh and cruel treatment of the Anabaptists, and maintained that they ought to be resisted only by the Word of God and arguments, not by fire and sword.”¹²⁷⁴ This is in stark contrast to the sentiments of Catholic leadership toward Protestantism.

Thus, in the Reformation time we continue to see evidence of the polarization between the City of God and the City of This World and the antagonism of the latter toward the former in the persecutions of Protestants by the Roman Catholic Church. The limited, but unfortunate persecution of Catholics by

¹²⁶²Ibid., 137.

¹²⁶³Blunt J. H. ed., *Martyrs // Dictionary of Doctrinal and Historical Theology*. – London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892. – P. 449.

¹²⁶⁴Gregg, p. 320.

¹²⁶⁵Ibid., 339.

¹²⁶⁶Ibid., 184.

¹²⁶⁷Bagchi, p. 212-213.

¹²⁶⁸Pettegree, p. 249-251

¹²⁶⁹Knott, *Discourses*, p. 120-122, 134-135.

¹²⁷⁰Gregg, p. 255.

¹²⁷¹Schaff P. *History of the Christian Church*. – N.p.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910. – Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972. – V. 8. – P. 684.

¹²⁷²Ibid. Schaff cites C. A. Cornelius, *Die Wiedertaufe*, Leipzig, 1860, P. 67.

¹²⁷³Ibid., v. 8, p. 83.

¹²⁷⁴Ibid., v. 7, p. 610.

Protestants can be explained as essentially political and not religious. Persecution of more “progressive” Protestants, such as Anabaptists and English Separatists or Puritans, by earlier Protestant movements is consistent with our persecution paradigm as well, in that previously persecuted parties can quickly become the persecutors of the next move of God.

8. Antichrist and the Church in the Last Days

We now bring our survey to modern times and beyond. From a Western perspective, the Church presently seems to be enjoying great peace and prosperity. However, the picture of Christianity on a worldwide scale is quite different. Authors commonly refer to the twentieth century as “one of the great ages of Christian martyrs.”¹²⁷⁵ Twentieth century martyrs number well into the millions.¹²⁷⁶ Dana writes, “No century has mounted so vast or sustained an attack on Christianity as the present one.”¹²⁷⁷ Beyerhaus confirms, “*Our 20th century is the bloodiest in the entire history of Christianity.*”¹²⁷⁸ Even Christians now enjoying political recognition and protection must be forewarned that the “proportion of legal Christianity is rapidly decreasing.”¹²⁷⁹

Although the enemies of Christianity in modern times have been several, atheistic Communism has likely provided the clearest representation of the City of This World in the last century. Their efforts both to exterminate Christianity locally and expand their influence worldwide presented a significant threat. With the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam may become the next major antagonist, seeing how Islamic Fundamentalists are taking a more aggressive posture internationally.

Although we can only tentatively predict the next great opponent of the church, we can with certainty anticipate her ultimate confrontation. Many Evangelicals anticipate a final and climatic manifestation of Satan’s kingdom at the end of time in the enigmatic person of Antichrist. His coming will usher in the most intense struggle between the Cities of God and This World, which finds its resolution in the physical return of Christ.

The Man of Lawlessness’s campaign against the church is most clearly depicted in the Book of Revelation, where we see “the final battle between the opposing kingdoms of Christ and Antichrist.”¹²⁸⁰ The Antichrist is depicted as a beast, who is given “to make war with the saints and to overcome them” (Rev 13:7). Earlier, Daniel predicted, “He will wear down the saints of the Highest One” (Dan 7:25). His followers “poured out the blood of saints and prophets” (Rev 16:6). The Great Harlot was “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (Rev 17:6), and in Babylon the Great “was found the blood of prophets and of saints” (Rev 18:24). Here the demarcation between the kingdoms of darkness and light is sharply drawn – the world is depicted as “implacably hostile” to the church.¹²⁸¹ There is no middle ground or third option – one must choose Christ or Antichrist.

Michelle Lee discerns this tension in the chiasmic structure of the Apocalypse. She locates the central (emphatic) elements of the chiasm in Rev 13:1-18 and Rev 14:1-20, entitling both a “Moment of Decision.”¹²⁸² These sections present a striking portrayal of the “choice between martyrdom and eternal life or earthly life

¹²⁷⁵Manson T. W. Martyrs and Martyrdom // Bulletin of the John Rylands Library. № 39. 1956-1957. P. 471.

¹²⁷⁶See Barrett D. B., Johnson T. M. Our World and How to Reach It. – Birmingham: New Hope, 1990. – P. 18; and Royal, Catholic Martyrs, p. 1.

¹²⁷⁷Gioia D. To Witness Truth Uncompromised // Bergman S. Martyrs: Contemporary Writers on Modern Lives of Faith. – San Francisco: Harper, 1996. – P. 326.

¹²⁷⁸Beyerhaus, p. 167. Italics original. Carson rightfully observes, however, that the large numbers are partially due to the larger world population and larger number of Christians. See Carson D. A. How Long, O Lord? – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990. – P. 69.

¹²⁷⁹Barrett, Johnson, Our World, p. 44. In assessing Barrett’s comment, however, one must take into consideration the 1990 date of this book, before the fall of the Soviet Union.

¹²⁸⁰Beyerhaus, p. 166.

¹²⁸¹Beasley-Murray G. R. The Book of Revelation // Clements R. E., Black M. New Century Bible Commentary. – London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983). – P. 44 (page citations are to reprint edition).

¹²⁸²Lee M. V. A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation // Novum Testamentum. № 40. 1998. P. 174.

and eternal torment.”¹²⁸³ The text causes readers “to identify their own place in the cosmic drama and forces them to choose sides in the battle between good and evil.”¹²⁸⁴

Revelation not only predicts tribulation for God’s people – it presents this time as the climax of the historical struggle we have been outlining. As Boring comments, the Old Testament allusions in Revelation cast the end-time persecution in the context of “God’s mighty acts in history”: “The present persecution is in continuity with the history of the people of God in the past, in which anti-God powers of oppression and injustice which seemed to be in control of the world were overthrown by the liberating act of God.”¹²⁸⁵ Beyond simply predicting persecution, the book of Revelation speaks much of martyrdom; one author entitles it “A Handbook for Martyrs.”¹²⁸⁶ The book contains many clear references to martyrdom (2:10, 13, 6:11, 11:7, 13:7, 16:6, 17:6, 20:4). Yet the “triumph” of the City of This World is only temporary, as many other passages in Revelation make clear.

C. Conclusions

In this section, I have argued that the people of God have typically been set in contrast to and persecuted by the City of This World. The “World” is represented in Scripture and history by various prominent oppressors: Cain, Egypt, Canaan, backslidden Israel, Antiochus Epiphanies, unbelieving Jews of the first century, the Roman Empire, the medieval Roman Catholic Church, Communism and, eventually, Antichrist.

We will conclude our survey with some more practical thoughts. First, Scripture urges us to not fear persecution (Neh 4:14; Isa 51: 7-14; Jer 1:8; Phil 1:28-29). Even when threatened by death, Jesus counsels, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do” (Lk 12:4). Suffering should not be a reason to be ashamed of our faith (2 Tim 1:8-12) or to recant it (Matt 10:32-33).

In the same way, persecution should not be a reason to cease laboring for the Lord. In spite of opposition, Nehemiah continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 4:6). The psalmist held onto the Word in the face of opposition (Ps 119:157, 161). Both Jesus and His disciples continued to preach the Kingdom of God, even when persecuted (Jn 7:26; Acts 4:19-20; 5:28-29, 40-42; 1 Thes 2:2).

Perseverance is needed in time of suffering. Paul advises his comrade Timothy to endure suffering “as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:3). Jesus praised the Ephesian church, “You have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary” (Rev 2:3; cf. 14:12). At times, Jesus’ disciples are called to endure to the end, i.e., undergo martyrdom (Rev 12:11). Finally, James lauds the perseverance displayed by the prophets (Jam 5:10). Scripture notes one instance where God gave a prophet supernatural endurance – Jeremiah: “Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; and though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you” (Jer 15:20). Similarly, the Lord gave special support to Elijah through an angelic visitation, “supernatural” food, and a personal encounter on Mount Horeb (1 Kin 19). Paul also received divine aid during his trial: “The Lord stood with me and strengthened me” (2 Tim 4:17). The knowledge that Christian suffering is temporary and the common experience of believers also provides comfort (1 Pet 5:9-10).

On the other hand, the Bible testifies of many instances where God delivered His servants from persecution. The Lord gave such promises to Jeremiah (Jer 1:8, 19; 15:20). Additionally, God promised through Isaiah to strengthen His people through trial and deliver them (Isa 41:10-12; 43:2).

Among his many sufferings for Christ, the apostle Paul also experienced the Lord’s protection and deliverance (Acts 18:9; 23:23-31), so that at the end of his life he could claim, “What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!” (2 Tim 3:11). At the same time, when Paul speaks of “deliverance”

¹²⁸³Ibid., p. 190.

¹²⁸⁴Ibid., p. 194.

¹²⁸⁵Boring M. E. The Theology of Revelation: ‘The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns,’ // Interpretation. № 40. 1986. P. 263.

¹²⁸⁶See Rist M. Revelation, A Handbook for Martyrs // Iliff Review 2. № 3. Fall 1945. P. 269-280.

he sometimes in speaking of spiritual deliverance, not physical. In particular, in Philippians 1:19-20 it is not totally clear if Paul is speaking of being delivered from prison, or of receiving strength to endure martyrdom:

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but {that} with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

In times of suffering, one must not forget God's sovereignty. God has all authority and can end the persecution at any moment. For example, in the book of Revelation Jesus informed the church in Smyrna that they would "have tribulation ten days" (Rev 2:10). Daniel 11:35 also speaks of persecution until "the appointed time."

The Bible relates that during suffering, God's people turn to Him in prayer. When Israel's enemies tried to stop the reconstruction of Jerusalem, Nehemiah sought the Lord (Neh 4:9). When the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem, Hezekiah "took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of Yahweh and spread it out before Yahweh. Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh" (Isa 37:14-15). In New Testament times, after the Jewish leaders threatened the apostles the Jerusalem church prayed for courage to preach the Word (Acts 4:24-30).

Another source of comfort during suffering is the knowledge that our sufferings for Christ themselves may have redemptive results. Paul reported that because of his imprisonment for the Lord "has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear" (Phil 1:13-14). Furthermore, the Lord granted Paul special comfort in his sufferings that he was able to pass on to others (2 Cor 1:4-6). In addition, Paul's "thorn in the flesh," which consisted of difficulties connected with his ministry, prevented him from boasting in his accomplishments (2 Cor 12:7-10). Moreover, persecution gives us the opportunity to demonstrate our faith. Jesus charged the church in Smyrna, "Be faithful until death" (Rev 2:10). Finally, testings and trials prompt us to draw closer to the Lord (Ps 27).

Some feel that those who suffer for Jesus receive a special reward from the Lord and a higher status in His Kingdom. When James and John requested from Jesus status in His Kingdom, He replied, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" (Matt 20:22), meaning participation in His sufferings. In addition, although all believers take part in the first resurrection and in Messiah's early reign, Revelation 20:4 highlights the martyrs' participation in these events.

How are God's people to relate to their persecutors? In the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, we often encounter prayers for their downfall. Nehemiah prayed in this way for those who hindered the reconstruction work on Jerusalem:

Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders (Neh 4:4-5).

In the New Testament, however, we see a different approach. Jesus taught His disciples, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5:44). When Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus, the Lord rebuked him (Lk 22:49-51). Correspondingly, Peter writes in his first epistle, "...not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead" (1 Pet 3:9). We witness a prime example of this attitude in Jesus (Lk 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60), who, at the point of death, forgave their persecutors.

Elsewhere, the Bible again charges us, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom 12:19). The Scriptures

often record God's promise to avenge His people (e.g. 2 Thes 1:6; Rev 16:6; 19:2) as well as examples when He did so (e.g. Dan 6:24; Esther 6:11).

Some wonder whether it is ever appropriate to flee persecution. The Early Church hotly debated the question.¹²⁸⁷ It is important to note that Jesus Himself taught that one should flee persecution (Matt 10:23; Mk 13:14-16). In regard to Paul, Raymor relates that he used every legal means available to him to avoid persecution.¹²⁸⁸ So then, fleeing persecution is not tantamount to denying Christ.

On the other hand, Karl Barth feels that after fleeing persecution, the believer is obliged to continue evangelizing at his or her new location, and, most likely, more opposition will result.¹²⁸⁹ Roberts makes the fair observation that when someone is captured, then it is time to prepare to suffer, unless a new opportunity to flee presents itself.¹²⁹⁰ Gundry advises striking a balance between faithfulness in discipleship and preservation of one's life. Such a balance prevents the corresponding extremes of compromise and spiritual pride. Keener correctly concludes that most people can reasonably distinguish fleeing persecution from an open denial of the faith.¹²⁹¹

Although persecution is unpleasant, both talking about it, and especially experiencing it, nonetheless, Jesus established the principle that believers should rejoice in their sufferings for Him (Matt 5:10). Rejection by the world is a sign of belonging to God's Kingdom. We recall the words of Peter, himself a partaker of Christ's sufferings, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation (1 Pet 4:13). Peter did exactly that when the apostles were beaten for their witness of Jesus: "So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for {His} name" (Acts 5:41).

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¹²⁸⁷Tertullian, for example, spoke out against fleeing persecution, while Clement of Alexandria was not opposed to it (noted in Bowersock, p. 54). Pettersen summarizes the defense for fleeing persecution proposed by Athanasius: (1) a successful escape can serve as a witness of God's protection; (2) it is better to resist evil than to passively submit to it; (3) Jesus taught that disciples should flee; (4) refusing to flee may be a manifestation of pride; (5) we do not know the appointed time of our death and so cannot presume that it has arrived; (6) God will allow us to be captured if it is His will; (7) to give oneself over to martyrdom is equal to suicide; (8) those who flee also experience difficulties and testing for Christ's sake. See Pettersen A. "To Flee or Not to Flee": An Assessment of Athanasius's *De Fuga Sua* // Sheils W. J. *Persecution and Toleration*. *Studies in Church History*, № 21. – No city: Basil Blackwell, 1984. – P. 29-39.

¹²⁸⁸From an interview with Rick Raymor, the director of division of Church and Society for the World Evangelical Alliance by Kim Layton on 05.06.1996 (see Shea N. *In the Lion's Den*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1997. – P. 15).

¹²⁸⁹Barth K. *Church Dogmatics* / Ed. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. – Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962. – 4.3.626-627.

¹²⁹⁰Roberts, *Martyrologies and Martyrs*, p. 228.

¹²⁹¹Keener C. S. *A Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. – P. 324.

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Chapter 14: Participation in Christ's Resurrection - New Birth

According to Scripture, we receive regeneration in virtue of Christ's resurrection from the dead: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3). Just as the Lord Jesus passed out of death to life, believers in Him pass out of the condition of spiritual death into a new condition – new life in Christ.

The new birth, or "regeneration," is that experience by which a believer in Jesus Christ receives new life and a new nature. The Holy Spirit enters the heart of each believer to renew, teach, direct, strengthen, sanctify, and comfort. Horton correctly notes that regeneration, as well as justification, are "the effect of union with Christ."¹²⁹²

Paul links the experience of the new birth with Christ's resurrection as well. We read in Romans 6:4, "As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." He repeats this thought in Ephesians 2:5-6: "Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ... and raised us up with Him." Colossians 2:13 reads, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him."¹²⁹³

It is significant that when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He immediately charged them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). This indicates that the experience of the new birth through the Spirit was connected with His physical resurrection and became available from that time.

Rightmire rightly emphasizes that the Christian calling is more than just imitating Christ's example: "Christian experience is more than an imitation of the life and teaching of Jesus. It is the present experience of the risen Christ indwelling the believer's heart by the Spirit."¹²⁹⁴

A. Definitions and Terminology

The rebirth of a fallen, sinful human into a new creation in Christ is one of the most stunning aspects of our salvation, and one of the most magnificent operations of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. The respected Evangelical theologian, Millard Erickson, gives a fine definition of the experience: "Regeneration... is God's transformation of individual believers, his giving a new spiritual vitality and direction to their lives when they accept Christ."¹²⁹⁵ Packer concurs, "Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁹⁶

In John chapter 3, Jesus calls this spiritual experience being "born from above," or "born again." Which of these expressions better translates the words of Christ? The first emphasizes the origin of the experience – it is from heaven, from God. The latter stresses the results of the experience – the start of a new life. Which did Jesus mean to communicate?

The proper translation depends on the meaning of the Greek phrase γεννηθῆναι ἀνωθεν (*gennethe anothēn*), which is found only in John 3:3-7. The first term, γεννηθῆναι (*gennethe*) is "to be born," but the meaning of the second term, ἀνωθεν (*anothēn*), is more elusive. It is found in other passages of Scripture with both meanings:

¹²⁹²Horton M. S. Traditional Reformed View // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. Justification: Five views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle Edition, 1102.

¹²⁹³Packer J. I. Regeneration // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1000-1001.

¹²⁹⁴Rightmire R. D. Union with Christ // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 789.

¹²⁹⁵Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 799.

¹²⁹⁶Packer J. I. Regeneration // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1000.

“from above” (Matt 27:51), and “again” (Gal 4:9). Peter’s term ἀναγεννάω (*anagennao*) in 1 Peter 1:3, 23, which translates “regenerate,” can have the same two connotations.

Paul’s reference to regeneration in Titus 3:5, though, may shed light on the question of translating John’s phrase γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (*gennethe anothēn*). Paul employs the term παλιγγενεσία (*paliggenesia*): “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration (παλιγγενεσία) and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This term consists of two parts: παλιν (*palin*), i.e., “again,” and γένεσις (*genesis*), i.e., “birth.” This example inclines us to translate γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν (*gennethe anothēn*) in John 3:3-7 as “born again.”¹²⁹⁷

We can confirm this conclusion by examining Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter 3. When Jesus stated, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” Nicodemus inquired, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Based on Nicodemus’ reaction to Jesus’ words, it is clear that Jesus meant “born again.” We also find confirmation in the oft-repeated New Testament concept of “new life” in Christ. This would imply that believers have experienced a new birth

Other designations express the idea of regeneration or new birth as well. The Bible speaks of the “new heart” (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Jer 24:7), the “law written on the heart” (Jer 31:33), the “new creation,” (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), the “new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), “receiving the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13; 6:19; Rom 8:9), and “becoming a child” (Lk 18:17; 1 Pet 2:2).¹²⁹⁸ The apostle John typically uses the expression “born of God” (Jn 1:13; 1 Jn 3:9; 4:7; 5:1-18).¹²⁹⁹ As we see from this list, the word “heart” is often associated with regeneration since it is the driving force for human life.¹³⁰⁰

We must draw a distinction between “regeneration” and “adoption,” which Paul prefers. The idea of regeneration concerns life transformation by the Holy Spirit as He begins His work of sanctification. “Adoption,” however, concerns a person’s status before God in Christ and the benefits that result from that position. We have already discussed the theme of adoption in chapter 10.

According to Christ’s teaching, rebirth is necessary for salvation: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5).¹³⁰¹ It is important to observe that Jesus did not speak of the necessity of rebirth to a so-called “sinner,” but to a religious leader – Nicodemus. Thus, as Nuelsen writes, “Even the most punctilious observers of the law are dead and therefore unable to meet the demands of God.”¹³⁰²

The Bible teaches that people are sinful by nature. Without an experience of spiritual renewal, no one can submit to the Lord (Rom 8:7-8). Whitefield comments that in order to live in a heavenly dwelling, one must have a heavenly nature. He considers an unbeliever simply attempting to lead a moral lifestyle to be inadequate. Moral living must spring from “the principle of a new nature.”¹³⁰³ Even Paul could not please God in the “flesh”:

¹²⁹⁷In Greek literature, this term is used to describe the renewal of the earth. It also referred to faith in reincarnation. Josephus employed it in discussing Israel’s restoration after the Babylonian captivity. In the Gospels, it refers to the millennial reign of Messiah (Nuelsen H. L. Regeneration // Bromiley G W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 67-68; Burkardt H. The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978. – P. 17).

¹²⁹⁸Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 367; Nuelsen, v. 4, p. 69.

¹²⁹⁹Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000.

¹³⁰⁰Faust S. D. Regeneration. – Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1902. – P. 57.

¹³⁰¹Hoch shares an interesting observation about Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus. In John 3:7, we encounter second person pronouns of both singular and plural number: μὴ θαυμάσῃς ὅτι εἶπόν σοι· δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν. In this way, we see that all people need the rebirth, not just Nicodemus (Hoch C. B. Jr. New Birth // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996. – P. 558).

¹³⁰²Nuelsen, v. 4, p. 68.

¹³⁰³Whitefield G. The Nature and Necessity of our Regeneration or New Birth in Christ Jesus // Smith T. L. Wesley & Whitefield on the New Birth. – Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press; Zondervan, 1986. – P. 71-75.

If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ (Phil 3:4-7).

Faust correctly states that although the actual objective experience of regeneration is the same for all, subjectively people's perception of the experience may differ. Some receive it with great emotion, others less so. Yet, all true experiences of regeneration lead to a progressive transformation of the individual, that is, "sanctification."¹³⁰⁴

Hoch rightly claims that, although regeneration initiates the process of sanctification, we must not conclude from this that regeneration itself is a process. Citing Jesus' words "born again" (Jn 3:3-7), Hoch, together with Packer, notes that we encounter here the Greek verb tenses "aorist" and "perfect," which refer to a momentary event.¹³⁰⁵ If we compare regeneration with natural birth, it become obvious that they both occur in a moment of time.¹³⁰⁶ Burkardt affirms that the new birth is an unrepeatable, historical beginning of a new life.¹³⁰⁷

B. Doctrine of Regeneration in Church History

The Early Church did not possess a clear doctrinal formulation for regeneration.¹³⁰⁸ From its earliest years, the post-apostolic Church identified water baptism as the beginning of the Christian life. During water baptism, the recipient supposedly experiences forgiveness of sins and receives grace to enable them to live the Christian life. The newly baptized receive a "new start" on life.

Augustine was the first to suggest that only by virtue of God's grace could a sinner turn to the Lord. However, Augustine did not equate this grace for conversion with regeneration itself. Later, followers of Calvin made this association, also calling this conversion-effecting grace "God's effectual calling." They compared the new birth with seed sown in the person's heart, from which repentance and faith spring forth. Exponents of Arminianism, on the contrary, hold that regeneration follows conversion. We will return to this discussion later.

Liberal theology created a different approach to the new birth altogether. In this school of thought, regeneration does not involve any supernatural impartation of grace. "Regeneration" is simply reforming one's life by means of self-effort. Some theorize that every individual has a "divine spark" that he or she must develop.¹³⁰⁹ Liberals look not only for the reformation of individuals, but of all society. Karl Barth and Otto Weber view regeneration not as personal renewal but the restoration of all creation.¹³¹⁰

C. Mechanism of Regeneration

What exactly occurs during the experience of spiritual rebirth? What changes occur in the born-again individual? Two main views are voiced. The first position posits that an actual change occurs in the makeup of human nature. Through regeneration, the people receive "divine life" in their spirits and in this way become

¹³⁰⁴Faust, p. 49-57.

¹³⁰⁵Hoch, p. 558; Packer, *Regeneration*, p. 1000.

¹³⁰⁶Luther held a different view – the Christian life is a continuous new birth (Burkardt H. *The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978. – P. 11). Here, Luther is confusing regeneration and sanctification.

¹³⁰⁷Burkardt, p. 29.

¹³⁰⁸Packer, *Regeneration*, p. 1001; Bromiley G. W. *Regeneration* // Bromiley G W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979–1988. – V. 4. – P. 70.

¹³⁰⁹Best W. E. *Regeneration and Conversion*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975. – P. 15.

¹³¹⁰Burkardt, p. 14-15.

“new creatures” is Christ (1 Cor 5:17) and partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). They are now “one spirit with the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17).

Adherents of the theosis teaching (see chapter 8) equate this “divine life” with God’s so-called “uncreated energies” that supposedly interpenetrate the believer’s soul and deify it. Yet, this renewal occurs only in human *nature*, not in the individual *personality*. This is because in His passion, Jesus took upon Himself “general human nature,” not each individual person. The renewal of the personality occurs by a different mechanism (see discussion in chapter 11).¹³¹¹

This first view in general, proposes that this “divine life” permeates the spirit and becomes part of the individual’s essence. As a result, the person’s spirit becomes perfected. Some even embrace the more extreme position that this infusion of divine life causes the human spirit to become divine (or deified). Consequently, it is thought that the “fruit of the Spirit” that Paul speaks of in Galatians 5:22-23 are, in fact, fruit of the reborn human spirit.

Smedes also believes that we receive the “the divine-human life of Christ.” Yet, he qualifies that nothing is “added” to the human constitution, but rather we are dealing with “more like a power that pushes the soul upward on the ladder of being.”¹³¹²

A well-known supporter of this theory is Kenneth E. Hagin. He teaches that people are basically spirit beings that have a soul and live in a body. Before the rebirth, people have a satanic nature (Jn 8:44). After the rebirth, they possess God’s nature: “The nature of God is within our spirits.”¹³¹³ Regeneration occurs exclusively in a person’s spirit: “In the New Birth, our spirits are recreated.”¹³¹⁴ The result is union with God: “We are one with Christ. Our spirits are one with Him.”¹³¹⁵

Hagin continues, “The new birth is a real incarnation.... (We are) as much sons and daughters of God as Jesus.”¹³¹⁶ He also writes,

*Jesus was first divine, and then He was human. So He was in the flesh a divine-human being. I was first human, and so were you, but I was born of God, and so I became a human-divine being! God is living in us!*¹³¹⁷

The rival understanding to the view described above claims that regeneration consists in receiving the person of the Holy Spirit and the effect His presence and activity has on the individual. The newly reborn person under the influence of the indwelling Spirit obtains new perspectives, new relationships, new ways of thinking, new direction in life, and new behavior patterns. In this view, the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23 are not the fruit of the human spirit, but of the Holy Spirit through the believer.

Mueller supports this variant: “Conversion is not a *substantial change*, that is, not the creation of a new essence of the soul..., but the complete transformation of the soul, or the creation of new qualities in man.”¹³¹⁸ Similarly, Best affirms, “The new birth is not the removal of anything from the sinner, neither the changing of anything within the depraved person; it is the impartation of the principle of the spiritual life to the elect.”¹³¹⁹ In the words of Faust, “The mind is to be illuminated, the eyes of the understanding opened, the heart renewed, the will conquered, and the man made willing.”¹³²⁰ Dickason adds his confirmation:

¹³¹¹Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 30.

¹³¹²Smedes L. B. *Union with Christ*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 116-119.

¹³¹³Hagin K. E. *The New Birth*. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1975. – P. 28.

¹³¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹³¹⁶Hagin K. *Zoe: The God Kind of Life*, p. 40.

¹³¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹³¹⁸Mueller D. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 339.

¹³¹⁹Best, p. 58.

¹³²⁰Faust, p. 54.

The new birth actually creates within the believer a renewal of the moral base of his whole person that allows him to exercise his reason, emotion, and will in harmony with God as he yields to the indwelling Holy Spirit, who created him new.¹³²¹

We may cite other respected authors in support. George Whitehead taught that through the new birth, we are “altered as to the qualities and tempers of our minds,” but the soul remains “the same as to essence.”¹³²² Hoch writes that regeneration “renews the believer’s intellect, sensibility, and will to enable that person to enter the kingdom of God and to do good works.”¹³²³

Pink also agrees that regeneration involves a change in the direction of a person’s life: “No new faculties are created, rather are his original faculties enriched, ennobled, and empowered.”¹³²⁴ Regeneration effects change not in one aspect of the human constitution alone (i.e., the spirit), but in the entire person. The reborn individual becomes a new creature not “in respect of his essence, but in his views, his desires, his aspirations, his habits.”¹³²⁵ This is called “new birth” because “it is the gateway into a new world, the beginning of an entirely new experience.”¹³²⁶

Returning to the question of whether Galatians 5:22-23 and similar passages refer to the fruit of the human spirit or the Spirit of God, we must recognize that the Greek term πνεῦμα (*pneuma*), which can be translated “spirit” or “Spirit,” is always written in the New Testament without the capital letter. We determine the best translation based on contextual and theological considerations.

In the entire epistle to the Galatians, there is only passage where the word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) clearly refers to the human spirit (Gal 6:18), and it is found there in Paul’s typical parting words. Many other passages in this epistle, though, clearly refer to the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2-5; 3:14; 4:6). We see the same in Romans 8. Therefore, we are safe to assume that in Galatians chapter 5, Paul is continuing on the theme of the work of God’s Holy Spirit. The Spirit manifests His divine nature through us, producing the fruit of the Spirit. It is the fruit of His work, not ours.

Furthermore, the contrast between “flesh” and “spirit” in such contexts also supports the variant “Holy Spirit.” Our interpretation here runs contrary to the Greek view that connects “flesh” with “body” (see below). The contrast in Scripture is not between the human spirit and the human body, but between the sin principle in people and life in the Holy Spirit.

Other factors count against the “impartation of divine life” view of regeneration. If the reborn spirit is divine, then one may consider the born-again human a divine being, or a “god.” We soundly refute this idea in chapter 7 of this volume. Moreover, such a teaching leads to developing an attitude of independence from God. If the human spirit is able to produce fruit on its own, then why do we need a continual dependence on the Spirit?

Concerning the interpretation of John 3:3-6, it is misguided to teach that the phrase “that what is born of the Spirit is spirit” refers to the birth of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit. The word “spirit” here likely refers to the “spiritual perception” or “receptivity” of the born again individual that is obtained through the new birth.

Moreover, some proponents of the “divine life” theory propose that the spirit of an unbeliever is dead. It comes to life only at the time of regeneration. Yet, they are mistaken here. Both believers and unbelievers have

¹³²¹Dickason C. F. *Demon Possession and the Christian*. – Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. – P. 137.

¹³²²Whitefield, *Nature and Necessity*, p. 68.

¹³²³Hoch, p. 558.

¹³²⁴Pink A. W. *Regeneration or the New Birth*. – Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications. – P. 18.

¹³²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹³²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 21.

an active spirit. The Old Testament testifies of the presence and activity of the human spirit in both believers and unbelievers.¹³²⁷

When the New Testament speaks of unbelievers being “dead,” what is meant is not that they lack a viable spirit, but that they are dead (that is, unresponsive) to God. They have a spirit, but it is not open to God or directed to Him. In this regard, Pink rightly states that spiritual death means that a person lacks the ability to properly use his members in relation to God.¹³²⁸

In refutation of this theory, we also call attention to its resonance with the Greek philosophical worldview, which likely serves as its source. The Greeks of antiquity divided the human constitution into two parts: soul and body. The first element contains a “divine spark.” In it dwells the “logos.” The soul is the “real person.” The body is a “prison” for the soul.¹³²⁹

So then, this teaching advises deliverance from dependence on the body in order to attain to true spirituality and actualize the potential of the soul. Although exponents of this theory do not necessarily advocate abusing the body, enough common factors exist between these systems to recognize that one has borrowed from the other.

We also take into consideration that the Bible reveals the need for believers’ spirits to undergo sanctification. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, we read, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The spirit of a born again person is still anticipating perfection, along with the soul and body. Paul speaks of this again in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete...».

Defenders of the “divine life” theory also appeal to 2 Corinthians 5:17, considering that the human spirit alone experiences the “new creation.” Consequently, the spirit, as a “new creature in Christ,” is now perfect. However, this passage nowhere refers to the human spirit. It does not say, “the spirit of a believer is a new creature,” but rather, “If anyone is in Christ, {he is} a new creature.” Paul is referring to believers’ new status in Christ. “In Christ,” the believer is already perfected in spirit, soul, and body. This positional status is progressively actualized in the experience of believers through the process of sanctification.

Concerning the text in 1 Corinthians 6:17, the phrase “joins himself (to the Lord),” translates *κολλωμένος* (*kollomenos*) and refers in verse 16 to a man’s relationship with a harlot. When a man “joins himself” sexually to a harlot, then enter into an intimate relationship, so much so that they are regarded as “one flesh.” Yet, they remain separate individuals. There is no merging of their natures. In a similar fashion, when people “join themselves” to the Lord, they enter into close fellowship with Him in the Spirit to the degree that we may speak of them as “one spirit.” Yet again, there is no merging of natures. Humans remain humans, and God remains God. Finally, see chapter 7 on “Deification” of a discussion of the interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4, which claims that we are “partakers of the divine nature”.

D. Results of Regeneration

As a result of the new birth, believers can expect the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and assistance from Him. Correspondingly, some commentators speak of “marks” of the genuine experience of regeneration. The apostle John’s teaching supports this idea when he details how truly born-again Christians conduct themselves in the word: in righteousness (1 Jn 2:29), in holiness (1 Jn 3:9), and in love (1 Jn 4:7).¹³³⁰ John Wesley identified the “marks” of the Spirit as faith, victory over sin, peace, as well as love.¹³³¹ Let us investigate further what the Spirit does in our lives as Christians.

¹³²⁷See Gen 41:8; Ex 35:21; Deut 2:30; Ps 145:4; Prov 15:4,13; 16:32; 18:14; Ecc 12:3.

¹³²⁸Pink, p. 17.

¹³²⁹Lane T. A Concise History of Christian Thought. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 7.

¹³³⁰Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000.

¹³³¹Wesley J. The Marks of the New Birth // Smith T. L. Wesley & Whitefield on the New Birth. – Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press; Zondervan, 1986. – P. 107-120.

1. Spiritual Fruit

The Spirit's most fundamental work is to bear spiritual fruit. Peter asserts that spiritual fruit comes as a result of the born again experience: "...fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again" (1 Pet 1:22-23). So then, those born of God bear the fruit of love. In his second epistle, Peter lists other fruit: "moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Pet 1:5-8).

The most well-known delineation of the fruit of the Spirit comes from Paul's epistle to the Galatians: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). It is remarkable to compare the list in Galatians 5:22-23 with Jesus' Great Commandment in Mark 12:30-31: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This commandment calls us to love God, others, and self. Correspondingly, we can divide the nine fruits of the Spirit into the same categories: spiritual fruit expressing love for God, spiritual fruit expressing love to others, and spiritual fruit expressing love to oneself.

The fruits pertaining to God are "goodness," "faithfulness," and "self-control." "Goodness" translates the Greek term ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*).¹³³² Aside from Galatians 5:22-23, we encounter this word another three times. In Ephesians 5:8-9, it is associated with such ideas as "righteousness" and "truth." The connotation, then, is proper behavior before the Lord. Its usage in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 implies the same. The reference in Romans 15:14 is less clear – whether ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*) connotes good behavior or graciousness to others. All things considered, we assign to ἀγαθωσύνη (*agathosune*) in Galatians 5 the meaning "proper behavior before God." This term expresses love to God through obedience to Him.

The next item in this list describing love for God is πίστις (*pistis*), which is typically translated "faith," but can also mean "faithfulness."¹³³³ The idea of "faith" as "trust" would be foreign to a list of Christian virtues. Therefore, we prefer the rendering "faithfulness." Although faithfulness is a trait that can be expressed toward people as well, it finds its highest expression in relation to God. Faithfulness is when we continue to do what is right before Him.

The Greek term ἐγκράτεια (*enkrateia*) is well translated "self-control" (see 2 Pet 1:6; 1 Cor 7:9; Tit 1:8).¹³³⁴ The sense of the word is that believers refrain from behavior that is not pleasing to the Lord. In summary, then, the spiritual fruits relating to God are goodness, faithfulness, and self-control, that is, proper behavior before the Lord, continuing to behave properly, and abstaining from wrong behavior.

The fruits that relate to other people in Galatians 5:22-23 are kindness, gentleness, and patience. The word translated "gentleness," πραΰτης (*prautes*), means "the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, *gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.*"¹³³⁵ This reflects our primary attitude toward others – walking in humility and showing respect and consideration for others.

The word "kindness" translates the Greek χρηστότης (*chrestotes*). Sometimes χρηστότης (*chrestotes*) refers to proper behavior (1 Cor 15:33; Rom 3:12), but it more frequently indicates "kindness" or "generosity" (2 Cor 6:6; Col 3:12; Rom 2:4; 11:22; Tit 3:4). This virtue especially applies to those in need, to whom believers can show special attention.

¹³³²Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 4 (Abbreviated BDAG); Ботнарь Е. Были ли святые ВЗ возрождены? // Студенческий реферат. – ETC, 2005.

¹³³³Ibid., p. 818-820.

¹³³⁴BDAG, p. 274.

¹³³⁵Ibid., p. 861. See Tit 3:2; Jam 1:21; 3:13; 1 Pet 3:4, 15; Matt 5:5; 21:5; 11:29; Gal 6:1; Col 3:12; 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 10:1; Eph 4:2; 2 Tim 2:25.

The final term, “patience,” comes from the Greek μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*).¹³³⁶ This type of behavior is especially called upon when someone offends or irritates us. Considering the description of love that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, it is interesting to note that μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*) and χρηστότης (*chrestotes*), are listed here as well in Galatians 5:22-23.

In summary, the Holy Spirit produces in the Christian the virtues of πραΰτης (*prautes*), i.e., gentleness or respect, χρηστότης (*chrestotes*), i.e., kindness, and μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*), i.e., patience. “Gentleness” or “respect” describes our basic approach and attitude of respect toward all people. “Kindness” applies especially to those in need. “Patience” is called upon when others fall short of our expectations. Love embraces all these qualities, seeking the welfare of others in every sense.

The final spiritual fruit to comment on relate to the Christian himself or herself, namely “joy” (χαρά - *chara*) and “peace” (εἰρήνη - *eirene*). Peace and joy, produced by the Holy Spirit, can be the believer’s constant possession independent of circumstances (Phil 4:4; Acts 13:52; Col 3:15) since the Spirit produces them in the heart (Rom 14:17). Correspondingly, the book of Acts relates, “The disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52), and Paul prays for the Thessalonians, “May the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance” (2 Thes 3:16).

We also recognize that one could expand this scheme to apply certain fruits to other categories as well. Self-control, for example, has application to self and others, and peace can apply to one’s relationship to God and others. The categories created above can be helpful, but are not meant to be limiting.

2. Fellowship with God

Likely, the most glorious aspect of the Spirit’s indwelling is that believers can enjoy continual contact and fellowship with God. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

The Greek term κοινωνία (*koinonia*), which is translated “fellowship,” has the following denotations:¹³³⁷

1. association, fellowship, close relationship
2. generosity
3. sign of friendship
4. participation

The first meaning best corresponds to Paul’s use in 2 Corinthians 13:13. Believers may expect this type of relationship with the Holy Spirit. In connection with this, the teaching of the Orthodox monk Symeon the New Theologian is thought provoking. He feels that a genuine experience with the Spirit should be characterized by a strong inner awareness of His presence and action.¹³³⁸ The well-known, 18th-century English evangelist George Whitefield affirmed the same.¹³³⁹ Although the claim that the new-birth experience is “always” accompanied by such a strong awareness of God’s presence may be a bit exaggerated, nonetheless these testimonies motivate us to seek a closer walk with the Spirit and consciousness of His presence in us.

3. Aid in Prayer

¹³³⁶Ibid. See Rom 2:4; 9:22; 2 Cor 6:6; 1 Thes 5:14; 2 Tim 3:10; 4:2; 1 Pet 3:20; Gal 5:22; 1 Cor 13:4; 2 Pet 3:9; Heb 6:15; Jam 5:7-8.

¹³³⁷BDAG, p. 552-553.

¹³³⁸Mantzaridis G. I. The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 49.

¹³³⁹Whitefield, G. The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of All Believers // Smith T. L. Wesley & Whitefield on the New Birth. – Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press; Zondervan, 1986. – P. 96.

The Bible testifies of the Spirit's support in the believer's prayer life. Thanks to the presence of God's Spirit, believers can pray effectively. Ephesians 2:18 informs us that through the Spirit, we have access to the Father.

The Spirit aids in prayer not only when believers pray in their own language, but He also gives supernatural enablement to pray in unknown tongues. According to Scripture, those who speak in tongues speak to God (1 Cor 14:2), praise Him (1 Cor 14:16-17), and at the same time, edify themselves (1 Cor 14:4). When Jude speaks of "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20), it is hard to decipher his meaning. It could refer to prayer in known tongues, or possibly in unknown tongues.

We give special attention to Romans 8:26: "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for {us} with groanings too deep for words." Key to interpreting this verse is the meaning of the final two terms, στεναγμός (*stenagmos*), i.e., "groanings," and ἀλάητος (*alaetos*), i.e., "too deep for words."

The word ἀλάητος (*alaetos*) consists of two parts: the verb λαλέω (*laleo*), "speak," and the negative particle "a." This indicates that what the Spirit expresses is non-verbal. The word στεναγμός (*stenagmos*) is well translated "groanings."¹³⁴⁰ When believers pray, then, the Spirit may groan within them, expressing prayer on a very deep level. The verse does not specify whether the person in prayer participates in this type of intercession or not. Some feel that the verse implies that we do participate in some way.

4. Leadership of the Holy Spirit

Believers are led by the Holy Spirit. We can highlight two aspects of the Spirit's leading. He directs in matters of Christian ministry (Acts 8:29; 10:19-20; 11:12; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-7; 20:22-23) and in the ethical life of the Christian (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:16). In this section, we will focus attention on the first aspect. The ethical aspect was highlighted in the section on spiritual fruit.

The Spirit's direction and guidance has a long history among God's people, who sought His counsel in difficult times, such as: during war (1 Chr 14:10-14; Judg 20:18-28; 1 Kin 22:5-7; 2 Sam 5:19-23), famine (2 Sam 21:1), and persecution (2 Sam 2:1; Jer 42:2-3). Those who did not ask God's counsel could encounter tragic results (Josh 9:14ff), along with those who did not take His advice (2 Chr 35:20-23).

After the exodus from Egypt, God directed Israel as a nation by means of a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Neh 9:12). He also gave direction to specific individuals as well. He often spoke to Israel's prophets and leaders. He also gave guidance through angels and dreams. 1 Samuel 28:6 lists several methods God employed: dreams, prophets, and Urim.

The Old Testament records many instances where God gave guidance through Urim or casting lots. By casting lots, Joshua divided the land of Canaan (Josh 16, 18), the transgression of Achan was discovered (Josh 7:14-18), the priests received their assignments (1 Chr 25:8; 26:12-16), people were appointed to live in Jerusalem (Neh 11), etc. The book of Proverbs applauds this system: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh" (Prov 16:33; cf. 18:18).

Interestingly, the New Testament recounts only one instance of casting lots – in the selection of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot among the Twelve (Acts 1:24-26). After the Spirit descended on the disciples at the day of Pentecost, we do not witness another time when believers cast lots. We may safely assume that since the Spirit has come, this practice is no longer appropriate.

The Spirit's leading in the book of Acts, in fact, is more internal. The indwelling Spirit directed people personally. For example, at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council, the participants wrote, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials...". Phillip was led by the Spirit in his meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-29). Paul was "bound by the Spirit" to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). The Spirit once forbade him to preach in Asia (Acts 16:6-7).

¹³⁴⁰See Acts 7:34; Mk 7:34; 2 Cor 5:2, 4; Heb 13:17; Jam 5:9.

The Old Testament also testifies of this internal leading by God's Spirit. God put it into Nehemiah's heart to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (Neh 2:12; 7:5), stirred Moses' heart to visit the Israelites (Acts 7:23), and taught David in the night (Ps 16:7).

There are also New Testament examples of God leading by more demonstrative means, namely, through dreams (Acts 16:9), visions (Acts 9:10-12; 10:10-16), and angels (Acts 27:23-24). Also notable is that God prophetically confirmed Barnabas and Saul's call to apostolic ministry (Acts 13:2).¹³⁴¹ Later in his ministry, God warned Paul through other believers about the sufferings that awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).

We also note in the Old Testament that God often confirmed His direction in supernatural ways. He did so for: Abraham's servant (Gen 24:12-14), Joshua (Josh 2:23-24), Ahaz (Isa 7:11-13), Saul (1 Sam 10:2-7), Samuel (1 Sam 10:20-21), Jonathan (1 Sam 14:8-12), Josiah (2 Chr 34:20-25), and, of course, Gideon (Judg 6).

5. Comfort in Suffering

When Christians suffer, God the Holy Spirit provides supernatural comfort (2 Cor 1:3-4). It is supernatural in the sense that even if the circumstances do not change for the better, nonetheless the indwelling Spirit comforts and strengthens. A believer's mood is not dependent on circumstances, but on the comforting presence of God's Spirit.

The psalmist expresses this thought well: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar {and} foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High (Ps 46:1-4). The "river" likely symbolizes the activity of the Holy Spirit.

6. Assurance of Salvation

Those who have the Spirit have an internal assurance of their salvation. This work of assurance has two aspects. First, the Spirit's production of fruit in Christians' lives helps them see that they are truly the Lord's people (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:22; 1 Jn 4:13). Second, the Spirit gives an inner witness to believers, that is, a subjective confidence confirming their status as Christians (Rom 8:16).

7. Insight into the Word

The Holy Spirit is our teacher. The apostle John speaks of Him, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things..." (1 Jn 2:27). This fulfills Jesus' promise that the Spirit "will teach you all things" (Jn 14:26) and "guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13).¹³⁴²

Yahweh was the source of truth for His Old Testament people as well: "I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go" (Isa 48:17). He makes known "the path of life" (Ps 16:11), "reveals the profound and hidden things" (Dan 2:22), and "teaches the humble His way" (Ps 25:9). He promises His people, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you" (Ps 32:8), and, "Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer 33:3).

Why do we need the Spirit's help in understanding the Word? First, the Bible reveals that we are fallen people with distorted minds (see Eph 4:17-18; Rom 12:2). Although we are now in Christ, our minds are still undergoing the process of renewal by the Holy Spirit.

¹³⁴¹Note that God had already personally called Saul and Barnabas, and that prophecy simply confirmed that calling.

¹³⁴²These promises find fulfillment, first of all, in Jesus' apostles in their capacity of inspired teachers.

Moreover, the Scriptures testify that God's Word is spiritual (1 Cor 2:12-13; Jn 6:63; Lk 24:45). This means that those who attempt to study the Word without the leading of the Spirit will never fully grasp its meaning and may well err in its interpretation. Yet, God promises that the Spirit will guide us into truth. The Spirit renews our minds to properly perceive God's truth. One must have spiritual perceptivity to properly handle the Lord's revelation. This is the significance of Jesus' saying: "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matt 13:9; 11:15; Rev chps. 2, 3).

It is important to understand that the Holy Spirit does not reveal new truths to us that are not already in the Bible. Rather, He opens the eyes of our heart to understand what is written there. Erickson correctly states,

There is an understanding of the text that cannot be obtained simply through intellectual study, but which the Holy Spirit gives in illumination... The role of the Holy Spirit is not to convey new information that is not in the biblical text. Rather, the Spirit gives insight or understanding of the meaning that is in the biblical text, although it may not always be possible to unpack that meaning fully using exegetical methodology.¹³⁴³

Fram adds, "Nor does the Spirit give us power to transcend reason altogether."¹³⁴⁴ Goldingay concurs, "Interwoven with the active analytic work of my mind is a periodic receiving of a spark of insight on the actual subject matter of the text I am wrestling with."¹³⁴⁵

How can we engage with the Spirit in this endeavor? First, the Bible urges us to pray and request guidance (Ps 119:18; Eph 1:16-19; 1 Kin 3:9). Second, upon completion of our exegetical research, we must reflect or mediate on the Word, relying on the Spirit to give insight. Scripture speaks of the value of meditation on the Word:

- This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it (Josh 1:8).
- I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation (Ps 119:99).
- Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything (2 Tim 2:7).

When students of Scripture sincerely seek the Spirit's help, He will guide them in their understanding. When the Spirit gives special insight, the interpreter may experience an inner confirmation that the Spirit is speaking. We observe an example of this in Luke 24:32: "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" It is important to note, though, that such an inner conviction is not the best indicator of true spiritual illumination from the Spirit, but rather the correspondence of one's interpretation with the total witness of Scripture on the topic. Henry rightly comments,

Yet unless priority is given to the objectively inspired content of Scripture, Spirit-illumination readily gives way to private fantasy and mysticism. The Spirit illumines persons by reiterating the truth of the scriptural revelation and bearing witness to Jesus Christ. Spirit-illumination centers in the interpretation of the literal grammatical sense of Spirit-breathed Scripture.¹³⁴⁶

When an interpreter, who has truly heard from the Spirit, gives out his or her teaching, others in the Body of Christ should be able to recognize and confirm that truth as well. It is curious to note that, although the

¹³⁴³Erickson M. *Evangelical interpretation*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993. – P. 50-52.

¹³⁴⁴Frame J. M. *The Spirit and the Scriptures* // Carson D. A., Woodbridge J. D. *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986. – P. 232.

¹³⁴⁵Goldingay J. *Models for Interpretation of Scripture*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995. – P. 188.

¹³⁴⁶Henry C. F. H. *God, Revelation, and Authority*. – Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999. – V. 2. – P. 15.

enemies of Jesus and the disciples opposed their teaching, they were not able to refute it, thereby indirectly confirming its validity (see Matt 22:46; Lk 2:46-47; 20:26, 39-40; 21:14-15; Acts 4:13; 6:8-10). Packer agrees that one can verify the insights given by the Spirit: "This Spirit-given understanding comes by a rational process that can be stated, analyzed, and tested at each point."¹³⁴⁷

8. Power for Living

Finally, we must not neglect to comment that the Holy Spirit provides power to live the Christian life. In a later chapter, we will look at the power of the Spirit for effective ministry. Yet, the Spirit is also active in the everyday life of believers, enabling them to do the will of the Lord.

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul prays that the church would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience" (Col 1:11). In one of his prison epistles, Paul expresses his confidence in the "provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" to aid him in getting through his trials for the Lord (Phil 1:19). Later, he boldly claims, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).

E. Receiving the New Birth

Two rival theories exist about how an individual receives the new birth. Calvinists teach that a person is reborn before their actual conversion and turns to Christ in the power of that new birth.¹³⁴⁸ They reason that conversion must be completely God's work, since people cannot repent or believe, that is, fulfill the requirements for salvation, on their own. Several Scriptures speak of God's initiative in salvation. Ephesians 2:8 states that faith is a gift of God (also see Phil 1:29; Heb 12:2; Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:9). Similarly, 2 Timothy 2:25, Acts 11:18, and Acts 5:31 reveal that God gives repentance.¹³⁴⁹

Best offers the following evidence.¹³⁵⁰ He points to the fact that unbelievers cannot perceive or understand spiritual things: "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor 2:14). They are "foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Cor 1:18). The darkness does not "comprehend" the Light (Jn 1:5). God enables people to receive the Word by first giving them the new birth. He did this, for example, when He "opened (Lydia's) heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14) and "shone in our hearts" so that we believed (2 Cor 4:6). He prepares the soil to receive the gospel (Matt 13:18-23). Just as in His work of creation, God takes the initiative to create new life in the hearts of the elect.

Moreover, God created us in Christ (Eph 2:10) and made us alive together with Him (Eph 2:5). He gives us understanding (1 Jn 5:20), just as He enlightened Peter (Matt 16:17). In His light (understood as regeneration), we see light (Ps 36:9). In addition, Best interprets the following words in a spiritual sense: "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made both of them" (Prov 20:12). Finally, Best sees in John 3:8 a comparison of the activity of the Spirit with the action of the wind. The Spirit's work is "secret, creative, and immediate,"¹³⁵¹ that is, the recipient is not aware that it is taking place. Ezekiel similarly writes about the "breath from the four winds" (Ezek 37:9) that brings dead bones to life.

On the other hand, according to the Arminian understanding, people turn to Christ before regeneration, and the latter is the result of the former. So then, at the moment when an individual believes in Christ, the Holy

¹³⁴⁷Packer J. I. *Infallible Scriptures and the Role of Hermeneutics* // Carson D. A., Woodbridge J. D. *Scripture and Truth*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992. – P. 337.

¹³⁴⁸Pecota D. *The Saving Work of Christ* // Horton S. M. *Systematic Theology*. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 397; Thiessen, p. 352; Mueller, p. 336ff; Еленой Ботнари, *Student Paper*

¹³⁴⁹Shedd W. G. T. *Dogmatic Theology* // Gomes A. W., ed. – 3rd ed. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 2003. – P. 326.

¹³⁵⁰Best, p. 82-86.

¹³⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 49.

Spirit enters the heart and seals it for salvation. In Paul's words, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13). Notice here that hearing the Word and believing in Christ precede the reception of the Spirit.

Peter taught the same. On the Day of Pentecost, he established the order: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).¹³⁵² He repeated this theme in his first epistle, stating that we have "born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, {that is,} through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). Here again, receiving the Word precedes regeneration. James confirms, "He brought us forth by the word of truth" (Jam 1:18).

How can we explain Ephesians 2:8, "saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God," from the Arminian point of view? The Greek pronoun translated "that" is in the neuter gender. The term "faith," however, stands in the feminine gender. Therefore, "that" does not refer to faith being the gift of God, but refers to the entire preceding sentence. "Salvation" is the gift of God that Paul is referring to.

According to 2 Timothy 2:25, God grants repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth. Yet, we respond that the individual must still respond to God's prompting to repent. In addition, the context speaks of other factors that condition someone's repentance, such as how one behaves toward those in need of repentance. For this reason, Paul instructs his protégé: "...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance." It appears that conversion depends on human factors as well.¹³⁵³

When Peter was giving account before the elders of the Jerusalem church about the happenings at Cornelius' house, the latter exclaimed in response, "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life" (Acts 11:18). The elders did not mean by this that God specifically chose certain Gentiles for salvation, but that now the gospel is available to all people, including Gentiles.

When considering the overall historical context of Acts 5:31, "a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel," the meaning is clear. Peter is not talking about predestination to eternal life, but that God grants forgiveness through His Son rather than through the sacrificial system.

Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil 1:29). This passage leaves the impression that God caused the Philippians to believe. Yet, Paul may have meant "the ability to believe."¹³⁵⁴ In other words, God grants individuals the opportunity to believe, but they decide for themselves whether or not to do so. This interpretation finds support in that this verse also speaks about being granted the opportunity to share in Christ suffering. In this latter case, the sufferings are not forced on the Church, but God's people voluntarily participate in them. Similarly, God does not coerce faith, but grants opportunity to voluntarily believe.

According to Romans 12:3, God gives to everyone the measure of faith. This context, however, is devoted to spiritual gifts. Thus, the faith mentioned here is not saving faith, but faith enabling one to operate in spiritual gifts. Also significant – the readers of this letter were already Christians, that is, they already possessed saving faith.

1 Corinthians 12:8-9 also claims that the Spirit gives faith. Yet again, Paul is teaching here about spiritual gifts. Faith in this context refers to a specific spiritual manifestation of power as the other items listed are as well, like prophecy, healings, etc. We also recall that the recipients of this instruction are already believers possessing saving faith.

¹³⁵²Shedd responds to this argument by claiming that Peter's words "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself" (Acts 2:39) indicate that repentance is possible only for those whom God regenerates at the moment that He calls them to salvation (Shedd, p. 772). Yet, Shedd's response does not overthrow the plain testimony of the text that repentance precedes the gift of the Spirit.

¹³⁵³Новик П. Студенческий реферат. Евангельская теологическая семинария. – Киев, 2005

¹³⁵⁴Pecota, p. 406.

Lutherans take the following view of regeneration and conversion. Mueller writes, “The right relation of faith to eternal election is this, that saving faith, wrought by the Holy Ghost, belongs into election as the *means* by which the object of election is accomplished.”¹³⁵⁵ In other words, faith precedes regeneration, yet it is conditioned by God’s election.

Although in the previous discussion, we defended the Arminian position that conversion precedes and is the condition for regeneration, we must nonetheless concur with Packer that the new birth, in a strict sense, is a work of “monergism.”¹³⁵⁶ This word means “one energy,” that is, although people must fulfill conditions to receive the new birth, God accomplishes the work of regeneration itself without human participation.

Another important facet of the question of receiving the new birth is the relation of regeneration to water baptism. Many of the Church Fathers and some present Christian denominations insist that people receive the new birth at the moment of baptism. Others, though, separate the two experiences. We discuss baptism in detail in chapter 22 of this volume.

The distinguished George Whitefield taught that people must put forward some effort to receive the new birth. He felt that those seeking this experience should “never cease watching, praying, and striving till he finds a real, inward, saving change wrought in his heart.”¹³⁵⁷ However, Whitefield’s description of the experience fails to correspond to the biblical witness. Paul, for example, taught that we receive the Holy Spirit by a single act of faith (Eph 1:13). Furthermore, he asked the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:2). Additionally, we see no example in Scripture where people sought the rebirth for an extended period of time. In the biblical narrative, people received the new birth at the moment that they believed in Christ.

Finally, all Christian confessions agree that at the time of regeneration, the Holy Spirit enters the hearts of new converts. Romans 8:9 confirms this: “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” According to this text, those who lack the Spirit are not Christians. The converse is also true: all true Christians have the indwelling Spirit.

F. Regeneration in the Old Testament

Many wonder whether the Old Testament saints were born again. What evidence exists to support that thesis? In Romans 9:4, Paul writes that the “adoption as sons” belonged to Israel. If Israel was adopted by God, it seems to follow that the Old Testament saints experienced the new birth. Moreover, God often spoke of Himself as the Father of Israel.¹³⁵⁸ Does this imply that regeneration was available in Old Testament times? Furthermore, although such references are rare, some texts do indicate that the Holy Spirit dwelt “within” individuals: in Joshua (Num 27:18), in the prophets (1 Pet 1:11), and in Daniel (Dan 4:6). However, the last example reflects the opinion of a Gentile king.

Adherents of this position also appeal to the good behavior of Old Testament saints. If they were not born again, then how did they live for Yahweh and serve Him so faithfully? In addition, in Saul’s case, after the Spirit descended on him, he was “changed into another man” (1 Sam 10:6).¹³⁵⁹ Additionally, in Psalm 51 David prays the Lord would create in him “a clean heart,” renew a “right spirit” within him, and not remove the Holy Spirit from him (Ps 51:10-11). Does this mean that David was reborn and had the Spirit dwelling in his heart?

¹³⁵⁵Mueller, p. 598.

¹³⁵⁶Packer, *Regeneration*, p. 1000.

¹³⁵⁷Whitefield, *Nature and Necessity*, p. 78.

¹³⁵⁸See Deut 14:1; 32:6, 19; 1 Chr 29:10; Ps 82:6; 103:13; Isa 1:2; 30:1, 9; 43:6; 45:11; 63:8, 16; 64:8; Jer 3:4, 19; 31:9; Hos 1:10; Mal 1:6; 2:10 (rus-baptist.narod.ru).

¹³⁵⁹Кремняк С. Были ли святые ВЗ возрождены? // Студенческий реферат. – ETC, 2005.

Jeremiah 24:7 creates the same impression, where Yahweh speaks to Jeremiah about the exiles returning from Babylon, “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am Yahweh.”¹³⁶⁰

Proponents of this view also note that in the Old Testament, Yahweh called His people to sincere repentance (Jer 4:1-4; Ezek 18:31; Ps 34:14).¹³⁶¹ Could such a repentance not lead to a new-birth experience? In addition, we recall Jesus words that without the new birth, one cannot be saved (Jn 3:3-5). Would this mean that all the Old Testaments saints perished, not having the new birth? In addition, when Jesus was discussing the new birth with Nicodemus, he reproved him for not already knowing about it: “Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?” (Jn 3:10). Jesus expected that Nicodemus already knew about regeneration from the Old Testament.¹³⁶²

Robertson contributes the following arguments.¹³⁶³ In the Old Testament, Yahweh calls people to circumcise their hearts (Jer 4:4; Deut 10:16). The second verse is especially significant in that the circumcision of the heart would enable God’s Old Testament people to “fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12). In addition, Robertson highlights passages in the Psalms where the Law is already in people’s hearts (Ps 37:31; 40:8). This corresponds to what Moses wrote, “The word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it” (Deut 30:14).

The contrary position on this question proposes that regeneration is available only under the New Covenant. When Paul speaks about the “adoption” of Israel in Romans 9:4, he is only pointing out the special, covenantal relationship that existed between Yahweh and His Old Testament people. Yet, they were not yet born again. The same explanation applies to God being the “Father” of Israel under the Old Covenant.

Moreover, in Romans 7 Paul contrasts life in the Spirit with life under the Law. Therefore, since Israel lived under the Law, they did not have the Spirit. They were still “slaves,” and not “sons” (Gal 4:1-7).¹³⁶⁴ Furthermore, Paul taught that we become new creatures “in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17). Old Testament believers did not enjoy that privileged position.¹³⁶⁵

A strong argument for the lack of regeneration under the Old Covenant is the existence of multiple predictions about the *future* coming of the new birth and the Holy Spirit:

- For I will pour out water on the thirsty {land} and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring and My blessing on your descendants; and they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water. This one will say, “I am Yahweh’s”; and that one will call on the name of Jacob; and another will write {on} his hand, “Belonging to Yahweh,” and will name Israel's name with honor (Isa 44:3-5).
- I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jer 31:33).
- I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always.... I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me (Jer 32:39-40).
- I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God (Ezek 11:19-20).
- Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Ezek 36:26-27).

¹³⁶⁰However, it is possible that this is an eschatological prediction, especially in light of Jeremiah 31:33 and 32:19-20.

¹³⁶¹Мышленник В. Были ли святые ВЗ возрождены? // Студенческий реферат. – ETC, 2005..

¹³⁶²Ботнар Е. Были ли святые ВЗ возрождены? // Студенческий реферат. – ETC, 2005.

¹³⁶³Robertson O. P. Covenants. – Norcross, GA: Great Commission Publishers, 1987. – P. 117.

¹³⁶⁴Ботнар.

¹³⁶⁵Кремняк С., Ботнар Е., Мышленник В. Были ли святые ВЗ возрождены? // Студенческий реферат. – ETC, 2005.

- I will heal their apostasy (Hos 14:4).¹³⁶⁶

It is unlikely that these prophecies were already fulfilled in the Old Testament period. The prophets spoke of this phenomenon as one that encompassed God's people *in their entirety*. The New Testament experience of rebirth is for each individual personally.¹³⁶⁷ Nuelsen comments that the Old Testament promises of regeneration "refer to the nation of Israel as such and to individuals only so far as they partake of the nation's blessings."¹³⁶⁸

Moreover, Moses speaks of a future time when "Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 30:6). This prediction was not fulfilled in the Old Testament. Through Jeremiah, God declared, "All the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart" (Jer 9:26).

We can conclude, then, that the prophetic promises of the new birth have two fulfillments. First, they refer to the regeneration of followers of Messiah in the New Testament Church. Second, they predict a still future, eschatological conversion of Israel.

The Psalms express this need for spiritual renewal in prayer:

- Revive us, and we will call upon Your name (Ps 80:18).
- Teach me Your way, O Yahweh; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name (Ps 86:11).
- Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it (Ps 119:35).
- Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me on level ground (Ps 143:10).

In the majority of Old Testament cases, the Spirit is not "in" individuals, but "on" them. The former designation refers to regeneration, while the latter indicates a more external empowerment by the Spirit of God.¹³⁶⁹ Even this empowering experience, though, was limited to only specially chosen individuals (see Num 11:29; Joel 2:28-29).

The words of Christ about the work of the Holy Spirit recorded in John are highly significant: "He abides with you and will be in you" (Jn 14:17). Here, we observe that the Spirit was not "in" the disciples. Jesus spoke of the Spirit's indwelling as a future experience. Therefore, they were not born again. Jesus also stated, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk 7:28)¹³⁷⁰. Possibly, New Testament believers are greater than John the Baptist because they have something John never possessed – the born again experience.

Later in John's Gospel, we learn that after His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Most likely, that was the moment of their spiritual regeneration. This agrees with 1 Peter 1:3 that the new birth is associated with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

All things considered, we are more persuaded by the view that the new birth was not yet available to God's Old Covenant people. Possibly, we can explain the faithfulness of the Old Testament saints by some kind of empowering by the Spirit, or by virtue of their faith.¹³⁷¹

¹³⁶⁶Nuelsen, Regeneration, v. 4, p. 68.

¹³⁶⁷Packer, Regeneration, p. 1000.

¹³⁶⁸Nuelsen, Regeneration, v. 4, p. 68. However, Nuelsen also recognizes that the latter prophets, as a rule, gave greater attention to the individual's personal relationship with the Lord.

¹³⁶⁹There are cases where we read that God put His Spirit "in Israel" (Isa 63:11; Hag 2:5), yet this means the Spirit's presence among the people as a whole.

¹³⁷⁰The King James Version of this verse reads, "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater *prophet* than John the Baptist," but it is based on inferior manuscripts.

¹³⁷¹Кремняк.

G. Warnings

We will conclude our examination of the new birth with some warnings from Scripture about how Christians must relate to the indwelling Spirit. We must not grieve Him (Eph 4:30; Isa 63:10; Ps 105:33), tempt Him (Acts 5:9), quench Him (1 Thes 5:19), offend Him (Heb 10:29), or resist Him (Acts 7:51).¹³⁷²

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¹³⁷²Thiessen, p. 144.

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## Chapter 15: Participation in Christ's Exaltation - Power

Based on our understanding of the believer's union with Christ (chp. 8), we affirm that because of our position "in Christ" we were made participants in His ascension and exaltation. The Savior's exaltation affords us certain benefits, which we will highlight in the following chapters, namely, miracle-working power for ministry and authority over all the powers of darkness.

### A. Ascension and Exaltation of Christ

After His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus spent 40 days with His followers, after which He ascended to heaven. Luke records this event: "While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven" (Lk 24:51), and, "After He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9).

The ascension of Jesus is also recorded in Mark 16:19, but many Bible scholars object to this passage being included in Mark's Gospel since we do not find it in the best Greek manuscripts. However, even without this testimony from Mark's Gospel, we have sufficient evidence to accept the historical veracity of Jesus' ascension to heaven.

After Christ's ascension, a momentous event occurred beyond the perception of the disciples – He sat down at the right hand of God the Father. Both Luke (Acts 2:33) and Paul (Eph 1:20; Rom 8:34) testify of this event. We call this the "exaltation" of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews adds his testimony as well (Heb 10:12).

Naturally, Jesus' exaltation to heaven resulted in Him being clothed with glory and dominion: "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9). In Peter's words, at that moment the Father appointed Jesus "Prince and Savior" (Acts 5:31).<sup>1373</sup>

The question arises as to the condition of Christ's resurrection body after His exaltation. When He was still among His disciples after His resurrection and before His ascension, they recognized Him as their Lord Jesus. Although His new body had special features foreign to our bodies at present, it still appeared to be a typical physical body. However, the book of Revelation provides us with a radically different picture of Christ in His glorified state (Rev 1:12-18). Did the apostle John merely see a vision of Jesus, or did he see the true condition of His glorified body?

In addition, Paul informed us that at the time the Church is caught up to meet the Lord, our bodies will be made like His glorious body (Phil 3:21). Does this mean that our bodies will be like Jesus' was before His ascension, or like that which John saw on Patmos? The Scriptures give us no more insight here.

The Orthodox scholar Sergei Bulgakov probed into the question of Jesus' resurrection body and concluded that between His resurrection and ascension, Jesus' body was in a "transitional" condition.<sup>1374</sup> He writes, "When the Lord appeared, He still belonged to this world, but at the same time, no longer belonged to this world."<sup>1375</sup> According to Bulgakov, at Jesus' resurrection He received a spiritual body that still "contained the marks of His saving sufferings on the cross."<sup>1376</sup> He also claims, "Although this body was completely spiritual and therefore earthly elements or carnality were absolutely foreign to its makeup, the body of the Lord preserved the powers of the body – it was still a body, at least in a dynamic form."<sup>1377</sup> Bulgakov feels that a "dynamic" body can change its form according to the desire of the one possessing it.

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<sup>1373</sup>Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 339-340.

<sup>1374</sup>Булгаков С. Евхаристический догмат, часть 2-я // Журнал "Путь" №21, 1930. P. 1-39. <http://www.odinblago.ru/path/21/1>.

<sup>1375</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13. Author's translation.

<sup>1376</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5. Author's translation.

<sup>1377</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 38. Author's translation.

Bulgakov defends his view of Christ's "dynamic body" by noting that neither the disciples travelling to Emmaus, nor Mary Magdalene initially recognized the Lord. Even when the Twelve first beheld Him, they mistook Him for a ghost. Additionally, Jesus was able to enter the upper room through closed doors.

Bulgakov's view, though, has several weaknesses. First, the claim that "earthly elements or carnality were absolutely foreign to (the) makeup" of Christ's resurrection body is in error. We recall that our Lord ate food in the presence of His disciples and invited them, "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Lk 24:39). So then, His new body consisted of matter.

One must also consider that according to Luke's narrative, the travelers to Emmaus did not recognize Christ, not because He appeared in a different form, but because "their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him" (Lk 24:16). Subsequently, "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him" (Lk 24:31).<sup>1378</sup> Finally, Jesus' sudden appearance in a locked room does not necessarily demonstrate new features of His resurrected body (although it may). The Spirit instantaneously transported Phillip to a new location while he was still in his mortal body (Acts 8:39-40).

Another thorny question is whether or not Jesus in His glorified body is omnipresent? Some object that a denial of Christ's omnipresence constitutes a denial of His deity. On the other hand, a true human body lacks such a quality. Can we assume that the changes that occurred to Jesus' resurrected body after His exaltation made omnipresence possible? Possibly, Christ's omnipresence is mediated by the Holy Spirit in connection with their relationship in the Trinity. Scripture does not resolve this dilemma.<sup>1379</sup>

The final issue for our investigation is Jesus' role as Intercessor before the Father (see Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1). Again, we receive little information as to the nature of this ministry. John does reveal, however, that it at least relates in some way to our redemption (see 1 Jn 2:1).<sup>1380</sup>

## **B. Union with Christ in His Exaltation**

The Bible testifies that believers in Jesus receive certain benefits in connection with His exaltation. All of these benefits are connected with and derive from the believer's union with Jesus Christ. One of these benefits is supernatural power from the Holy Spirit. We have already shown that regeneration is the believer's present experience of Christ's resurrection (see 1 Pet 1:3). Through His resurrection, we obtain new life. A supplemental encounter with the Spirit, however, the "baptism in the Holy Spirit," is associated with the exaltation of Christ and is available to all born-again Christians for empowerment in ministry. In this chapter, we will defend the thesis that believers receive Spirit-baptism separate from and subsequent to the new birth.

Several Scripture texts confirm the tie between Jesus' exaltation and the baptism in the Spirit. After the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost Day, Peter explained to the crowd, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33). This plainly indicates that the Holy Spirit was poured out in Pentecostal power only after the exaltation of Christ. In addition, in Ephesians 4:7-11 Paul reveals that the ascended Christ gives gifts to His people. Again, we see that the power and gifts of the Spirit became available in connection with Jesus' exaltation.<sup>1381</sup>

The interpretation of John 7:39 is more problematic. At first glance, it seems that this verse teaches the same truth about the connection between the Spirit's outpouring and Christ's exaltation: "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet {given,} because Jesus was not yet glorified." Yet, we must also consider that in the Fourth Gospel, the idea of Christ's "glorification"

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<sup>1378</sup>It is true that in Mark 16:12, Jesus appeared "in another form" after His resurrection. At the same time, the manuscript evidence weighs against inclusion of Mark 16:9-16 in the Second Gospel.

<sup>1379</sup>Thiessen, p. 339-340.

<sup>1380</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1381</sup>*Ibid.*

can refer not only to His exaltation, but to His death (and, assumedly, to His resurrection) as well (see Jn 12:23-24; 13:31-32).<sup>1382</sup>

### C. Biblical Survey on the Outpouring of the Spirit

The God of the Christian faith is a God of the supernatural. In both testaments, the Bible testifies of the Lord's miraculous works among His people. As a rule, the manifestation of supernatural power is ascribed to the Third Person of the Trinity, i.e., the Holy Spirit. The Spirit endows the people of God with power and manifests His might through them.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit demonstrated supernatural power only through certain select individuals. He aided the judges of Israel to battle victoriously. The Scriptures record that the Spirit was "on them" (except in one example): Joshua (Num 27:18, "on"; Deut 34:9, "in"), Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34), Jephthah (Judg 11:29), and Samson (Judg 14:6, 19; 15:14-15).<sup>1383</sup> He also gave special strength to the early kings of Israel, like Saul (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6) and David (1 Sam 16:13). Yahweh gave Bezalel ability to construct the tabernacle (Ex 35:30-31). Finally, all the prophets were anointed by God's Spirit.

Among the prophets anointed by the Spirit, pride of place belongs to Moses. We observe an interesting happening when God took from the Spirit that was on Moses and gave Him to 70 of the elders of Israel. As a result, they prophesied (Num 11:17, 24-26). When Joshua objected to this, Moses expressed this desire: "Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets, that Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!" (Num 11:29). God expressed the same intent in Joel's prophecy:

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

Finally, we see symbolism of the Spirit in the anointing of the priests, tabernacle, and its utensils with oil (Ex 29:7; 30:22-33; 40:9-16). Since anointing oil is a common symbol of the Spirit (see Isa 61:1; 1 Sam 10:1; 16:12; 1 Jn 2:20, 27), we can conclude that everything devoted to God's service must have the anointing, that is, the power of the Spirit, in order to serve God effectively. This coincides with Zechariah's words to Zerubbabel, when the latter was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says Yahweh of hosts" (Zech 4:6).

The Old Testament also predicts the coming of the Anointed One, Messiah. The Holy Spirit will come on Him to equip Him for a ministry of miracles:

The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me, because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of Yahweh... (Isa 61:1-2; cf. 42:1; 11:2).<sup>1384</sup>

As we know, this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, who had an empowering experience at the time of His water baptism when the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove (Lk 3:16). After this encounter, Jesus began His miracle ministry: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit" (Lk 4:14). Later, Peter specifically attributed Christ's miracle ministry to the work of the Holy Spirit: "{You know of} Jesus

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<sup>1382</sup>Dunn concurs (Dunn J. D. G. – Baptism in the Holy Spirit. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970. – P. 174).

<sup>1383</sup>Dunning H. R. A Wesleyan Perspective on Spirit Baptism // Brand C. O. Five Views on Spirit Baptism. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2004. – P. 211.

<sup>1384</sup>Ibid.

of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and {how} He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

Even in connection with Messiah’s birth, God displayed His power in filling key individuals with the Holy Spirit: Elizabeth (Lk 1:41), Zechariah (Lk 1:67), Simeon (Lk 2:25), and even the infant John the Baptist (Lk 1:15). At the commencement of Christ’s earthly ministry, John the Baptist announced that He would baptize in the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:8; Jn 1:33).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus gave His disciples supernatural power and authority to heal diseases and cast out devils (Matt 10:1). However, He announced the experience of the baptism in the Spirit only just before His ascension (Acts 1:5). The disciples received power through this experience (Lk 24:49) in order to become witnesses of Jesus (Acts 1:8).

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus’ promise was fulfilled when the Spirit came in power (Acts 2:1-4). From that time on, the Church displayed amazing signs and miracles in confirmation of the gospel. This began the fulfillment of Jesus’ words to His followers, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater {works} than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (Jn 14:12).

The experience of being baptized in the Spirit was not only for Jesus’ first disciples. The converts in Samaria experienced the same (Acts 8), as did Cornelius’ household (Acts 10), disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19), and the apostle Paul (Acts 9).

However, the contemporary Church is engaged in a fiery debate over this question. Some insist that regeneration and Spirit baptism are one and the same experience with the Spirit. Others, though, separate them. Therefore, we will investigate these claims further to discover which one best aligns with the biblical witness.

#### D. Terminology for the Baptism in the Spirit

In Greek, the phrase “baptism in the Spirit” is βαπτίζειν ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ (*baptidzein en pneumatic hagio*). The phrase is found seven times in the New Testament. In four of those instances, it is found on the lips of John the Baptist (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). Twice, Jesus quoted John’s words (Acts 1:5; 11:16). We find the final example in the writings of the apostle Paul (1 Cor 12:13).

What did John the Baptist (and Jesus, who quoted him) mean by the words “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8)? Comparing Spirit baptism with water baptism, we may conclude that Jesus will “immerse” people in the Spirit, just as John immersed them in water. So then, “water” and “Spirit” are the elements of baptism. In the Greek text, the preposition ἐν (*en*) stands before and indicates these elements.

Paul’s usage is more nuanced. He writes in 1 Cor 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Did Paul mean by this that through the experience of Spirit baptism people enter the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church? If that is the case, then one must receive the baptism in the Spirit for salvation, which would equate that experience with regeneration.<sup>1385</sup>

Ciampa and Rosner note a parallel structure in the Greek text of this verse that influences its interpretation:<sup>1386</sup>

ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν ...  
πάντες ἐν πνεύμα ἐποτίσθημεν

<sup>1385</sup>Some assert that without the baptism in the Spirit, one can be saved, but will not be part of the Church. Scripture does not support such a view. All true believers are in Christ’s Body, the Church. Even in this text, Paul reveals that “we all,” that is, all believers in Christ, are “baptized into one body.”

<sup>1386</sup>Ciampa R. E., Rosner B. S. *The First Letter to the Corinthians* // Carson D. A. *The Pillar New Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010. – P. 592-593.

by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,  
we were all made to drink of one Spirit

According to the custom of Hebrew poetry, which stands behind this Greek text, the phrase “we were all made to drink of one Spirit” repeats the thought of “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Both phrases refer to conversion to Christ. At the same moment of time, a new convert enters the Church and also “drinks” from the Holy Spirit, i.e., experiences the new birth.

The initial expression, “by one Spirit,” indicates exactly how a person enters the Body – by the Holy Spirit. This thought is repeated in the final phrase, “We were all made to drink of one Spirit.” “By one Spirit,” in other words, by receiving (“drinking”) the Spirit, that is, through the new birth, a person enters (“is baptized into”) the Body of Christ. So then, this verse is not referring to the baptism in the Spirit (i.e., “immersion in the Spirit”), as described in the Gospels and Acts, but rather to baptism into the Church through the experience of spiritual rebirth.

This translation coincides with one of the basic usages of the Greek preposition ἐν (*en*) – instrumental means. In other words, God employs the Holy Spirit as an “instrument” for engrafting the new convert into the Church through the agency of the new birth.

Some feel that we should understand the preposition ἐν (*en*) not as instrumental means, but as final/personal means. This would render the meaning, “The Spirit Himself baptizes us into the Body.” The personal action of the Spirit, in fact, is not infrequently expressed through such a grammatical construction.<sup>1387</sup> Horton notes that in 1 Corinthians 12:8-9, the phrase ἐν τῷ πνεύματι (“by the Spirit”) is used in a context where the Spirit is the one performing the action. This observation is consistent with taking the preposition ἐν (*en*) in the sense of final/personal means.<sup>1388</sup> On the other hand, although this preposition can indeed have this meaning, in the New Testament the one performing a baptism is always indicated by the pronoun ὑπο (*hupo*), and not ἐν (*en*).<sup>1389</sup> We add that the Spirit’s action in other affairs is also often indicated by the grammatical construction with ὑπο (*hupo*).<sup>1390</sup>

Others object that in the New Testament, the preposition ἐν (*en*) is usually associated with the element in which the baptism takes place.<sup>1391</sup> According to this interpretation, we should interpret this verse as follows: “By the baptism in the Spirit (i.e., immersion in the Spirit”) we are joined to the Body.” In addition, the preposition εἰς (*eis*), which is found in the phrase εἰς ἓν σῶμα, i.e., “in one body,” usually indicates not the element of baptism, but either its goal or the entity for which the baptism is performed.<sup>1392</sup>

Additionally, in a near context, namely in 1 Corinthians 10:2, we discover a similar combination of the same prepositions: “All were baptized into (εἰς) Moses in (ἐν) the cloud and in (ἐν) the sea.” In this example, the element of baptism (cloud and sea) are indicated by the preposition ἐν (*en*), and the referent of that baptism (Moses) takes the pronoun εἰς (*eis*). Consequently, it is thought that we should apply this interpretation to our text in question. The construction “by (ἐν) one Spirit, we were all baptized into (εἰς) one body” means that through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, i.e., “immersion in the Spirit,” we are engrafted into the Church.

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<sup>1387</sup>See Matt 12:28; Lk 4:1; Rom 2:29; 8:14; 15:16; 1 Cor 2:13; 3:3; 12:9; Gal 5:18; Eph 3:5; 1 Pet 1:3.

<sup>1388</sup>Horton S. What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit. – Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976. – P. 215-216.

<sup>1389</sup>See Matt 3:6, 13, 14; Mk 1:5, 9; Lk 3:7; 7:30; Acts 1:5.

<sup>1390</sup>See Matt 4:1; Lk 2:26; Acts 13:4; Acts 16:6; 2 Pet 1:21.

<sup>1391</sup>C See Mk 1:5, 8; Mφ 3:6, 11; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:26, 31, 33; Acts 1:5; 11:16. Sometimes the means of baptism is shown by the dative case without the preposition ἐν (*en*): Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Acts 1:5; 11:16.

<sup>1392</sup>See 1 Cor 1:13, 15; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; Rom 6:3; Matt 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5. Also see Hart L. Spirit Baptism: A Dimensional Charismatic Perspective // Brand C. O. Five Views on Spirit Baptism. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2004. – P. 125; Dunn J. D. G. – Baptism in the Holy Spirit. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970. – P. 128.



Although this proposed interpretation is consistent with the use of the given prepositions, it nevertheless encounters several difficulties. First, as we will show later in this chapter, in the book of Acts the baptism in the Holy Spirit is conventionally received subsequent to regeneration (see Acts 2:4; 8:14-17; 9:17; 19:5-6). Second, in Jesus' words, the goal of Spirit baptism is not to become engrafted into the Church, but to receive supernatural power for effective ministry (Acts 1:5, 8). This was Christ's personal experience when He began His ministry after the Holy Spirit came upon Him.

Third, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the word order suggests that the verb βαπτίζειν (*baptidzen*), i.e., "baptized," refers to the following phrase, εἰς ἓν σῶμα, i.e., "in one body," rather than to the preceding phrase ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, "by one Spirit." Finally, the element of baptism is not always indicated by the preposition ἐν (*en*). In Mark 1:9, the element of baptism is shown by the preposition εἰς (*eis*): εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ("in the Jordan"). So then, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, a person is not baptized (immersed) in the Spirit, as Jesus and John used the term, but in the Body, the Church.

Finally, some theorize that in 1 Corinthians 12:13, the word "baptized" refers to water baptism.<sup>1393</sup> We will examine this claim in chapter 22 of this volume.

In conclusion, we can touch on the intriguing expression in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, "baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire." Several explanations are offered.<sup>1394</sup> First, the word "fire" may apply to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In support, we note that the terms "Spirit" and "fire" are joined by a single preposition ἐν (*en*), which may indicate that these two experiences with the Spirit are one and the same. In addition, at the Day of Pentecost, tongues of fire appeared over the disciples, creating an association between fire and the Spirit. Moreover, both experiences are for believers: baptism in fire and in the Spirit. Finally, it seems that both experiences occur at the same time. Therefore, some conclude that "fire" is simply another way of saying "Spirit."

The second option is to propose that the word "Spirit" refers to the baptism in the Spirit for believers, while "fire" relates to the punishment for those who reject Messiah. The image of "fire" is often used in Scripture for punishment. Additionally, contrary to the previous position the Scriptures nowhere teach that the baptism in the Spirit is for the goal of sanctification. It provides power. Horton adds that the tongues of fire over the disciples heads symbolized not sanctification, but that the Church was the new temple of God.<sup>1395</sup>

The following context also supports this second option: "His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Lk 3:17). The wheat and the chaff are two different groups experiencing different results. Correspondingly, the Spirit is for believers, while the fire is for unbelievers.

Dunn suggests a third option. The baptism in the fire is for believers for the purpose of cleansing, but for unbelievers it means judgment.<sup>1396</sup> Dunn supports this interpretation for believers by appealing to Isaiah 4:4: "When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." He adds the thought that on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself a "baptism of fire" in the sense of taking the punishment for sins. On the other hand, the weakness in Dunn's position is that he fails to fully appreciate John the Baptist's comment, "...to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." The "baptism in fire" is not for cleansing, but for judgment.

In this passage, John the Baptist speaks of the baptism in the Spirit and fire as an eschatological event.<sup>1397</sup> How might this be explained, since believers already experience Spirit baptism? First, John himself did not know how God's plan would be realized. Jesus' disciples also thought that the end times were coming soon

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<sup>1393</sup>Ervin H. M. *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984. – P. 99-102.

<sup>1394</sup>Horton, *What the Bible Says*, p. 85-88.

<sup>1395</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 141-142.

<sup>1396</sup>Dunn, p. 8-12, 42-43.

<sup>1397</sup>Hart L. *Spirit Baptism: A Dimensional Charismatic Perspective* // Brand C. O. *Five Views on Spirit Baptism*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2004. – P. 111-112.

(Acts 1:6). Second, we cannot exclude the possibility that there will also be a future, eschatological fulfillment of these words in the experience of national Israel, when God pours out His Spirit upon them in the last days. Finally, we may be dealing here with the phenomenon of “prophetic perspective,” where a prophet will describe various future events as a completed whole (see Dan 11; Isa 42:1-4; 1 Sam 10:2-8; Zech 9:9-10). This final feature is discussed more in volume 2, chapter 7, in the section on “Analysis of Genre – Prophecy.”

## **E. Distinction of the Baptism in the Spirit from Regeneration**

### **1. Key Passages**

#### **a. The Baptism of Jesus (Matt 3, Lk 3)**

In this section, we will convincingly demonstrate that the new birth and the baptism in the Spirit are separate and subsequent encounters with the Holy Spirit. We begin with the experience of our Lord Jesus. In Luke 3:21-22, the Spirit comes upon Jesus. Acts 10:38 shows that the Spirit’s coming was to prepare Jesus for miracle ministry: “{You know of} Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and {how} He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” Although Jesus is the Son of God, He relied on the power of the Spirit in His ministry to serve as an example for us. Just as Jesus received a special empowering experience with the Spirit, His disciples can expect the same.

Some object that in Luke 4:18, the goal of the Spirit’s coming on Jesus was to announce the coming of God’s kingdom or the establishing of a “new stage” in God’s salvation plan. Dunn suggests that Luke’s placement of Jesus’ baptism with His genealogy (Lk 3:23-28), which traces back to Adam, shows that His baptism (both in water and in Spirit) should be the common experience for all. Dunn coins the phrase “conversion-initiation,” which is the conversion process that all converts to Christ go through. It includes: repentance, faith, water baptism, and the baptism in the Spirit. Therefore, Spirit baptism is part of the initiation process of the new covenant and is the same as regeneration.<sup>1398</sup>

We respond that the coming of the Spirit on Jesus as a mark of the coming kingdom does not exclude the goal of empowering Him for ministry. Nothing prevents us from positing two goals for that experience. It is also difficult to equate Jesus’ experience with the typical experience of the new convert. Jesus had no need for repentance, saving faith, or the new birth. His reception of Spirit baptism served only two goals: the announcement that God’s kingdom has come, and the anointing of Messiah for His miracle ministry. Since the baptism in the Spirit of believers does not serve the purpose of heralding God’s kingdom, its only purpose in the Church is to empower Christians for ministry (see Acts 1:8).

Dunn’s theory is also problematic in that it implies that people receive the new birth through water baptism, which on biblical grounds is a teaching rejected by most in the Evangelical Movement. A more substantial discussion of water baptism is provided in chapter 22.

In addition, if Dunn proposes that converts must progress through all steps in the process of “conversion-initiation,” then why does he leave out speaking in tongues? In the book of Acts, those who experienced these stages also spoke in tongues. If Dunn insists that all these steps are necessary for salvation, then he must propose that speaking in tongues is a requirement for salvation as well.

Another argument in refutation of Dunn’s view is that Jesus’ first disciples did not go through Dunn’s “conversion-initiation” process – they never submitted to Christian baptism. Moreover, they repented and believed in Jesus long before they received the outpouring of the Spirit.<sup>1399</sup> Dunn explains that the first disciples had a protracted process. Yet, if that be the case, then how can the experience of the first disciples serve as a model for the “typical” conversion-initiation process that all believers are required to undergo?

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<sup>1398</sup>Dunn, p. 4-32.

<sup>1399</sup>Ervin, p. 17.

## b. The Experience of the First Disciples (Jn 20:22; Acts 2)

In John 20:22, we learn that after Jesus' resurrection from the dead, He breathed on His disciples and imparted to them the Holy Spirit. At that moment, they received the new birth. Fifty days later, the disciples encountered the Holy Spirit again, receiving power for ministry (Acts 2:1-4). So then, the first disciples experienced the baptism in the Spirit separate and subsequent to regeneration.

Dunn rejects this view, asserting that in John 20:22 the disciple did not receive the Spirit. Rather, on the Day of Pentecost, they experienced the "conversion-initiation" process described above. Only then did they become Christians and at that time the Church was born. Brunner also feels that the disciples did not receive salvation until the Day of Pentecost because they lived in an "unusual period in the apostles' career between the ascension of Jesus and his gift of the Spirit to the church at Pentecost."<sup>1400</sup>

Dunn supports his view by citing the prophecy in Joel 2:28-29, which was fulfilled at Pentecost. According to that prophecy, the outpouring of the Spirit declared the commencement of a new age, which supposedly corresponds to the process of "conversion-initiation." In addition, parallels can be drawn between what happened at Sinai and on the Day of Pentecost. This supposedly reveals that on that day, God established a new covenant with His new people.

Dunn also appeals to Peter's words in Acts 11:17, comparing the experience of Cornelius' household with that of the disciples at Pentecost: "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as {He gave} to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Dunn interprets this verse to say that only at Pentecost did the disciples become genuine believers in Christ and recipients of the Spirit.

However, we can subject Dunn's view to several criticisms. First, the prophecy of the Spirit's outpouring in Joel 2:28-29 relates to the commencement of a new stage in God's plan only in the sense that through the fulfillment of this prophecy God's power would become available to all of God's people. Moses foresaw this in Numbers 11:29: "Would that all the Yahweh's people were prophets, that the Yahweh would put His Spirit upon them!" In fact, Joel's prophecy was not for unbelievers who needed the "conversion-initiation" experience, but for those who were already God's people.<sup>1401</sup> In addition, Joel writes not about the new birth, but about receiving supernatural power:

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Furthermore, according to New Testament teaching, Christ established a new covenant with His disciples not on the Day of Pentecost, but during the Last Supper and His subsequent Passion events (Lk 22:20).<sup>1402</sup> Moreover, Pentecost was associated more with the Old Testament feast of harvest than with the events at Sinai. The harvest symbolizes the effective evangelism that the Spirit's outpouring would equip the disciples to perform. This was the stated goal of Pentecost (Acts 1:8).

Nevertheless, to our amazement, Dunn directly contradicts the words of Christ in Acts 1:8 and the experience of the Early Church recorded in Acts. Dunn writes, "The fact is that the phrase 'baptism in the Spirit' is never directly associated with the promise of power, but is always associated with entry into the messianic age or the Body of Christ."<sup>1403</sup>

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<sup>1400</sup>Quotation from Wyckoff J. W. *The Baptism in the Holy Spirit* // Horton S. M. *Systematic Theology*. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 488.

<sup>1401</sup>Ervin, p. 1.

<sup>1402</sup>Ibid., p. 13, 16.

<sup>1403</sup>Dunn, p. 54.

Dunn also rejects the clear biblical testimony that before the Day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus had already received regeneration, as indicated in John 20:22. In that text, we read that Jesus breathed on His disciples and imparted to them the Spirit. That is, they received the new birth. It is also significant that this occurred immediately after His resurrection. According to Scripture, the new birth became available only after the resurrection and on the basis of that event (see 1 Pet 1:3).

Some suggest that in John 20:22, Jesus simply symbolically spoke of the future outpouring of the Spirit that occurred on the Day of Pentecost. In other words, the disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit in any sense until Pentecost. Such thinkers also draw a parallel between Jesus' commission to the disciples in the upper room, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (Jn 20:21), with similar commission in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses..." The first incident is thought to be only a precursor, but the second was the real outpouring.

However, this view is unconvincing. Why would Jesus perform a symbolic bestowal of the Spirit? How would that benefit His disciples? In addition, in connection with the giving of the Spirit in John 20, Jesus said to them, "If you forgive the sins of any, {their sins} have been forgiven them; if you retain the {sins} of any, they have been retained." This implies that the disciples truly received something from the Lord that would enable them to fulfill their commission.

Moreover, in John's Gospel Jesus promises several times to bestow the Spirit. If in John 20:22, Jesus did not give the Spirit, then all the promises He made previously would find no fulfillment in that Gospel. From a literary point of view, such an omission is inexcusable. Additionally, Jesus' promises of bestowing the Spirit recorded in John's Gospel make no mention of signs and wonders accompanying the Spirit's coming. Therefore, in the context of John's Gospel we expect the Spirit to come in order to regenerate the disciples, not to endue them with power. We find such a coming in John chapter 20.

Horton advances other convincing arguments in favor of our thesis.<sup>1404</sup> Jesus' "breathing" the Spirit on the disciples recalls when God "breathed into (Adam's) nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7), and when the breath of God made dry bones come to life (Ezek 37:8-10). Moreover, Jesus did not make a promise of the Spirit's coming, but issued a command, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The same Greek word, λαμβάνω (*lambano*), i.e., "receive," is used in other texts for the actual receiving of the Spirit (Rom 8:15; 1 Cor 2:12).

Dunning objects that according to John 7:39, the Spirit could not come until Jesus was glorified. Moreover, John 16:7 reads, "If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you." Does this mean that Jesus could not have given the Spirit before His ascension, such as we are claiming for John 20:22?<sup>1405</sup>

On the other hand, in the Fourth Gospel the idea of Jesus' "glorification" does not always apply to His ascension, but also to His death (Jn 12:23-24; 13:31-32) and, supposedly, His resurrection as well.<sup>1406</sup> So then, if the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are all considered elements of His "glorification," He could bestow the Spirit after His resurrection in John 20:22. In addition, at the time Jesus gave the disciples the Spirit, He was on the threshold of His departure to heaven.

Finally, Unger proposes the unlikely theory that in John 20:22, Jesus gave the disciples some type of partial, preliminary experience with the Holy Spirit in order to enable them to receive the teaching He was planning to impart to them before His ascension. The actual outpouring of the Spirit would occur at Pentecost.<sup>1407</sup> This theory, though, finds no Scriptural support and is logically unconvincing. Jesus has already been teaching His disciples for three years without the aid of some type of preliminary infilling of the Spirit.

All things considered, the most viable option is that Jesus truly imparted the Spirit to His disciples after His resurrection, and that they received regeneration at that time. At Pentecost, however, according to Jesus'

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<sup>1404</sup>Horton S. M. *Spirit Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective* // Brand C. O. *Five Views on Spirit Baptism*. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2004. – P. 128-131.

<sup>1405</sup>Dunning, p. 222, 225.

<sup>1406</sup>Dunn agrees (Dunn, p. 174).

<sup>1407</sup>Unger M. F. *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* // *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Vol. 101. 1944. P. 365-367.

promise and through the Spirit's outpouring, the disciples received a supplemental experience with the Holy Spirit, namely, the baptism in the Spirit.

### c. The Samaritans' Experience (Acts 8)

The third example of Spirit baptism in distinction from regeneration is the experience of the converts in Samaria. They repented at the preaching of Phillip and received water baptism. However, the Holy Spirit did not descend on them until Peter and John arrived. Only then did they receive the Holy Spirit in the sense of the baptism in the Spirit. Since we know that people are born again through faith in Jesus, it is fair to conclude that the Samaritans were reborn when they turned to the Lord. When the apostles came and laid hands on them, they received a supplemental experience with the Holy Spirit – the baptism in the Spirit.

Many who defend the position that Spirit baptism does not differ from regeneration offer the following explanation. They feel that this was a special case since at that time there were hostile relations between Jews and Samaritans. Therefore, God withheld the Holy Spirit from the new converts in Samaria until the apostles came from Jerusalem. In this way, God made clear to Jewish believers that He accepts Samaritans into His kingdom.

We respond to this interpretation as follows. First, one must observe how Luke described these events. He explained that the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen because the Samaritans "had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16). We may paraphrase Luke's implied meaning: "Of course, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit baptism. They had *simply* been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." The baptism in the Spirit is *usually* expected after regeneration.

Second, in light of the fact that in all other instances where Luke describes receiving the Holy Spirit (except for Cornelius' household) it occurs after regeneration, it is fair to conclude that this is the typical order of things. We must also admit that the claim that God withheld the Spirit is pure speculation with no indication from the biblical text that such was the case. In addition, we can compare the Samaritans' example with what occurred with another non-Jewish group receiving the Spirit – those of Cornelius' house. In that case, God did not withhold the Spirit, but rather gave the baptism in the Spirit simultaneously with regeneration as the sign that God accepts Gentiles. If God wanted to send the message that He was accepting Samaritans, He would have baptized them in the Spirit at the time of their new birth, just as He did with Cornelius' house.

Dunn offers another objection.<sup>1408</sup> He feels that the Samaritan converts were not yet Christians until Peter and John came. He supports his idea by claiming that throughout the book of Acts, the Spirit is received only once. Therefore, that must have been the case in Samaria as well. Our findings in this section, though, clearly contradict this claim. The typical case in Acts was two separate encounters with the Spirit.

Furthermore, Dunn asserts that the Samaritans' initial faith was not in Christ, but in the evangelist Phillip. It does not say that they believed in Christ, but "they believed *Philip*" (Acts 8:12). Moreover, the Samaritans' reception of water baptism does not necessarily mean that they were genuine believers. Simon supposedly "believed" and received baptism, but was not truly saved (vv. 13-23).

On the other hand, nowhere in the New Testament do we see an example where someone is described as having «believed" when in fact they did not. In addition, the Samaritans did not only believe Phillip, but also believed "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12), that is, they believed the gospel, which is the only requirement for salvation. For that reason, when Peter and John arrived, they did not preach the gospel to the Samaritans, since they had already believed.

Additionally, Dunn errs in his claim that not only Simon, but also *all* the Samaritans failed to truly believe. It is highly unlikely that not a single person among them had genuine faith in Christ. We can also challenge the assertion that Simon was not converted. In response to Peter's rebuke, Simon expressed remorse and humility: "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (Acts 8:24).

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<sup>1408</sup>Dunn, p. 57-68.

Finally, to prove that the faith of the Samaritans was incomplete, Dunn refers to Luke's use of the term προσέχω (*prosecho*), i.e., "giving attention," to describe how the crowds were receiving Phillip's message (v. 6). This is the same way that they previously received Simon's teaching (vv. 10-11). Therefore, their faith must have been only superficial. In addition, the grammatical construction used to describe the Samaritans' faith differed from the norm. When people believe in Christ, the prepositions εἰς (*eis*) or ἐν (*en*) stand before the object of faith. In the Samaritans' case, no preposition is used, but only the dative case for the object of faith.<sup>1409</sup>

Donald Ervin responds to these claims by showing that in Acts 16:14, the verb προσέχω (*prosecho*), "giving attention," describes how Lydia, who truly believed, received Paul's message. In addition, using the dative case without a preposition for the object of faith can refer to genuine belief (see Acts 5:14; 16:34; 18:8; 24:14; 27:25). Ervin also gives attention to a parallel between the experience of the new converts on the Day of Pentecost and the new converts in Samaria: they received the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41; 8:12-14).<sup>1410</sup>

So then, at Phillip's preaching the Samaritans truly believed in Jesus and received the new birth. When the apostles came and laid hands on them, they received a supplemental experience with the Spirit – the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

#### d. Paul's Experience

The next example is when Paul received the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 9:10-18; 22:12-16). After Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, Ananias visited him to pray for his healing and reception of the Holy Spirit. Again, we see a case where a believer received the Holy Spirit after regeneration.

Some object that when Ananias visited Paul, the latter was still an unbeliever. They offer the following points as proof. First, Paul was fasting and praying when Ananias arrived. He must have been seeking salvation. Second, Jesus said to Paul, "It will be told you what you must do" (Acts 9:6), i.e., to be saved. Third, Ananias invited Paul to "wash away your sins."<sup>1411</sup>

In light of the above considerations, Dunn concludes that Paul's conversion was stretched out over three days – from the time of his encounter with Jesus until Ananias's visit. Dunn compares this with the same time period Jesus spent in the tomb. He also suggests that Paul needed this "extra time" to collect his thoughts. Finally, the opening of Paul's physical eyes supposedly coincided with the opening of his spiritual eyes.<sup>1412</sup>

On the other hand, as a result of his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul became convinced that Jesus was risen. Paul even calls Him "Lord" (κύριος - *kurios*).<sup>1413</sup> Later, Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). This is exactly what Paul himself did.

Moreover, it is important to note that Ananias did not preach the gospel to Paul, which he certainly would have done if Paul was still in unbelief. Furthermore, Ananias called Paul "brother."<sup>1414</sup> Also significant is that Ananias laid hands on Paul in the same way that others received Spirit baptism (see Acts 8:17; 19:6).<sup>1415</sup> In addition, when Ananias invited him to "wash away your sins," he said that in connection with the injunction "calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). The term "calling" is a Greek participle in the time aspect "aorist," which, in general, refers to something done before the action of the main verb of the clause. This means that Paul had already called on Christ's name before he received water baptism. Water baptism, as we shall discover in

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<sup>1409</sup>Dunn, p. 64.

<sup>1410</sup>Ervin, p. 28-33.

<sup>1411</sup>Dunn, p. 74-77.

<sup>1412</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1413</sup>We recognize that the word κύριος (*kurios*) can also be translated "sir."

<sup>1414</sup>However, Dunn observes that in the book of Acts, in 19 of 57 greetings the term "brother" is used among fellow Jews. Therefore, we cannot claim that it is an exclusively Christian greeting (Dunn, p. 74, note in Ervin, p. 47).

<sup>1415</sup>Ervin, p. 49.

chapter 22 of this volume, is a symbolic representation of the reception of salvation and the washing away of sins.

In addition, when Jesus said to Paul, “It will be told you what you must do,” He was not referring to receiving salvation, but to his future calling to gospel ministry. Finally, comparing Jesus’ three days in the tomb with Paul’s time in prayer is pure conjecture. The connection between opening his physical and spiritual eyes is conjecture as well.

Therefore, Paul became a genuine believer when he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. When Ananias laid hands on him, Paul received the baptism in the Spirit.

#### **e. Cornelius and His Household (Acts 10-11)**

The New Testament contains only one example where people received both the new birth and the baptism in the Spirit simultaneously. This occurred in Cornelius’ house, as recorded in Acts chapter 10.

Some interpret this instance of the simultaneous reception of regeneration and Spirit baptism as proof that they are one and the same experience. In support, they note Peter preached about salvation, not about receiving power for ministry. Cornelius and his people were expecting to receive salvation when the Spirit came. Peter seems to confirm this by equating the “gift of the Holy Spirit” with “cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). In addition, the leaders of the Jerusalem church connected the reception of the Spirit with “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life.”<sup>1416</sup>

We acknowledge that here we are indeed dealing with a special case. The baptism in the Spirit was given to Cornelius’ household as an external sign that God saves Gentiles. Many Jews of that time doubted that Gentiles could be God’s people. Therefore, God granted this external sign to convince these doubting Jewish believers that God welcomes Gentiles into the Church. In Acts 10:45-47, we read that the sign of tongues convinced Peter that the Gentiles are included in the people of God. The same sign convinced the Jewish believers in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts 11:16-18.

We reject the claim that the apostles equated the baptism in the Holy Spirit with regeneration. They clearly understood that they themselves received the experience of Spirit baptism separately from the new birth, and that Jesus had explained to them that the Spirit baptism was for the purpose of power for ministry (Acts 1:8). The apostles understood that the reception of the baptism of the Spirit in Cornelius’ case was simply a confirmation that they were now born again Christians. They did not confuse the baptism in the Spirit with regeneration.

When Peter and the Jerusalem leaders spoke of salvation and the baptism in the Spirit together, they had in mind that since only true believers can receive the Spirit baptism, Cornelius and his household must have truly become genuine Christians. We do not interpret their experience to say that the baptism in the Spirit is the same as the new birth (since the other example in Acts contradict this). Rather, when Peter preached the gospel, the people assembled there sincerely gave their hearts to the Lord Jesus, which put them in position to receive what only born again Christians can receive – the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which they then received without delay.

#### **f. The Ephesians’ Experience (Acts 19)**

Our final example of the distinction between spiritual rebirth and Spirit baptism is the history of the conversion of certain disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus. Before their encounter with Paul, they had been baptized by John’s baptism. We are not specially told, though, whether they were also believers in Jesus at that time and therefore reborn.

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<sup>1416</sup>Dunn, p. 80-81.

Paul's first impression was that they were genuine believers. Paul speaks of the time "when you believed" (Acts 19:2). Subsequently, though, he discovered that they had only been baptized with John's baptism. Dunn also observes the absence of the Greek article before the word μαθηται (*mathetai*), i.e., "disciples," in reference to these men of Ephesus, which may shed doubt on their status as Christians. In other cases, the article is used to indicate genuine disciples of the Lord Jesus.<sup>1417</sup>

Even if Paul was mistaken, though, the question he posed to the Ephesians reveals his understanding of the baptism in the Spirit: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (v. 2). If Paul knew that there was only one experience with the Spirit and that it occurred at the time of conversion, then his question would have been meaningless. By asking such a question, Paul reveals that one can receive the Spirit after conversion.

Dunn objects that Paul's question was not intended to draw a distinction between believers with Spirit baptism and those without it. He is simply inquiring whether or not they were Christians.<sup>1418</sup> If that was so, he would have asked more directly, "Have you believed in Jesus Christ?" Clearly, something motivated Paul to ask the question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Most likely, having observed the quality of their spiritual lives, Paul noted their lack of spiritual power. Therefore, he inquired about their spiritual experience.

Unger, rejecting the doctrine of a separate baptism in the Spirit, offers this explanation. He feels that the Ephesians did believe, but not in the proper object of faith. If they had truly believed *in Jesus*, they would have already received the Holy Spirit as part of their conversion to Christ.<sup>1419</sup> However, Unger's attempt still fails to adequately explain Paul's question. Paul was not inquiring about the object of their faith, but about their experience with the Spirit. He was not expressing doubt in the quality of their faith, but in their experience with the Holy Spirit. Only after they responded, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit," did Paul begin to investigate the quality of the faith.

Finally, even if the Ephesians first believed in Christ from Paul's preaching, they nevertheless received the baptism in the Spirit separately from regeneration and after water baptism. In verse 4, they specifically believed in Jesus, and in verse 5 they received Christian baptism, but only in verse 6 did they receive the baptism in the Spirit when Paul laid hands on them. In this connection, we also note that the combination of the participle ἐπιθέντος (*epithentos*), "laid hands," and the verb ἦλθε (*elthe*), "came," indicates the close connection between these events. At the moment that Paul laid hands on them, and not before, the Spirit came upon these men of Ephesus.<sup>1420</sup>

Interestingly, the order observed here – receiving salvation and then Spirit baptism – exactly corresponds to the question Paul began the conversation with: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"<sup>1421</sup>

## **g. Hebrews 6:1-2**

In conclusion, we need to mention Hebrews 6:1-2: "Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment." It is significant that laying on of hands is listed among the foundational teachings of the Christian faith. Most likely, the reference here is to laying on of hands to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6). According to this text, this experience is mentioned in distinction from repentance, faith, and water baptism. Therefore, this event is a separate and distinct experience in the Christian life.

## **2. Other Arguments**

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<sup>1417</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>1418</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>1419</sup>Unger, p. 491.

<sup>1420</sup>Ervin, p. 65.

<sup>1421</sup>Ibid., p. 63.



The following may serve as a supplemental argument supporting the claim of regeneration and Spirit baptism as separate experiences. In the Bible, when the context concern the new birth, the Holy Spirit is said to be dwelling “in” the believer. However, when the topic is the baptism in the Spirit, the preposition “on” is employed. Prophesying of future regeneration, Ezekiel writes, “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (Ezek 36:27). When Luke describe Spirit baptism, though, he writes, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Let us look more closely at the indwelling of the Spirit – that He abides “in” the Christian. As mentioned, the Spirit’s indwelling is linked to Christian character. This corresponds to the experience of the new birth and the Spirit’s subsequent work of sanctification (see Rom 8:9-10; 2 Cor 13:5; Eph 3:16-17; Col 1:27-28). Also remarkable is that the Old Testament speaks of regeneration as a future phenomenon. Only rarely do we see references to the Spirit indwelling people in the Old Covenant.<sup>1422</sup> As a rule, the new birth was to be a future experience for God’s Old Testament people (cm. Ezek 11:19-20; 36:27; 37:14).

We find the following words of Jesus to His disciples very significant: “The Holy Spirit abides with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:17). It appears that during Jesus’ earthly pilgrimage, His disciples did not have the indwelling Spirit. On the other hand, in the New Testament the indwelling of the Spirit is a common feature of the Christian life (see Rom 8:9-10; Col 1:27-28; 1 Cor 6:19-20). We conclude that the Spirit’s indwelling of the heart corresponds to regeneration and became available only after Jesus’ resurrection.

We go on, then, to discuss the Spirit’s abiding “on” the believer. When we see this phenomenon in the Bible, it is associated with obtaining power for ministry. The Old Testament abounds in examples where the Spirit of God descended on someone, which resulted in a manifestation of supernatural power.<sup>1423</sup> However, in Old Testament times, not everyone had access to the Spirit – only certain select individuals. At the same time, God promised in the future to pour out His Spirit on all His people (see Num 11:17; Joel 2:28).

We also note that when the Spirit descended on Jesus to prepare Him for miracle ministry, again the preposition “on” is used (see Mk 1:10; Matt 3:16; Lk 3:22; 4:18; Jn 1:32). In the same way, every time the New Testament describes the baptism in the Spirit, we encounter the word “on” (see Acts 1:8; 2:17-18; 8:16; 10:44-45; 11:15; 19:6). Judging from this, we may conclude that the Spirit’s descent “on” someone corresponds to the baptism in the Holy Spirit or some other empowering experience.

There are however, some exceptions to this rule. First, the idea of “the outpouring of the Spirit” implies the Spirit’s descent on someone. Sometimes this phrase applies to the baptism in the Spirit, as in Joel chapter 2, while other times it refers to development of character, which better corresponds to regeneration (see Isa 32:15; 44:3-9; Ezek 39:29; Zech 12:10). Second, Peter states that during times of persecution, the Spirit is “on” God’s people (1 Pet 4:14). This appears to be for the purpose of perseverance more than for empowering for ministry.

In defense of the Pentecostal position on the baptism in the Spirit, William and Robert Menzies argue that when Luke speaks of people receiving the Spirit, he is always referring to the reception of spiritual power.<sup>1424</sup> They contrast the pneumatology of Luke with that of Paul, who focuses more on the soteriological operation of God’s Spirit – regeneration and sanctification. In this light, Peter’s words, recorded by Luke, have special significance: “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:39). This means that the empowering experience with

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<sup>1422</sup>Two exceptions exist: it was written of Joshua, “in whom is the Spirit” (Num 27:18), and Peter wrote about “the Spirit of Christ within” the prophets (1 Pet 1:11).

<sup>1423</sup>See Judg 3:9-10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13; 19:20; 2 Kin 2:9; 1 Chr 12:18; 2 Chr 20:14; Lk 1:35; Lk 2:25.

<sup>1424</sup>Menzies W. M., Menzies R. P. *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000. – P. 51-52, 115. We taken into consideration that not all passages correspond to that claim, in particular, Luke 11:13. This appears to be the only exception, however.

the Spirit belongs to all believers of all times. Joel confirms this claim, whose prophecy is also recorded by Luke: “I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind” (Acts 2:17).

Finally, several historical considerations support this position. Interestingly, the oldest Christian confessions recognize the distinction between regeneration and Spirit baptism. In Eastern Orthodoxy, two sacraments are thought to impart the Holy Spirit: Baptism and Chrismation. The first is believed to impart new birth, while the second serves for empowerment from the Spirit.

In Roman Catholicism, the same two sacraments serve the same functions (except that Chrismation is called “confirmation”). Based on this observation, one can propose that the oldest Christian confessions preserve traces of the original understanding of receiving the Spirit that existed in the Early Church – there were two separate and distinct experiences with the Spirit for different goals.

We also cannot ignore the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement over the last 100 years. Since its inception, the Movement has grown to embrace over 500 million adherents. Such rapid growth may serve as a historical evidence of God’s blessing on this movement.<sup>1425</sup>

### 3. Other Objections and Responses

Opponents to the Pentecostal teaching on the baptism in the Spirit draw a parallel between Spirit baptism and water baptism. They propose that the idea of “baptism” implies “initiation,” since water baptism in one’s inauguration into God’s kingdom. Therefore, when the New Testament speaks of a “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” it refers to the initial experience of the Spirit, i.e., “regeneration.”

In response, we recall that the Bible does not teach that we enter the kingdom through water baptism. Neither do we read anywhere that water baptism symbolizes entering the kingdom. According to Scripture, water baptism symbolizes cleansing and burial (see Acts 22:16 and Rom 6:4). Moreover, the biblical texts that compare water baptism with the baptism in the Spirit compare the latter with John’s baptism. The baptism of John was not associated with entering God’s kingdom, but with repentance and consecration to the Lord.

Another objection is that in the epistles, we do not encounter a command for believers to be baptized in the Spirit. Nevertheless, such an invitation is made in the book of Acts. We may also assume that nothing is said about receiving Spirit baptism in the epistles because the recipients of the epistles had already received it. According to book of Acts, this was a standard event experienced by all new converts in the New Testament Church.<sup>1426</sup>

Furthermore, opponents of the Pentecostal teaching point out that according to Ephesians 4:5, there is only “one baptism.” Does this exclude the possibility of the existence of a Spirit baptism along with water baptism? We respond that Ephesians 4:5 is dealing with water baptism alone – there is only one such experience. Paul is not addressing the baptism in the Spirit here. Paul’s goal here is not to equate regeneration with Spirit baptism, but to emphasize church unity. All believers share a common experience of water baptism. We must also consider that Hebrews 6:2 speaks of “baptisms” in the plural.<sup>1427</sup>

Another objection is that doctrine must be based on didactic passages of Scripture, not on biblical narrative.<sup>1428</sup> All passages of Scripture supporting the claim that Spirit baptism is distinct from regeneration are found in narrative passages, namely in the book of Acts. This causes some to doubt the veracity of the Pentecostal teaching.

Yet, in the world of theology it is widely accepted that biblical historians write their narrative with a theological agenda as well. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul confirms the theological values of Old Testament narrative: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” Paul also wrote, “Whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction” (Rom

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<sup>1425</sup><http://www.bible.ca/global-religion-statistics-world-christian-encyclopedia.htm>; Wyckoff, p. 481.

<sup>1426</sup>Лысюк В. Рецензия на книгу «Основы богословия», ВЕЕ. – Киев: ETC, 2004

<sup>1427</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1428</sup>Noted in Fee G. Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1991. – P. 85.

15:4). In addition, in Romans 4 Paul cites the narrative of Abraham as evidence for the doctrine that justification comes through faith.<sup>1429</sup>

In the narrative of Acts, we observe a consistent pattern of how the first-century believers received the Holy Spirit. In each case, with the exception of Cornelius' household, we see two separate and distinct experiences with the Spirit. It is fair to assume that this same order is intact to the present day.<sup>1430</sup>

Opponents of the dual-experience view also object that such a teaching adds a condition to salvation – an additional experience with the Spirit. This is considered a perversion of the gospel. Such thinkers fail to realize, though, that reception of Spirit baptism is not a requirement for obtaining eternal life. The goal of this experience is to empower saints for ministry. In addition, it is possible to receive both experiences simultaneously, as was in the case of Cornelius and his household. We also note that the conditions for receiving the baptism in the Spirit is the same as for receiving the new birth – faith. Yet, one must specifically request this supplemental experience. We receive what we ask for (see Jam 4:2).<sup>1431</sup>

The next objection is worth close consideration. In Acts 2:38-39, Peter announced that those who repent and receive water baptism receive the gift of the Spirit. It appears here that, according to Peter's words, the gift of the Spirit comes at the time of conversion, which would equate it with regeneration. Also significant is that Luke always uses the phrase "gift of the Spirit" to indicate the baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:20; 15:8; 10:45; 11:17). So then, immediately upon conversion, the new convert receives the "gift" of the Spirit, that is, the baptism in the Spirit, which is, in fact, the same as the new birth.

Another factor supports this objection. Luke also employs the phrase "the promise of the Spirit" to refer to the baptism in the Spirit (see Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33). In Acts 2:39, Peter promises that his hearers can receive the "promise." Therefore, the "promise" of the Spirit, that is, Spirit baptism, comes immediately at conversion. Also of interest is that Peter promises the crowd that they would receive the same experience that they had just witnessed – the baptism in the Spirit – on the condition of repentance and water baptism. Finally, in his appeal to the crowd, Peter mentions only one experience with the Spirit.

On the other hand, we may offer the following explanation for Peter's invitation on Pentecost Day. First, the expression "gift of the Spirit" could still refer to regeneration rather than Spirit baptism if we allow for an atypical usage of the phrase by Luke. Second, the phrase "gift of the Spirit" could refer both to regeneration and Spirit baptism, but each in its own time. Peter generalized his appeal and drew no distinction between these experiences.

If Peter truly was referring to the baptism in the Spirit, the following explanations may suffice. We note that the word "receive" is in the future tense, not the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood indicates the result of a previous action, i.e., as a direct result of repentance and water baptism, one will undoubtedly receive the gift of the Spirit

The future tense, though, makes a different implication. If someone repents and receives water baptism, he or she may at some point in the future receive the gift of the Spirit, but not necessarily immediately. In other words, Peter may be meaning to say that if someone repents and receives water baptism, that individual will be *in a position* (as a born again believer) to receive that which the disciples in the upper room just received – the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:14 is also appealed to in refutation of the Pentecostal view: "...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Without a doubt, this text is dealing with the new birth by the Spirit. This objection assumes that Paul's use of "promise of the Spirit" carries the same sense as Luke's words, "I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you" on the Day of Pentecost (Lk 24:49). So then, the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts 2 serves the purpose of regeneration, as it does in Galatians 3:14.

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<sup>1429</sup>Horton, Spirit Baptism, p. 56.

<sup>1430</sup>Wyckoff, p. 487.

<sup>1431</sup>Ibid., p. 510-511.

Ervin defends the Pentecostal view by noting that in Luke 24, Jesus clearly explains the purpose for the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost: “You are to stay in the city until you are *clothed with power* from on high” (Lk 24:49).<sup>1432</sup> In addition, different biblical authors can use the same word, such as “promise,” with various senses. We will show an example of this in a coming section. Therefore, it is not necessary that Paul and Luke meant the same thing by the phrase “promise of the Spirit.”

We should also explain Paul’s words in Romans 5:5: “The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Clearly, this is an internal work of the Spirit in the heart of believers. Is this consistent, though, with the picture of the Spirit “poured out,” which resembles the experience of Pentecost?<sup>1433</sup> Ervin responds that in Romans 5:5, the Spirit is not poured out, but rather the love of God is. Moreover, in Romans 5:5 the Greek perfect tense is used, which indicates a continual outpouring. This differs from the Pentecostal experience, where the Greek aorist verb tense is used, indicating a single event.<sup>1434</sup>

In conclusion, let us briefly mention Unger’s unique view of Spirit baptism.<sup>1435</sup> In his opinion, at conversion people receive both regeneration and Spirit baptism. Although they are separate experiences, they are always received simultaneously. They differ in the following manner. In the rebirth, Christ enters the believer (Jn 17:23; Col 1:27; Rev 3:20), while through the baptism in the Spirit, the believer enters into Christ (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12; Eph 4:5; 1 Pet 3:21; 1 Cor 12:13).

However, none of the verses cited teach that the baptism in the Spirit places us “in Christ.” Ephesians 4:5 and 1 Peter 3:21 refer to water baptism. In Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27, and Colossians 2:12, water baptism is symbolic of entering into union with Christ. Only 1 Corinthians 12:13 mentions the Holy Spirit. Yet, in that text, regeneration is in view, not Spirit-baptism (see discussion above).

## F. Receiving the Baptism in the Spirit

In considering how to receive the baptism in the Spirit, we must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is a “gift”: “The *gift* of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45). Since it is a gift, it is not some kind of spiritual attainment or reward for righteous living. God gifts the Spirit to all who are open to Him. At any moment after converting to Jesus, a believer can receive this gift from the Lord.<sup>1436</sup>

In addition, those who desire to receive the baptism in the Spirit need ask Him from the Lord with faith. Jesus promised, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will {your} heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Lk 11:13). Paul wrote, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:2).

Laying on of hands is often associated with receiving the baptism in the Spirit (see Acts 8:17; 9:17; 19:6). Although this practice is helpful, it is not required. Cornelius’ household, for example, received the Spirit without laying on of hands.

Some mistakenly think that seekers of Spirit baptism must “tarry” or go through a period of spiritual preparation before receiving God’s gift. This conviction is based on Jesus’ command to His first disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high (Lk 24:49). Others feel that such perseverance in prayer is necessary to overcome the stubbornness of the human spirit.<sup>1437</sup>

On the other hand, we must recall that Jesus had a special reason for commanding His disciples to “tarry.” God’s plan was for the first outpouring of the Spirit to take place on the Day of Pentecost to fulfill the symbolism of that Old Testament festival – a time of harvest. In addition, the crowds present in Jerusalem that

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<sup>1432</sup>Ervin, p. 19-20.

<sup>1433</sup>Dunn, p. 139.

<sup>1434</sup>Ervin, p. 105-106.

<sup>1435</sup>Unger, p. 233-234.

<sup>1436</sup>Wyckoff, p. 511.

<sup>1437</sup>Horton, Spirit Baptism, p. 92.

day made this first harvest possible. Moreover, in the subsequent instances of Spirit baptism recorded in Scripture, believers did not wait or “tarry” for the Spirit, but received the Spirit in answer to believing prayer. Horton confirms, “Jesus’ command to tarry (sit, wait) and not depart from Jerusalem was necessary for this occasion only.”<sup>1438</sup>

## G. Results of the Baptism in the Spirit

How does the baptism in the Spirit effect the lives of those who receive it? In Jesus’ words, this experience gives boldness to witness for Him, leading to more effective evangelization: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8). In Acts, we see how being filled with the Spirit led to believers “speaking the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). We also note the rapid growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement.<sup>1439</sup> One reason for this is the effective evangelization that results from Spirit baptism.

Moreover, it is often thought the baptism in the Spirit introduces believers to the manifestation of spiritual gifts in their lives. Some challenge this claim, however, since Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 that all believers have a gift from the Spirit to share with the Body.<sup>1440</sup> In addition, we observe the success of many ministries that do not openly acknowledge this teaching or experience. On the other hand, we see in biblical examples – both the early disciples and the Lord Jesus Himself – the manifestation of the more “dramatic” gifts of the Spirit after Spirit baptism, such as tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles. Joel predicted that God’s people would prophecy after the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:18).<sup>1441</sup>

Although the question appears to lack clarity, we can nevertheless confidently conclude that although the Spirit does distribute gifts to all believers, after Spirit baptism their manifestation appears to be intensified and enhanced. It is also possible that some gifts do not appear until after Spirit baptism, such as tongues.

The Pentecostal scholar Stanley Horton comments on the goal of Spirit baptism: “It leads to a life of service where the gifts of the Spirit provide power and wisdom for the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Church.”<sup>1442</sup> He reminds us that in the Old Testament, Pentecost was a harvest celebration, which symbolizes evangelization.<sup>1443</sup>

The baptism in the Spirit inspires and empowers for enthusiastic worship of God. We see evidence of this in Luke’s book of Acts. After experiencing the Holy Spirit baptism, the saints were “speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:11), and “speaking with tongues and exalting God” (Acts 10:46). Jesus informed us that “Those who worship (the Father) must worship in spirit (or “Spirit”) and truth” (Jn 4:24).

William Menzies gives this general summary about the value of the baptism in the Spirit: “The baptism is the gateway into the manifold ministries in the Spirit called gifts of the Spirit, including many spiritual ministries.”<sup>1444</sup>

A highly debated issue is the claim that Spirit baptism is evidenced by speaking in other tongues. Several views exist in this regard.<sup>1445</sup> Those that equate the baptism in the Spirit with the new birth as a rule deny that tongues ever accompany that experience. Moreover, the view is often voiced that the gift of tongues ceased to operate in the Church after the apostolic period.<sup>1446</sup> Many Charismatics, who recognize the distinction between

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<sup>1438</sup>Horton, *What the Bible Says*, p. 139.

<sup>1439</sup><http://www.bible.ca/global-religion-statistics-world-christian-encyclopedia.htm>

<sup>1440</sup>Menzies, p. 190-191.

<sup>1441</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>1442</sup>Horton, *What the Bible Says*, p. 261.

<sup>1443</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>1444</sup>William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, Mo.: Logion Press, 1993), 126. Quotation from Wyckoff, p. 508.

<sup>1445</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 495ff.

<sup>1446</sup>For a detailed discussion on the claim that spiritual gifts have ceased in the Church, see volume 5, chapter 16.

regeneration and the baptism in the Spirit, feel that tongues may accompany this experience, but not necessarily.

Classic Pentecostals and some Charismatics teach that the baptism in the Spirit differs from the new birth and is always accompanied by and evidenced by speaking in other tongues.<sup>1447</sup> Finally, some extreme Pentecostals, including the “Oneness” Pentecostals, believe that regeneration and Spirit baptism are different experiences, that the latter is always evidenced by tongues, and that speaking in tongues is required for salvation. However, this final teaching contradicts the biblical doctrine of salvation.

Concerning the claim that Spirit baptism always results in speaking in tongues, we must acknowledge, along with Stanley Horton, that no specific passage of Scripture concretely states that speaking in tongues is the normative evidence of Spirit baptism,<sup>1448</sup> and with Hurtado, that the Bible does not plainly state what is the evidence of Spirit baptism.<sup>1449</sup> This claim is supported by indirect means.<sup>1450</sup>

In support of this claim, we note the following arguments. First, in several cases of Spirit baptism in Acts the recipients definitively spoke in tongues (see Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). In Cornelius’ case (Acts 10), it is significant that Peter convinced the leaders of the Jerusalem church that the Gentiles truly received the baptism in the Spirit by relating that they spoke in other tongues (Acts 11:15-18). For Peter and the Jerusalem church, tongues served as evidence of Spirit baptism.<sup>1451</sup> Wiebe, who does not share the Pentecostal conviction, nonetheless admits, “Glossolalia, then, on this occasion is construed as evidence of Spirit baptism.”<sup>1452</sup>

We must also take into consideration a certain feature of the accounts in Acts 10 and 19. In the first case, we read, “They were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God” (Acts 10:46). In Ephesus, “They {began} speaking with tongues and prophesying” (Acts 19:6). Even though one could understand these texts to say that only some spoke in tongues while others prophesied or exalted God, it is in no way excluded that *all* spoke in tongues, prophesied, and exalted God.<sup>1453</sup>

Some advance the idea that the purpose of the gift of tongues is to preach the gospel to foreigners, such as on the Day of Pentecost. In that case, however, tongues was not used for the purpose of missionary evangelism. All those gathered at the feast understood Aramaic. So then, there was no need for the gospel to be preached in other tongues. In addition, the disciples did not preach the gospel in tongues, but spoke of “the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:11). The book of Acts, in fact, records no instance where the gift of tongues was used to preach the gospel to a foreign people group.<sup>1454</sup>

Moreover, in support of tongues as the “initial evidence” of Spirit baptism, we note that Paul was baptized in the Spirit in Acts 9:17, and in 1 Corinthians 14:18, we learn that he spoke in tongues. Acts 8:17-19 does not specifically say that the Spirit-baptized Samaritans spoke in tongues, but there was definitely a manifestation of supernatural power which spurred Simon to offer money for the ability to impart the Spirit. In addition, Wiebe comments that there must have been some definite indication that the Samaritan converts had not yet received the Holy Spirit baptism.<sup>1455</sup> Since in other cases, Spirit-baptized converts spoke in tongues, one can propose that this was the sign missing in the Samaritan’s experience.

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<sup>1447</sup>The Pentecostal scholar Stanley Horton, though, makes the qualification that one who receives the baptism in the Spirit may not immediately speak in tongues, but that this may come later (Horton, *What the Bible Says*, p. 260).

<sup>1448</sup>Horton, *Spirit Baptism*, p. 97.

<sup>1449</sup>Hurtado L. W. *Normal, But Not a Norm: “Initial Evidence” and the New Testament* // McGee G. B. *Initial Evidence*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991. – p. 191.

<sup>1450</sup>It is also important to note that speaking in tongues is not always evidence of Spirit baptism, since there can be a satanic imitation of this gift as well. Therefore, it is imperative to “test the spirits” (noted in Bruce F. F. *Commentary on the Book of Acts*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1954. – P. 57).

<sup>1451</sup>Вагайцева Е.В. Реферат: Доктрина о крещении Духом Святым. – М. Московский Теологический Институт.

<sup>1452</sup>Wiebe P. H. *The Pentecostal Initial Evidence Doctrine* // *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1984. Vol. 27. P. 464.

<sup>1453</sup>Вагайцева.

<sup>1454</sup>See Horton, *Spirit Baptism*, p. 75, 143.

<sup>1455</sup>Wiebe, p. 464. Yet, Wiebe does not believe that tongues is the definite evidence of Spirit baptism.

Wiebe makes another interesting observation in defense of the Pentecostal position. He echoes the suggestion that since Acts 2:4 is the first instance of disciples receiving the baptism in the Spirit, it may serve as a pattern for future occurrences. This suggestion is supported by similar phenomena being observed in subsequent experience of Spirit baptism.<sup>1456</sup>

Paul's teaching on tongues in 1 Corinthians, though, presents a challenge to the Pentecostal teaching. Why did Paul write in 1 Corinthians 12:30, "All do not speak with tongues, do they?" Pentecostals responds that Paul is not speaking here of the "initial evidence," but of the public use on tongues in a worship service. The other gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 are for public ministry. God does not prompt everyone to bring a message in tongues during a worship service, but only some. In 1 Corinthians 14, however, Paul teaches on the private, personal use of tongues (see vv. 2, 4, 28).<sup>1457</sup>

Kaiser objects that according to 1 Corinthians 12, God gives various gifts to the Church in order to strengthen relationships and create interdependence between its members. Therefore, He does not give tongues to all, but only to some.<sup>1458</sup> We affirm with Kaiser that spiritual gifts are meant to strengthen relationships and create interdependence in the Church. Yet, as mentioned above, God accomplishes this goal by not giving the *public* use of tongues to all members of the Body.

Kaiser also directs our attention to 1 Corinthians 14:5: "Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues..." This shows that not all the Corinthian believer spoke in tongues. Does this not indicate that not all Spirit-baptized saints possess this gift?<sup>1459</sup>

A possible explanation is that in this verse, Paul is again speaking of the public use of tongues. The verse continues with mention of another "public" gift: "...but {even} more that you would prophesy." In other words, Paul is saying, "I wish you all could bring a message in tongues before the congregation, but I desire even more that you would prophecy." However, this interpretation is complicated by verses 2 and 4, which run parallel to verse 5. In these texts, the private use of tongues is in view.

Another explanation is offered. Not all the Corinthian believers had yet received the baptism in the Spirit. Therefore, Paul's wish is that they would all be Spirit-baptized so that they could enjoy the private use of tongues in prayer. Finally, some Pentecostals may respond that since tongues may not appear immediately after Spirit baptism, this may explain why all the Corinthians were not tongue speakers.

## H. Other Terms Describing Experiences with the Spirit

The Bible employs other terms besides regeneration and baptism to describe the work of the Spirit in believers' lives. The expression "filled with the Spirit," for example, can describe Spirit baptism, as in Acts 2:4 and 9:17. However, this phrase finds two other uses as well. Sometimes it refers to the continual sanctifying influence of the Spirit in our lives, such as in Acts 6:3; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52; Lk 4:1; and Eph 5:18. Its third usage is to describe a transitory experience of empowerment which results in the manifestation of supernatural power or a spiritual gift (see Acts 4:8; 4:31; 13:9; Lk 1:15; 1:41; 1:67). After the gift is exercised or the miracle performed, this experience of "filling" ceases.

The Bible provides some indications of how to distinguish these final two experience of the Spirit's fullness from one another. When the ongoing sanctifying work of the Spirit is in view, we find the Greek verb πληρώω (*pleroo*). When a temporary filling of the Spirit for power is occurring, the verb is πίμπλημι (*pimplemi*). When

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<sup>1456</sup>Ibid., p. 464. Yet, Wiebe himself rejects this claim.

<sup>1457</sup>Вагайцева.

<sup>1458</sup>Kaiser W. C. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit as the Promise of the Father: A Reformed Perspective // Brand C. O. Five Views on Spirit Baptism. – Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2004. – P. 30-31.

<sup>1459</sup>Ibid.

the Spirit fills a person in the πληρώ (*pleroo*) sense, the context is highlighting the fruit of the Spirit, while the context underscores spiritual gifts or the baptism in the Spirit when πίμπλημι (*pimplemi*) is found.<sup>1460</sup>

A classic example of the infilling of the Spirit in the πληρώ (*pleroo*) sense is Ephesians 5:18, where Paul exhorts the church to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” The Greek imperative here is in the present tense, which refers to an ongoing, continual action. On the other hand, the Spirit’s fullness as πίμπλημι (*pimplemi*) can repeat multiple times in a believer’s life. For example, the Scriptures record Peter’s experience of the Spirit’s fullness for power twice on separate occasions (Acts 4:8; 4:31). We also read of Paul having such a momentary empowering experience (Acts 13:9).<sup>1461</sup>

Unger, who believes that regeneration and Spirit baptism are identical, suggests that in Acts 2 the disciples experienced the supernatural not because they were “baptized” in the Spirit, but because they were “filled” with the Spirit. He feels that Spirit baptism, that is, “regeneration,” boasts no supernatural accompaniments. Unger, however, fails to consider the following. First, in Acts 1:5-8 Jesus promised His disciples that the baptism in the Spirit would result in an impartation of supernatural power. Second, in Acts 10-11 Peter could confirm that Cornelius’ household received the baptism in the Spirit because they spoke in tongues.

Interestingly, in the case of Cornelius’ household Luke does not say that they were “filled” with the Spirit. Instead, they spoke in tongues because “the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out” (Acts 10:45) and they “received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:47). As we shall demonstrate later, for Luke the expressions “gift of the Spirit” and “receiving the Spirit” refer to the baptism in the Spirit. Therefore, it is misguided to suggest that only the “filling” of the Spirit, and not Spirit baptism, results in supernatural phenomena.

Let us investigate, then, the usage of the phrases “receiving the Spirit” and “the gift of the Spirit.” In this case, their meanings depend on who is employing them. In Luke’s writings, we encounter these phrases in connection with the baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; 8:17-20; 15:8; 10:45-47; 11:16-17; 19:2). Paul and John, however, use them to describe regeneration (see Gal 3:2, 14; Jn 7:39; 14:17; 20:22; 2 Cor 11:4).

Based on this observation, Hart advances the idea that the expressions “baptism in the Spirit” and “regeneration” describe different aspects of the same experience. John emphasizes the aspect of receiving new life, Paul – the beginnings of sanctification, and Luke – receiving spiritual power.<sup>1462</sup> Yet, this view runs contrary to the many proofs cited earlier about the clear distinction between spiritual rebirth and Spirit baptism.

Finally, the Bible teaches that believers are “sealed with the Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22). In light of the fact that believers are sealed “for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), this expression most likely refers not to the baptism in the Spirit, but to rebirth by the Spirit.

## I. The Baptism in the Spirit in Church History

From church history, we can highlight several individuals who claimed to have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit or a similar experience. Among the earliest Church Fathers, we hear of supernatural manifestations in the Church, including speaking in other tongues: Justin Martyr (*Dialogue*, 87-88, 39; 2 *Apology*, 6), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 5.6.1), Tertullian (*Against Marcion*, 5.8), Novation (*On the Trinity*, chp. 29), *Apostolic Constitutions*, 8.1, John Chrysostom (*Sermon on Holy Pentecost*, 2), and Augustine (*City of God*, 12.8).<sup>1463</sup>

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<sup>1460</sup>Acts 7:55, though, seems to be an exception to this rule. This text focuses on Stephen’s vision, not on his character. Therefore, one would expect to see πίμπλημι (*pimplemi*). Instead, we have πληρώ (*pleroo*).

<sup>1461</sup>Ervin incorrectly concludes that in these cases, the participle πλησθεις (*plestheis*) refers to the apostles’ spiritual condition (Ervin, p. 35-39). The fact is that the context records a display of spiritual power.

<sup>1462</sup>Hart, p. 128.

<sup>1463</sup>Burgess S. M. *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1984. – P. 33; Some quotations suggested by Sergei Yastremski.



In the sixth century in the West, the Venerable Bede spoke of “Pentecostal fire,” which compelled a person to speak out. When commenting on Acts 19, he made a distinction between receiving the new birth and the baptism in the Spirit. The latter is received by contemplating the heavenlies.<sup>1464</sup>

In the eleventh century, the Catholic mystic John of Avila stressed the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers. He also taught that they can receive a special experience from the Lord – the baptism in the Spirit. A person prepares for that experience through inner cleansing, fasting, isolation, asking, and refraining from worldly cares. The result of this experience is an increase in love, joy, strength to resist temptation, and deliverance from fear.<sup>1465</sup>

In the East, Symeon the New Theologian (10th-11th c.) distinguished himself by his teaching and experience with the Spirit. He claimed to have had a special encounter with the Spirit, which he termed the baptism in the Spirit.<sup>1466</sup> It is available after the new birth, but is reserved for more “tested” believers. To receive this gift, one must purify oneself, strive for it, and humble oneself to the point of tears. Tears are also the evidence that one has received Spirit baptism, along with producing the fruit of the Spirit, an enhanced awareness of God’s presence, and insight from the Spirit.

The famous reformer Thomas Müntzer (16th c.) also spoke of the baptism in the Spirit as a distinctive encounter with the Spirit. The Spirit can also provide personal guidance for Christians and reveal things to them through dreams and visions. Those desiring Spirit baptism must purify themselves and refrain from worldly pleasures.<sup>1467</sup> Similarly, the Puritans taught that after conversion, Christians can receive special grace from the Lord that will enable them to stand firm in their salvation.<sup>1468</sup>

Although we do see definite mentions of Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts in the course of church history, we acknowledge that such manifestations and experiences became less frequent over time. We affirm with Boyd, though, “The fact that the exercise of the charismatic gifts waned during this period does not mean that it did so by God’s design. Rather, it is an indication that the spiritual vibrancy of the church declined during this period.”<sup>1469</sup>

However, from the eighteenth century on, the Church began to experience a revival of interest in the ministry of the Spirit. A follower of John Wesley, John Fletcher by name, taught that a person could receive total sanctification through an experience he called the “baptism in the Spirit.” One of the branches of Methodism, namely the “Holiness Movement,” also equated Spirit baptism with complete sanctification.

Another significant event was the yearly conference held by “holiness” believers in Keswick, England. Their understanding of the baptism in the Spirit was more in line with the New Testament teaching of an endowment of spiritual power. A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, taught the same.

Although we can locate traces of the Pentecostal teaching and experience in the history of the Church, the actual “founder” of the contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is thought to be the evangelist Charles Parham (20th c.). It was in the Bible school he founded that the students began to experience Spirit baptism with the sign of speaking with other tongues. This teaching and experience spread worldwide through the revival on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, led by William Seymour.

In the mid-twentieth century, a Pentecostal move of the Spirit occurred among more traditional Christian denominations, where many members received the experience of Spirit baptism. We now identify this as the “Charismatic Movement.” It effected nearly all of Christendom, especially Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, millions of which received the “second blessing.” Baptists and Eastern Orthodox, though, were

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<sup>1464</sup>Burgess S. M. *The Holy Spirit: Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1997. – P. 22-24.

<sup>1465</sup>Burgess, *Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*, p. 185-187.

<sup>1466</sup>Burgess S. M. *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1989. – P. 56-60.

<sup>1467</sup>Burgess, *Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*, p. 203-206.

<sup>1468</sup>Hart, p. 143.

<sup>1469</sup>Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 217.

generally less welcoming to this move. Many independent Charismatic congregations and networks were birthed through this Movement.

Finally, the last main contributors to this Pentecostal move were adherents of the “Third Wave.” In this view, the baptism in the Spirit is minimized or even rejected. According to this teaching, believers can participate in the more dramatic, “charismatic” spiritual gifts without first receiving the baptism in the Spirit.

In conclusion, we will examine evidence for the conviction that the post-apostolic Church believed in two distinct encounters with God’s Spirit. The Catholics practice confirmation, while the Eastern Orthodox perform the similar ritual of Chrismation. The term “confirmation” derives from the conviction that this sacrament strengthens the grace already received at water baptism.<sup>1470</sup>

In the Roman Catholic Church, members receive this sacrament at age 12, while Orthodox administer it to infants along with water baptism. Catholics also anoint infants during baptism, but do not equate this with the sacrament of confirmation.<sup>1471</sup> The Orthodox tradition is prior, but Catholics began to administer this sacrament at an older age because the bishop, who alone was authorized to perform the rite, could not attend every infant baptism. In Catholicism, the bishop will arrive to confirm a group of candidates at one time. In the East, the bishop authorizes the priest to perform Chrismation and sanctifies the oil used in the ceremony.<sup>1472</sup>

Interestingly, as in the Pentecostal teaching, the Roman Church also believes that the empowering experience of confirmation is analogous to Christ receiving the power of the Spirit at His water baptism. Catholics also affirm that this experience is intended for “the whole messianic people” and was first experienced on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>1473</sup>

Clearly, the Catholic and Orthodox teaching about a second encounter with the Holy Spirit resonates with the contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic view and serves as a historical confirmation that such was the teaching and experience of the post-apostolic Church. We read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “It is evident from its celebration that the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost.”<sup>1474</sup>

According to the Catholic position, the recipients of confirmation “are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit” in order to be witnesses of Christ.<sup>1475</sup> Orthodox anticipate the bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit listed in Isaiah 11:2: “The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh.”<sup>1476</sup>

Catholics interpret the present-day charismatic experience of their members in different ways.<sup>1477</sup> Catholic dogma takes no definite position on the question. It is not rejected, but rather received with caution. Of note also is that Catholic dogma never embraced the idea that gifts of the Spirit ceased to operate in the Church.

Some Catholics explain this “new” encounter with God’s Spirit as a manifestation of the grace received at baptism or confirmation. Others theorize that the indwelling Spirit can manifest His power in various ways at various times. In this sense, the baptism in the Spirit is like the Spirit’s manifestation of “sanctifying grace.” Some claim that the baptism in the Spirit is simply the deepening of one’s personal relationship with the indwelling Spirit.

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<sup>1471</sup>Ibid, № 1291.

<sup>1472</sup>Demetrakopoulos G. H. Dictionary of Orthodox Theology. – New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1964. – P. 47; Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1290.

<sup>1473</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1287.

<sup>1474</sup>Ibid., № 1302.

<sup>1475</sup>Ibid., № 1285.

<sup>1476</sup>Potessaro G. (Ed.) The Orthodox Doctrine of the Apostolic Eastern Church. – New York, NY: AMS Press, 1969. – P. 47ff.

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## Chapter 16: Participation in Christ's Exaltation - Authority

### A. Introduction

Christ's exaltation means that He was given "the name which is above every name" (see Phil 2:9-11). Therefore, He has all authority in heaven and on earth. Before His ascension and in anticipation of His exaltation, Jesus announced to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Now, Jesus resides "at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 12:2).

His position at the Father's right hand means that Christ now possesses authority over all the powers of evil. Therefore, Peter writes, "...who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him" (1 Pet 3:22). Paul echoes this thought in writing, "He is the head over all rule and authority" (Col 2:10).

Of course, since Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, all earthly and heavenly powers must submit to Him anyway. Jesus displayed His spiritual authority during His earthly ministry by casting out demons (Mk 1:23-25). However, the authority Christ received in connection with His exaltation has importance for the Church. He was exalted in His capacity as the Head of the Body. Paul states,

... seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly {places,} far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:20-23).

Therefore, since believers are positionally located in Christ, He shares with the Church His authority over the devil and all demons. Arnold comments, "Sharing with Christ in his exaltation is particularly important as we consider spiritual warfare because this entails sharing with Christ in his present authority over that realm.... We share in Jesus' authority over the demons and unclean spirits."<sup>1478</sup> Even prior to His ascension, Jesus shared His authority with His disciples: "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you" (Lk 10:19).

Therefore, we devote this chapter to study the relationship of believers to evil spirits, particularly their authority over them in Christ. We will delve into the topic of spiritual warfare and the means by which believer can successfully engage the enemy and secure victory over him. Before we embark on our investigation, though, we must stress an important point. The believer's victory over the powers of darkness is inseparably connected with the redemption accomplished by Christ's sacrifice. Let us explain.

Satan's influence over people comes in three forms: accusation, temptation, and affliction. First, the Scriptures assert that the devil slanders and accuses (Rev 12:10). Since all people have sinned before the Lord, Satan has grounds to accuse us before Him. Yet, thanks to the blood of Jesus, Satan has lost his grounds for accusation. Forgiveness of sins through Christ delivers us from Satan's power to accuse.

Second, Satan exercises control through temptation. When persons are enslaved to sin, it is not difficult for the devil to manipulate them through their sinful desires. In this manner, he is able to control unregenerate persons and perform his will through them. However, when Jesus suffered, He took upon Himself not only the penalty for our sins, but our sinful selves as well in order to destroy the power sin had over us (Rom 6:6). Therefore, through Christ believers obtain deliverance from the second ploy of the enemy – his control over them through temptations to sin.

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<sup>1478</sup>Arnold C. E. Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997. – P. 40.

Finally, Satan seeks to afflict people and inflict suffering. In response, followers of Jesus can rely on God's promise to guard and protect His children from evil (Ps 91, 121, 27). The Most High God is more than capable to defend His own.

So then, on the one hand, the *death* of Christ delivers believers in Him from the powers of darkness. On the other hand, through the *ascension and exaltation* of the Son, as noted above, believers have authority over Satan and his demons. This chapter will examine the both of these aspects with emphasis on the latter – the authority of the believer over the enemy.

## **B. Survey of Biblical and Intertestamental Data**

### **1. Principles of Spiritual Warfare in the Old Testament**

Before we undertake a biblical study on the topic of spiritual warfare, we will briefly mention the understanding of demons in the nations surrounding ancient Israel.<sup>1479</sup> Persons of the Ancient Near East, especially in Assyria and Babylon, believed in demons and in their detrimental effect on people, which included physical and psychological disease, misfortune, anti-social behavior, and even premature death. To ward off demons, they employed amulets, rituals, incantations, etc. Exorcism was used to deliver from demon possession.

The Old Testament, however, gives little attention to demon powers (see discussion in chapter 3), and gives little insight into spiritual warfare. Yet, the Old Testament narrative devotes much attention to war in a physical sense, from which we may draw certain principles for our study.

First, whenever God commanded His people to engage their enemies in war, they came forth victorious. God gave this promise on the condition of obedience, "You will chase your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword; five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword" (Lev 26:7-8). On the other hand, violation of the covenant would lead to defeat (Lev 26:14ff; Deut 28:15ff). Even ceremonial impurity could hinder success (Deut 23:9-14).

Yahweh so closely associated Himself with His people that He considered a battle against Israel a battle against Himself. Concerning a conflict with the Canaanites, God Himself will "drive His enemies out from before Him" (Num 32:21). Whenever Israel disembarked from their encampment in the wilderness, Moses would proclaim, "Rise up, O Yahweh! And let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You" (Num 10:35). When David battled with Goliath, he acknowledged the true source of victory: "Yahweh does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is Yahweh's and He will give you into our hands" (1 Sam 17:47).

There were times when a visible sign of the Lord's presence accompanied Israel into battle: "Moses sent... Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand" (Num 31:6). On the other hand, a visible indication of God's presence proved useless if the Lord Himself did not accompany His people to the battle (see 1 Sam 4:1-11).

We note instances when the praises of God became a weapon in battle. When Jehoshaphat warred with Ammon and Moab, he sent out the singers first, and "they went out before the army and said, 'Give thanks to Yahweh, for His lovingkindness is everlasting'" (2 Chr 20:21). As a result, "When they began singing and praising, Yahweh set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed (2 Chr 20:22).

Similarly, God established the following principle for Israel when they went to war:

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<sup>1479</sup> Aune D. E. Exorcism // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 2. – P. 242.

When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before Yahweh your God, and be saved from your enemies (Num 10:9).

The same principle is voiced in Ps 149:5-9, where success in battle is associated with worship of Yahweh:

Let the godly ones exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. {Let} the high praises of God {be} in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written; this is an honor for all His godly ones. Praise Yahweh!

Psalm 8:2 can be puzzling: "From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength because of Your adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease." The Septuagint here has αἶνον (*ainon*), i.e., "praise," which differs from the Hebrew תִּיב (oz), "strength." The Septuagint reading would again connect praise with victory over enemies. We generally regard the Hebrew text as more reliable. Nevertheless, when Matthew cites Jesus quoting this verse, he uses the word αἶνον (*ainon*), "praise," instead of "strength" (Matt 21:16).

Although believers depend on the Lord for victory, in most cases their participation is required as well. It is written of David in 2 Samuel 8, for example, that he "defeated the Philistines," "defeated Moab," "defeated Hadadezer," etc. In Psalm 144:1, David speaks of both the divine and the human participants in the battle: "Blessed be Yahweh, my rock, who trains my hands for war, {and} my fingers for battle."

However, we note an instance where the Lord defeated Israel's enemies without the latter's involvement. When Jehoshaphat was preparing for battle against Ammon and Moab, he announced, "You {need} not fight in this {battle}; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of Yahweh on your behalf" (2 Chr 20:17). In a similar manner, when Assyrian troops threatened Jerusalem, "Yahweh sent an angel who destroyed every mighty warrior, commander and officer in the camp of the king of Assyria" (2 Chr 32:21).

When Israel was about to go to war, they were consistently charged not to fear. We cite the following examples:

- Moses to Israel: "Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for Yahweh your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deut 20:3-4; cf. 1:29; 7:18; 31:6).
- Joshua to Israel: "Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus Yahweh will do to all your enemies with whom you fight" (Josh 10:25).
- Jahaziel to Jehoshaphat: "Thus says Yahweh to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's'" (2 Chr 20:15).

This injunction was applied to the point where those who were afraid to go into battle were forbidden to do so: "Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart" (Deut 20:8). When Gideon was preparing to battle the Midianites, the fainthearted were, in fact, sent home (Judg 7:3). This indicates that faith is an indispensable ingredient to success in war. God's warriors must enter the battle fray with confidence in victory.

However, Israel was not always immediately victorious. For example, they failed to completely conquer the Promised Land. God anticipated this result, and explained why this outcome was necessary in this case: "I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you" (Ex 23:29-30).

The Old Testament gives further keys to victory. One of these is prayer. When Solomon was dedicating the temple, he requested of the Lord to hear the prayer of those going to war (1 Kin 8:44-45). We observe an

interesting example when Judah was threatened by the Northern Kingdom of Israel. We read, “Then the men of Judah raised a war cry, and when the men of Judah raised the war cry, then it was that God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah” (2 Chr 13:15). This war cry was an expression of the faith of Judah in God’s intervention and their determination to fight.

God’s will consists not only in giving His people victory, but also that His people would gain experience in war. In the book of Judges, it is written that because of Israel’s idolatry, Yahweh refused to further drive the Canaanites out before them (Judg 2:20). However, God worked this event into His plan for His people’s good. First, it would provide Israel with the opportunity to demonstrate their faithfulness to God in the future by rejecting the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites who remained (Judg 2:21-23). Second, it gave opportunity for future generations of His people to learn war:

Now these are the nations which Yahweh left, to test Israel by them ({that is}, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly) (Judg 3:1-2).

Also notable is that when the Lord defeated His enemies, he often did it by introducing confusion into their camp. It was so in His victory over the Philistines: “Then Saul and all the people who {were} with him rallied and came to the battle; and behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, {and there was} very great confusion” (1 Sam 14:20). The same occurred when Syrian troops surrounded Samaria: “For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, {even} the sound of a great army” (2 Kin 7:6). We also recall that when Gideon blew his trumpet, “Yahweh set the sword of one against another even throughout the whole army” (Judg 7:22), and when Jehoshaphat sent the singers before the army, “the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying {them} completely; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another” (2 Chr 20:23).

Along with references to physical conflict in the Old Testament, we can also glean material on spiritual warfare itself. In the book of Job, we learn that Satan attacked Job physically through calamities and sickness. Yet, the devil’s primary goal was not physical destruction, but weakening Job’s faith (Job 1:11). Through his trials, Job demonstrated patience and perseverance, and in this way, he defeated the devil. Another significant observation is that before Satan assaulted Job, Yahweh “made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has” (Job 1:10).<sup>1480</sup> This shows that God is able to protect His own from Satanic attack.

Moreover, in the book of Zechariah Satan accused Joshua the high priest, who may well have been a symbolic representation of God’s people in general. However, the angel of Yahweh rebuked him in the name of the Lord. Redemption was the means to defeat Satan’s accusations: “See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes” (Zech 3:4), which reminds us of the New Testament reference to victory over the devil’s accusation through the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:10).

Saul’s case is also interesting. When God allowed an “evil spirit” to torment him, Saul received comfort from hearing David play music (1 Sam 16:14-23). Aune sees this as the only case of exorcism in the Old Testament.<sup>1481</sup>

Finally, the classic Old Testament passage about spiritual warfare is in Daniel chapter 10. There, we read about a conflict between God’s angels and the “princes” of Persia and Greece. Unfortunately, this passage does not enlighten us about how exactly warfare between angels takes place.<sup>1482</sup> Nevertheless, we can learn somethings about spiritual warfare through this passage.

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<sup>1480</sup>Page S. H. T. Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study on Satan and Demons. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 27.

<sup>1481</sup>Aune, Exorcism, p. 242.

<sup>1482</sup>It is curious to note that not a few Christian writers thought that the princes of Daniel chapter 10 were, in fact, good angels: Theodoret, Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory I, and Jerome (Lowe C. Territorial Spirits and World Evangelization. – Geanies House, Great Britain: OMF, 1998. – P. 86-87).



First, angels battle with demons. Second, demons can, for a time, withstand angels. Third, demons can delay, for a time, an answer to prayer or transmission of a revelation from God. Fourth, evil spirits have some type of connection to human governments and, most likely, support and direct them.

It is also significant that during the battle between God's angel and the "prince of Persia," Daniel was fasting. We are not specifically told, however, to what degree his fast resulted in a spiritual breakthrough. The eventual victory, in fact, was attributed to the arrival of "Michael, one of the chief princes" (Dan 10:13).

In summary, we will emphasize certain important principles. First, when God's people are in proper relationship to Him, they always eventually triumph over their enemies. The enemies of God's people are also God's enemies. Second, the Lord's assistance and aid are vital for securing victory. Sometimes the Lord wages war without human participation, and sometimes by means of human instrumentation.

Moreover, we can underscore others aspects of spiritual warfare. Sometimes praise and worship led to victory over enemies. Prayer also advanced the cause, enhanced by fasting. Violation of the covenant and fear of one's enemies both hinder progress. Therefore, those who war for the Lord must be faithful to Him and bold in faith. In addition, God's will is for all believers to become experienced in conflict with the powers of evil. God's people are a people of war. Finally, perseverance (Job) and the application of redemption (Joshua the high priest) play significant roles in winning spiritual battles. We must also not neglect to mention the activity of good angels in this conflict.

## 2. Survey of Intertestamental Literature

In spite of the lack of a developed demonology or clear instruction about casting out devils in the Old Testament, we do see a more developed demonology in the intertestamental times. Weiss reports that in the intertestamental period, "exorcisms were the order of the day."<sup>1483</sup> Aune feels that, in regard to exorcism, the Jews borrowed much from other peoples, especially the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians.<sup>1484</sup>

The book of Tobit gives an example of how exorcism was understood in the intertestamental period. There, it is claimed that a certain demon killed seven bridegrooms of a certain maiden on their wedding night. The angel Raphael promised her next bridegroom, Azarias, "When thou comest into the bride-chamber, take of the liver of the fish with the heart and place them upon the ashes of the incense and the smell shall go forth, and the devil shall smell it, and flee away, and never appear any more to her" (*Tobit*, 6.17-18).

Solomon was thought to possess special strength against demons. The book *Wisdom of Solomon* claims that he possessed special knowledge of "the powers of spirits" (7.20).<sup>1485</sup> Josephus wrote about Solomon,

God also enabled him to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and sanative to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return.<sup>1486</sup>

Josephus relates an instance where a certain exorcist,<sup>1487</sup> Eleazar by name, employed Solomon's methods of exorcism:

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<sup>1483</sup>Weiss J. Demoniac // The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, 1909. – V. 3. – P. 402; in Unger M. F. Biblical Demonology. – Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1952. – P. 80

<sup>1484</sup>Aune, Exorcism, p. 243.

<sup>1485</sup>Charles R. H. Apocrypha of the Old Testament. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004.

<sup>1486</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.2.5.

<sup>1487</sup>Moreau correctly observes that the New Testament never uses the word ἑξορκιστής (*exorkistes*), i.e., "exorcist," for Jesus or His disciples. The only use of this word in the New Testament is in Acts 19:13 for some Jewish exorcists (Moreau A. S. Exorcism // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 427).

I have seen a certain man of my own country whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this: He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man.<sup>1488</sup>

In the book *Testament of Solomon*, the author claims that with the aid of a certain device, given him by the archangel Michael, Solomon was able to control demons. It is also claimed that Solomon held conversations with demons, during which he learned their names, their special demonic “skills,” and the name of the angel that could control them.<sup>1489</sup> Solomon’s reputation for success in this matter allegedly spread as far as Greece and Rome, and his name is associated with some incantations used there.<sup>1490</sup>

Other intertestamental books also relate instances of exorcisms. In the Qumran manuscript *Genesis Apocryphon*, chapter 20, we read of an alleged exorcism in the house of Pharaoh through the prayer of Abraham. In another Qumran text, *Prayer of Nabonidus*, a Jewish exorcist by the name of Daniel forgave the sins of Nabonidus.<sup>1491</sup>

From the New Testament, we understand that Jewish exorcists were indeed active in the first century (see Mk 9:38-39; Matt 12:27; Acts 19:13-17).<sup>1492</sup> They enjoyed much respect in the ancient world. They employed the name of the God of Israel, sometimes according to the formula “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” At times, they used the names of angels.<sup>1493</sup> These formulas have been found even in Greek incantations, which testify of the great influence Jewish exorcists had on other people groups.<sup>1494</sup>

The Greeks believed in the existence of demons, but show no record of practicing exorcism until the second century B.C. The following list describes in general terms their method for casting out evil spirits. One must: (1) force the demon to speak, (2) learn the demon’s name and area of demonic activity, (3) issue a command for the demon to depart, (4) use various names in the incantation, and (5) expect a violent exit by the demon.<sup>1495</sup> A second-century philosopher, Lucian of Samosata, describes aspects of this process:

Everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the adept in it [i.e., exorcism], how many he takes in hand who fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless, he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind, delivering them from their straits for a large fee. When he stands beside them as they lie there and asks: “When came you into this body?” the patient himself is silent, but the spirit answers in Greek or in the language of whatever foreign country he comes from, telling how and when he entered into the man; whereupon, by adjuring the spirit and if he does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out. Indeed, I saw one coming out, black and smokey in colour.<sup>1496</sup>

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<sup>1488</sup>Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 8.2.5.

<sup>1489</sup>Aune, *Exorcism*, p. 243.

<sup>1490</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1491</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>1492</sup>Aune D. E. *Demonology* // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 1. – P. 922.

<sup>1493</sup>See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 2.12.4; 8.2.5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.4.6; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1.22; 4.33-34; 5.45; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 85.135 (Aune, *Exorcism*, p. 243).

<sup>1494</sup>*Ibid.* Aune also mentions the use of Jesus’ name in Gentile exorcisms (Aune, *Demonology*, p. 923).

<sup>1495</sup>Aune, *Exorcism*, p. 243-244.

<sup>1496</sup>See *Philopseudes*, 16 (Aune, *Exorcism*, p. 243-244).

### 3. Principles of Spiritual Warfare in the New Testament

The Gospels present us with many examples of demon possession and casting out of demons. In this section, we will examine the phenomenon of demon possession in general terms, and in the following section, we will search out proper methodology for casting them out.

Demon possession is often expressed by the phrase ἔχω δαιμόνιον (*echo daimonion*), which literally translates, “have a demon” (see Mk 5:2; 7:25; 9:25; Lk 4:33; 8:27; Acts 8:7). Jesus’ opponents used this phrase to accuse the Lord of being possessed (Μκ. 3:22; Jn 7:20; 8:48-52). Another term to express this condition is δαιμονίζομαι (*daimoniksomai*). This is a verb in the passive tense that literally means “to be demonized.” The New Testament employs this word very often, especially in the form of a participle: Matt 15:22 (as a verb), Matt 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; Mk 1:32; 5:15-16; Jn 10:21 (as a participle).

Next, we examine the phrase ἐνοχλούμενοι (or ὀχλούμενοι) ἀπὸ πνευμάτων ἀκαθάρτων (*enochloumenoi apo pneumatōn akathartōn*). The verbs ἐνοχλούμενοι (*enochloumenoi*) or ὀχλούμενοι (*ochloumenoi*) mean “to hinder/bother.” Therefore, an evil spirit will “hinder” or “bother” a possessed person. Two passages utilize this phrase (Lk 6:18; Acts 5:16).

Mark also employs the preposition ἐν (*en*) having the denotation “together with,” which in context translates “with an unclean spirit.” Finally, the fact that demons are “cast out” indicates that they are dwelling within an individual.

When we compare these expressions, we come away with the following observations. In the case of the possessed man in the synagogue (Mk 1:23; Lk 4:33-36), he both “had a demon” and was “with an unclean spirit.” In a similar way, the man with a “legion” (Matt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-17; Lk 8:26-37) both “had a demon” and “was demonized.” Therefore, these parallel expressions all point to the same experience of demon possession and do not differ in essence.

How do demon possessed persons behave? First, they display strange behavior, such as screams (Mk 1:24; 5:5; Lk 9:39), self-mutilation (Mk 5:5; 9:18), and nakedness (Lk 8:35).<sup>1497</sup> Such persons may possess supernatural power (Mk 5:4; cf. Acts 19:16).<sup>1498</sup> A person may have more than one demon (Mk 16:9; Lk 8:2, 30; 11:26). However, all the characteristic signs of possession do not necessarily need to be present in every case.

The Bible also speaks of demons causing incurable diseases, such as crippling back issues (Lk 13:11), dumbness (Mk 9:17; Lk 11:14), blindness (Matt 12:22), muteness (Mk 9:25), and epilepsy (Mk 1:26; 9:20).<sup>1499</sup>

The Gospels abound in examples where Jesus cast demons out of possessed individuals (for example, Matt 8:16, 28-33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22). McClelland aptly states that one of the main goals for casting out demons in Jesus’ ministry was to demonstrate that the kingdom of God had come: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt 12:28).<sup>1500</sup>

Furthermore, in Mark 12:43-45 Jesus warns that after a demon leaves someone, that individual must fill that “empty spot,” so that the demon may not return and find its previous habitation “unoccupied, swept, and put in order” (Matt 12:43) and return with other demons. Demons are seeking a body to indwell (Matt 12:43), even in animals (Mk 5:12).<sup>1501</sup> Lester Sumrall holds the opinion that demons seek to indwell a body in order to cause more harm and find greater expression in the material world.<sup>1502</sup>

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<sup>1497</sup>Aune, *Demonology*, p. 922.

<sup>1498</sup>McClelland S. E. *Demons, Demonization* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 332.

<sup>1499</sup>Aune, *Demonology*, p. 922.

<sup>1500</sup>McClelland, p. 332.

<sup>1501</sup>Page defends the view that Jesus allowed the demons to enter the swine in order either to show that they actually came out of the possessed man, or to show the destructive nature of evil spirits (Page, p. 155).

<sup>1502</sup>Sumrall L. F. *101 Questions and Answers on Demon Powers*. – Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1983. – P. 28-30.

The Gospels also deal with another important topic – temptation. Jesus Himself was tempted, but overcame (Matt 4)! In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus encouraged His disciples to “not come into temptation” (Mk 14:38) and also taught them to appeal to their heavenly Father for aid: “Do not lead us into temptation” (Matt 6:13).

In the book of Acts, the apostles were also active in casting out devils (Acts 5:16; Acts 16:16-18; Acts 19:12), to which we will turn our attention later. Acts also records the failure of Jewish exorcists to cast out demons in Jesus’ name. Aune comments here,

In Acts there is a general emphasis on miracles, exorcisms, and magic, since the author wishes to demonstrate not only that the gospel proclaimed by the apostles was confirmed by supernatural demonstrations of power, but also that Jewish and pagan magic and exorcism was impotent by comparison.<sup>1503</sup>

Finally, as in Jesus’ experience we also see in Acts that demons openly acknowledged Him (cf. Acts 16:18; Mk 1:24). Yet, neither Jesus nor Paul welcomed such demonstrations and forbade the demons to speak (Mk 1:34; Acts 16:18).

Moving on to the New Testament epistles, we immediately note the absence of references to demon possession. Stedman seeks to explain this by claiming that demons were more active at the time of Jesus’ ministry, and less so after its consummation.<sup>1504</sup> However, it is hard to image for what reason demons would become more passive. Their evil agenda never alters.

In the General Epistles, we encounter practical counsel about dealing with demons. Both Peter and James charge believers to “resist” the devil (1 Pet 5:9; Jam 4:7). They employ the same word in their exhortations – ἀνθίστημι (*anthistemi*).<sup>1505</sup> At the same time, Peter taught that resisting Satan does not depend totally on human will power, but “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation” (2 Pet 2:9). That the powers of darkness are already subject to Christ is also to the believer’s advantage (1 Pet 3:22).

Paul devotes much attention to the theme of spiritual warfare. He portrays Christians as warriors (Phil 2:25; 2 Tim 2:3; Philemon 2).<sup>1506</sup> Consequently, they must prepare themselves for battle by putting on “the full armor of God” (Eph 6:11). The subsequent verses in Ephesians detail the elements of this spiritual armor. In general, they provide protection from Satan’s attacks. Arnold insightfully notes in this context the repetition of the word “stand.”<sup>1507</sup> Stedman correctly states, “We are not out to take new ground; we are to defend that which is already ours.”<sup>1508</sup> In other words, we hold fast to what Jesus has already accomplished for us through His redemptive work.

Arnold also directs our attention to the term in Ephesians 6:12 – πάλη (*pale*), i.e., “struggle.” This word was used in sporting competitions: “It involves strenuous effort, stamina, and, especially, proper spiritual fitness.”<sup>1509</sup>

It is important for us, together with Dickason, to define the righteousness with which we cloth ourselves (Eph 6:14). This is not our personal righteousness, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ: “Our righteous living is far from perfect and is the object of Satan’s attack. Only the righteousness of Christ can provide perfect protection against the thrusts of the enemy.”<sup>1510</sup>

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<sup>1503</sup>Aune, Exorcism, p. 244-245.

<sup>1504</sup>Stedman R. Spiritual Warfare. – Waco, TX: Word Books, 1975. – P. 46.

<sup>1505</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>1506</sup>In Philippians 2:25 and Philemon 2, the term “fellow-soldier” is a translation of the Greek συστρατιώτης (*sustratiotes*), which consists of two parts: συ = together with, and στρατιώτης = soldier.

<sup>1507</sup>Arnold, p. 43.

<sup>1508</sup>Stedman, p. 139.

<sup>1509</sup>Arnold, p. 38.

<sup>1510</sup>Dickason C. F. Demon Possession and the Christian. – Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987. – P. 253.

Stedman shares the thought that in the description of the three initial pieces of armor, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the gospel of peace, the verb tense “aorist” is used, indicating past time. This reveals that the believer already wears these pieces. They relate to the believer’s position in Christ. One must merely remind oneself of that positional status in the Lord. However, concerning the next three pieces, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, a verbal form in the present tense indicates that one must constantly employ these items when battling against Satan’s devices.<sup>1511</sup>

Furthermore, Stedman asserts that Satan’s opposition is beneficial for the believer: “We never would develop or grow properly if we were not attacked in this manner.”<sup>1512</sup> Arnold agrees, “Spiritual warfare is an integral part of the entire Christian experience.”<sup>1513</sup>

When Paul refers to the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,” we affirm along with Dickason and others that what is in view here are specific Scripture texts that enable us to resist specific temptations (see Matt 4:4-10).<sup>1514</sup>

According to the apostle Paul, Satan’s power lies in his ability to accuse people based on the Law (Col 2:14). Arnold comments here,

(Satan) likewise reminds believers of their shortcomings, unworthiness, and sin. By stimulating feelings of guilt, he hopes to keep Christians from feeling well-assured in their relationship to Christ and unworthy to receive his empowering grace.<sup>1515</sup>

However, when Jesus accomplished our redemption, He “disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Col 2:15).<sup>1516</sup> Therefore, the death of Jesus delivers believers from the powers of darkness (Col 1:13), since His sacrifice provides for them forgiveness of sins and liberation from the power of sin. So then, the devil no longer has a place in believers, since they are in Christ Jesus (cf. Jn 14:30).<sup>1517</sup>

Therefore, in spite of the power and prevalence of Satan’s work, Paul could boldly claim victory over him in Christ: “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39). Complete realization of this victory, though, still lies in the future: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20). Nevertheless, “The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil {one}” (2 Thes 3:3).<sup>1518</sup> God “will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor 10:13). Paul was personally assured that “the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim 4:18).

The apostle John reveals that the Son of God came “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus secured this victory through His death (Jn 12:31; 16:11). Consequently, in the book of Revelation we learn that the path to victory over the enemy and his accusations is through faith in the shed blood of the Lamb of God (Rev 12:11). Page affirms, “The verse emphasizes that Christ’s salvific work has robbed Satan of the right to bring accusations against Christians.”<sup>1519</sup>

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<sup>1511</sup>Stedman, p. 69-77.

<sup>1512</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>1513</sup>Arnold, p. 19.

<sup>1514</sup>Dickason, p. 107.

<sup>1515</sup>Arnold, p. 99.

<sup>1516</sup>Ibid., p. 252-253.

<sup>1517</sup>Anderson N. T. The Bondage Breaker. – Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990. – P. 79.

<sup>1518</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>1519</sup>Page, p. 215.

John writes of our victory over Satan in other passages as well: “I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one” (1 Jn 2:13), “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4), “The evil one does not touch him” (1 Jn 5:18; cf. Jn 17:15).<sup>1520</sup> Unlike other Gospels, though, John’s account gives no record of casting out demons.<sup>1521</sup>

The book of Revelation’s use of verb νικάω (*nikao*) is most revealing. Its basic definition is “to conquer.” Sometimes it refers to triumph in a physical sense. For example, the beast “conquers” the saints through persecution (Rev 11:7; 13:7). On the other hand, when Christ returns, He will physically “conquer” the beast (Rev 17:14). Revelation uses νικάω (*nikao*) for spiritual triumph as well. For example, Jesus “conquered” temptation (Rev 5:5). In a similar way, the saints also “conquer” by not apostatizing during times of persecution (Rev 12:11; 15:2).

We come away, then, with the following startling contrast. In a physical sense, the beast conquers the saints through persecution. On the other hand, the saints conquer the beast by their perseverance in faith. They remain faithful to the Lord in spite of pressure from Antichrist to recant. Bauckham makes the same observation: “The same event – the martyrdom of Christians – is described both as the beast's victory over them and as their victory over the beast. In this way John poses the question: who are the real victors?”<sup>1522</sup>

However, in the end the book of Revelation declares that Satan will suffer defeat not only spiritually, but his influence will also be totally negated. In Revelation 12:9 he is “cast down to the earth,” in Revelation 20:2-3 he is bound and cast into the abyss, and in Revelation 20:10 he is thrown into the lake of fire.

Let us summarize the New Testament teaching. These books describe in detail the condition of demon possession and how people in that condition conduct themselves. Aside from possession, the New Testament relates other activities of the devil, such as temptation, accusation, afflicting with disease, and persecution of Jesus-followers.

The good news, however, is that through the death of Christ for our sins, the power and authority of the devil over believers in Him is annulled. Through His ascension and exaltation, Jesus subdued the domain of darkness.<sup>1523</sup> So then, through Christ’s sacrifice and exaltation, believers enjoy victory over all the powers of evil. Although Satan is still not “crushed beneath our feet,” that is, he is still active in the world, believers nevertheless have power and authority over devils and can effectively resist them and cast them out.

## C. Special Topics

### 1. Casting Out of Demons

According to research conducted by Moreau, peoples of all nations and epochs have practiced exorcism. Various methods and rituals have been employed, including torture of the possessed, herbs, magic formulas, incantations, and animal sacrifice.<sup>1524</sup> However, as we shall see, the biblical method differs markedly.

Before we discuss casting out of devils, it will be useful to touch on the mechanism of demon possession.<sup>1525</sup> Dickason notes that the word most commonly used to describe possession, δαιμονιζόμενος (*daimonidzomenos*), stands in the passive voice. On that basis, he concludes that possession is “demon-caused passivity,” that is, the demon indwells the individual, controls him or her, and expresses itself through that person.

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<sup>1520</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>1521</sup>Page, p. 173

<sup>1522</sup>Bauckham R. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. – Cambridge University Press, 1993. – P. 90.

<sup>1523</sup>Piggin F. S. *Principalities and Powers* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 956.

<sup>1524</sup>Moreau, p. 427-428.

<sup>1525</sup>Dickason, p. 37-44.

There are various types of demons, indicated by their names (Acts 16:16; Lk 13:11; Mk 9:17). Demons express themselves through the individual in accordance with their designation. Hagin asserts, "When an unclean spirit controls a person or embodies him, it makes him unclean. A lying spirit makes a liar out of a person."<sup>1526</sup> Sometimes a demon will express through the possessed person not only certain characteristics, but its personality as well, speaking through the voice of the possessed one.<sup>1527</sup> Dickason thinks that the amount of control exercised by demons depends on the number of demons involved, their rank, and the degree of their maleficence (see Matt 12:44-45).<sup>1528</sup> Yet, it is misguided to suppose that the possessed individual "belongs" to the evil spirit – he or she is merely under its influence and control.

How do people end up in this condition? The Bible does not say. Theologians and ministers of the gospel propose various theories, yet their views are based on personal experience. Nonetheless, we will examine several proposals.

Unger, for example, rejects the view accepted among ancient peoples that a demon can enter persons against their will. He appeals to the example of Saul, whom demons tormented because of his persistence in disobedience (see 1 Sam 13:13; 15:22-23; 16:14).<sup>1529</sup> Dickason (and others) ascribe some instances of demon possession to participation in the occult.<sup>1530</sup> Hagin teaches that the process begins when people receive a thought from the devil, which they allow to penetrate deeper and deeper into their personality. He also believes that only one demon possesses a person, but that demon can invite others to join. The "possessing" spirit always belongs to the class "world rulers of this darkness."<sup>1531</sup>

Anderson holds a similar view of how possession begins. In his opinion, the path to demon possession begins in the mind – people lose control of their thinking. Then, they may start hearing voices in their heads, directing them to perform various actions. Thus, Anderson feels that absorption into the possessed state takes place progressively: "Nobody loses control to Satan overnight; it's a gradual process of deception and yielding to his subtle influence."<sup>1532</sup>

On the other hand, we see in Scripture that possession may begin from childhood (Mk 9:21; cf. Mφ. 15:22; 17:14-16), which implies that it is not always the result of personal sin. In such examples, Dickason operates on the principle that the sins of the parents may affect their offspring,<sup>1533</sup> especially if the parents were involved in the occult.<sup>1534</sup>

However, it is curious that in the instances of deliverance recorded in the New Testament, it is nowhere indicated that the demon-possessed person was guilty of something that caused the possessed state. In addition, no demon-possessed person ever received a rebuke from the Lord for some past sin or exhortation to repent. Page boldly claims,

There is no biblical evidence to suggest that the demoniacs were considered responsible for their condition; in fact, the way possession is linked to illness in the Bible strongly suggests that they were not.<sup>1535</sup>

We also learn from Scripture that after a devil is cast out, it can return to its "host" if that individual allows it to do so (Lk 11:24-26; Matt 12:43-45).

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<sup>1526</sup>Hagin K. E. Demons and How to Deal with Them – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1987. – P. 2.

<sup>1527</sup>Stedman, p. 44.

<sup>1528</sup>Dickason, p. 44.

<sup>1529</sup>Unger, p. 27-28.

<sup>1530</sup>Dickason, p. 217.

<sup>1531</sup>Hagin K. E. Ministering To the Oppressed. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1987. – P. 6, 9.

<sup>1532</sup>Anderson, p. 107.

<sup>1533</sup>He cites 1 Kings 14:9-10; 16:1-3; Jeremiah 16:10-13; Nehemiah 9:33-37; Matthew 23:32-36.

<sup>1534</sup>Dickason, p. 219-220. Arnold also comments on this (p. 116-120).

<sup>1535</sup>Page, p. 178-179.

Some consider that demonization occurs more frequently in those places where the gospel has been rarely preached or where people pray or read the Bible less. In other words, Satan enjoys more freedom in places where he receives less interference.<sup>1536</sup> Unger adds the thought that in modern culture, many cases of demon possession are unrecognized since the devil adopts more “culturally appropriate” manifestations.<sup>1537</sup>

From a biblical point of view, casting out of demons is a privilege of believers in Jesus. The Lord promised the Church authority to cast out demons, and the Church still possesses that authority today. The New Testament recorded many instances where not only Jesus, but also His disciples cast out evil spirits (Matt 10:8; Lk 10:17-20; Acts 16:18).

With rare exceptions, Jesus cast out demons with a straightforward command: “He cast out the spirits with a word” (Matt 8:16). Aune observes that unlike healing the sick, it is never recorded that Jesus ever touched a possessed person. Aune contrasts Christ’s straightforward approach with the pagan practice: “The brevity and authority of such commands and the absence of the invocation of divine or angelic names contrast with the lengthy adjurations and invocations that characterize formulas in the magical papyri.”<sup>1538</sup> It is also important to consider that although demons at times exit with a cry, convulsion, or the like, the New Testament does not devote much attention to such manifestations.<sup>1539</sup>

Once, Jesus asked the name of a demon (Mk 5:9). However, judging from the answer He received, “My name is Legion; for we are many” (Mk 5:9), this example may deal not so much with the names of the demons as with their number. “Legion” is not a name. Also notable is that when Jesus delivered this individual, He did not invoke the demon’s name in some formulaic way.<sup>1540</sup>

We also observe that the Legion did not immediately exit the possessed man. This verse employs the verbal form “imperfect,” ἔλεγεν (*elegen*), indicating a repetitive action. Dickason explains that Jesus allowed this delay either to emphasize the reality of the demon-possession, or His authority over the demons.<sup>1541</sup> Yet, the reality of the possessed man’s condition was already evident, and Jesus’ authority would be on greater display had the demons existed immediately.

In this connection, it is important to take into consideration that Jesus recognized different types of demon possession. After casting a devil out of a possessed boy, Jesus explained: “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mk 9:29). Possibly, Jesus asked a question to the boy’s father to discern the “species” of demon He was dealing with: “How long has this been happening to him?” (Mk 9:21). It seems, then, that perseverance is needed to cast out certain types of demons (Mk 5), or special power obtained through prayer (Mk 9).<sup>1542</sup> Also significant is that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus urged His disciples to pray “that you may not come into temptation” (Mk 14:38). Hence, we see again the efficacy of prayer in spiritual warfare.

Fasting is also an effective spiritual weapon. Here, though, we must clarify that in Mark 9:29, some translations read, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer *and fasting*.” Nonetheless, these words are missing in two of the most reliable Greek manuscripts (א, B).<sup>1543</sup> The parallel passage in Matthew 17:21 encounters the same dilemma – in these manuscripts (א, B), verse 21 is absent.<sup>1544</sup> On the other hand, when Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He had been fasting for 40 days (Lk 4:2). Although the text does not specifically indicate that Jesus fasted in preparation for this spiritual battle, it is a safe assumption.

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<sup>1536</sup>Sumrall, p. 40-41

<sup>1537</sup>Unger, p. 82-83.

<sup>1538</sup>Aune, *Exorcism*, p. 244.

<sup>1539</sup>General Council of the Assemblies of God. Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?  
[http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_4176\\_posessed.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4176_posessed.pdf)

<sup>1540</sup>Page, p. 152.

<sup>1541</sup>Dickason, p. 258-259.

<sup>1542</sup>Page suggests that the one performing the deliverance must ask God for the power to perform it (Page, p. 164).

<sup>1543</sup>Metzger B. M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. – 2nd ed. – London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. – P. 85

<sup>1544</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 35.



The account in Mark chapter 9 mentions another key to success in casting out demons – faith. When the possessed boy’s father expressed doubt in Jesus’ ability to deliver his son, the Lord replied, “All things are possible to him who believes” (Mk 9:23). The Matthean parallel gives special stress to this aspect, where Jesus answered His disciples question “Why could we not drive it out?” with the words, “Because of the littleness of your faith” (Matt 17:20).<sup>1545</sup> Finally, through faith the Canaanite woman received a miracle of deliverance for her daughter (Matt 15:22-28).<sup>1546</sup>

Of interest to note is that, although Jesus required faith from his disciples to cast out demons and sometimes from parents of those afflicted, He never required it from those possessed. The latter always assumed a passive role in the act. Page concurs, “Deliverance from possession is never granted in response to the faith of the possessed, though it is sometimes related to the faith of others.”<sup>1547</sup>

Moreover, when Jesus was discussing demon possession in Matthew chapter 12, He revealed this truth: “How can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong {man}? And then he will plunder his house” (Matt 12:29). This means that someone must overpower Satan before he will release any of his prisoners. The fact that Jesus did indeed deliver victims of demon possession shows that He had bound the strong man. Many feel that Jesus accomplished this through His sacrifice on Calvary, as indicated in Jn 12:31-32.<sup>1548</sup> Others posit that since Jesus cast out demons before His crucifixion, He must have bound the strong man when He successfully resisted temptation in the wilderness. The first option, though, has clear biblical support.

Some final features to note in Jesus’ “methods” for deliverance are as follows. He could forbid demons to return to a liberated individual: “You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again” (Mk 9:25). It appears that He also had authority to cast demons into the abyss. This would explain the demons’ request “not to command them to go away into the abyss” (Lk 8:31). Moreover, Jesus never sought out candidates for deliverance – they came to Him or were brought to Him.<sup>1549</sup> Finally, Jesus could cast out a demon from a distance (Matt 15:22-28).<sup>1550</sup>

In the book of Acts, the disciples continue the Master’s work of deliverance (Acts 5:16; 8:5-7).<sup>1551</sup> In imitation of the Lord, Paul cast a demon out of a servant girl by issuing a command in Jesus’ name (Acts 16:16-18). It is curious to note that at one time, demons exited individuals upon contact with Paul’s clothing (Acts 19:12), which differs from the principle earlier noted that Jesus never touched those He delivered from evil spirits.

We must add that to effectively deliver from demons, one must not only employ the name of Jesus, but also be a believer in Him. Some Jewish exorcists were unable to cast out demons in Jesus’ name (Acts 19:13-16). Dickason comments here, “When the believer utters, ‘In the name of the Lord Jesus,’ he is not using a magical or mystical formula; he is exercising His God-given authority by virtue of his union with Christ.”<sup>1552</sup>

Unger adds the thought that the authority to cast out demons is not in the words, “in the name of Jesus,” as if it was an incantation, but in the One to whom the words apply. We also take into consideration that the Holy Spirit is also active in this affair (Matt 12:28), which again confirms that the power is not in a formula, but in the Persons of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>1553</sup>

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<sup>1545</sup>Page thinks that because of the disciples’ earlier success in casting out evil spirits, they began to rely on their own ability and not on the name of Jesus. See Page, p. 163.

<sup>1546</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>1547</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>1548</sup>Arnold, p. 50; Page, p. 129.

<sup>1549</sup>Possibly, the case with the legion of demons may be an exception. It is very likely that Jesus crossed the sea with the intention of meeting the man.

<sup>1550</sup>Page, p. 158, 165.

<sup>1551</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>1552</sup>Dickason, p. 248.

<sup>1553</sup>Unger, p. 103ff.

We also discover an interesting example in the Gospels where a person, who was not one of the disciples following Jesus, was casting out demons in His name (Mk 9:38-39). We must assume that this unnamed “exorcist,” even though he was not numbered among the disciples, was a true believer in Him.<sup>1554</sup>

To our surprise, God’s Word forbids us to revile the devil or demons. Jude decries those who “revile angelic majesties” (Jude 8). He cites the example of Michael the archangel, who refused to “pronounce against (the devil) a railing judgment” (Jude 9).

Before we come to any conclusion about this issue, we will conduct a brief survey of deliverance ministry in church history. In the second century, Justin Martyr testified of the success Christians were having in dealing with demon possession:

For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs (2 *Apology*, 6).

Similarly, Tertullian speaks of the authority believers have over demons in the name of Jesus:

Why, all the authority and power we have over them is from our naming the name of Christ, and recalling to their memory the woes with which God threatens them at the hands of Christ as Judge, and which they expect one day to overtake them. Fearing Christ in God, and God in Christ, they become subject to the servants of God and Christ. So at our touch and breathing, overwhelmed by the thought and realization of those judgment fires, they leave at our command the bodies they have entered (*Apology*, 23).

Origin also glorifies the power of Jesus’ name:

For it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus, accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him; for the repetition of these has frequently been the means of driving demons out of men, especially when those who repeated them did so in a sound and genuinely believing spirit. Such power, indeed, does the name of Jesus possess over evil spirits, that there have been instances where it was effectual, when it was pronounced even by bad men, which Jesus Himself taught (would be the case), when He said: “Many shall say to Me in that day, In Thy name we have cast out devils, and done many wonderful works” (*Against Celsus*, 1.6).

In conclusion, we cite Marcus Minucius Felix:

Thus they fly from Christians when near at hand, whom at a distance they harassed by your means in their assemblies (*Octavius*, 27)

Moreau tells of various rituals that have crept into the church over time, which have no biblical sanction, such as: use of water, oil, the cross, reading Scripture, and special formulas.<sup>1555</sup> Since the second century, practitioners of deliverance added to the simple command, “in the name of Jesus,” various biographical events from the Savior’s career, for example, “In the name of Jesus, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate.”<sup>1556</sup>

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<sup>1554</sup>Unger so teaches (see Unger, p. 106).

<sup>1555</sup>Moreau, p. 427.

<sup>1556</sup>See Justin Martyr, *Dialog*, 30.3; 76.6; 85.2; *Apology* 2.6; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.49.3. From Aune, *Demonology*, p. 923.

However, Gross warns of the danger of using formulas for casting out demons: “When success in deliverance ministries centers on saying the right words or being in the right environment, the whole procedure dangerously approaches magic.”<sup>1557</sup>

In the Roman Catholic tradition, exorcism is applied at the time of water baptism. This practice traces back to the Early Church, when candidates for water baptism renounced the devil and all his works.<sup>1558</sup> In the case of actual demon possession, a “major exorcism” is performed by a priest in the name of Jesus by permission of the bishop.<sup>1559</sup> Some Catholics light candles to ward off evil powers. Unger believes that this practice traces back to “ancient modes for keeping evil spirits in check by fire.”<sup>1560</sup>

The Reformers responded by refraining from exorcism altogether. The Catholic Church also subsequently set limits on how exorcism was practiced. Liberal theologians went to the other extreme of denying the reality of demon possession, considering it a manifestation of psychological pathology.<sup>1561</sup>

In modern times, those experienced with deliverance ministry give their recommendation. Dickason, for example states that if a demon refuses to come out, one must inquire on what basis it refuses. After the possessed individual confesses and forsakes sin, the demon must depart. Confession of sin is also beneficial after the deliverance along with renunciation of occult practices by the individual or family. Such persons must also put away all objects connected with the occult (see Ex 32:20; 2 Kin 23:4-25; Acts 19:18-19). In addition, the liberated individual must maintain their position of victory that Christ accomplished for them, resisting the devil and growing spiritually.<sup>1562</sup>

Dickason also recommends spiritual counselling for those delivered from evil spirits so that the individual can grow in his or her personal relationship with Jesus. Counselling is done to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord, “Make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Dickason doubts the existence of a concrete spiritual gift of delivering from demons and warns that devoting too much attention to this ministry can be detrimental to the deliverance minister.<sup>1563</sup>

Another gospel preacher experienced in deliverance ministry, Lester Sumrall, shares his insights.<sup>1564</sup> Referring to Jesus’ example, he feels that the one casting out a demon has the right to determine what the demon can or cannot do subsequently. Furthermore, he feels that demons can inhabit a dwelling, but can be expelled from there.<sup>1565</sup> In addition, a possessed person cannot deliver themselves.<sup>1566</sup> Finally, the sign that the demon has truly been cast out is that the eyes clear, the stomach relaxes, and joy is experienced.

Kenneth Hagin adds the thought that the presence of a demon in a person is discerned with the aid of the spiritual gifts “word of knowledge” or “discerning of spirits.” He also feels that knowing the name and number of demons is needed for a successful encounter. He holds that believers have authority to cast demons of lower ranks into the abyss.<sup>1567</sup>

Neil Anderson asserts that those casting out demons must possess certain personality characteristics, such as confidence in one’s spiritual authority, humility, and dependence on the Lord.<sup>1568</sup> Anderson conducts an interview with the possessed person to ascertain with certainty that possession has occurred. He inquires as to the individual’s involvement with the occult, or that of his or her family. He provides basic spiritual instruction

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<sup>1557</sup>Gross E. N. *Miracles, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare: An Urgent Call for Discernment*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990. – P. 119.

<sup>1558</sup>Aune, *Demonology*, p. 923; McClelland, p. 333.

<sup>1559</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1673. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

<sup>1560</sup>Unger, p. 4.

<sup>1561</sup>McClelland, p. 333.

<sup>1562</sup>Dickason, p. 251, 335-337.

<sup>1563</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 257, 266.

<sup>1564</sup>Sumrall, p. 54, 74, 121-135.

<sup>1565</sup>Also see Anderson, p. 222.

<sup>1566</sup>Unger holds to the opposite view (see Unger, p. 96).

<sup>1567</sup>Hagin, *Ministering to the Oppressed*, p. 2, 14-15.

<sup>1568</sup>Anderson, p. 68-71

to the candidate for deliverance, and leads the individual through: (1) renunciation of his or her involvement in the occult or that of his or her family, (2) an honest self-evaluation and confession of sin, (3) forgiveness of others, (4) submission to God and authorities, and (5) embracing humility. By this means, the possessed person actually delivers himself or herself, which is preferred since it places the delivered individual in better position to resist the devil subsequent to the experience of deliverance.<sup>1569</sup>

However, when we rely on someone's personal experience in deliverance ministry without backup from the Bible, we violate the principle of the "sufficiency of Scripture," which states that the Bible contains all that is necessary for successful Christian life and ministry (see 1 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, although it is prudent to listen to the counsel of experienced ministers of the gospel, it is always preferable to have biblical confirmation of any teaching or practice.

On the basis of Scripture, we can say the following about demon possession:

1. Demon possession is a real phenomenon, with which the Church must be ready to deal.
2. In Christ, the Church has authority over Satan and demons.
3. Any believer in Jesus can cast out a devil in His name. At the same time, it is desirable that such individuals have confidence in their position in Christ and the authority of that position.
4. In connection with the previous point, faith is required of those performing the deliverance and is also desired of those in charge of the possessed person. The minister of deliverance must approach the encounter with full confidence in its positive outcome.
5. One must not resort to special rituals or formulas to liberate the possessed individual. A simple command in Jesus' name is adequate.
6. The degree of possession depends on the number of demons (Mk 5:9), the "type" of demon (Mk 9:29), and their degree of wickedness (Matt 12:45).
7. In connection with the previous point, at times it is necessary to learn something about the evil spirit or its character in order to elucidate the severity of the possession. One may obtain this information from the demon (Mk 5:9), from people aware of the situation (Mk 9:21), or from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:8-10).
8. In cases of more severe demonization, the minister of deliverance must be spiritually prepared through prayer and possibly fasting. Casting out demons in this context may require more perseverance.
9. It is better not to allow demons to speak (except as in No 6).
10. It is inappropriate to revile demons (Jude 9).

## **2. Demon Possession of Believers?**

Many are troubled by the question whether true believers in Christ can have a demon. We will examine arguments for and against this position.

In favor of this view, we may appeal to the following proofs. Some cite Saul as an example of a backslidden believer who became possessed (1 Sam 16:14-15). On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the demon tormented Saul, but did not appear to indwell him. In addition, some would challenge the claim that Saul was a genuine believer at all. Also significant is that the Holy Spirit departed from him before the evil spirit came to him (1 Sam 16:14). Finally, the demon departed from him whenever David played his harp, which one would not expect from an indwelling demon.<sup>1570</sup>

Another case to consider is the woman bent over by a demon, whom Jesus called a "daughter of Abraham," thus likely indicating a genuine faith (Lk 13:16, cf. Lk 19:9).<sup>1571</sup> Opponents of this view, however,

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<sup>1569</sup>Ibid., p. 187-219.

<sup>1570</sup>Dickason, p. 121-123.

<sup>1571</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

claim that the designation “daughter of Abraham” may not refer to her spiritual condition, but simply her ethnicity. In addition, the demon may not have possessed her, but merely caused the physical malady.

In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul introduces the topic of delivering someone over to Satan. This does not involve giving someone over to demon possession, but removing God’s protection from the person being chastised. In Acts chapter 5, it is said that Satan filled the heart of Ananias. Again, no demon possession is in view here, but Ananias merely gave place to the devil’s temptation.<sup>1572</sup> Regarding Judas Iscariot, without doubt he was possessed, possibly by Satan himself (Jn 13:27). Yet, it is very doubtful that he was a sincere follower of Christ – Jesus once called him a “devil” (Jn 6:70).<sup>1573</sup>

In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul makes reference to a “spirit of fear.” Is this a spirit that can indwell believers? Here, we must consider that in the New Testament, the term “spirit” can refer both to a personality and also to an attitude, such as a “spirit of gentleness” (1 Cor 4:21) or a “quiet spirit” (1 Pet 3:4). We affirm the following statement:

Thus, unless the context shows that an independent spirit-being is meant, it seems best to take most phrases such as a haughty spirit, a hasty spirit, a spirit of slumber, a spirit of jealousy, etc., to be sins of the disposition or lusts of the flesh (Galatians 6), and not demons.<sup>1574</sup>

Arnold advances the following arguments supporting the conviction of a believer’s possession.<sup>1575</sup> He points our attention to the word τόπος (*topos*) in Ephesians 4:27: “Do not give the devil a place (τόπος).” We encounter this term in discussions of demons in Luke 11:24 and Revelation 12:7-8 as well. In both instances, it indicates a physical location where Satan or a demon can be situated. Moreover, Ephesians 3:16-19 is interpreted to say that the Holy Spirit progressively fills the heart of believers. Does this mean that evil spirits can inhabit the places the Spirit does not yet occupy?

However, any “vacancy” left unoccupied by the Spirit will not inevitably be given over to Satan. In addition, the phrase “give place to the devil” does not necessarily refer to possession, but likely refers to giving in to temptation.

Furthermore, Arnold sees possible references to demon possession of believers in the following excerpts: “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body” (Rom 6:12); “They may come to their senses {and escape} from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:26); “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8); “In later times some will fall away from the faith” (1 Tim 4:1); “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception” (Col 2:8); “How is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?” When considering these examples, though, one must note that Satan can exert his influence in various ways, not just through possession.

Hagin defends the view that a demon cannot indwell the spirit of a Christian since he believes that the spirit of a believer is born again and has divine nature. An evil spirit can indwell the soul or body of a Christian, if the latter gives place to it.<sup>1576</sup> Nevertheless, Hagin’s understanding of demon possession is tainted by his incorrect anthropology, which we discussed in chapter 1.

Along with our refutations of the arguments above supporting possession of believers, other arguments count against it as well. For example, one could argue that the presence of the Holy Spirit in believers rules out the simultaneous occupation by a demon spirit (Rom 8:9). According to Luke 11:24-26, a demon spirit can enter

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<sup>1572</sup>Ryrie C. C. Basic Theology. – Victor Books, 1984. – P. 167.

<sup>1573</sup>Dickason, p. 125.

<sup>1574</sup>General Council of the Assemblies of God. Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?  
[http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_4176\\_possessed.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_4176_possessed.pdf)

<sup>1575</sup>Arnold, p. 76-97.

<sup>1576</sup>Hagin, Demons and How to Deal with Them, p. 5-17.

only when the “home” is “empty.”<sup>1577</sup> The body of a Christian cannot be the temple of the Holy Spirit and a den of demons at the same time (2 Cor 6:15-16).<sup>1578</sup>

Supporters of the theory that believers can be possessed respond that the presence of a sinful nature in humans does not prevent the simultaneous indwelling of the Spirit. Why can an unclean spirit, then, not indwell a believer? They also appeal to Job chapters 1-2, where God allowed an evil spirit (Satan) into His presence.<sup>1579</sup> Arnold compares the heart of a believer with the Jerusalem temple. He cites times when idols would be present in the temple where God also dwelt.<sup>1580</sup>

Turning again to arguments opposing the teaching on possession,<sup>1581</sup> we note that the Bible abounds in references to Christ’s victory over the devil and the believer’s deliverance from his power (Col 1:13; 2:14-15; Heb 2:14-15; Acts 26:18). However, others object that these passages of Scripture describe the legal position believers have in Christ, not their daily experience. Satan continues to “prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

Furthermore, the Lord promises to keep His own from the evil one (1 Jn 5:18; 2 Thes 3:3; Jn 17:15; 10:28-29). The Greater One lives in us (1 Jn 4:4). On the other hand, the Bible instructs us to resist the devil, which implies that the Lord’s protection is not automatic.

The final argument refuting possession of believers is that in the New Testament epistles, the apostles never mention that a believer may have a demon.<sup>1582</sup> It is reasonable to assume that if demon possession was a significant problem for believers in Christ, the apostles, who were intensely invested in the spiritual growth of the Church, would have certainly addressed this issue. Yet, the New Testament epistles lack any clear reference to it.

We will glance at several excerpts from the Church Fathers to discover their views on this topic.<sup>1583</sup> The following writers considered possession of believers a real possibility. The book *Pastor of Hermas* claims that both the Spirit of God and an evil spirit can cohabitate in a Christian.

But if any outburst of anger take place, forthwith the Holy Spirit, who is tender, is straitened, not having a pure place, and He seeks to depart. For he is choked by the vile spirit, and cannot attend on the Lord as he wishes, for anger pollutes him. For the Lord dwells in long-suffering, but the devil in anger. The two spirits, then, when dwelling in the same habitation, are at discord with each other, and are troublesome to that man in whom they dwell (*Commandments*, 5.1).

The next passage asserts that the devil may only enter into an uncommitted Christian:

So also the devil goes to all the servants of God to try them. As many, then, as are full in the faith, resist him strongly, and he withdraws from them, having no way by which he might enter them. He goes, then, to the empty, and finding a way of entrance, into them, he produces in them whatever he wishes, and they become his servants (*Commandments*, 12.5).

Origen speaks of believers being possessed and of their deliverance:

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<sup>1577</sup>General Council of the Assemblies of God. Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?

<sup>1578</sup>Gross, p. 166.

<sup>1579</sup>Dickason, p. 132.

<sup>1580</sup>Arnold, p. 76-97.

<sup>1581</sup>Dickason, p. 81-99; General Council of the Assemblies of God. Can Born-Again Believers Be Demon Possessed?

<sup>1582</sup>Ibid. Also see Page, p. 260.

<sup>1583</sup>Burgess S. M. The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1984. – P. 23; Arnold, p. 110-112.

Anyone who vanquishes a demon in himself, e.g. the demon of lewdness, puts it out of action; the demon is cast into the abyss, and cannot do any harm to anyone (*Homily on Joshua*, 15:5).<sup>1584</sup>

We can also cite the so-called Apostolic Constitutions, written in the fourth century, where the author comments on possession of the unbaptized.<sup>1585</sup>

Ye energumens, afflicted with unclean spirits, pray, and let us all earnestly pray for them, that God, the lover of mankind, will by Christ rebuke the unclean and wicked spirits, and deliver His supplicants from the dominion of the adversary (8:6).

If anyone hath a demon, let him indeed be taught piety, but not received into communion before he be cleansed (8:32).

Cyprian ascribes victory over demons to water baptism, yet demons can re-enter a backslider:

The obstinate wickedness of the devil prevails even up to the saving water, but that in baptism it loses all the poison of his wickedness.... When, however, they come to the water of salvation and to the sanctification of baptism, we ought to know and to trust that there the devil is beaten down, and the man, dedicated to God, is set free by the divine mercy (*Letters*, 75.15).

Some of those who are baptized in health, if subsequently they begin to sin, are shaken by the return of the unclean spirit, so that it is manifest that the devil is driven out in baptism by the faith of the believer, and returns if the faith afterwards shall fail (*Letters*, 75.16).

In addition, Eusebius twice mentions the ministry of exorcism in the Church (*Church History*, 6.43.11; 8.6). Yet, we also note that the office of an exorcist is not mentioned until the third century, although the practice of exorcism dates back to the second century.<sup>1586</sup>

Not a few modern commentators, who have experience with casting out demons, insist that believers can be possessed if they are walking according to the flesh.<sup>1587</sup> Gross objects, though, that such people may not actually be true Christians at all.<sup>1588</sup>

Church history also records those who rejected the idea of a possessed Christian. Calvin, for example, penned the following:

God thus turning the unclean spirits hither and thither at his pleasure, employs them in exercising believers by warring against them, assailing them with wiles, urging them with solicitations, pressing close upon them, disturbing, alarming, and occasionally wounding, but never conquering or oppressing them.... I deny that believers can ever be oppressed or vanquished by him.... God, therefore, does not allow Satan to have dominion over the souls of believers.<sup>1589</sup>

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<sup>1584</sup>From Arnold, p. 110.

<sup>1585</sup>Roberts A., Donaldson J., Coxe A. C. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

<sup>1586</sup>Schaff P., Wace H. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. – New York, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1890.

<sup>1587</sup>Sumrall, p. 104-105.

<sup>1588</sup>Gross, p. 164.

<sup>1589</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.14.18, Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997.

Stedman concurs, asserting that Satan can discourage, frighten, or weaken believers, but not control them.<sup>1590</sup> Unger, author of *Biblical Demonology*, initially taught that believers can be subject to “pressure, suggestion, (and) temptation,” but not possession.<sup>1591</sup> However, according to Arnold, Unger later rethought his position and conceded that believers could indeed be possessed.<sup>1592</sup>

Finally, some take an agnostic stance toward the question. In Dickason’s words, “A rather thorough examination of the biblical evidence leads us to conclude that it neither clearly affirms nor denies the reality of demonization of believers.”<sup>1593</sup>

Of all the arguments presented above, the most convincing is the fact that the epistle writers, who were intensely interested in the sanctification of believers and their victory over Satan, never mention deliverance from demon possession as an asset to spiritual growth. This fact, supplemented by other proofs already mentioned, convince us that a sincere Christian will not have a demon.

What about the fact that demon possession was so common in first-century Israel? Here, we must note that the spiritual condition of those possessed is unknown. We might concede that the woman that Jesus called a “daughter of Abraham” had genuine saving faith (cf. Lk 19:9). It is written of her that she had a “sickness caused by a spirit,” or literally πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας, “a spirit of infirmity” (Lk 13:11). However, a careful reading of this passage reveals several important nuances. First, Jesus did not cast a demon out of the woman, but rather said, “Woman, you are freed *from your sickness*.” Second, Jesus laid hands on her, which is something He never did in cases of possession by evil spirits. So then, although this woman had a “sickness caused by a spirit,” this does not appear to be a classic case of demon possession. We may allow that a believer can have a sickness caused by a demon.

Nonetheless, even if Christians cannot be possessed, they are subject to attacks from the devil. Jesus-followers must resist him, in Dickason’s opinion, with a rebuke directed to the demon itself<sup>1594</sup>. Believers must also rely on their position of authority in Christ, as Gross notes, “When Christians claim their status as God’s children, through the person and work of Christ, Satan’s influence over them is immediately vanquished.”<sup>1595</sup>

### 3. “Binding” and “Loosing”

Many apply the words of Jesus, that the Church has authority to “bind and loose,” to dealing with devils. It is thought that a proclamation to bind Satan prevents him from carrying out his evil intentions. The following passages are pertinent to our discussion: Matthew 12:29; Matthew 16:19; Matthew 18:18.

Examining the context of Matthew 18:18, though, we discover that “binding and loosing” here refers to church discipline. Matthew 16:19 is a more open question. Nevertheless, the mention of the “keys of the kingdom of God,” which most likely refer to the preaching of the gospel, leads us to understand “binding and loosing” as proclaiming the conditions for receiving salvation.

Only Matthew 12:29, then, directly deals with our struggle with the powers of darkness: “How can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong {man}? And then he will plunder his house.” In our previous discussion of this verse, we concluded that Jesus is the one who bound Satan through either His sacrificial death or His victory over temptation in the wilderness. Only in virtue of Jesus *already* having bound the devil can His followers approach casting out demons with confidence.

Nonetheless, the biblical injunction to “resist” the devil remains applicable for believers (Jam 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9). It is not so important what words we use to resist him, as it is the fact that we are resisting. In addition,

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<sup>1590</sup>Stedman, p. 53.

<sup>1591</sup>Unger, p. 100.

<sup>1592</sup>Arnold, p. 76.

<sup>1593</sup>Dickason, p. 340.

<sup>1594</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1595</sup>Gross, p. 114.



the fact that during His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke directly to Satan gives us grounds to address evil spirits directly in the name of the Lord, resisting their evil actions against us.

#### 4. Territorial Spirits

We recall our discussion from chapter 3 on the existence of a hierarchy of demons that support various national governments and direct them. We found sufficient evidence to conclude that a demonic hierarchy in some relation to human governments likely exists. Yet, the question remains as to the appropriate response to this phenomenon.

A main figure in the move to actively engage in spiritual warfare against these so-called “territorial spirits” was C. Peter Wagner.<sup>1596</sup> He defines the concept of territorial spirits as follows:

These enemy forces are frequently called “territorial spirits” because they attempt to keep large numbers of humans networked through cities, nations, neighborhoods, people groups, religious allegiance, industries or any other form of human society in spiritual captivity.<sup>1597</sup>

The goal of this engagement with territorial spirits is to remove the hindering influence of these demons, which is described in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4. This goal is reached through prayer: “Our number one spiritual weapon is prayer.”<sup>1598</sup>

However, the type of prayer practiced in this movement has its own unique character. Operating on the example of Joshua 1:3, “Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you,” prayer walks are organized, especially on site at the “target” areas, to conduct “strategic prayer.” In addition, “spiritual maps” are drawn up indicating the location, names, character and activity of the main demonic powers in the target area.<sup>1599</sup> These maps are prepared with the aid of prophetic revelation. It is thought that such information makes possible more accurate and effective prayer.

Moreover, based on 2 Samuel chapter 21, exponents of this theory practice “identification repentance,” which consists of an act of repentance by the intercessor on behalf of those who live in the target area and are caught up in a certain type of transgression. The prevailing vice for which identification repentance is performed is also discovered by prophetic revelation. If identification repentance is not done, the demons may return to their positions of authority.<sup>1600</sup>

Another weapon in use is “binding and loosing.” Again, prophetic insight makes known exactly what needs to be bound or loosed. The demonic forces are addressed by name and given orders and demands. Jesus already won the victory over evil, but the Church must enforce His authority. In this way, the words of Paul are fulfilled, “that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly {places}” (Eph 3:10).

Although the Bible does not detail all these aspects of spiritual warfare, Wagner and his followers feel that the Bible is not the only source of truth. They rely on experience as well. They observe what God is doing in practice and form their theology correspondingly. They feel the positive results that they obtain confirms their

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<sup>1596</sup>Wagner C. P. *Confronting the Powers*. – Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1996. – 262 p.

<sup>1597</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>1598</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>1599</sup>In Wagner’s opinion, the main demonic powers include Beelzebub, Abaddon, and Wormwood (Wagner, p. 146-147). It is sometimes felt that (1) the names of pagan gods corresponds to territorial spirits, such as Baal, Chemosh, Milkom, and El, (2) the territorial spirit of Rome is represented in Revelation 17:8, (3) possibly, in Revelation 2-3, the “angels of the churches” are good territorial spirits (4) Satan was once the territorial spirit over Tyre, and (5) in Revelation 17:15, the harlot is a territorial spirit over many people groups (noted in Arnold, p. 153, 157; Lowe, p. 32, 48).

<sup>1600</sup>Arnold, p. 149.

convictions. Supporters of this approach also feel that animism offers some helpful insights into spiritual truths and are ready, with caution, to learn from it.

Finally, exponents of this method conduct interviews with demons (in possessed people seeking deliverance), who allegedly give insight into the spirit-world. They justify this practice by noting that in the biblical narrative, demons always answer truthfully to questions asked of them. However, Gross correctly states that in light of Jesus' instruction in 8:44, information obtained from demons is not reliable. In fact, Jesus often forbade demons to speak (Mk 1:34; Lk 4:41).<sup>1601</sup>

Wagner also appeals to church history for examples of warfare with territorial spirits. Gregory the Miracle Worker cast a demon out of the temple of Apollos resulting in the conversion of the pagan priest serving there. Consequently, 83 percent of the inhabitants of that region became Christians. Martin of Tours resisted the main demon in a certain region, who was worshiped under the figure of a pine tree. This act also resulted in people coming to Christ. Other saints, like Benedict of Nursia and Boniface, destroyed idols, thereby bringing down the corresponding demonic powers.

Arnold makes mention of several Church Fathers who taught on territorial spirits.<sup>1602</sup> Justin Martyr spoke of an "evil demon that dwelt in Damascus" (*Dialogue*, 78) and that "evil angels have dwelt and do dwell in Tanis, in Egypt" (*Dialogue*, 79). Furthermore, Tertullian and Marcus Minucius Felix associated idols with pagan gods. Lactantius taught that God appointed angels to oversee people, yet they became evil and aspired to deity.

Wagner also takes an example from the ministry of our Lord Jesus. He began His ministry by defeating Satan in the wilderness. Therefore, all successful ministries begin with a struggle against Satan. Wagner also draws on the book of Acts for examples:

- When Peter rebuked Simon of Samaria, he tore down the local territorial spirit, which led to the outpouring of the Spirit on Samaria (Acts 8).
- Herod was the instrument of a territorial spirit, yet prayer in the home of Mary nullified it (Acts 12).
- Paul drove out a territorial spirit in Pathos when he resisted Elymas (Acts 13).
- In Acts 16, Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a slave girl. Literally, the phrase is πνεῦμα πύθωνα (spirit Puthona), which is the name of a territorial spirit.
- The expression "wild beasts in Ephesus" (1 Cor 15:32) refers to Paul warring with territorial spirits through strategic prayer.

Lowe cites other arguments used by adherents to "strategic prayer."<sup>1603</sup> Hebrews 2:5 is interpreted to say that God submitted to the angels not the world to come, but this present world. In addition, when the Legion requested Jesus "not to send them out of the country" (Mk 5:10), they were desiring to stay in their native "territory."

However, we discover several weaknesses in this position. Concerning the citations from Acts, we note the following. The revival in Samaria began not with Peter's rebuke of Simon, but with Phillip's preaching. In addition, Peter addressed Simon directly, not some controlling spirit. At Mary's house, it is safe to assume that they prayed for Peter's release, not against dominating evil powers. The deliverance of Acts 16 led not to a revival, but to persecution. Finally, the narrative of Paul's ministry in Ephesus in no way hints of his warring with territorial spirits through strategic prayer.

Arnold makes the following criticisms of this teaching.<sup>1604</sup> First, if territorial spirits control various nations, then why do they war between themselves? Second, we never read about this practice in the New Testament.

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<sup>1601</sup>Gross, p. 121.

<sup>1602</sup>Arnold, p. 157-159.

<sup>1603</sup>Lowe, p. 38.

<sup>1604</sup>Arnold, p. 161-183.

Third, the evidence for spiritual warfare with territorial spirits from church history is unconvincing. The Council of Nicaea, in fact, rejected the practice.

Furthermore, even though the prophet Daniel learned about demonic princes, he nowhere prayed against them. Instances of revival attributed to strategic prayer could be explained by other causative factors. In addition, Arnold fears that learning demon's names to control them smacks of animism. He also expresses doubts, as do we, that the principle of "binding and loosing" in Matthew 16:19, relates to warring against demonic principalities.

Lowe offers his criticisms as well.<sup>1605</sup> He holds the view that our position toward Satan is not offense, but rather defensive. According to Ephesians 1:20-21, the domain of darkness is already subject to Christ. Believers in Him are already delivered from Satan's control (Eph 2:1-9; Col 1:13; 2:15). Therefore, as stated in Ephesians 6:13, our task is to "stand" against the powers of evil, i.e., stand in the victory that Christ already attained: "Christ has won the battle; we are to stand firm in the face of Satanic counter-attack."<sup>1606</sup>

Lowe observes some significant features about Paul's description of "the full armor of God." It consists not only of defense gear, but also one offensive weapon – the sword of the Spirit. Yet, Lowe qualifies that during Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, He used the Word for defense. Moreover, the mention of prayer in connection with the full armor of God does not lend credence to the practice of strategic prayer. This call to prayer is not grammatically connected to the previous context. In addition, Paul does not summon the saints to pray against demonic strongholds, but to pray for him and all the saints.

Lowe notes the same points in the book of Revelation. Although the Apocalypse makes numerous mentions of demonic powers, it never instructs the saints to engage in strategic prayer. The saints overcome, rather, through perseverance in trials. From a historical point of view, Lowe adds that, although Christians of the Middle Ages conducted prayer walks for expulsion of demons, the Reformers rejected this practice and considered it magical. It is said that Luther resisted the devil with "Scripture and sacraments."<sup>1607</sup>

Lowe continues his critique by noting that revival broke out not only in Argentina, where strategic prayer was employed, but also in other South American countries, where it was not practiced. Thus, the revival in Argentina may have arisen from factors other than battle with territorial spirits. Lowe is also concerned about the overlap between strategic prayer and animism. He warns, "When the key to ministry success depends of a particular type, pattern or formula of prayer, then animism is not far behind. When effectiveness depends on identifying and using spirit names, magic is at work."<sup>1608</sup>

Page comments that, on the one hand, this approach makes several correct assertions: (1) one must take the spiritual realm and its influence on us seriously, and (2) one should be active in intercession.<sup>1609</sup> Arnold also sees value in confessing the sins of a people group (see Dan 9 and Neh 1).<sup>1610</sup>

On the other hand, we concur with Page, "That the Bible attests to the existence and activity of territorial spirits does not constitute grounds for thinking that Christians can or should attempt to identify them and the areas they control."<sup>1611</sup> We conclude, then, that the practice of strategic prayer against territorial spirits lacks sufficient biblical support to be an acceptable practice for the Church.

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<sup>1605</sup>Lowe, p. 55-120.

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<sup>1607</sup>Ibid., p. 92, 96.

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## *Section 4. Participation in Christ's Body*

Until now, we have looked only at the personal experience of those enjoying the privileges of union with Christ. We must now reflect on the corporate aspect of that union. Those in union with Christ are also united to others in union with Him, i.e., the Body of Christ, the Church. The following chapters will underscore the more theoretical side of the concept of "Church," while volume 5 will highlight more practical questions of church life.

### **Chapter 17: Definition of the Church**

#### **A. Introduction**

The Church was established by the Lord Jesus Himself. He announced to his disciples, "I will build My church" (Matt 16:18). What did Jesus mean by the term "church?" We will attempt to give definition to this concept.

When people hear the word "church," various ideas come to mind. Some think of the building where a congregation meets, while others picture a worship service. Still others identify it as a certain denomination, such as Orthodox, Baptist, etc. Do any of these common notions correspond to the biblical concept of "church?"

An accurate definition of the Church is vital for several reasons. First, without it, unbiblical traditions can creep into church life and dominate it. Often, we conduct church affairs as we are accustomed to do without critically evaluating whether or not they are appropriate for a New Testament congregation. Only when we understand what the Church is can we define its activities and customs. All Church functions and activities should correspond to how the Bible defines Christ's Church.

Second, without a proper notion of "Church," we cannot evaluate its condition. In the medical world, we rely on "vital signs" to determine the immediate health of an individual. What are the "vital signs" of a healthy congregation? Unfortunately, many judge the success of a fellowship of believers by worldly standards – how many people attend and how much money is taken in. The Bible offers other criteria.

Third, we must understand the nature of the Church to judge whether our church ministry is truly effective. We can labor our entire lives only to discover that what we have built is not the Church at all, but our own imagination of what the Church should be. The great church planter Paul warned us, "Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is {to be} revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work" (1 Cor 3:12-13). Therefore, it is worth the effort to properly define Christ's Church.

#### **B. Biblical and Intertestamental Data**

##### **1. Old Testament Witness**

Although the concept "church" is absent from the Old Testament, we can nonetheless gain insight from Yahweh's dealing with His people Israel. Martens notes that God's plan from the beginning was to have a special people for Himself.<sup>1612</sup> His desire for a chosen people finds expression in the oft-repeated phrase, "I will

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<sup>1612</sup>Martens E. A. The People of God // Hafemann S. J., House P. R. Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. – P. 225-230.

take you for My people, and I will be your God.” God first expressed this desire when He brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage (Ex 6:7). In the Mosaic Law, God reaffirmed this intention on condition of Israel’s obedience (Lev 26:12). Even after Israel forsook the Lord, Yahweh did not annul His plan, but promised to be God to the remnant returning from Babylonian captivity (Jer 24:7; Ezek 11:20). Looking ahead, God’s plan will reach culmination in the New Heavens and New Earth, where “they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Rev 21:3).

What was special about God’s Old Testament people? First, as Van Groningen comments, God took the initiative to form this group.<sup>1613</sup> Israel was His “chosen people.” Erickson confirms that Yahweh not only *chose* for Himself a people, but also *created* a people that did not previously exist.<sup>1614</sup>

Just as God created the universe from nothing, He chose and created for Himself a new people beginning with one man – Abraham. God did not desire to chose a pre-existing people who were already accustomed to certain values and practices, and tainted by a perverted worldview, but rather to form a people from His “friend,” the faithful Abraham (Jam 2:23). God sought and found an individual whose quality of life differed from that of his contemporaries. Yahweh’s design was that through Abraham and his descendants, He might introduce a new order into the world with new values and a true knowledge of Him.

Corresponding to this, throughout the course of Old Testament history it was expected that God’s people would distinguish themselves among the nations. God established this principle on Sinai (Lev 18:3; 20:23), where He called His people to holiness, which is essentially separation unto Him (Lev 19:2).

When Israel abandoned its covenant with Yahweh and became like their pagan neighbors, God severely punished them (2 Kin 17:15-18). Therefore, we see that holiness, that is, separation to Yahweh, was to be the distinguishing feature of Israel’s existence and calling. They were to worship and serve only Him and keep His commandments.

God’s commandments for Israel were not merely legislative acts, but were given in the context of His covenant with His people. We must not, though, understand this covenant in terms of modern day contracts. Yahweh’s covenant was structured along the lines of the ancient suzerain covenants. According to this system, the ruler defined the conditions under which his people would live, and in exchange for their submission, they would enjoy protection and provision from him. In a similar way, through the Mosaic Law, Yahweh established order in Israel and promised them blessing for obedience (Lev 26, Deut 28).

It is significant here that even when Israel violated the covenant, Yahweh did not abandon them. He preserved His covenant throughout the Old Testament period in spite of Israel’s sometimes brazen disregard for it. God had promised Abraham an eternal covenant (Gen 17:7).

Another special feature of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel was His presence with them. When the Lord established the covenant on Sinai, He displayed a powerful manifestation of His presence there (Ex 19). Even before that, in the wilderness, His presence was evident in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21). His glory was also displayed in the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35) and in the temple (1 Kin 8:10-11). The latter served as a constant visible point of contact for God’s people to recognize His presence among them (1 Kin 9:3). Thus, God’s purpose was (at least partially) fulfilled: “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people” (Lev 26:12).

Along with the visible sign of God’s presence, the Jerusalem temple, another indication of Yahweh’s special relationship with the descendants of Abraham was the cycle of festivals. Three times a year, all males were required to appear before the Lord at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Feast of the Harvest, and the Feast of the Ingathering (Ex 23:14-17). Israel’s worship consisted not only of doctrinal adherence to monotheism and keeping the Law, but also in rituals and customs. Observing feast days reminded God’s people of His gracious dealings with them.

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<sup>1613</sup>Van Groningen G. Israel // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 379ff.

<sup>1614</sup>Erickson M. J. Introducing Christian Doctrine. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 341-342.

Among the Hebrew festivals, Passover played a special role. This feast day reinforced for Israel the historical foundation of their faith. The Hebrew faith is not theoretical or philosophical, but based in events of history where Yahweh intervened in the life of His people.

We begin to approach the New Testament concept of “church” when we study the idea of Israel as God’s people. As was mentioned, Yahweh Himself chose the sons of Jacob as His special nation. All the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were included in God’s Old Testament people (Gen 17:7; 26:3; 28:13). Therefore, there was no mistaking who belonged to this chosen group. That distinction was based on physical inheritance. Their covenant status was confirmed (for males anyway) by the rite of circumcision (Gen 17:10-14).

However, we must make a qualification here. Not all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or those who received circumcision remained faithful to Yahweh’s covenant. Apostasy was a common occurrence. Even though God always remained faithful to His covenant with the nation as a whole, individual violators of the covenant could be excluded from the congregation of Israel. Israel in general was nation circumcised in flesh, but not in heart (Jer 9:26; Lev 26:41).

Ewert notes that through Hosea, God rebuked the waywardness of Israel as follows: “You are not My people and I am not your God” (Hos 1:9).<sup>1615</sup> Martins properly states, “In both Testaments, however, the boundaries marking a ‘people’ are spiritual in nature; in both Testaments the composition of this ‘people’ depends upon a connectedness to God as Saviour.”<sup>1616</sup>

In spite of Israel’s occasional and at times total backsliding, Yahweh stayed true to His promise to Abraham by preserving in Israel a “righteous remnant.” God comforted Elijah by revealing this to him when the prophet thought that all had forsaken God (1 Kin 19:18). The prophets offered the hope that after the time of God’s discipline, He would again show favor (Isa 10:20-22; Jer 23:3; Ezek 6:8). In this regard, Tippet writes, “But even in judgment the prophets retained the phrase... ‘a remnant shall be saved.’”<sup>1617</sup> The returning exiles from Babylon understood this as an act of Yahweh’s mercy (Ezra 9:8).

We can, therefore, perceive a two-dimensional relationship of Yahweh to His people. On the one hand, only those who were actively engaged in covenant living could consider themselves part of God’s people. On the other hand, the Lord’s covenant with Israel as a nation remained intact in spite of their behavior.

It is also important to note that, in general, only people from the tribes of Judah and some Levites returned from exile. Although the Lord promised to restore “Israel” to Canaan (e.g. Ezek 28:25), it appears that this prophecy found fulfillment primarily in Judah. So then, in the latter years of Old Testament history, “Israel” was defined not by the twelve tribes, but basically by one – Judah. The other tribes, in general, remained scattered across the globe and are no longer recognizable as components of the nation of Israel.

The period of the exile provides us more insight as to the nature of God’s people. Before that time, the land of Canaan played a key role in defining the people of God. It was one of the basic elements in the Lord’s promise to Abraham – that he would inherit Canaan (Gen 17:8). In addition, the return from exile meant return to the Promised Land (Ezek 37:21). Nevertheless, even when absent from the Promised Land, Israel remained God’s people. So then, strictly speaking, the definition of God’s Old Testament people did not depend on their physical location. Also significant is that Israel retained its status even without temple worship, which they lacked during the exile.

Not only could individual Israelites be excluded from Yahweh’s Old Testament people, but Gentiles could be included. The Bible contains many references to the inclusion of the Gentiles (Ob 3:9-10; Isa 19:24-25; Amos 9:11-12; Deut 32:43).<sup>1618</sup> This applied not only to a future time, but during the Old Testament period as well.

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<sup>1615</sup>Ewert D. The Church, The New People of God. – Abbotsford: HeartBeat Productions, 2004. – P. 14. From Martens, p. 234.

<sup>1616</sup>Martens, p. 237.

<sup>1617</sup>Tippet A. R. People of God // Bromiley G. W. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised. – Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988; 2002. – V. 3. – P. 761.

<sup>1618</sup>Martens, p. 233.



Figures like Jethro, Rahab, and Ruth joined the assembly of God's people. Martins writes, "All these non-Jews are enfolded in the group known as 'people of God' because they believed God."<sup>1619</sup>

In summary, from the beginning God had a people that specially belonged to Him. He created an entirely new people from Abraham's descendants so that they would be a holy people, distinct from the surrounding pagan nations. Yahweh established a covenant relationship with Israel, which was sealed (among male members) by the rite of circumcision. The Lord blessed His people with His presence, giving them a physical point of contact of His dwelling among them – the sanctuary and temple. He also established the religious calendar of feast days to remind them of His gracious works on their behalf.

Nevertheless, we also affirm that even without access to the temple or the Promised Land during the period of exile, Israel as a national entity maintained their status as God's people.

Although all the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had the privilege to consider themselves participants in the Lord's people, only those who remained in the covenant truly held that status. Although individual Israelites could forfeit their status, Yahweh continued in covenant faithfulness to Israel as a whole. This "Israel as a whole," though, was reduced to a "righteous remnant," found basically in the tribe of Judah. Moreover, believing Gentiles could find inclusion in God's people by virtue of their personal faith.

In light of the above considerations, we can fairly conclude that the primary determining factor for those included in the role of Yahweh's people was faithfulness to the covenant. Any individual, whether from the tribe of Judah or from among the Gentiles, who faithfully kept the covenant, could consider himself or herself a member of Yahweh's congregation, whether or not they lived in Canaan or worshiped at the temple.

What is Israel's status at the present time? Can we consider them to be God's people or not? Does Israel still have a place in the Lord's plan, or have they forever forfeited it through their rejection of Messiah? We address these questions in chapter 9 of volume 2.

In conclusion, we will find it helpful to briefly treat the role of the temple in the life of the people of the Lord. Many consider the Old Testament temple to be a type of the Church.<sup>1620</sup> Paul speaks of the Church as the temple, i.e., God's dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16-17). The prophet Zechariah figuratively predicts the rebuilding of God's temple:

Thus says Yahweh of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of Yahweh. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of Yahweh, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices" (Zech 6:12-13).

It is clear that these words were not fulfilled in Zerubbabel the governor of Judah. This is a prediction of a future event accomplished by the "Branch," i.e., Messiah. In addition, God promised David that his "son" would build the temple. This word found only partial fulfillment in Solomon. The builder of the new temple – a spiritual temple – is the Messiah Jesus.

## 2. Intertestamental Period

After the exile to Babylon and in connection with the loss of temple worship, another form of worship arose in Israel – synagogue worship. The synagogue was not meant to replace the temple, but to supplement the temple ritual as was seen after the construction of the second temple, when both systems operated simultaneously. Nevertheless, during this time some Israelites shunned temple worship, namely members of the Qumran community and Hellenistic Jews.<sup>1621</sup>

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<sup>1619</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>1620</sup>Martens aptly comments that the temple also served as a type of Christ, who "dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14)(see Martens, p. 230).

<sup>1621</sup>Julius S. J. Jewish Backgrounds of the NT. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995. – P. 139-143, 153-155.

Also significant is that in the Hellenistic world of religion – the “mysteries” and Gnosticism – the focus was on personal salvation. Consequently, the importance of “community” in the spiritual life of worshipers became less prominent.<sup>1622</sup>

### 3. New Testament Witness

Although the New Testament abounds with information on the topic of the Church, we will limit our investigation to what it says about the Church’s definition. Other timely topics, like church unity, the work of the Church, and church leadership, are covered in volume 5 of this series. We will begin our study with the foundation-laying announcement by the Savior, “I will build my church” (Matt 16:18). The Greek term here is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), which we will now investigate.

The term ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) consists of two parts: the preposition ἐκ (*ek*), which means “from,” and the verb καλέω (*kaleo*), i.e., “to call.” Therefore, the etymological rendering of the word is: “to call out.”<sup>1623</sup> The Greeks used this word to describe the assembly of citizens “called out” to vote. Such a usage is found in Acts 19:32, 39-40, where the citizens of Ephesus gathered at the instigation of rioters.

Some feel that the idea of being “called out” relates to the Church’s need to separate themselves from the sinful lifestyles of surrounding unbelievers. This corresponds to the Old Testament charge to Israel to live for Yahweh. Peter applies this charge to the Church: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for {God’s} own possession” (1 Pet 2:9). Jesus also stated that His disciples are not “of this world” (Jn 17:16). However, Zorn comments that ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) was never actually used with that connotation.<sup>1624</sup>

In the Hebrew text, we encounter two main words for the congregation of Israel: אָדָּא (*ada*) and קָהָל (*kahal*). The word אָדָּא (*ada*) is typically used of Israel, especially when they were in the wilderness. The word קָהָל (*kahal*) sometimes refers to Israel, but can also apply to any congregation of people. The Septuagint translates אָדָּא (*ada*) with συναγωγή (*synagoge*), or “synagogue.” When קָהָל (*kahal*) relates to Israel, the Septuagint translators use συναγωγή (*synagoge*). When קָהָל (*kahal*) refers to a general assembly, the term ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) is usually employed.<sup>1625</sup>

Therefore, when Matthew quotes Jesus’ words, “I will build my church,” we do not see the word συναγωγή (*synagoge*), which conventionally applies to Israel, but ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*). This may imply that the Church, in essence, differs from Israel. It is not simply a continuation or renewal of the people of Israel, but a brand new entity consisting of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

So then, certain distinctions can be drawn between Israel and Christ’s Church. It is a new epoch in God’s plan, based on a new covenant with better promises (Heb 8:6ff).<sup>1626</sup> It is capable of reaching greater heights than what Old Testament saints could achieve. It is a multi-national and multi-cultural institution. In Jesus’ words, “They will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline {at the table} in the kingdom of God” (Lk 13:29). Paul confirms that in the Church, “There is no {distinction between} Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11).

Moreover, the New Testament looks upon God’s Old Testament people as a type of the New Testament Church. The Church is called “Israel” (Gal 6:16), God’s chosen people (1 Pet 2:9), the true circumcision (Phil

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<sup>1622</sup>Martens, p. 232.

<sup>1623</sup>Dusing M. The New Testament Church // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 598.

<sup>1624</sup>Zorn R. O. Church and Kingdom. – Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1962. – P. 13.

<sup>1625</sup>Schmidt K. L. *kalew* // Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 394-395. Pate observes that in the Old Testament, Israel is sometimes the referent for the term ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) (especially in Deuteronomy 23). Yet, we must consider that when this occurs, this term is qualified by the following word κυρίου (Lord), which specifies that Israel is in view (see Pate C. M. Church // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 95-98).

<sup>1626</sup>Pannenberg W. Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-1998. – V. 3. – P. 468.

3:3), the seed of Abraham (Rom 4:16), God's flock (1 Pet 5:2), and priests (Rev 1:6). Therefore, Israel's hope is not in their physical descent, but in their acceptance of the new covenant which Messiah has made with His Church.<sup>1627</sup>

Finally, we will consider the use of the word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) in the New Testament. It is rarely used outside of its designation for the Church. As noted above, in Acts 19 we find its common use as a gathering of citizens of a town. Interestingly, twice in the New Testament it refers to the assembly of Israel (Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12). It is also interesting that once the Church is designated by the word συναγωγή (*sunagoge*): "For if a man comes into your assembly (συναγωγή) with a gold ring..." (Jam 2:2).<sup>1628</sup>

The term ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) appears in reference to the Church in two ways: either to indicate all believers in Jesus, i.e., the Universal Church, or in connection with a single Christian congregation. Often, we speak of a Christian denomination as a "Church," yet the New Testament never speaks of a group of local congregations as "Church."

Passages do exist where Paul refers to the "churches of Asia" (1 Cor 16:19), the "churches of Galatia" (Gal 1:2), or the "churches of the Gentiles" (Rom 16:4). In these instances, however, he uses the plural noun. The singular noun, "church," refers only to the Universal Church (Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 1:24), or a single local congregation (Acts 18:22; 1 Cor 14:28; 3 Jn 9). The only exception to this rule is Acts 9:31: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace."<sup>1629</sup> However, the meaning here is likely the Universal Church, which was expressed in local churches located in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

Other features point to the conclusion that Paul did not consider a group of churches the "Church." At times, Paul greets the recipients of his epistles as "church," but sometimes without that appellation. For example, Paul greets the Corinthians and the Thessalonians as "church." We know from Romans 16:23 that the church of Corinth met in one location and constituted a single congregation. We lack such information, though, on the condition of the Thessalonians. On the other hand, Paul does not use the term "church" in relation to believers in Rome, Colossae, or Philippi. Romans 16:5 and Colossians 4:15 inform us that there were more than one congregation in Rome and Colossae. We do not know about the situation in Philippi.

It appears, then, that Paul designated "Church" only the Universal Church and single local congregations, but not a group of congregations. Therefore, it is more proper to refer to any group of churches or a Christian denomination as "churches" or "union of churches." The local church is the purest expression of the Universal Church. God has given each local church the special status as a representative of the Church Universal and its expression in a certain locale. It has been aptly stated, "Two or more churches do not make the church, nor are there many churches, but one church in many places."<sup>1630</sup> Catholic ecclesiology promotes a similar idea, "Each local church is wholly church even though no local church is the whole church."<sup>1631</sup>

Various terms are used to describe members of the Universal Church.<sup>1632</sup> The Church is God's people (1 Pet 2:9-10), which emphasizes that they belong to the Lord. The Church is God's chosen (2 Tim 2:10). God has a special plan for the Church and its members. The Church are saints (Col 1:2). The term "saints" relates not to specially "canonized" saints, but to all believers in Jesus. Christ sanctified His Church by His death and sanctifies her by His Spirit. Furthermore, the Church consists of believers in Jesus Christ (1 Thes 1:7). Faith is the requirement for receiving the new birth and entry into the Universal Church. The Church is "brethren" (Gal 1:2). Family ties exist between members of the Body of Christ. They are also "friends" (3 Jn 15). The Church is the gathering of disciples (Acts 11:26). Disciples are constantly increasing in the knowledge of God. The Church is "Christians" (Acts 11:26). They bear Christ's name in the world as His representatives.

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<sup>1627</sup>Ibid., v. 3, p. 473–474.

<sup>1628</sup>Dusing, p. 599.

<sup>1629</sup>The King James version, following lower quality manuscripts, has the plural "churches."

<sup>1630</sup>Schmidt, p. 398.

<sup>1631</sup>Wood S. Issues and Perspectives in Roman Catholic Ecclesiology Today // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. The Ecumenical Future. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. – P. 127.

<sup>1632</sup>Dusing, p. 604ff.

Certain metaphors also shed light on the essence and character of the Universal Church.<sup>1633</sup> The Church is God's flock (1 Pet 5:2). They depend on the Lord for provision, protection, etc. The Church is God's temple (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22), the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Rev 2:1). The Church stands on the foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11; 1 Pet 2:4-6; Eph 2:20; Acts 4:11). All believers are priests, who bring offerings of service and worship to the Lord (1 Pet 2:5). It is not necessary for the entire Church to congregate in order to enjoy the Lord's presence. According to Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

The Church is the Bride of Christ (Rev 21:2; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:30-32). They enjoy a close relationship with the Lord through the Spirit and are the special objects of His love. Moreover, the Church is the "pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). Christ commissioned His Church to teach His Word and preserve His truth. The Church is God's field (1 Cor 3:9). He cultivates spiritual fruit among His people. In a similar metaphor in John 15, Jesus compares His disciples with branches that are in Him, the Vine, and produce spiritual fruit.

It is interesting to note that metaphors that describe the Universal Church also apply to a local church and even to believers individually:

- Bride: Universal Church (Eph 5:25), local church (2 Cor 11:2), believer (Rom 7:4)
- Temple: Universal Church (2 Cor 6:16), local church (1 Cor 3:16), believer (1 Cor 6:19)
- Body: Universal Church (Eph 1:23), local church (1 Cor 12)

The above studies of the word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), terms describing members of the Church, and metaphors that describe the Church all give helpful insight into its nature. However, the most central and exhaustive descriptive metaphor, which reveals the very essence of the concept of "Church," is the Church as the Body of Christ. In Colossians 1:24, the apostle Paul, who introduced this idea, wrote, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church." Similarly, in Ephesians 1:22-23, he again equates the Church with Christ's Body: "He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."<sup>1634</sup>

What does Paul mean in Ephesians 1:23 by calling the Church the "fullness of Him who fills all in all?" The word translated "fullness" is πλήρωμα (*pleroma*). This term can denote either that which fills something, or that which is filled by something. In order to select the proper meaning of πλήρωμα (*pleroma*) here, we must consider several factors.

Scripture teaches that both the Church and the individual believer are filled with the fullness of Christ. John writes, "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace" (Jn 1:16). Moreover, we cannot claim that the Church "fills" God's Son in the sense that He is somehow incomplete without us. However, the Church, in some sense, does "complete" Christ. The text carries this implication: "...the church, which is His body, (which is) the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

We clarify that the Church does not complete Christ "ontologically," that is, it does not complete His being, but rather "functionally." Through the Church, Christ has chosen to express Himself in the world. This is why Paul adds, "...the fullness of Him *who fills all in all*." This reminds us that Christ's fullness is not limited by or determined by the Church, but rather is expressed through it. At the same time, we acknowledge that Christ has chosen no other "fullness" in the sense of "expression" in the world except through the Church.

The Church as the Body of Christ is a living and growing organism. The participation of all its members, contributing the gifts that the Spirit has bestowed, results in "the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph 4:16). As a body, each member has a definite function, and all the members are necessary for the proper function of the whole (1 Cor 12:12-27).

<sup>1633</sup>Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 408; Dusing, p. 610.

<sup>1634</sup>Also see Rom 12:4; 1 Cor chp. 12; Eph 3:6; 4:4,12,16; 5:23,30; Col 1:18; 2:9; 3:15 (Thiessen, p. 408).

Grudem insightfully notes that Paul has two applications of the Church as the Body.<sup>1635</sup> First, in 1 Corinthians 12 members of the Church make up the entire Body, including the head (see 1 Cor 12:15-17). In this way, Paul emphasizes the interaction and interdependence between the members. In the epistle to the Ephesians, however, Christ is the Head (Col 2:19; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23). Here, Paul focuses on the place of authority Christ occupies in the Church and on His provision for the Body. As the Head of the Body, Jesus so closely identifies with the Church that He considers persecution of the Church as a personal attack against Himself (Acts 9:3-5).

In conclusion, we observe that the New Testament draws a distinction between those who simply attend congregational services and those who are genuine Christians. The Scriptures warn us against false teachers and false “brethren” among God’s people:

- I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29).
- For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 4).
- ...that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith (2 Thes 3:2).

## C. Conclusions

### 1. Definition of the Church

In light of the biblical data shown above, we may suggest the following definition for the Church. The Church consists of all born again believers in Christ, who together express His life and carry out His ministry. As noted earlier, this definition applies both to the Universal Church and to local churches who seek to express the life of Christ in a specific geographical locale.

First, the Church consists of all born again believers. A key passage in this regard is 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Thus, all who have “drunk” of the Spirit, that is, have been born again, are incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ.

Various denominational spokesmen confirm this truth. Concerning the Church Universal, the Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper writes, “The Christian Church is composed of all those, and only those, in whom the Holy Spirit has worked the faith that for the sake of Christ’s vicarious satisfaction their sins are forgiven.”<sup>1636</sup> The Lutheran Mueller adds, “The *communion of believing saints* which the Holy Ghost thus gathers through the Gospel we call the Church.”<sup>1637</sup> The Presbyterian R. C. Sproul concurs, “The church refers to all the people who belong to the Lord, those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ.”<sup>1638</sup> The Baptist Thiessen also affirms, “In the universal sense the Church consists of all those who, in this dispensation, have been born of the Spirit of God and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the body of Christ.”<sup>1639</sup>

Second, the Church expresses Christ’s life and fulfills His ministry. In support, we cite the following texts. Paul writes to the Galatians, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19), and in Colossians 1:27, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Christ’s ministry continues in His Body, as the Lord Himself promised, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater {works} than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (Jn 14:12). This thought is echoed in Acts

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<sup>1635</sup>Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 859.

<sup>1636</sup>Pieper F. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1951. – V. 3. – P. 397.

<sup>1637</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934 – P. 541.

<sup>1638</sup>Sproul R.C. Essential Truth of the Christian Faith. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1992. – P. 217.

<sup>1639</sup>Thiessen, p. 407.

1:1-2, “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the day when He was taken up {to heaven}.” In other words, Jesus’ ministry did not end when He left the earth, but continues through the Church, which is the “fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Third, the appellation “Church” applies to the Universal Church, consisting of all believers, and to local congregations of true believers. Since only God knows who are truly in the faith, only He knows the composition of the Universal Church. Paul wrote to Timothy, “The firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘the Lord knows who are His’” (2 Tim 2:19). Jesus gave the same assessment, “I know My own and My own know Me” (Jn 10:14). From our imperfect human perspective, we can only speculate on the condition of people’s hearts. Therefore, the Universal Church is said to be “invisible.”<sup>1640</sup>

Each local congregation, in turn, strives to express the nature of the Universal Church in its own community. Thiessen expresses it this way, “In the local sense the word ‘church’ is used of the group of professed believers in any one locality.”<sup>1641</sup> Yet, here we must make the qualification that every local congregation will consist of both believers and unbelievers. Therefore, the local church can only approximate the Universal Church, but never fully represent it. Nonetheless, we can make the generalization that the local church is a visible expression of the invisible Church, howbeit an imperfect one.

Therefore, we include in our definition both of these aspects: the invisible Universal Church and the visible local church. Citing Millard Erickson, Dusing describes it in this way, “While there are distinctions between the visible and the invisible Church, it is important to have a ‘both-and’ approach so that one seeks to make the two as identical as possible.”<sup>1642</sup>

To determine the signs or marks of a genuine local church, we appeal to the descriptive terms and metaphors by which the Church is described, especially the Church as Christ’s Body. A genuine Christian congregation, as a local Body of Christ, manifests the life of Jesus and accomplishes His work. To what degree Christ is manifest, though, will depend on the spiritual maturity of that congregation.

Having arrived at a definition for the Church, we are in position to judge the appropriateness of church customs and practices. We ask ourselves, “Does a certain practice aid in manifesting the life of Christ or accomplishing His work?” In this way, Christian congregations can “weed out” empty traditions that do not aid in accomplishing these goals. By this criterion, we can also judge the health of any local congregation and the success of our ministry in it. A successful church or ministry is one that makes manifest the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

## 2. Inclusion in the Church

How does an individual become a member of both the Universal Church and a local Christian congregation? If the Church is the sum of all born again believers manifesting the life of Christ and accomplishing His ministry, then the only requirement for inclusion in the Universal Body of Christ is the experience of the new birth. We recall 1 Corinthians 12:13: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” All who are genuinely reborn belong to the Universal Church. The presence of God’s Spirit in a person’s heart enables that individual to express the life of Christ and to do His works.

Regarding membership in a local church, every congregation has the right to establish conditions for membership. However, in light of our definition of “Church,” all requirements for local church membership must be directly related to recognizing whether or not an applicant has had a genuine experience of regeneration. If church leadership is convinced of a person’s true conversion, they have no right to deny that

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<sup>1640</sup>Mueller, p. 547.

<sup>1641</sup>Thiessen, p. 408.

<sup>1642</sup>Dusing, p. 613.

individual membership in a local Christian congregation. A local church cannot deny membership to those already belonging to the Church Universal.

### 3. Beginning of the Church

The final question of interest in defining the Church is when exactly it began to exist.<sup>1643</sup> Some propose that the Church existed during the Old Testament period. However, in our study of the word ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), we learned that Christ adopted this term to distinguish the Church from the synagogue (συναγωγή). In addition, Jesus said, “I will build My church.” The use of the future tense here shows that the Church did not exist before Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Others feel that the Church began at Pentecost. Yet, if the condition for membership in Christ’s Church is spiritual rebirth (1 Cor 12:13), and if regeneration became available through Jesus’ resurrection, then we can date the beginning of the Church immediately after Christ’s resurrection, when He appeared to His disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22).

### D. Historical Survey

#### 1. Early Christianity and the Middle Ages

In surveying the history of Christian thought regarding the nature of the Church, we note, first of all, that the early Fathers made a clear distinction between Israel and the Church.<sup>1644</sup> In the epistle of “Barnabas,” we encounter for the first time the expression “the new people of God” (5.7; 7.5). Other writers (Justin, Hermas) echo that thought. “Barnabas” also claimed that Israel was never genuinely the people of God (14.1ff). Melito of Sardis and Hippolytus of Rome also distinguished Israel from the Church, but at the same time recognized the former as God’s Old Testament people.

The early Fathers also delineate how the Church differs from Israel.<sup>1645</sup> God’s Old Testament people were a type or symbol of God’s New Testament Church and prepared the way for the latter to appear.<sup>1646</sup> God’s “new” people consist of many ethnicities and are spread across the globe.<sup>1647</sup> Circumcision is no longer practiced, but rather the circumcision of the heart.<sup>1648</sup>

Moreover, among early Christian writers we observe a tendency to exalt the position of the bishop. Clement of Rome, in fact, exhorted the Corinthian church to respect those leaders that the apostolic successors appointed over them.<sup>1649</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, a famous second-century martyr, wrote to the church of the Magnesians, “Your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles” (*Magnesians*, 6), and also: “As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, so neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters” (*Magnesians*, 7). He also wrote,

In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the sanhedrin of God, and assembly of the apostles (*Trallians*, 3).

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<sup>1643</sup>See Dusing, p. 600-601.

<sup>1644</sup>Pannenberg, p. 470-479.

<sup>1645</sup>Oden T. C. *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology*. – San Francisco, CA: Harper-San Francisco, 1992. – P. 296-297.

<sup>1646</sup>See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.36; 4.2, 15; 3.9.1; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 123.6; Pastor of Hermas, *Visions*, 2.2.6.

<sup>1647</sup>See Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.21; *Apology*, 21.

<sup>1648</sup>See Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.21.

<sup>1649</sup>Lane T. A *Concise History of Christian Thought*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 8.

Irenaeus of Lyons was especially concerned about the Gnostics promoting their teaching as Christian truth. In order to refute the claim that they possessed the “secret teachings” of the apostles, Irenaeus argued that if the apostles did pass down a secret teaching, they would have done so to the congregations that they themselves founded and taught in.<sup>1650</sup> In this way, Irenaeus strengthened the authority of the churches that traced back to the apostles and participated in developing the doctrine of apostolic succession.

Tertullian, a leading teacher in the Western Church, wrote in defense of apostolic succession:

But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst Of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,—a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers (*The Prescription against Heresies*, 32).

Another major contributor to the Early Church’s self-understanding was Cyprian. He strongly stressed the importance of the bishop’s role in church life. According to Cyprian, “Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church” (*Epistles*, 68.8). Additionally, in his opinion salvation is attained only in the context of the Church.<sup>1651</sup> Cyprian considered the bishops to be the successors of the apostles. He taught that in his own congregation, the bishop held the highest office. At the same time, all bishops are of equal rank and can consider themselves bishops only if they are in good standing with the others.<sup>1652</sup>

We can better understand Cyprian’s position when we investigate the historical conditions of his time.<sup>1653</sup> A debate was raging with the Novatians, who insisted that those who denied the faith during persecution could not be readmitted to fellowship. Some congregations exited from the “apostolic churches” and joined this new movement. As a result, the question arose, “Are water baptisms performed by followers of Novatian valid?” Cyprian responded that only those congregations that have a lawfully ordained bishop can perform valid water baptisms. Bishops in the Novatian movement were thus excluded. So then, the ministry of the bishop was deemed necessary for the proper functioning of the true Church.

Augustine also advanced his theories.<sup>1654</sup> He taught that within the institutional church there were both true believers and unbelievers. Only God, who knows the hearts of all, knows exactly who truly believe. So then, Augustine introduced the idea of the “invisible” Church, which in time became the dominant motif among Protestants. As the same time, Augustine spoke of the “visible” Church, which was governed by the clergy, in particular, by the bishop. All genuine believers are part of the “visible” Church, that is, a specific Christian congregation. Salvation is found in the visible Church. This latter view correlates with the present Catholic and Orthodox doctrine.

It is interesting to note that a contemporary of Augustine, the Donatist Ticonius, taught that true believers reside in both the Catholic Church and the Donatist Church. Thus, he advanced the position that true believers can be found in various Christian denominations – the view now prominent among Protestants.

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<sup>1650</sup>Ibid., p. 12–13.

<sup>1651</sup>McGrath A. E. *Historical Theology*. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. – P. 72.

<sup>1652</sup>Lane, p. 26.

<sup>1653</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novatianism>, Newton J. Cyprian // Douglas J. D., Comfort P. W. – *Who’s Who in Christian History*. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992. – P. 186-187.

<sup>1654</sup>McGrath, p. 75; Bornkamm H. *Luther’s World of Thought* (electronic ed.). – St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000. – P. 143; Lane, p. 49–50.



## 2. Eastern Orthodoxy

### a. Description

How do the Orthodox understand the Church? They describe it with phrases like “life in God,” or “the fullness of life in Christ.” Another definition is “God’s manifestation and activity in the world,” or the “extension of Christ’s Body in the world.” All these expressions contain the thought that the Church is the participation of Christians in the life of the Savior and His manifestation in the world.<sup>1655</sup>

According to the mystical theology of the Orthodox Church, especially present in the teaching of Gregory Palamas, the Church is rooted in union with Christ in His deified human nature (see chapter 7, “Theosis”): “The church is the ‘new building’ formed by Christ through His incarnation and through His ‘recapitulation’ of all things in Himself.”<sup>1656</sup> In Vladimir Lossky’s words, the Church is rooted in the glorified human nature of Christ and continues His incarnation.<sup>1657</sup> Consequently, the Church is a “divine-human organism, in which created things unite with God.”<sup>1658</sup>

The Church is in connection with God’s so-called “uncreated energies.” God’s deifying grace is resident in the Church, and believers as well as all creation benefits from this grace by the agency of the Church.<sup>1659</sup> Lossky writes, “All the necessary conditions for attaining union with God are in the church.”<sup>1660</sup> Nikon claims, “Thus, the Church in providing humanity with deification becomes the yeast that will leaven all things.”<sup>1661</sup>

God’s deifying grace is transmitted through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist: “Deification is accomplished in the Church by the Holy Spirit. The most potent means of deification is the sacraments of the church.”<sup>1662</sup> Lossky adds, “We must feed on God in order to attain to deification.”<sup>1663</sup> Shmeman confirms that the Eucharist is the central sacrament in the Church as its eternal identification as the Body of Christ.<sup>1664</sup> In order to join the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church, one must receive His Body through the sacrament of the Eucharist.

In his commentary on Orthodox faith, Fairbairn relates the Orthodox view that just as the bread becomes the body of Christ during the Eucharist, the participants are transformed into the Body of Christ, i.e., the Church.<sup>1665</sup> The Orthodox scholar Kuraev suggests a similar definition: “We ask that through the bread and wine, transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the Lord would make us into the Body of Christ.”<sup>1666</sup> John of Damascus taught the same: “For since we partake of one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood, and members one of another, being of one body with Christ” (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.13).

If participation in the sacraments is necessary for inclusion into the Church, then the question of who has the right to perform the sacraments becomes monumental. Orthodoxy asserts that ordained Orthodox clergy, as representatives of God’s people, have this right.<sup>1667</sup>

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<sup>1655</sup>Fairbairn D. *Partakers of the Divine Nature*. – 1991. – P. 13-14; Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – P. 94, 233.

<sup>1656</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 57.

<sup>1657</sup>Лосский В. Образ и Подобие Бога, p. 187; taken from Слова об обожении // под ред. Архимандрата Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – М.: Сибирская Благовонница, 2004. – P. 182.

<sup>1658</sup>Лосский В. Очерк мистического богословия, p. 139; taken from Слова об обожении, p. 182. Author’s translation.

<sup>1659</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 85-86.

<sup>1660</sup>Taken from Слова об обожении, p. 181. Author’s translation.

<sup>1661</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 65. Author’s translation.

<sup>1662</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 64. Author’s translation.

<sup>1663</sup>Лосский В. Догматическое богословие, p. 248; taken from Слова об обожении, p. 186. Author’s translation.

<sup>1664</sup>Taken from Fairbairn, p. 15.

<sup>1665</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>1666</sup>Кураев, p. 213. Author’s translation.

<sup>1667</sup>Иларион А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 117.

So then, the Orthodox insist that the Church consists of all believers who participate in the Eucharist, but insist also on the necessity of ordained clergy to perform the rite. Pelikan comments,

Even when the church was defined, in this case by Greek Orthodox theologians, as “strictly speaking, the gathering of the faithful,” the net outcome of the definition was that “the one holy catholic and apostolic church” was equated, by another Greek Orthodox theologian, with “the bishops, presbyters, and deacons.”<sup>1668</sup>

Therefore, on the one hand, one must partake of the sacraments to be considered part of the Church. Yet, only the “true Church” can perform the sacraments. How can one identify, then, the “true Church?” Orthodoxy teaches that the mark of the true Church is apostolic succession. According to Kuraev, “To have the true Sacraments, one must be in the true Church. The true Church must reside in the apostolic succession.”<sup>1669</sup>

The “apostolic succession” is the claim that the first apostles transferred their authority over the Church, which they received from the Lord, to their successors, who, in turn, passed it on to their successors to this present day. Metropolitan Ilarion offers this definition: it is “the uninterrupted chain of ordination... issuing from the apostles unto the present-day bishops.”<sup>1670</sup> Moreover, Kuraev asserts, “The sacramental life, which began with the apostles, must be continued. Therefore, apostolic succession is necessary.”<sup>1671</sup> It is claimed that Orthodoxy has preserved this uninterrupted chain of apostolic successors, and that Orthodox clergy are in that line.

We can summarize the Orthodox position as follows. The Church is the residence of God’s deifying, uncreated energies, which are transmitted to those participating in sacraments performed by priests in the line of apostolic succession, which is faithfully preserved in the Orthodox faith. Additionally, participation in the sacraments is necessary for salvation. Since these salvific sacraments are supposedly available only in the Church, one must be part of the Church to be saved. Kuraev states, “There is no salvation from this fallen world and cosmos outside of Christ’s Church.”<sup>1672</sup>

What about the sacraments offered in other Christian confessions? Orthodox theologians differ on this question. Some feel that genuine sacraments are available only in the Orthodox Church. Others are ready to concede that other Christian confession also offer legitimate sacraments, yet they give preference to those offered in Orthodoxy.<sup>1673</sup>

## **b. Support**

Orthodox thinkers seek to support their view on the Church by appealing to Scripture. They focus on the authority that Jesus gave to His disciples. In Mark 3:14, for example, Jesus chose 12 disciples so that they would be with Him and that He might send them out to preach. Before His ascension, Jesus commissioned His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

Other passages refer to the apostles as the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). Additionally, according to Orthodox teaching, in John 20:23 Jesus granted His disciples the authority to forgive sins. Moreover, the Bible records that the first apostles ordained others, transferring to them, as it is supposed, the

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<sup>1668</sup>Pelikan J. *The Christian Tradition, Volume 5: Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture*. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago. – P. 14.

Pelikan cites Eugenios Bulgaris, *Orthodox Confession*, 7.

<sup>1669</sup>Курьев, р. 274. Author’s translation.

<sup>1670</sup>Иларион, р. 114. Author’s translation.

<sup>1671</sup>Курьев, р. 275. Author’s translation.

<sup>1672</sup>Ibid., р. 237, 274. Author’s translation.

<sup>1673</sup>Иларион, р. 136-140.

apostolic authority that they received from the Lord (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim 1:6).<sup>1674</sup> Especially notable is that Timothy received ordination through “laying on of hands by the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14). Because of these factors, the Orthodox are convinced of the necessity for ordination according to apostolic succession.<sup>1675</sup>

Furthermore, to support their claim to be the only true Church, Orthodox interpret Jesus’ phrase “the gates of Hades will not overpower (the church)” (Matt 16:18) to mean that their will be an uninterrupted chain of church leadership. The Church is the “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Jesus promised to be with the Church forever (Matt 28:20). It is also asserted that the Orthodox have records demonstrating the descent of their leadership from the apostles.<sup>1676</sup>

Orthodoxy argues that the Reformation has introduced divisions and diverse teachings, which contradict the axiom that there is only one Church. They interpret the “stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2:35) to mean that the Church will experience consistent growth with no need for reform. Finally, according to Romans 15:20 Paul desired not to “build on another man's foundation.” Therefore, Protestants should not proselytize in Orthodox lands.<sup>1677</sup>

Along with these biblical arguments, Orthodoxy cites the Church Fathers in support of the doctrine of apostolic succession. See the historical survey of early Christianity and the Middle Ages above for examples.

### c. Rebuttal

In assessing the Orthodox position, we discover several problems.<sup>1678</sup> First, no evidence exists that the apostles established a system of succession or passed on their authority to their successors. All that such passages as Acts 14:23 and 2 Timothy 1:6 inform us is that the apostles ordained other ministers either to serve in local churches or to participate in their apostolic team.

Second, the apostles themselves instructed Christians to test those who claim to be apostles (Rev 2:2; 2 Cor 11:13; Gal 1:8). This implies that local congregations have the right to judge the validity of anyone claiming apostolic authority or leadership in the Church. It is significant to note that even Cyprian, who vigorously defended the idea of the bishop’s authority in the Church, himself affirmed that local congregations have the right and responsibility to reject false leaders:

- Unworthy persons are sometimes ordained, not according to the will of God, but according to human presumption (*Epistles*, 67.4),
- The bishop should be chosen in the presence of the people, who have most fully known the life of each one (*Epistles*, 67.5),
- A people obedient to the Lord’s precepts, and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from a sinful prelate, and not to associate themselves with the sacrifices of a sacrilegious priest, especially since they themselves have the power either of choosing worthy priests, or of rejecting unworthy ones (*Epistles*, 67.3).

Third, the teachings of those who supposedly are in the apostolic succession not infrequently contradict New Testament teaching, which contains the actual doctrine of the apostles themselves. We would do well to recall Paul’s warning in Galatians 1:6-8 not to receive any teaching that varies from apostolic truth.<sup>1679</sup>

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<sup>1674</sup>Noted in Mueller, p. 549.

<sup>1675</sup>Школа начальной катехизации «Исследуйте Писание: Диспут Харизматы – Православные».

<sup>1676</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1677</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1678</sup>Mueller, p. 549.

<sup>1679</sup>In particular: apophatic theology, theosis, God’s uncreated energies, veneration of Mary and the saints, salvation by works, and many others.

Fourth, if the apostles intended to transfer their authority to their successors, we would expect some indication of that in their writings. On the contrary, in the final epistles of Peter and Paul, when they were expecting their imminent martyrdom (see 2 Pet 1:14; 2 Tim 4:7-8), they said nothing about passing on their apostolic authority. Instead, they spoke of preserving Christian truth through the preaching of apostolic doctrine and passed on to the churches their written works.

In Paul's last letter to Timothy, whom he most likely would have appointed his successor, he said nothing about transferring authority, but rather charged him to "preach the word" (2 Tim 4:2), i.e., preserve the apostolic teaching through his preaching ministry. Similarly, instead of introducing a system of apostolic succession, Peter planned to remind the Church of the apostolic teaching through written sources: "I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind" (2 Pet 1:15). Peter will remind them of "these things" through the writings he is leaving behind. In addition, in the following context Peter speaks of the reliability of his historical witness of Jesus' life and the dependability of Holy Scripture (2 Pet 1:16-21). Thus, he again focuses on historical and written sources as guides for God's people.

We heartily agree with the Orthodox claim that the apostles are the foundation of the Church. It is the apostles' witness that informs us of the life, teaching, and ministry of our Lord. Yet, we must determine how that apostolic authority is preserved. Orthodoxy rejects the idea that it is preserved solely in the New Testament writings. Kuraev writes, "The essence of the life of the Church is not mastering the 'apostolic teachings,' which are accessed only by reading books written by people in the past or their modern adaptations."<sup>1680</sup>

It is certainly more reasonable to base Christian truth not on so-called apostolic successors, but rather on the teachings of the apostles themselves contained in the New Testament. Whenever any teaching from any party varies from the biblical norm, the latter is always to be embraced.

Orthodoxy often appeals to the antiquity of their institution as proof of its superiority – it traces its history to the earliest days. Kirby Riles, however, makes a convincing reply. Since Orthodoxy has made a significant departure from New Testament (apostolic) truth, they can no longer claim continuity with the apostolic church. Christian confessions who preserve New Testament teaching have the true connection with antiquity.<sup>1681</sup>

From a historical vantage point, one must remember that the episcopalian system of church government (with the bishop at the head) arose due to the threat of early heretical movements. To ward off these threats, the Early Church relied on the bishop as the source of true doctrine. However, at that time the New Testament was still in process of formation. Therefore, the Early Church appealed to church leadership to settle doctrinal issues. In this way, bishops became regarded as the authoritative teachers of the Christian Church.<sup>1682</sup>

Another difficulty with the Orthodox view is that in New Testament times, the office of "bishop" did not differ from the office of elder (i.e., presbyter) or pastor. In the first century, there was no office of "bishop" in the sense of clergy that had authority over the Church in general. Consequently, it is problematic to suggest that in the first century the apostles transmitted their apostolic authority to "bishops." The following passages demonstrate that the bishop, elder (presbyter), and pastor are identical.

In Peter's first epistle, he equates the office of presbyter and pastor (1 Pet 5:1-2):

Therefore, I exhort the *elders* (πρεσβυτέρους) among you, as {your} fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, *shepherd* (ποιμάνετε) the flock of God among you.

In another place, the terms "bishop" and "elder" are used interchangeably.

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<sup>1680</sup>Кураев, p. 275. Author's translation.

<sup>1681</sup>Riles, K. What's the Difference: Comparing the Beliefs of Catholics, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox. – P. 9.

<sup>1682</sup>Кулакевич Ю. Дипломная работа, «Апостольская преемственность». – Киев: Евангельская Теологическая Семинария, 2004.

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint *elders* (πρεσβυτέρους) in every city as I directed you... For the *bishop* (ἐπισκόπος)... (Tit 1:5-7).

Similarly, in 1 Timothy chapter 3 Paul lists qualifications for bishops and deacons, omitting mention of elders (presbyters). This also creates the impression that bishops are elders. Moreover, in Philippians 1:1 Paul greets the bishops and deacons, again omitting the elders, since bishops and elders are the same.

In Acts 20:28, all three titles – bishop, elder, pastor – are combined synonymously:

(Paul) sent to Ephesus and called to him the *elders* (πρεσβυτέρους) of the church.... Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *bishops* (ἐπισκόπους), to *shepherd* (ποιμαίνειν) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:17, 28).

Also interesting is that nowhere in the New Testament do we see instances where apostles forgave sins. If we are to understand John 20:17 that way, then why do we nowhere see them active in forgiving sins?<sup>1683</sup> It seems more reasonable to propose that Jesus was referring to their ministry of proclaiming the gospel, indicating the conditions for people to receive forgiveness.

In regard to the claim that church membership is necessary for salvation, Warfield wisely responds, “Men are not constituted members of Christ through the Church, but members of the Church through Christ.”<sup>1684</sup> In other words, receiving salvation through faith in Jesus precedes (logically, but not temporally) inclusion in the Church.

So then, the results of our survey lead us to reject the doctrine of apostolic succession. Consequently, the Orthodox understanding of the Church, which depends heavily on this doctrine, must be considered errant.

### 3. Roman Catholicism

#### a. Description

The Roman Catholic view of the Church basically traces back to the third-century Church Father Cyprian of Carthage. As noted above, he penned the words, “Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the Church” (*Epistles*, 68.8).<sup>1685</sup> In other words, the Church consists in the person of the bishop and those under his authority. Along with the Eastern Orthodox, Catholics hold to the doctrine of apostolic succession.

However, Catholicism differs from Orthodoxy in that it also claims that Jesus gave primacy over the other apostles to Peter, and that the Pope is the successor of Peter. So then, the Roman bishop (the Pope) exceeds in rank all other bishops and has authority over the entire Church. According to the Catholic understanding, the Church is that network of congregations that are submitted to bishops who are part of the “college” of bishops under the headship of the Pope.<sup>1686</sup> In Hill’s words, “Today the episcopacy is still considered to be an authoritarian link with the apostolic tradition. Vatican II pointed out that the apostolic succession of bishops was divinely instituted.”<sup>1687</sup>

The Council of Trent conducted by the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century issued the following definition of the Church: “The congregation of men under the rule of duly called pastors and especially of the

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<sup>1683</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1684</sup>Warfield B. B. Two studies in the history of doctrine : Augustine and the Pelagian controversy : the development of the doctrine of infant salvation. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897. – P. 166.

<sup>1685</sup>Noted in Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 228.

<sup>1686</sup>Wood, p. 134-135.

<sup>1687</sup>Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic Theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 244.

one vicar of Christ upon the earth, the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>1688</sup> Similarly, the catechism of Trent defines the Church as “The Tridentine Catechism however, defines the Church as ‘the body of all the faithful who have lived up to this time on earth, with one invisible head, Christ, and one visible head, the successor of Peter, who occupies the Roman see.’”<sup>1689</sup>

In the above-cited definition, we note that Catholicism emphasizes the “visible” Church. This means that it is theoretically possible to gather all those baptized into Catholic faith and under the authority of the Pope and call that assembly the “Church.” Along with Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholics consider that the marks of the true Church are expressed in the saying, “The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.”<sup>1690</sup>

The Catholic doctrine of the Church experienced development during the First Vatican Council in the nineteenth century. It was announced there that when the Pope makes an official decree concerning Christian faith, his teaching is infallible.<sup>1691</sup> On the Second Vatican Council it was determined that the council of bishops can aid the Pope in his definitions of faith, but that the final determination remains with the Pope.<sup>1692</sup>

Although the Second Vatican Council strengthened the place of the episcopate in ruling the Church, nonetheless, as Wood states, “The Bishop of Rome, even when acting alone, is acting implicitly as the head of the college of bishops.”<sup>1693</sup> On the other hand, the authority of bishops, even the Pope, is “limited by the content of revelation and their apostolic heritage.”<sup>1694</sup>

Other features of Vatican II are worth mentioning. The Catholic hierarchy acknowledged other Christian denominations as genuine. However, they qualify that non-Catholics do not enjoy all the privileges of salvation.<sup>1695</sup> There are three types of Christians. Catholics participate fully in the life of the Church. Concerning non-Catholics, “In some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also He gives His gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with His sanctifying power.”<sup>1696</sup>

The third group is people from other religions who have not heard the gospel, yet they strive to do good.<sup>1697</sup> According to Catholic teaching, “Each of these groups participates in the grace of God, but to varying degrees and with varying experience and enjoyment of that grace.”<sup>1698</sup> Catholics desire that all persons will eventually join the Catholic Church. Those who reject Catholicism, knowing that it is the true Church, are excluded from the Church and its grace.<sup>1699</sup>

Catholics make a distinction between the visible Church and the Body of Christ. Previously, they shared the Orthodox view that partaking of the Eucharist (i.e., the “Body of Christ”) was directly connected with membership in the Church.<sup>1700</sup> At present, though, they claim that although the Body of Christ has its “basis” in the Church, it extends beyond it to include other Christian confessions and other religious groups.<sup>1701</sup>

Karl Rahner was highly influential in developing modern Catholic ecclesiology. He advanced the concept of the “anonymous Christian.”<sup>1702</sup> According to this theory, since God became incarnate, all of humanity can be

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<sup>1688</sup>Mueller, p. 545.

<sup>1689</sup>Berkhof, p. 234.

<sup>1690</sup>Hill, p. 231.

<sup>1691</sup>Hill clarifies that only once in the history of the Papacy has this authority ever been exercised – when the assumption of Mary was announced (see Hill, p. 274).

<sup>1692</sup>Routhier G. L’autoité dans l’Eglise. – Source not indicated. – P. 154-155; A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism // World Evangelical Fellowship. – Wheaton, Ill: 1986.

<sup>1693</sup>Wood, p. 137.

<sup>1694</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>1695</sup>McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 406-408; A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism // World Evangelical Fellowship. – Wheaton, Ill: 1986.

<sup>1696</sup>Erickson, How Shall They Be Saved? – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 110-112.

<sup>1697</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>1698</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1699</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1700</sup>Pannenberg W. Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991-1998. – V. 3. – P. 467-468.

<sup>1701</sup>Smedes L. B. Union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 174.

<sup>1702</sup>Erickson, How Shall They Be Saved, p. 110-112.

considered an expression of God. People who strive to become truly human, then, are open to God and partakers of His saving grace.<sup>1703</sup>

Moreover, the Second Vatican Council emphasized that the Church is in need of renewal and development. It is not so much an “institution or visible society,” as it is a “mystery” and “a pilgrim people who have yet to reach their eschatological destination.”<sup>1704</sup>

Vatican II introduced another novelty into Catholic ecclesiology – the idea of the Church as the mystery of Christ for the world. The Church is the continuation of Christ’s incarnation on the earth and enables Christ to “to act sacramentally in the world.”<sup>1705</sup> Additionally, it is thought that the priest receives his authority not so much through the episcopate, but directly from Christ, who is sacramentally present in the Church.<sup>1706</sup> Nonetheless, Catholics still require the ordination of priests by a bishop.

## **b. Support**

In support of their view of the Church, Catholics appeal to many of the arguments used by Orthodoxy. We can briefly review them. Jesus chose the apostles so that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach (Mk 3:14). Prior to His ascension, Jesus commissioned the Twelve to “go and teach all nations” (Matt 28:19). Thus, they became His representatives in the world. Apostles are the foundation of the Church (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). According to John 17:20, Jesus gave them authority to forgive sins. The first apostles ordained others, allegedly transmitting their apostolic authority to them (Acts 14:23; 2 Tim 1:6).

The uniqueness of the Catholic view is their understanding Matthew 16:18, where Jesus said to Simon Peter, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Peter’s name means “rock.” On this basis, the Roman Church concludes that the Church is build on Peter, and that Jesus gave him authority over the entire Church.

Jesus went on to say to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). Catholics understand these words as references to Peters and his successors’ unique privilege of granting access to God’s kingdom through their teaching and administration of the sacraments. This verse concludes with the words, “Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” Here, Peter is given authority to forgive sins.

Another argument in support the papacy appeals to the incarnation of the Son of God. If God became visible in the Person of Jesus Christ, then the Church must also be visible, consisting of all who are under the Pope’s headship.<sup>1707</sup> The Catholic doctrine also claims support from the existence of ancient succession lists going back to Peter. Irenaeus provides the following succession list (*Against Heresies*, 3.3.3):

1. Peter
2. Linus
3. Anacletus
4. Clement
5. Evaristus
6. Alexander
7. Sixtus
8. Telephorus
9. Hyginus
10. Pius

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<sup>1703</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1704</sup>Wood, p. 126.

<sup>1705</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>1706</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>1707</sup>Berkhof, p. 234.

11. Anicetus
12. Soter
13. Eleutherius

Additionally, Irenaeus himself stressed the importance of submitting to the church at Rome: “For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere” (*Against Heresies*, 3.3.2). Moreover, at the Council of Chalcedon, it was said of the Roman bishop Leo 1, “Peter speaks through the mouth of Leo.”<sup>1708</sup>

### c. Refutation

In the section on Orthodoxy, we already advanced arguments opposing the theory of apostolic succession in general. These points also count in refutation of the Catholic doctrine:

1. Lack of biblical evidence for apostolic succession
2. The biblical injunction to local congregations to test those claiming apostolic authority
3. The deviation of Roman Catholic and Orthodox teaching from the New Testament<sup>1709</sup>
4. The question of the antiquity of these confessions in light of their departure from apostolic tradition
5. The reason why a hierarchical system developed in the Church
6. The equating of the offices “bishop,” “elder,” and “pastor” in the New Testament
7. Absence of examples where the apostles forgave sins.

We will go on, then, to address the uniquely Catholic positions. First, the Catholic view depends heavily on the precision and reliability of the succession lists from the first apostles. We already cited Irenaeus’ list. However, in Tertullian’s work *The Prescription against Heresies*, he claims that Clement succeeded Peter, not Linus (chp. 32). A. T. Ehrhardt researched the question of succession lists and discovered still other discrepancies. For example, sometimes the list of bishops begins with James and not Peter.<sup>1710</sup>

Second, we should note that in the early history of Christianity, the primacy of the Roman bishop was not universally accepted, but developed gradually. To this day, in fact, many Christian denominations do not accept the papal claim, namely the Orthodox and Protestants. The Orthodox are ready, though, to respect the Roman bishop as an equal among other ancient patriarchs: namely the patriarchs of Alexandria, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Antioch. The Orthodox also point out that the Council of Chalcedon called Constantinople the “new Rome.” In addition, Peter himself was not infallible.<sup>1711</sup>

Pelikan gives a fair appraisal of the difference between East and West in attitudes toward church leadership: “To the East the pope was the chief bishop because he was orthodox, while to the West he was and always would be orthodox because he was chief bishop.”<sup>1712</sup>

One of the first claims of papal primacy was made by the Emperor Constantine in 533 A.D. The title “Universal Bishop” was conferred on Boniface III in the seventh century.<sup>1713</sup> In the same century, Gregory I

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<sup>1708</sup>Hill, p. 273.

<sup>1709</sup>In regard to Catholicism, we object to the doctrines of Mary’s eternal virginity, her sinlessness and assumption, purgatory, the actual sacrifice of Christ during the mass, and many more.

<sup>1710</sup>Scott J. J. James the Relative of Jesus and the Expectation of an Eschatological Priest // *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1982. № 25. P. 327; Ehrhardt A. *The Apostolic Succession in the First Two Centuries of the Church*. – London: 1953; Ehrhardt A. *The Apostolic Ministry*. SJT Occasional Papers. – Edinburgh: 1958.

<sup>1711</sup>Pelikan J. *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1974. – P. 162, 165, 273.

<sup>1712</sup>Pelikan J. *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 2, p. 161.

<sup>1713</sup>Berkhof, p. 232.



coined the phrase “the servant of God’s servants.” In the ninth century, Gregory VII aspired not only to ecclesiastical, but also civil authority. In that same century, the Pope began donning royal attire. Also in the ninth century, Pope Nicolas I claimed the primacy of the Roman seat in a letter to Patriarch Michael III.<sup>1714</sup> In the twelfth century, Pope Innocent III proclaimed himself king of the world.<sup>1715</sup>

In order to reinforce the claim of papal supremacy in early church history, Catholics for many years appealed to the document *The Donation of Constantine*, which supported this position. However, the document has been universally discredited as a forgery.<sup>1716</sup>

One must also question whether Peter ever served as bishop of Rome. The New Testament nowhere records this. In 58 AD, when Paul penned his epistle to the church of Rome, he makes no mention of Peter.<sup>1717</sup> We know that Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome by crucifixion. However, in his publication *The Apostles after Jesus*, Criswell argues that Peter arrived in Rome only a couple years before his martyrdom in 65 AD, that he wrote his epistles from there (see 1 Pet 5:13), and that the first bishop of Rome was Linus, not Peter. The claim that Peter served as bishop of Rome first emerged in the late second or early third century.<sup>1718</sup>

Catholic ecclesiology depends heavily on the teachings of Cyprian of Carthage. However, during the Novatian controversy, Cyprian opposed the Roman bishop, Stephen, and thereby rejected the primacy of that office. In his tract *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, Cyprian asserted that all bishops have equal authority.<sup>1719</sup>

One must also consider the dominant role Rome played in the ancient world. This likely had a pronounced influence on the Roman church and its leadership. Just as Rome dominated the world politically, the Church of Rome saw itself as dominant in the world of Christianity.<sup>1720</sup>

How should one interpret, then, the words of Jesus to Peter in Matthew 16:18-19, which the Catholics claim as the foundation for the papacy’s claims? We can propose alternate understandings of this passage. Some feel that here Jesus was speaking of Himself as the foundation of the Church. Others theorized that Jesus was including all the apostles in the foundation with Peter as their representative. Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that the foundation Jesus spoke of was the revelation that Peter received of Christ’s messiahship.<sup>1721</sup> Let us investigate further.

Arguments in favor of the view that Jesus is the foundation go as follows. First, Peter’s name in Greek is *petros*, while the conventional word for “rock” is *petra*. Jesus literally said, “You are *petros*, and on this *petra* I will build my church.” Possibly, the differences between these terms may indicate that *petra* refers not to Peter, but to the Lord. In addition, other passages of Scripture speak of Jesus being a stone or rock (Rom 9:33; 10:4; 1 Pet 2:8). Paul speaks directly of Jesus as the Church’s foundation: “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). Peter does the same: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner” (1 Pet 2:6). Moreover, if Jesus meant to designate Peter as the foundation of the Church, then He could have expressed that more directly: “On you I will build my church.”<sup>1722</sup>

How about the option that Jesus meant that the foundation of the Church consists of all the apostles with Peter as their representative? We note that Ephesians 2:20 and Revelation 21:14 include all the apostles in the foundation. In addition, in Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 Jesus gave all the apostles authority, not just Peter: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on

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<sup>1714</sup>Pelikan J. *The Christian Tradition*, v. 2, p. 158.

<sup>1715</sup>Hill, p. 218, 273. In defense of the Catholic view, Hill answers that in the course of time, the Church must grow and develop, even in its style of leadership (Hill, p. 215).

<sup>1716</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>1717</sup>In support of the Catholic position, Hill responds that Peter arrived in Rome in 60 AD, that is, after Paul wrote his epistle to that congregation (Hill, p. 199).

<sup>1718</sup>Criswell D. *The Apostles after Jesus: A history of the Apostles*. – Dallas, TX: Fortress, 2013. – P. 20-29.

<sup>1719</sup>Newton, p. 186-187.

<sup>1720</sup>Pannenberg, p. 466.

<sup>1721</sup>Иларион, p. 121 (from the seventh edition); Fairbairn, p. 18-19.

<sup>1722</sup>See Thiessen, p. 412-413; Mueller, p. 550-551.

earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (Matt 18:18); “If you forgive the sins of any, {their sins} have been forgiven them; if you retain the {sins} of any, they have been retained” (Jn 20:23). In Ephesians 2:20, in fact, Paul identifies two components of the foundation: “...having been built on the foundation of the *apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself* being the corner {stone}.”

This second theory does not exclude Peter, however. He makes up part of the foundation along with the other apostles, and his revelation that Jesus is the Messiah makes up part of the overall revelation and testimony that the apostles proclaim. Additionally, as *petroc*, that is, “a small stone,” Peter contributes to the composition of the entire foundation, i.e., *petra*.

However, we must acknowledge that Matthew 16 does give special prominence to Peter. Jesus speaks to Peter in the second person singular, which differs from the second personal plural in Greek: “I will give you (sing.) the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you (sing.) bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you (sing.) loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” In addition, in another instance Jesus gave preference to Peter over the Twelve: “Simon, {son} of John, do you love Me more than these?... Tend My lambs” (Jn 21:15).

We also consider that from the first to the eleventh chapters of Acts, Peter functioned as head of the apostolic team. In chapter 1, he proposed that the disciples choose a replacement for Judas. In chapter 2, he preached at the Day of Pentecost, and later, in chapter 3, to a crowd at the temple gate. Chapter 4 saw him defend the faith before the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5, he announced judgement on Ananias and Sapphira and performed other wonders. It seems that Peter did enjoy a place of special prominence among the Twelve.

We propose that the special privilege afforded to Peter was the opportunity to be the first to preach the gospel. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus promised him the “keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus employed the image of “key” again in Lk 11:52: “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering.” The “keys” refer to knowledge. If we ascribe that meaning to Matthew 16:19, we can conclude that through his ministry of preaching Peter enjoyed the privilege of giving people knowledge that would lead to salvation. The “keys of the kingdom,” then, are not authority over the Church, but the opportunity to open the doors of salvation through gospel preaching.<sup>1723</sup>

Corresponding to that, the words “whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” refer to the conditions for receiving salvation that Peter would announce through preaching the gospel. Of course, all the apostles were engaged in gospel preaching, but Peter was the first.

Peter was the first to preach to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and the first to preach to the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius. Peter himself reflects on this in Acts 15:7: “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.” In addition, in Acts chapter 8 when the Samaritans received the gospel they did not receive Spirit baptism until Peter and John laid their hands on them.<sup>1724</sup>

Furthermore, in the book of Acts we note that after Peter preached the gospel to the Gentiles, his place of prominence in the Church seemed to wane. In Acts 12, he finds himself in prison. In chapter 15, he participates in the Jerusalem Council, but not as its head. In Galatians 2, Paul reproves Peter publically for hypocrisy. In the latter chapters of Acts, the leader of the “mother church” in Jerusalem is not Peter, but James.

It appears that Peter used his last “key” in preaching to Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. The “keys of the kingdom” were the privilege to preach first to Jews, then to Gentiles. After that, Peter recedes in prominence and becomes like the other apostles.

We conclude, then, that the Catholic doctrines of apostolic succession and papal primacy lack Scriptural and historical support. Their understanding of the Church is badly misguided.

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<sup>1723</sup>Thiessen, p. 413.

<sup>1724</sup>Ibid.

## 4. Protestantism

The Catholic and Orthodox understandings of the nature of the Church lean heavily on the role of church hierarchy. During the Reformation, the Protestants sought to return to a biblical basis for ecclesiology. We earlier defined the Evangelical (biblical) view of the Church. We now wish to survey other prominent views among Protestants.

### a. Liberal Theology

The so-called “father of liberal theology,” Friedrich Schleiermacher, based his overall theology on the premise that true religion consisted of an inner feeling of dependence on God. He therefore concluded that the Church was the place where Christians could enjoy mutual fellowship and share with one another their personal experience with the Lord.<sup>1725</sup> Bornkamm offers this description of Schleiermacher’s thought, “In the eyes of romanticism the church was the expression of holy emotional forces slumbering in man in varying degrees.”<sup>1726</sup>

Paul Tillich, who believed that God is the “ground of being,” taught that victory over “non-being,” which is our primary foe, is realized through Jesus Christ, who introduces into humanity a “New Being.” In the Church, particularly through preaching of the Word and the sacraments, this “New Being” is imparted to worshipers. The Church is also the place where Christians can share their experience of the “New Being.” The Church should strive to conquer the ambiguities of life through the spiritual presence.<sup>1727</sup>

Wolfhart Pannenberg viewed the Church as “a provisional form of this people and a preliminary sign of its future consummation that will embrace not only members of the church but the Jewish people and the ‘righteous’ of all the nations who stream in from every culture to the banquet of the reign of God.”<sup>1728</sup> The Church is “the core of this humanity of the future.”<sup>1729</sup>

### b. Lutheran and Reformed Faith

Conservative Protestants believe that the Universal Church consists of all truly born again Christians in all places and from all times independent of what Christian confession they belong to. Luther expresses the Protestant perspective well:

I believe that there is one holy Christian Church on earth, i.e., the communion and number or the congregation of all Christians in the whole world, the only bride of Christ and His spiritual body, of which He is the only head.<sup>1730</sup>

However, McGrath comments that due to the influence of the so-called “Radical Reformation,” that is, the Anabaptism Movement, Luther felt pressured to include in his definition of the Church a reference to church structure as well. This introduces some inconsistencies in his view.<sup>1731</sup>

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<sup>1725</sup>Sykes S. Friedrich Schleiermacher / Nineham D. E. Robertson E. H. Makers of Contemporary Theology. – Richmond VA: John Knox, 1965. – P. 30-31.

<sup>1726</sup>Bornkamm, p. 135.

<sup>1727</sup>Thomas J. H. Paul Tillich // Nineham D. E. Robertson E. H. Makers of Contemporary Theology. – Richmond VA: John Knox, 1965. – P. 29-34.

<sup>1728</sup>Pannenberg, p. 477.

<sup>1729</sup>Ibid., p. 469.

<sup>1730</sup>*Vom Abendmahl Christi* (1528): 26, 506, from Bornkamm, p. 144.

<sup>1731</sup>McGrath, p. 203-204.

Regarding local congregations, Lutheran and Reformed believers assert that the marks of a true local church are the proper preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments.<sup>1732</sup> In Luther's words,

There God's Word is preached and believed purely and ardently; there children are accepted into the kingdom of God through Baptism; there hearts assailed by sin and temptation find solace and strength in Holy Communion; there sinners unburden their conscience in confession; there ministers are commissioned in orderly fashion for preaching the Word, for administering the Sacraments, and for other pastoral ministrations; there a prayerful Christian people offers God praise and thanks in public worship; there people are opposed and persecuted for the sake of Christ, and there they must bear the cross of their Master.<sup>1733</sup>

The authoritative statement of faith for Lutherans, the Augsburg Confession, defines the marks of a true church as "the congregation of the saints in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administrated."<sup>1734</sup> Mueller gives a more detailed description of the Lutheran view: "We therefore rightly define local churches as assemblies of true believers, who are gathered at a certain place for the purpose of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments."<sup>1735</sup>

The Reformed churches hold a similar view. Calvin defines the marks of a true church with the familiar words, "We have said that the symbols by which the Church is discerned are the preaching of the word and the observance of the sacraments" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.10).<sup>1736</sup>

Lutherans also acknowledge that among Christian congregations we observe both sincere Christians and others whose lifestyles do not correspond to their Christian confession. Yet, just as we call an item "golden" when it is not 100 percent pure, we call congregations "churches," even though they have imperfections.<sup>1737</sup>

An interesting feature of the Lutheran view is that although Lutherans recognize that the Universal Church consists of all true believers from all denominations, they feel that the Universal Church finds its purest expression through the Lutheran confession. Mueller comments here, "The Lutheran Church is therefore the orthodox visible Church of Christ on earth."<sup>1738</sup>

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<sup>1732</sup>Berkhof, p. 237-239.

<sup>1733</sup>*Vom Abendmahl Christi* (1528), 50, 628–643, from Bornkamm, p. 145.

<sup>1734</sup>Berkhof, p. 237.

<sup>1735</sup>Mueller, p. 555.

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## Chapter 18: Unity of the Church

### A. Definition of and Basis for Church Unity

The unity of the Church has been the hope of God's people for many generations. We see it emphasized in the Old Testament as well: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity" (Ps 133:1) Yet, instead of brothers and sisters in Christ living together in harmony, the Church is divided among various movements and denominations, some of which barely fellowship with one another.

In the beginning of Church history, only one Christian confession existed.<sup>1739</sup> In the eleventh century, the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholics parted ways. Since that time, especially in the West, many more divisions have occurred.<sup>1740</sup> At the present time, the number of separate Christian confessions number about 1000.

Nelson recalls unsuccessful attempts in the past to unify the Body of Christ.<sup>1741</sup> Efforts failed to reconcile Eastern and Western Christianity at the Councils of Lyons (1274), Ferrara (1438), and Florence (1439). Negotiations between Catholics and Protestants also deadlocked in Regensburg (1541). Luther and Zwingli met to resolve differences (1529), but Luther left in disgust with the parting words, "You are of another spirit than we."<sup>1742</sup> In the early nineteenth century, Thomas Campbell began a movement to unite all Christendom. Instead, his movement turned into yet one more new denomination – the Disciples of Christ.

Divisions in the Church cause much embarrassment before unbelievers. Voltaire once said,

The shameful quarrels of divided Christians have done more mischief under religious pretenses, made more bad blood, and shed more human blood, than all the political contentions which have laid waste France and Germany under pretense of maintaining the balance of Europe.<sup>1743</sup>

However, unlike the history just surveyed above, the ecumenical movement has made more progress in the twentieth century than ever before.<sup>1744</sup> We can mention the merger of Canadian Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada. The same three joined with the Congregationalists to form the Church of South India.<sup>1745</sup> In 1999, Catholics and Lutherans cosigned the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. How should we understand these recent developments and the question of church unity in general?

First, we must tackle the question of what church unity is. "Unity" implies agreement, harmonious interrelationships, and cooperation. "Church" is the sum total of all born again believers. Therefore, church unity involves agreement, harmonious interrelationships, and cooperation between all true believers in Christ.

At the same time, church unity does not mean the unification of all people without regard to faith. Divisions between believers and unbelievers do not nullify the unity of the Church. It is interesting to note the historical situation after the flood of Noah, when all humanity joined in a unified effort to build the Tower of Babel as an expression of their independence from God. This type of unity, however, was not pleasing to the Lord, and He divided the peoples by their languages. The Bible predicts that there will be another future

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<sup>1739</sup>We must consider, though, together with Bromiley, that the Early Church and Medieval Church also experienced divisions (Bromiley G. W. *The Unity and Disunity of the Church*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958. – P. 16-17).

<sup>1740</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>1741</sup>Nelson J. R. *Overcoming Christian Divisions*. – New York: Association Press, 1962. – P. 52-64.

<sup>1742</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>1743</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>1744</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70, 99, 102-103.

<sup>1745</sup>Kik J. M. *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*. – Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1958. – P. 1.



attempt by Antichrist to unite the world under himself. Therefore, although church unity is desirable, world unity is threatening, even dangerous.

Regarding God's Old Testament people, several factors unified Israel: a common homeland, law, place of worship, administration, covenant with Yahweh, and history.<sup>1746</sup> Malachi calls God's Old Testament people to treat one another fairly due to their unity in Yahweh: "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" (Mal 2:10).

The Church is also God's people (Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:9) and the place of God's habitation (Eph 2:22; 1 Pet 2:5).<sup>1747</sup> Yet, there is a more powerful unifying factor at work here than in the Old Covenant: rebirth into God's spiritual family. All believers are brothers and sisters, joined together by a spiritual union in Christ.

Ephesians 4:4-6 lists the fundamental factors that unify Christians: one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one calling, one hope, one Lord, one Father. Still other passages of Scripture highlight other aspects of Christian unity: one Body in Christ (1 Cor 12:12), one flock of God (Jn 10:16), one foundation (Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 3:11), and a sharing together of one bread (1 Cor 10:17).<sup>1748</sup> The Holy Trinity serve as a model for unity: "...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, {are} in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us" (Jn 17:21).

Bromiley rightly stresses Christ as the basis for our unity.<sup>1749</sup> We are joined together with Him in death and resurrection. He is the object of our common faith. We share a common life in Him. He is the Savior of us all. In His death, all divisions were abolished: "This unity in Christ is an invincible unity in face of human disunity because it has been accomplished for us by the act of God Himself."<sup>1750</sup> Along with this, the Holy Spirit is active in the Church to realize this unity.

However, church unity does not lead to a monolithic state. The Spirit distributes to believers various gifts (1 Cor 12:4-6). Even God's Old Testament people consisted of 12 different tribes, and in their early years, no centralized government ruled over them. Nelson entertains the idea that monotony is not unity, and variety is not divisiveness. Diversity enhances and enriches the spiritual experience of the Church.<sup>1751</sup>

## **B. The Dilemma of Division**

### **1. Call to Unity**

Although in one sense, God's people are already one in Christ, it is vital for believers to make this unity visible. Jesus described Himself as a Shepherd who gathers His flock (Jn 10:16; 11:52), and He prayed that the Father would unify His disciples for the sake of effective evangelism (Jn 17:20-21). Additionally, Jesus praised the peacemakers (Matt 5:9) and spoke against divisions (Lk 11:17). Reconciliation between parties is part and parcel of the Good News of the gospel.<sup>1752</sup>

The apostles laid stress on the importance of harmony among believers as well. Unity is part of a life "worthy of the gospel" (Eph 4:1; Phil 1:27). Christians must be "diligent" to preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3). The book of Acts gives us a great picture of what unity looks like (see chps. 2 and 4). In its early days, the Church enjoyed unity in all respects: doctrinal, spiritual, emotional, and material. Of note is that the Spirit fell on the disciples when they were all together and of one mind (Acts 1:14; 2:1).

The Old Testament contains several fine examples of unity among God's people as well. The tribes of Israel worked together to conquer the Promised Land. The tribes that inherited the lands East of Jordan left their

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<sup>1746</sup>Bromiley, p. 10.

<sup>1747</sup>Ibid., p. 10-11.

<sup>1748</sup>In fact, celebrating the Lord's Supper can be an excellent opportunity to reflect on church unity.

<sup>1749</sup>Bromiley, p. 50, 56-61.

<sup>1750</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>1751</sup>Nelson, p. 31-39.

<sup>1752</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

inheritance to assist the other tribes gain their lands (Josh 1:12-15). All the tribes crossed the Jordan together, gathered twelve stones from the river bed representing the twelve tribes, and built a common altar (Josh 4:1-7). Additionally, when the tribes East of Jordan returned, they also constructed an altar so that in future times, the other tribes would not exclude them from the congregation of God's people (Josh 22:21-29).

The Bible not only endorses unity, but also decries divisions among God's people. Among the things the Lord "hates" is "...one who spreads strife among brothers" (Prov 6:16-19). Scripture also graphically describes the true nature of those causing discord – they are "fleshly" (1 Cor 3:3-4), "perverted and sinning" (Tit 3:10-11), "worldly-minded, void of the Spirit" (Jude 19).

From a historical point of view, Nelson comments that during times of persecution, believers in Christ are more ready to cooperate with one another. Difficult times show "the frailty of many of the causes for division which are normally defended with passion."<sup>1753</sup> Nelson summarizes the attitude of true Christians toward church unity: "We may not agree what the church is, or what kind of unity it ought to have, or what are the conditions of its attainment, or how it is to be sought, but we all agree that the church ought to be one."<sup>1754</sup>

## 2. Types of Division

Scripture unquestionably maintains that believers must attain harmony in interpersonal relationships. They must love one another (Jn 13:35), be patient with one another (Eph 4:32), and live in harmony (Eph 4:2-3; 1 Pet 3:8). Aside from harmony in personal relationships, the Bible teaches believers to hold the same values and strive for the same goals (Phil 2:2; 4:2; 2 Cor 13:11). Humility is essential to achieve this (Rom 12:16; Phil 2:3).

Divisions by race or societal status are also unlawful. God's people are an international community without over attachment to national patriotism (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Eph 2:14; Rom 15:5-9). The Church must also not divide over preference for one preacher over another, as was the case in Corinth (1 Cor 1:12). This leads to jealousy and strife (1 Cor 3:3-4). Believers must work together as a team. We recall how Jesus' disciples tried to forbid a certain "preacher" who was not in their company and received a rebuke from the Lord (Lk 9:49-50).

The Old Testament presents us with many instances of unlawful divisions. For example, Israel engaged in civil war because Jephthah failed to invite the tribe of Ephraim to the battle against Ammon (Judg 12). Moreover, from the time that the Northern Kingdom separated from the Southern Kingdom (2 Chr 10:16) these kingdoms were frequently at war with one another.<sup>1755</sup>

When divisions concern doctrinal questions, though, a resolution is more evasive.<sup>1756</sup> One must first distinguish petty doctrinal questions from vital ones that effect a person's salvation. Excommunication from the Church for heresy is in no way a violation of church unity. The apostles never hesitated to expel false teachers from the congregation (Rom 16:17; Gal 1:8; 2 Jn 10; Tit 3:10-11). In the Old Testament, an individual was "cut off from his people" for violation of fundamental commandments. We also recall instances where Israel fought among themselves in order to expel apostates (Ex 32:25-28; Judg 20).

Nelson counsels us regarding doctrinal purity, "Unity must never be sought by neglecting Christian truth, as though unity were more important than truth. Christ who is the truth is also the one in whom there is unity."<sup>1757</sup>

There has always been false teaching in the Church (1 Tim 4:1; 2 Pet 2:1; Matt 7:15). According to Jesus' parable, tares and wheat will coexist in God's kingdom until the end (Matt 13:24-30; 37-43; 47-52). 1 Corinthians 11:19 gives us insight into how God works this into His plan: "For there must also be factions

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<sup>1753</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>1754</sup>Bromiley, p. 14.

<sup>1755</sup>We also take into consideration that the separation of the 11 tribes from the tribe of Judah was a punishment for Solomon (1 Kin 11:11-13).

<sup>1756</sup>It is important to remember, together with Nelson, that frequently in Israel's history, so-called doctrinal divisions were in fact covert attempts to gain authority or riches (see Nelson, p. 43-44).

<sup>1757</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.” God allows heresies to arise to test His people – can they distinguish false teaching from truth (see Deut 13:1-3)?

The Old Testament records examples when God’s people were infected with false belief or practice. Cordial relations between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms sometimes led to the latter being misled by the error of the former (2 Chr 28:2-4; Mic 1:9; 2 Kin 17:19; Ezek 16:46). It reached the point where Yahweh forbade cooperation between the groups (2 Chr 20:35-37; 25:5-10). This reminds us of the New Testament injunction that the Church should not fellowship with heretics. The opposite, though, can also occur – the Southern Kingdom at times was able to introduce reform into the North (2 Chr 11:13-16; 15:9; 30:1ff; 31:1).

If the doctrinal issues are trivial in nature, believers must bear with each other to preserve the unity of the faith. In such cases, harmony between brethren takes priority over individuals defending their views (Rom 14:1-8). A certain seventeenth-century Lutheran pastor, who called himself “Meldenius,” coined the famous saying: “In all things necessary, unity; in things not necessary, liberty; in all things, charity.”<sup>1758</sup>

Besides vital and trivial doctrinal differences, some teachings may not involve actual heresy, but they can still be potentially harmful to faith and warrant concern. Conscientious church leaders may be unwilling to allow such views to be voiced. In such cases, Jesus’ counsel on administering church discipline will come into play (Matt 18).

According to proper church discipline, one should attempt to resolve the matter by personal interview with the “offenders.” Only when this fails should the matter be addressed publically. A failure at this level may well lead to a church division. However, if the dispute is not vital to Christian faith or salvation, the two groups should grant each other mutual recognition as legitimate expressions of the Church and seek to maintain positive relationships as long as the matter remains unresolved. Here we apply Paul’s principle, “Do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thes 3:15).

## **C. Restoration of Unity**

### **1. The Hope of Unity**

Although at present, divisions over doctrinal questions are sometimes necessary and unavoidable, Christians hold out hope for a future reconciliation of all genuine Christian confessions. Unity in doctrine and practice is a process in the life of the Church. Ephesians 4:10-16 speaks of “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” as future events when the Church attains “to a mature man.” Clearly, the closer each Christian confession is to the Head, Christ, the closer they will be to one another.

Church leaders and teachers play a leading role in this quest for unity. They are gifts to the Church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:12-13). To the degree that all members of Christ’s Body, especially its leaders, are open to an intensive and honest examination of God’s Word, they can move toward doctrinal unity: “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all {aspects} into Him who is the head, {even} Christ” (Eph 4:15). The Church’s goal should be to fulfill Paul’s charge to the church in Corinth:

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10).

Besides hope in the future reconciliation of Christian confessions, the question remains as to what can be done at present. Five primary approaches have been recommended.<sup>1759</sup> First, believers can simply

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<sup>1758</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>1759</sup>Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998. – P. 1141-1143.

acknowledge the already existing spiritual unity between all true believers (i.e., all true believers are already members of the Universal Church) and not be concerned about making that unity visible. Second, local churches can take the initiative to build relationships with other local congregations, visit their worship services, and cooperate on common projects without any formal merger.

The third “level” of unity is forming Christian denominations, which local congregations voluntarily join, holding to like doctrines and submitting to denominational leadership. A fourth degree of involvement is forming interdenominational fellowships, in which separate denominations engage in fellowship and undertake common projects without merging into a single confession or changing their beliefs. The final and most exhaustive step in organizational unity, in which all Christian confessions merge into a single union with the same beliefs and under the same leadership.

## **2. Acknowledgement of Spiritual Unity**

Let us look more closely at the simplest and least demanding form of Church unity – recognizing that all true believers are already one in Christ. From a human perspective, it appears to us that there are many churches. They function mostly independent from one another and sometimes conflict among themselves. From God’s point of view, however, He sees only one Church, since He knows which members of these Christian confessions are truly His. This factor requires us to acknowledge that all true believers regardless of denominational affiliation are equal members of the Universal Church, even though they belong to different ecclesiastical organizations.

Acknowledging the spiritual unity of the Church is the most fundamental expression of Christian unity. Hans Küng expresses well the concept of spiritual unity: “The unity of the church is a spiritual unity. It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all place and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and the same Christ who through his word and Spirit unites all together in the same bond of fellowship of the same body of Christ.”<sup>1760</sup>

Some picture the Church as a growing organism that undergoes various stages of development. It is thought that the historical confessions, i.e., Catholicism and Orthodoxy, make up the first and least mature stage of development. After them, the first Protestants became the next phrase of growth. In our day, the Church is continuing to mature, and, consequently, more highly developed Christian confessions emerge, such as the Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics.<sup>1761</sup>

However, we also must keep in mind that God’s will is for the Church to attain a *visible* unity. Therefore, it is not sufficient to simply recognize that God’s people are one in a spiritual sense. The Church must strive for a more practical expression of harmony. Bromiley warns that embracing unity only on this level reduces it to a mystical, emotional, platonic, and spiritual concept that is incapable of solving ongoing issues in Christ’s Body.<sup>1762</sup> Additionally, Bromiley appeals to the incarnation of God’s Son – since He became physical and historical, we must have a physical and historical expression of His Body.<sup>1763</sup>

## **3. Interchurch Fellowship**

The second level of expression for church unity is mutual congregational fellowship. Local church can voluntarily build bridges between themselves to engage in fellowship and shared ministry without the expectation that they will merge into a single congregation or denomination. They visit each other’s worship services, they cooperate in evangelistic or humanitarian projects, their pastors meet for prayer, etc. Here we

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<sup>1760</sup>McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 411.

<sup>1761</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1762</sup>Bromiley, p. 36-37.

<sup>1763</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

see a visible demonstration of the Church's unity. Some feel that this level of engagement is adequate, while others seek a closer relationship through formation of concrete denominations.

#### **4. Denominationalism**

A third level of visible church unity is when individual Christian congregations voluntarily join together under one leadership and embrace one doctrine to form a Christian confession or denomination. In such a system, it often occurs that individual congregations retain the right to choose their own pastor, determine congregational order, and organize their own worship services.

Protestant denominations differ from Orthodoxy and Catholicism in that the former regard membership in the union as voluntary, and if a congregation decides to leave the association, yet maintains true Christian doctrine, they are still considered part of the Universal Church. On the other hand, Catholics and Orthodox consider themselves to be the only true Church. Therefore, according to their understanding, a congregation must belong to their organizations to be a true local church in the full sense of the word.<sup>1764</sup>

Unlike the opinion of many, Nelson opposes denominationalism. He compares it with what Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:12: "Each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.'" He states,

It is perfectly clear that according to the Bible the Church exists on two levels only. There is the one Church Universal on earth and in heaven. And there is the local congregation which is the focal point of the Church. In between here are no communions or denominations, as we know them now.<sup>1765</sup>

#### **5. Interdenominational Fellowship**

Interdenominational fellowship involves separate Christian denominations connecting between themselves and participating in common projects, yet maintaining their distinct beliefs and leadership. This type of fellowship can happen without any formal organizing body. Any denomination at any time can take initiative to connect with another Christian group for the purpose of fellowship and cooperation. This level of visible unity disturbs some since it involves association with groups that may have a significantly different doctrinal position. This may create the false impression to outsiders that these confessions hold to the same teachings.

Interdenominational fellowship can be facilitated by formal organizational bodies. At the present time, there exist two main organizations that perform that function: the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).

Let us trace the history the WCC.<sup>1766</sup> The idea for such an organization arose in the nineteenth century in connection with world missions. Missionaries understand how important unity is for evangelization – division hinders the preaching of the one Christian message. The modern ecumenical movement, then, traces back to the Edinburg Missionary Conference of 1910 and similar missionary conferences that took place subsequent to it. A participant in the Edinburg meetings, Charles Brent, organized another conference on the theme of Church faith and order in Geneva in 1920. A third movement arose distinct from these, devoted to the life and work of the Church. In 1948, the last two groups merged to form the WCC. The Edinburg Conference joined them in 1958.

The early participants in the WCC expressed their aim of unity in a statement made at the 1961 conference in New Delhi:

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<sup>1764</sup>In recent times, some Catholic and Orthodox leaders are ready to recognize Protestant churches as members of the Body of Christ.

<sup>1765</sup>Nelson, p. 28.

<sup>1766</sup>Rusch W. G. A Survey of Ecumenical Reflection about Unity // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. The Ecumenical Future. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. – P. 1-10.

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people. It is for such a unity that we believe we must pray and work.<sup>1767</sup>

Other feature of the WCC are worth noting. The Council consists of 352 Christian denominations from 120 nations of the world. Catholicism is not an official member of the union, but has close ties to it. The statement of faith of the WCC reads as follows:

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>1768</sup>

The WCC pursues the following goals. First, it seeks to visibly express the unity of the Christian faith. Second, its members participate in humanitarian and evangelistic missions. Third, the WCC promotes justice and world peace. Fourth, a special committee studies doctrinal questions that divide the Church. Dialog occurs not only between Christian confessions, but also with non-Christian groups. WCC does not seek to unite all confessions organizationally, but respects the autonomy of each member group.

The WCC "is a community of churches on the way to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ. It seeks to advance towards this unity, as Jesus prayed for his followers, 'so that the world may believe.'"<sup>1769</sup>

The Council has certain requirements for its members. First, they must accept the statement of faith of the WCC. Second, they must participate in and work to advance the ecumenical movement. Third, they are expected to participate in WCC sponsored projects. Additionally, members are expected to show regard for official announcements made by the WCC. They must also refrain from proselytizing members of other Christian confessions. Finally, members of the WCC are obliged to defend women's rights.

On the one hand, it appears that the WCC stands for much that is good and honorable. However, some Christians, especially those of Evangelical faith, refrain from participation in the WCC for several reasons. The statement of faith does not address many vital Christian doctrines, especially in regard to salvation. Some observe a leaning toward liberalism in the member denominations. Finally, some feel the WCC is more engaged in politics than spiritual matters.

Because of these concerns, another interdenominational union was formed in 1951 – the World Evangelical Alliance.<sup>1770</sup> The WEA embraces 420 million believers from various denominations, and their members reside in 127 nations of the world. As a rule, each nation hosts a national evangelical alliance. The goal of the WEA is as follows:

The WEA affirms and seeks the biblical unity of Christ's body, the Church, celebrating the diversity of practices and theological emphases consistent with the WEA Statement of Faith, recognizing the existing dynamic tension between undeniable unity and marvelous diversity.

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<sup>1767</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>1768</sup><https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc>

<sup>1769</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1770</sup><http://www.worlddea.org>

The WEA affirms the following beliefs:

- The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- One God, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and his personal return in power and glory.
- The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ.
- The Resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

We can mention one other Evangelical organization that is less prominent than the WEA – the International Council of Christian Churches, founded by Carl McIntire.<sup>1771</sup> This union holds its general conferences just before the WCC and in the same city. It considers the WCC to be an apostate movement and stands in opposition to it. This association feels that true unity exists only between true believers in Christ and is actualized not organizationally, but spiritually.

Excerpts from the goals of the ICC:

- To provide a worldwide fellowship of evangelical churches and people for mutual encouragement and help in the things of the Lord;
- To encourage all member bodies to foster a loyal and aggressive revival of Bible Christianity over all the world;
- To seek to awaken Christians everywhere to the insidious dangers of Modernism and call them to unity of mind and effort against all unbelief and compromise with Modernism of every kind, and against Roman Catholicism – in the hope that with the blessing of God this effort may result in a genuine 21st century Reformation, in the spirit of the 16th century Reformation.
- To undertake to do for the bodies belonging to this Council the things which they can better do in cooperation than by themselves.
- To arouse other Christian churches throughout the world to participate in this Council;
- To seek by every proper means to facilitate the missionary work of member bodies;
- To advocate steadfastly the Christian mode of life in society at large, in the hope that we may be able to do something to retard the progress of atheistic and pagan ideologies under any name, of loose morality, and of godlessness which have become such alarming threats to the Christian method of life in our times.

## 6. Organizational Unity

By “organizational unity,” we mean a merger of all Christian confessions into a single organization under one leadership and holding to one doctrine. Since Catholics and Eastern Orthodox consider themselves to be the only true Church and seek to incorporate all Christendom in themselves, they stand opposed to an equal “merger.”<sup>1772</sup>

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<sup>1771</sup><https://iccc-churches.org>

<sup>1772</sup>Bromiley, p. 29.

Most already existing Christian denominations fear that such a merger would force them to compromise some of their fundamental doctrines and practices. Bromiley adds the thought that forcing a merger would repel some groups and thus exclude some genuine believers from the organization. He also argues that the Church is not a historical, but a spiritual institution. The irreplaceable element in the true Church is the presence of Christ, which cannot be forced.<sup>1773</sup>

On the other hand, some writers support this plan. Charles Morrison, author of *The Unfinished Reformation*, claims that our goal should be “to bring the Church of Christ into an empirical existence so that we *can* see it, *can* lay hold of it.”<sup>1774</sup> Samuel feels that, although the official position of the WCC does not advance this plan, many of its participants dream of the merger of all Christian groups, “even if they feel the goal is still a long way off.”<sup>1775</sup>

## D. Attitudes toward Ecumenism

### 1. Eastern Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy’s view of church unity is not monolithic. At the WCC conference of 1974, the former Patriarch of Moscow, Pimen, confirmed this.<sup>1776</sup> Nonetheless, we can cite several statements that may shed light on the general Orthodox opinion.

In 1961, the Russian Orthodox Church joined the WCC for the purpose of, according to Piman, “restoration of Christian unity and ministry to humanity.”<sup>1777</sup> Piman also stated, “We are absolutely convinced that Orthodoxy... can and must make a positive, and I even say definitive contribution to restoring Christian unity.”<sup>1778</sup>

More specifically, the Russian Orthodox Church did not actually join the Council, but entered into an “ongoing cooperative relationship” with the representatives of other churches in the Council.<sup>1779</sup> We must remember that Orthodoxy considers itself the only true Church. Limouris describes the Orthodox attitude toward ecumenism in the following words:

The Orthodox Church is not a confession, one of many, one among many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just the Church.... She finds herself in an unbroken and continuous succession of ministry, sacramental life, and faith.... The Orthodox Church, by her inner conviction and consciousness, has a special and exceptional position in the divided Christendom, as bearer of, and witness to, the tradition of the ancient undivided Church, from which all existing denominations stem, by way of reduction and separation.<sup>1780</sup>

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<sup>1773</sup>Ibid., p. 20-31.

<sup>1774</sup>Morrison C. C. *The Unfinished Reformation*. – New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953. – P. 54.

<sup>1775</sup>Samuel L. *Evangelicals and the Ecumenical Movement*. – London: Evangelical Alliance, 1964. – P. 8.

<sup>1776</sup>Pimen (Patriarch of Moscow). *An Orthodox View of Contemporary Ecumenism // The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*. – Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978. – P. 326. In Kozlov’s opinion, most Orthodox view ecumenism negatively. (see Козлов М. (Протоиерей). *Русская Православная Церковь и экуменическое движение*. – 31 марта 2006 года. – <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/jurnal/478.htm>).

<sup>1777</sup>Pimen, p. 328. Author’s translation. The Russian Orthodox Church was not able to participate in the WCC previously due to hostilities between the USSR and Western organizations (Pimen, p. 327).

<sup>1778</sup>Ibid., p. 336. Author’s translation.

<sup>1779</sup>Nikodim (Metropolitan). *The Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement // The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*. – Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978. – P. 269.

<sup>1780</sup>Limouris G. ed, *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, p. 30; taken from Guroian V. *The Crisis of Orthodox Ecclesiology // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. The Ecumenical Future*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. – P. 164.



The Orthodox hesitate to join any union of confessions since they consider themselves the preservers of God's truth. Nikodim writes,

Orthodox doctrine is unchangeable in its essence, which may be defined as the sacred, living Tradition of the Church. The Church faithfully guards and explains (without marring it) the Apostolic and revealed heritage of the faith entrusted to it.<sup>1781</sup>

Therefore, true unity must be accomplished in the context of Eastern Orthodoxy. In his address to the WCC in 1968, Metropolitan Nikodim explained, "Only the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which is the full, healthy foundation of the Body of Christ, possesses the true and full unity, because it is obedient to the voice of divine Truth."<sup>1782</sup>

Consequently, Orthodoxy's goal is that the denominations belonging to the WCC would eventually join Orthodoxy. Nikodim hints at this when he expresses the desire that "all the Churches belonging to the World Council of Churches (would) hold the faith which was the faith of the ancient undivided Church."<sup>1783</sup> Patriarch Pimen adds that only the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church performs the Eucharist in the fullest sense.<sup>1784</sup>

In Nikodim's words, true unity consists of "intimate communion with Him through faith and through participation in the sacramental life, especially in the true Eucharist, on condition that full obedience is paid to the fullness of the divine revelation."<sup>1785</sup> So then, the intention of the WCC should not be to "create" unity between churches, but rather to recover it.<sup>1786</sup>

Moreover, Pimen insists that this unity must embrace: (1) the baptism of both adults and infants, (2) belief in the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, which is a sacrifice for sins, (3) ordination according to apostolic succession, and (4) the teaching function of the Church.<sup>1787</sup> Other Orthodox theologians insist that doctrinal unity be based on the Trinitarian doctrine and union with Christ.<sup>1788</sup>

According to Orthodox thought, the WCC cannot be or become the Church. It also cannot fill the role of a church council authorized to define Christian faith. It can only function as a forum for discussion. As soon as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is restored, the WCC will have accomplished its purpose and will no longer be needed.<sup>1789</sup>

Orthodox hierarchy do not always endorse all that the WCC does. Patriarch Pimen made the statement that the decisions of the WCC actually have little effect on the life and faith of the Church. In 1991, The Orthodox Church offered the following criticism of the WCC:

We miss from many WCC documents the affirmation that Jesus Christ is the world's Saviour. We perceive a growing departure from biblically-based understandings of (a) the Trinitarian God; (b) salvation; (c) the 'good news' of the gospel itself; (d) human beings as created in the image and likeness of God; (e) the Church.<sup>1790</sup>

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<sup>1781</sup>Nikodim, p. 271.

<sup>1782</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>1783</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>1784</sup>Pimen, p. 330.

<sup>1785</sup>Nikodim, p. 274.

<sup>1786</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>1787</sup>Pimen, p. 330-331.

<sup>1788</sup>Guroian V. *The Crisis of Orthodox Ecclesiology* // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. *The Ecumenical Future*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. – P. 162-163.

<sup>1789</sup>Pimen, p. 333.

<sup>1790</sup>Wainwright G. *The Global Structures of Ecumenism* // Braaten C. E., Jenson R. W. *The Ecumenical Future*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004. – P. 19.

On the other hand, the Orthodox sometime praise the work of the WCC when it overlaps with their own agenda. For example, Nikodim was pleased to see appeals to the Church Fathers in the discussions of the WCC.<sup>1791</sup> Also laudable was the position of solidarity the WCC takes with the Church of the past.<sup>1792</sup>

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the Orthodox Church itself failed to maintain unity within its own ranks. In the former Soviet Union alone, besides the Moscow Patriarchate, there exist: the True Orthodox Church, the Old Believers, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Patriarchate of Kiev, and the Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church. Other Orthodox bodies might be considered deviants from conventional Orthodoxy as well: the Orthodox Church of Macedonia and Montenegro, the Bulgarian Faction, the Coptic Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, and the Indian Orthodox Church.<sup>1793</sup>

## 2. Catholicism

Catholicism considers the divisions in the Church a disgrace to the Christian Faith. In *The Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council*, we read that division “is a scandal to the world and a hindrance to the sacred task of preaching the Gospel to every creature.”<sup>1794</sup>

According to Catholic theology, church unity depends on several factors.<sup>1795</sup> First, the Church is united in its origin from the Triune God: “The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.” Second, the Holy Spirit enables this unity: “It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity.” In addition, Mary is thought to be a unifying factor as well.

Along with the above-mentioned, the following “visible bonds of communion” are essential for genuine unity.<sup>1796</sup>

- profession of one faith received from the Apostles;
- common celebration of divine worship, especially of the sacraments;
- apostolic succession through the sacrament of Holy Orders, maintaining the fraternal concord of God's family.

It is also supposed that the Lord Jesus entrusted the pastoral care of the Church to Simon Peter, whose place the Pope fills today: “It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ.”<sup>1797</sup> Therefore, “It is through Christ's Catholic Church alone... that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”<sup>1798</sup>

However, sincere believers in Jesus Christ who were raised in other Christian denominations are regarded “with respect and affection as brothers.”<sup>1799</sup> In addition, “All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers in the Lord.”<sup>1800</sup> Catholics also acknowledge that outside of the Catholic Church “many elements of

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<sup>1791</sup>Nikodim, p. 274.

<sup>1792</sup>Guroian, p. 162.

<sup>1793</sup>Райэлз К. Три великие церкви / Пер. с англ. С. А. Резниченко. 2006. — Р. 26-28.

<sup>1794</sup>The Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council, № 1, taken from Leeming B. The Vatican Council and Christian Unity. — New York: Harper & Rom, 1966. — P. 1.

<sup>1795</sup>See Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 813.

<sup>1796</sup>Ibid., № 815.

<sup>1797</sup>See Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 816.

<sup>1798</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1799</sup>Ibid., № 818.

<sup>1800</sup>Ibid.

sanctification and of truth” can be found,<sup>1801</sup> which “can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church.”<sup>1802</sup> Yet, only in the Roman Catholic Church can worshipers “benefit fully from the means of salvation.”<sup>1803</sup>

According to the Catholic view, the Roman Church maintains the true unity of the Faith: “We believe that this unity exists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we cherish the hope that it will go on increasing.”<sup>1804</sup> However, as noted earlier, sincere believers who do not submit to Rome can still consider themselves Christians. They are considered “children” of the Catholic Church. The grace of God even reaches non-Catholics by mediation of the Catholic Church.

The following statement reiterates the Catholic view of non-Catholics:

Whenever the Sacrament of Baptism is duly administered as our Lord instituted it, and is received with the right disposition, a person is truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ, and reborn to a sharing of the divine life.<sup>1805</sup>

At the same time, Catholics make the qualification that Protestants “have not retained the authentic and full reality of the eucharistic mystery, esp. in the absence of the sacrament of Orders.”<sup>1806</sup>

Regarding Catholics and Orthodox, the Roman Church recognizes in the Eastern Church true apostolic succession and genuine sacraments. Catholics are urged to “avail themselves still more of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of the divine.”<sup>1807</sup> Nevertheless, Catholicism views the Orthodox as “Eastern children of the Catholic Church,” and recognizes that certain barriers prevent a merger.<sup>1808</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church feels that the WCC can bring much benefit to the Body of Christ, especially in the area of dialogue, prayer, and mutual humanitarian projects. Rome considers that the Holy Spirit inspired this movement. Catholics also caution that achieving church unity is beyond human effort, but depends on the work of God’s Spirit.<sup>1809</sup> Catholics also do not participate in a non-Catholic Eucharist. Yet, they await the day when this barrier is removed:

This is the way that, when the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion have been gradually overcome, all Christians will at last, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, be gathered into a single Church in that unity which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning.<sup>1810</sup>

### 3. Evangelicals

Samuel summarizes the typical attitude of Evangelical believers to the WCC and ecumenism in general.<sup>1811</sup> Some consider the WCC part of God’s plan to unity Christendom. Some have joined the WCC because it seemed the “fashionable” thing to do. Others join with hesitation, hoping to have a positive influence on the

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<sup>1801</sup>Ibid., № 819.

<sup>1802</sup>The Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council, № 4, taken from Leeming, p. 6.

<sup>1803</sup>Ibid., № 3, taken from Leeming, p. 4.

<sup>1804</sup>Ibid., № 4, taken from Leeming, p. 5.

<sup>1805</sup>Ibid., № 22, taken from Leeming, p. 17.

<sup>1806</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1807</sup>Ibid., № 15, taken from Leeming, p. 14.

<sup>1808</sup>Ibid., № 17, taken from Leeming, p. 15.

<sup>1809</sup>See Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 821-822; The Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council, № 4, 8, 12, taken from Leeming, p. 5-11.

<sup>1810</sup>The Decree on Ecumenism by the Second Vatican Council, № 4, taken from Leeming, p. 5.

<sup>1811</sup>Samuel, p. 5-7, 19.

organization. The rest either ignore the WCC or oppose it. There are those who fear associating with “non-Reformation” denominations, namely, Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Some Evangelicals have concerns about ecumenism even in an Evangelical context. For example, the Missouri Synod Lutherans and Southern Baptists refrain from joining any church union. They feel that centralization hinders the freedom of individual confessions and congregations. Nelson warns that a reckless quest for unity can lead not only to compromise of vital doctrinal positions, but also delays healing of deep wounds caused by abuses in the past, which require long periods of time to heal.<sup>1812</sup>

Arguments for participation in the ecumenical movement include promotion of evangelism, a positive influence on secular society, giving Christianity a unified voice, and fulfilling the prayer of Jesus for unity (Jn 17:21).<sup>1813</sup> Some think that since the Evangelical Movement is the most mature expression of Christianity, it should take the lead in promoting Christian unity.<sup>1814</sup> Bromiley feels that, despite the flaws of ecumenism, “real disunity... is a definite evil in the church. The movement for unity is thus to be applauded in principle.”<sup>1815</sup>

Kik warns of the following dangers in this movement in general. First, it is naive to think that forming an organization for church unity will necessarily lead to resolution of doctrinal difference. In addition, it is inappropriate and actually dangerous to require doctrinal conformity for the sake of organizational unity.<sup>1816</sup>

Second, a certain saying is common among ecumenists: “We agree to disagree.” Kik responds, “The suggestion to find union by ‘agreeing to disagree’ on vital doctrines is unworthy of the Christian church.”<sup>1817</sup> Finally, one should not rely on a human organization to secure church unity. Jesus promised that *He* would build His Church. Therefore, our trust must be in the Lord and His promise that we will all “attain to the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13).<sup>1818</sup>

Although Evangelicals disagree on how far to be involved in interchurch or interdenominational fellowship, a common approach is to emphasize the already existing spiritual unity of true believers in Christ. Many consider this the appropriate starting point for any further discussion of ecumenism. Correspondingly, Kik suggests the following definition of ecumenism from an Evangelical perspective:

Ecumenism is the movement in the universal visible church upon earth by which, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church comes into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.<sup>1819</sup>

Samuel cites Ephesians 4:3 to demonstrate that Christian unity comes from the Holy Spirit: “{There is} one body and one Spirit...”<sup>1820</sup> The Church is not called to create unity, since it already exists.<sup>1821</sup> The New Testament says nothing about an organizational unity, but only of a spiritual one. The Church is called to maintain this spiritual oneness.<sup>1822</sup> Samuel does not, however, object to the existence of Christian denominations. They do not necessarily “get in the way of fellowship with others who are truly born again.”<sup>1823</sup>

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<sup>1812</sup>Nelson, p. 98-99.

<sup>1813</sup>Kik, p. 6-8.

<sup>1814</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>1815</sup>Bromiley, p. 5.

<sup>1816</sup>Kik, p. 70.

<sup>1817</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>1818</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17, 76, 151.

<sup>1819</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>1820</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>1821</sup>Lloyd-Jones sees indications of the unity already existing among true believers and the need for preserving that unity in the words of Jesus: “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, {the name} which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We {are}” (Jn 17:11) (Lloyd-Jones D. M. *The Basis of Christian Unity: An Exposition of John 17 and Ephesians 4.* – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962. – P. 11-15).

<sup>1822</sup>Samuel, p. 11.

<sup>1823</sup>Samuel, p. 12.

Lloyd-Jones also feels that Christian unity is spiritual in nature: “The unity itself is inevitable among all those who have been quickened by the Holy Spirit out of spiritual death and given new life in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1824</sup> He notes reference to the Trinity in Ephesian 4:4-6. Christian unity, then, should be based on the Trinitarian concept of God. He also acknowledges that Christian unity can embrace a diversity of gifts (Eph 4:7-12).

Appealing to Ephesians 4:11-16, Kik claims, “The road to unity is through faith and knowledge of Christ and not through organization.”<sup>1825</sup> Noting that according to Ephesians 4:11-12, the teaching ministry of the Church should prepare believers “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,” Kik claims, “While the church has achieved some maturity, definite growth is still needed through the teaching ministry.”<sup>1826</sup>

Again appealing to Ephesians 4, Kik adds the thought that the path to unity is not quick and easy:

Evangelical ecumenism looks forward to the time when the church comes into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... Though the road may be long and arduous towards the stature of the fullness of Christ, that only will fulfill the will of God and achieve true unity.<sup>1827</sup>

In his examination of Ephesians 4, Lloyd-Jones includes consideration of the preceding context.<sup>1828</sup> He appeals to Eph 1:10 and 2:14 to conclude that God’s eternal plan consists of unity. He also states that in chapters 1-3, Paul focuses on doctrinal questions – they cannot be neglected in the quest for unity. In particular, the unity of faith is only possible for those who truly embrace the gospel (Eph 1:8-10; 2:8-10).

Kik also cites Jesus’ teaching on unity, especially in John 17:21, where the Lord compares unity between Christians with unity between the Father and the Son. This kind of unity includes unity of doctrine (Jn 7:16; 8:26, 28) and common goals (Jn 6:38, 40; 17:4). The unity of the Trinity is not visible, but spiritual.<sup>1829</sup> Samuel concurs with the above, defining genuine unity as follows:

...unity of essence, a oneness of Spirit, a oneness of Life. It is an organic unity, not an organizational unity.... So for the Christian today unity of life through new birth, and unity of mind and purpose through loyalty to the Son are the key to conscious enjoyment of unity with fellow-Christians.<sup>1830</sup>

Lloyd-Jones adds the thought that in John 17, Jesus does not pray for everyone, but rather for those whom the Father has given Him (Jn 17:9). So then, unbelievers (including nominal “Christians”) are not included in this prayer.<sup>1831</sup> Nelson comments that in Jesus’ words, God’s family consists of those who do the will of God (Mk 3:35).<sup>1832</sup>

Kik advances other arguments that true church unity is spiritual in nature.<sup>1833</sup> First, true Israel was invisible, that is, not all who were born Israelites were truly God’s people in heart. Second, not all who call Jesus Lord are truly saved (Matt 7:21-23). Third, the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, is hidden from sight. Therefore, His Body will be as well. Finally, people are baptized into the Body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), which again indicates the spiritual nature of Christ’s Church.

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<sup>1824</sup>Lloyd-Jones, p. 25.

<sup>1825</sup>Kik, p. 27.

<sup>1826</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>1827</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>1828</sup>Lloyd-Jones, p. 17-25.

<sup>1829</sup>Kik, p. 41-44.

<sup>1830</sup>Samuel, p. 10.

<sup>1831</sup>Lloyd-Jones, p. 9-10.

<sup>1832</sup>Nelson, p. 11.

<sup>1833</sup>Kik, p. 91-102.

The moral condition of believers in Jesus is also a key to church unity. Lack of holiness can hinder harmonious relationships since it breeds pride, greed, and other vices.<sup>1834</sup> Divisions in Corinth, in fact, arose due to excessive partiality for one preacher over another (1 Cor 1:12).<sup>1835</sup> Bromiley correctly states, “Perhaps the greatest obstacle to genuine unity in the church is the basic unwillingness of the old man to die.”<sup>1836</sup>

Similarly, Samuel emphasizes Christian love as a means to unity. Tolerance is mandatory in non-essential matters.<sup>1837</sup> Yet, tolerance has its limits. At times, division is needed to preserve sound doctrine. “Disloyalty to the Christ and the Scriptures” is a bigger issue than division in the Church.<sup>1838</sup>

Along with this, Kik stresses proper Christology. He raises the question, “Which Christ is ecumenism promoting”? Is the WCC following the true Savior?<sup>1839</sup> Moreover, he notes that the Church labored a long time to reach a biblical understanding of Jesus Christ. It is *that* Christ that should be the basis for Christian unity both doctrinally and in practical Christian living.<sup>1840</sup>

Bromiley approaches the question of Christology with more flexibility.<sup>1841</sup> He doubts that the Church can reach total agreement about the nature of Jesus: “To confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is obviously essential. To accept an intricate definition of His relationship to God is not so obviously essential to saving faith, and surely ought not to be imposed as a condition of unity.”<sup>1842</sup> Our faith should primarily be not in Christological definition, but in a Person. On the other hand, a mere faith in the “Person” of Christ lacks clarity and specificity. We must have some concrete definition of the true Jesus. The Chalcedonian definition has served the Church in this capacity for many generations.

Finally, according to Ephesians 4:5 we must preserve the “one faith.” Kik writes, “Diverse gospels produce diverse faiths.”<sup>1843</sup> The New Testament speaks much about preserving true Christian faith (Acts 6:7; Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1; Tit 1:4; Jude 3). Therefore, the quest of unity must not overshadow our concern for sound doctrine. Kik warns, “The very substance of Christianity will be lost if truth be sacrificed to obtain peace and union.”<sup>1844</sup> Lloyd-Jones observes that the infant congregation in Jerusalem, which serves an excellent example of church unity, highly valued the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42).<sup>1845</sup>

#### 4. Pentecostals and Charismatics

Although Pentecostals and Charismatics share with all other evangelical believers a common approach to church unity, we can nonetheless highlight some unique features in their views.

In spite of the hesitation evangelicals show toward participation in the WCC, some Pentecostal groups have joined the Council, especially from Latin America and Africa. A prominent Pentecostal ecumenist has also gained notoriety in this regard – David du Plessis.<sup>1846</sup> Nevertheless, most Pentecostal groups shun the WCC.

In his publication *The Ambivalent Ecumenical Impulse in Early Pentecostal Theology in North America*, Jacobsen comments on the general attitude of early Pentecostal leaders to ecumenism.<sup>1847</sup> His research

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<sup>1834</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>1835</sup>Lloyd-Jones, p. 48.

<sup>1836</sup>Bromiley, p. 64.

<sup>1837</sup>Samuel, p. 11.

<sup>1838</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>1839</sup>Kik, p. 11-12.

<sup>1840</sup>Ibid., p. 55-61.

<sup>1841</sup>Bromiley, p. 77-9.

<sup>1842</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>1843</sup>Kik, p. 65.

<sup>1844</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>1845</sup>Lloyd-Jones, p. 58.

<sup>1846</sup>Hunter H. D. *Global Pentecostalism and Ecumenism: Two Movements of the Holy Spirit* // Vondey W. *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*. – Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2010. – P. 26-27.

<sup>1847</sup>Jacobsen D. *The Ambivalent Ecumenical Impulse in Early Pentecostal Theology in North America* // Vondey W. *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*. – Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2010. – P. 3-19.

revealed that among early leaders of the Pentecostal movement, one finds both supporters and opponents of ecumenism. On the one hand, the former indicted an over-emphasis on doctrinal purity as a major cause of church division. On the other hand, the latter insisted that protecting the doctrine and experience of Holy Spirit baptism was a valid reason to divide the Church. In general, though, Jacobsen concludes that early Pentecostals tended to withdraw from non-Pentecostals.

The founder of modern Pentecostalism, Charles Parham, felt that we must not force congregations to merge. True unity comes voluntarily as a result of our submission to Christ. The revivalist of Azusa Street, William Seymour, welcomed Christians from any background to his meetings. Nevertheless, he was careful to preserve pure doctrine.

We must make mention of an interdenominational organization created for Pentecostal groups – the Pentecostal World Fellowship.<sup>1848</sup> Fifty-nine Pentecostal associations from across the globe participate in this association. All members share the conviction of the baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in other tongues. Every three years since 1947, they hold a general conference.

In the mid-twentieth century, a milestone event occurred in the Body of Christ that promoted and enabled, at least for a time, meaningful fellowship between Christian denominations – the worldwide Charismatic Movement. At that time, to the amazement of all, both clergy and laity of the more traditional Christian denominations began to receive the baptism in the Spirit. The Charismatic Movement spread rapidly among nearly every Christian confession throughout the world. The number of those claiming Spirit-baptism reached hundreds of millions. This common experience of the Spirit provided a basis for unity among Spirit-baptized Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Pentecostals, etc.

As a result of this movement, the “Conference on Charismatic Renewal in the Christian Churches” was held in Kansas City in 1977. Fifty thousand participants attended from nearly every Christian denominational and non-denominational group.<sup>1849</sup> Nonetheless, the lack of doctrinal unity and uniformity in church practice eventually weakened the movement. Although similar conferences were subsequently held, both attendance and zeal waned over time.

## **E. Conclusions**

We must agree that, although the Church already possesses spiritual unity, it must nonetheless strive for a visible unity as much as possible. Did not Jesus pray “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, {are} in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn 17:21)? On the other hand, we share the concern that a merger of Christian associations would unavoidably lead to serious compromise of cardinal doctrines.

Nevertheless, while we await the day when “we all attain to the unity of the faith,” the Church must make concrete steps toward a visible unity – whether through interchurch fellowship, formation of denominations, or interdenominational fellowship in the form of the World Evangelical Alliance.

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## Part 3. Result of Faith: Obtaining Salvation

### Chapter 19: The Role of Repentance in Salvation

#### A. Terminology

Repentance is turning from sin to God. The Old Testament has many ways to express the concept of repentance. For example, we find such phrases as: “Incline your hearts to Yahweh” (Josh 24:23), “Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh” (Jer 4:4), and, “Break up your fallow ground” (Hos 10:12).<sup>1850</sup>

For the most part, the Old Testament idea of repentance is expressed by the verb *שׁוּב* (*shuv*). This term basically means “turn” or “return.” Such a meaning is found in Genesis 22:5, where Abraham said, “I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” Therefore, in contexts that refer to repentance, the word *שׁוּב* (*shuv*) describes an action when a person turns from sin and turns to the Lord.

Other key texts include: Jeremiah 25:5: “Turn (*שׁוּב*) now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds,” Isaiah 44:22: “Return (*שׁוּב*) to Me, for I have redeemed you,” and Ezekiel 18:27: “When a wicked man turns away (*שׁוּב*) from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.” Here we see that a person is directed in life either toward righteousness or unrighteousness. Repentance relates to both turning from sin and turning to God.

Dement comments on the meaning of *שׁוּב* (*shuv*) – it is “a radical change in one’s attitude toward sin and God. The term implies a conscious, moral separation and a personal decision to forsake sin and enter into fellowship with God.”<sup>1851</sup> On the other hand, Thompson notes that the same term is used when people turn away from the Lord (e.g. Jer 34:16; 8:5). It also describes the instances when God cancels punishment, that is, “turns away from it” (e.g. Hos 14:5).<sup>1852</sup>

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<sup>1850</sup>Hamilton V. P. *שׁוּב* // Harris R. L., Archer G. L. Jr., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. – P. 909.

<sup>1851</sup>Dement B. H., Smith E. W. Repent // The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 4. – P. 135.

<sup>1852</sup>Thompson J. A., Martens E. A. *shuv* // VanGemeren W. New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. – P. 57.

In Isaiah 45:22 another word relates to the concept of repentance – פָּנָה (*pana*): “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” The significance of this word is that the Hebrew word for “face” comes from this verb root. This demonstrates that God invites people to stand face to face with Him, and to turn their backs on sin. Repentance, then, is an act that leads to an overall life orientation of living for the Lord. Interestingly, this word is also used when Yahweh turns to His people to bless them (Lev 26:9).

A less commonly found term for repentance is נָחַם (*naham*). Its basic meaning is “pant,” “exhale,” or “groan.” It usually applies to compassion or suffering. The term often describes God’s compassion, but refers to human repentance only in Job 42:6 and Jer 8:6; 31:19.<sup>1853</sup> The word נָחַם (*naham*) can be found together with שׁוּב (*shuv*) in the sense of “turn and relent” (see Jonah 3:10).<sup>1854</sup>

In the New Testament, the primary term for repentance is μετάνοια (*metanoia*), which consists of two elements: μετα (*meta*), which means “after,” and νοια (*noia*) from the word νοῦς (*nous*) or “mind.” Therefore, its basic denotation is “after thought” in the sense of “reconsider” or “change one’s mind.”<sup>1855</sup>

For the Greeks of antiquity, μετάνοια (*metanoia*), i.e., a change in thinking, was accompanied with sorrow only in the sense that a previous intention or direction turned out to be unsuccessful or incorrect. The word for the Greeks, however, lacked the idea of a complete change in one’s life direction. Therefore, the biblical conception of repentance was foreign to the Greeks.<sup>1856</sup>

The Septuagint lacks the noun μετάνοια (*metanoia*), but the verb form μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) is used to translate the Hebrew נָחַם (*naham*), but not שׁוּב (*shuv*). In most cases, μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) reflects the idea of “regret.” The Septuagint translators preferred to translate שׁוּב (*shuv*) with the Greek verbs ἀποστρέφω (*apostrepho*) or ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrepho*). Nevertheless, when μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) is in parallel with ἀποστρέφω (*apostrepho*) or ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrepho*), it can refer to repentance.<sup>1857</sup>

The New Testament writers, however, did not follow the Septuagint, but preferred the term μετανοέω (*metanoëo*).<sup>1858</sup> Goetzmann comments that in this way they emphasized a change of mind and will, and not a physical change of direction.<sup>1859</sup> Kromminga states that μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) refers to a change of inner disposition while ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrepho*) indicates a change in one’s direction is life, yet the difference in meaning here is actually slight.<sup>1860</sup>

The terms μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) and μετάνοια (*metanoia*) are found most frequently in Luke’s writings and in the Book of Revelation. Dunnett highlights several key passages in Luke where Jesus calls people to repentance (Lk 10:13; 11:32; 13:3, 5; 17:3–4) or where repentance is associated with forgiveness of sins (Lk 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 26:18, 20).<sup>1861</sup> The words μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) and μετάνοια (*metanoia*) are rare in Paul and are completely absent in John’s Gospel and epistles.<sup>1862</sup>

## B. Biblical Survey and Intertestamental Period

### 1. Old Testament

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<sup>1853</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 135.

<sup>1854</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1855</sup>Behm J. *metanoëō, metánoia* // Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 639.

<sup>1856</sup>Goetzmann J. *metanoia* // Brown C. New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. – P. 357; Behm, p. 639.

<sup>1857</sup>See Jer 31:19; Isa. 46:8 (Dement, v. 4, p. 136); also Behm, p. 639.

<sup>1858</sup>Goetzmann introduces an example where μετανοέω (*metanoëo*) and ἐπιστρέφω (*epistrepho*) run parallel – Acts 3:19; 26:20 (Goetzmann, p. 359). The word is also found in Acts 9:35; 11:21; 1 Thes 1:9 (Dement, v. 4, p. 136).

<sup>1859</sup>Goetzmann, p. 357.

<sup>1860</sup>Kromminga C. G. // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1012.

<sup>1861</sup>Dunnett W. M. Repentance // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 672.

<sup>1862</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

We will begin our survey of the Old Testament with the Torah and the book of Job. The book of Job is well known for Job's dialog with his "friends," who are trying to lead him to repentance for sins that supposedly led to his ruin. Job is open to God's reproof and asks to be shown his sin (Job 13:23). In the end, Job says, "I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6), but his repentance was not for personal sin, but for doubting God.

The book of Genesis contains an interesting example when the brothers of Joseph repented of their wicked treatment of him (Gen 44). Joseph tested them to convince himself of the sincerity of their repentance (Gen 42). In the next Pentateuchal book, we see an example of insincere repentance when Pharaoh repented under Yahweh's chastisement, but relented when the Lord withdrew His punishments and gave him relief (Ex chp. 6ff).

The Law of Moses prescribed confession of sin and restitution if necessary when offering a sacrifice for sin (Lev 5:5; 26:40-42; Num 5:5-8). Forgiveness was not extended to the proud or unrepentant (Deut 29:19-21).

At times, Israel repented at Yahweh's rebuke (Ex 33:4-6), but sometimes they went to the extreme of overcorrecting their mistake in violation of God's command (Num 14:39-45). God predicted that by means of His discipline, Israel would eventually acknowledge their pitiful spiritual condition (Deut 31:17) and would turn to Him in sincerity during the exile (Deut 4:29-30; 30:2) and receive restoration (Deut 30:3-5).

In the historical books, we encounter similar episodes of both repentance and unrepentance. At times, people repent at the rebuke of the Lord or His prophets (Judg 2:3-4; 2 Sam 12; 1 Kin 21:28), or after a manifestation of His power (1 Kin 18:36-39). More frequently, though, people turn to Yahweh during times of distress (1 Chr 21:8ff, 1 Kin 14:1-3; 2 Chr 15:3-6), which is especially featured in the book of Judges. Judges records a repeating cycle: Israel forsakes Yahweh, the Lord sends punishment, Israel repents, and God delivers His people. Israel's persistence in disobedience eventually led to their exile (2 Kin 17:14-15; 2 Kin 25).

The Old Testament recorded cases of people hardening their hearts to the Lord's rebuke (2 Chr 36:11-13) to the extreme of killing His prophets who are delivering the rebuke (e.g. 1 Kin 11:40). On the other hand, even those who are farthest from the Lord can repent, as in the case of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:12-13). David also serves as an example of sincere repentance and rededication after God's rebuke of his transgressions (2 Sam 12:19-21).

In some instances, repentance is incomplete. Although Jehu served Yahweh, he failed to remove the idolatrous golden calves (2 Kin 10:29). Jeroboam's repentance resembled Pharaoh's. He turned to God in trouble, but never really changed his direction in life (1 Kin 13:6, 33).

People engaged in sincere repentance confess their sins to God (1 Kin 8:33-36; 2 Chr 6:24-25), abandon them, (1 Sam 7:3-5), and sometimes perform some external expression of their remorse, such as tearing their clothes (2 Kin 22:11; 2 Chr 34:19-28) or putting on sackcloth (2 Kin 6:29-30). After repenting, people may make a covenant of rededication to the Lord (2 Kin 23:3).

As a result of repentance, God annuls the prescribed punishment (e.g. 2 Chr 12:6-7; 32:26) and restores the repentant one (1 Sam 12:10-11; 1 Kin 8:46ff, 2 Chr 7:14).

In the Old Testament poetical books, people seek forgiveness from the Lord (Ps 39:8; 51:1-4), confess sin (Ps 32:3-6; Ps 38:18), and abandon it (Prov 28:13). They turn from their own way to seek the Lord (Ps 50:23; 119: 26, 30, 59). God regards the broken in spirit (Ps 51:17). The Psalms also warn of insincere repentance (Ps 78:34-37) and of punishment for unrepentance (Ps 7:12-13; 106:43). An inner renewal is needed (Ps 51:10), which only God can accomplish (Ps 80:3, 7, 19).<sup>1863</sup> God's chastisement can result in repentance (Ps 83:16).

The book of Proverbs often comments on people's failure to correctly evaluate their lives, thinking themselves righteous (Prov 16:2; 21:2; 14:12; 16:25; 28:14; 30:12). Therefore, the reader is exhorted to receive God's correction (Prov 3:11-12; 15:10-12; 13:1; 29:1).

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<sup>1863</sup>Würthwein E. *metanoéō, metánoia*: Repentance and Conversion in the OT // Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 641; Kromminga, p. 1012.

The Old Testament prophetic books abound in calls to repentance in view of the coming punishment of exile. Yahweh calls both the Northern Kingdom (Hos 14:1-2) and the Southern Kingdom (Jer 6:8, 26; 26:3) to repent. Ezekiel invites those already in exile to repent so that God may restore them (Ezek 33:10-11). Isaiah calls people to prepare for the Lord's coming (Isa 40:3-5). The Lord commissioned Jonah to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh.

Along with sorrow for sin, God calls the repentant to change their behavior (Hos 10:12; 12:6), which at times involved destroying idols (Isa 30:22; 31:7). Isaiah writes the following well-known summons to repentance:<sup>1864</sup>

- Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isa 1:16-17).
- Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (Isa 55:6-7).

As we saw in the other sections of the Old Testament, God often leads people to repentance through chastisement (Isa 26:16; Jer 2:27). If people are not willing to listen to the Lord in times of peace, He will send calamity (Jer 22:20-23). When troubles come, God makes it known whether it is from Him or not (Isa 1:5-8).<sup>1865</sup> Israel acutely experienced the Lord's discipline during the exile, which resulted in their repentance (Jer 24:7; 50:4; Ezek 6:8-10; 7:16-19; 16:41-43). Thus, Yahweh draws His "unfaithful bride" back to Himself (Hos 2:7, 14). After the exile, a faithful remnant will return (Isa 4:3-4). Hosea writes about this time:

Come, let us return to Yahweh. For He has torn {us,} but He will heal us; He has wounded {us,} but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before Him (Hos 6:1-2).

God responds to repentance with mercy (Isa 30:19) and offers forgiveness: "Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Isa 1:18; cf. Jer 36:3; Ezek 33:13-16). Consequently, repentance leads to deliverance (Isa 30:15; 55:7) and redemption (Isa 59:20) from the Lord. The repentant acquire life and blessing (Ezek 18:21-31; Jer 7:3-7; Amos 5:4-6). Their punishment is annulled (Jer 18:7-8).

However, in most cases Israel did not listen to Yahweh or repent (Isa 65:2, 12; Jer 5:3; 15:7; 18:12). They rejected the message of rebuke by the prophets (Ezek 3:4-7; Amos 2:12). Jeremiah devotes much attention to this theme.<sup>1866</sup> Israel also rejected the discipline of the Lord (Isa 9:8-13; 42:25; Amos 4:6-11). Even when they witnessed God's punishment of others, they were not moved (Jer 44:7-10). Instead, they were not even ashamed of their ways (Jer 3:3; 6:15) and rejected God's messengers of correction (Amos 5:10; 7:10-13).

The prophets warned that people can harden their heart to the point that they can no longer repent. Isaiah wrote that Israel became as hard as iron or bronze (Isa 48:4). Jeremiah states that God's people are blind (Jer 5:21). Hosea reveals that Israel is not able to recognize their sin (Hos 12:8; cf. Jer 8:5-7; 8:12). Micah describes Israel's condition as an incurable illness (Mic 1:9). God stands aloof from such persons (Zeph 2:1-3; Lam 3:42-44; Amos 8:11-13). This well-known saying in Isaiah's prophecy speaks directly to this condition:

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<sup>1864</sup>Kromminga, p. 1012.

<sup>1865</sup>Würthwein comments that when any calamity occurred, Israel often (and sometimes mistakenly) assumed that Yahweh sent it as a punishment (Würthwein, p. 640).

<sup>1866</sup>See Jer 6:10, 16-19, 28-29; 7:13, 24-26, 27; 25:3-7; 26:5; 29:19; 44:4, 10.

Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed (Isa 6:10).

As was noted previously, the prophets also decry incomplete repentance: “Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception” (Jer 3:10). Repentance can be insincere (Hos 7:10, 14). Even when people fast, it does not necessarily mean that they have truly repented (Isa 22:12-14; Zech 7:5-6). God calls people to repent with a whole heart: “Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13; cf. Ezek 14:6; Jer 4:4, 14).

Finally, the Old Testament predicts God’s intervention to deliver His people from disobedience and unrepentance. God predicts through Hosea, “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely” (Hos 14:4; cf. Isa 57:18), and through Ezekiel, Yahweh promises, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26).

## 2. Intertestamental Period

In the intertestamental literature, the word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) can carry the sense of overall repentance and total commitment to the Lord, but more often it relates to overcoming specific vices or observing specific commandments. Repentance also has an eschatological application – in the future, God will act to draw His people to Himself.<sup>1867</sup>

Philo sometimes employed the word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) in the secular sense of “rethink,” but included also a religious and moral element, that is, turning from sin to God. Josephus used it in a similar way. In his understanding of repentance, Philo also borrowed a nuance from Stoicism of harmonization of word and thought.<sup>1868</sup> Also significant is that Philo used *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) to describe Gentiles turning to God.<sup>1869</sup>

At Qumran, emphasis was placed on turning from all evil (1QS 5:1) and observing the Mosaic Law (1QS 5:8). Members of this community considered themselves “converts of Israel” (CD 4:2) and their covenant with the Lord a “covenant of conversion” (CD 19:16).<sup>1870</sup>

## 3. New Testament

According to New Testament teaching, all people must repent. Paul announced to the people of Athens, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30), and Jesus said to His disciples, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Lk 13:3, 5).

Therefore, when John the Baptist came he baptized not only “sinners” in Israel, but also the most religious among them, i.e., the Pharisees (Matt 3:7). This general call to repentance was associated with the proclamation, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2). Therefore, everyone must ready themselves for this new stage of God’s plan (Mk 1:2-3). After John, and for the same purpose, Jesus also preached repentance (Matt 4:17). When the Lord sent His disciples on their mission, He directed them to preach repentance (Lk 24:47; cf. Acts 3:19). The New Testament Church considered repentance one of the foundational truths of Christian faith (Heb 6:1).<sup>1871</sup>

As it was in the Old Testament, repentance was a call to turn from sin (Acts 8:22; 2 Cor 12:21; Rev 2:21-22) and turn to God (Acts 20:21; 26:20; Rev 16:9).<sup>1872</sup> In preaching repentance, Jesus and John meant a complete

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<sup>1867</sup>Behm, p. 641-642.

<sup>1868</sup>Ibid.

<sup>1869</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1870</sup>Goetzmann, p. 357.

<sup>1871</sup>Behm, p. 643.

<sup>1872</sup>Goetzmann, p. 358-359.

change in life direction. Jesus illustrated this by comparing repentance to becoming a child again: “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3), and, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt 19:14). Also significant is that at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed that God’s kingdom consisted of the “poor in spirit,” the “meek,” and those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:3-6).

Repentance results in salvation, forgiveness of sins, and deliverance from God’s wrath (Lk 3:3; Matt 3:7). When Jesus sent His followers on their mission, He repeated the promise of forgiveness through repentance (Lk 24:47). Consequently, Peter preached repentance to the crowd on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:38-39), to the people of Jerusalem after healing the lame man (Acts 3:19), and to the leaders of Israel (Acts 5:31).<sup>1873</sup>

Along with these, Paul also proclaimed “to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21). In Athens he declared, “Having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30).<sup>1874</sup>

The New Testament sometimes speaks of repentance as a gift from God.<sup>1875</sup> Paul counseled Timothy, “...with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:25). God “exalted (Jesus) to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). The leaders of the Jerusalem church concluded, “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life” (Acts 11:18).

In the New Testament, repentance is associated not only with confession of personal sins (Matt 3:6; Acts 19:18; 1 Jn 1:9), but also with recognition of one’s fallen condition (Lk 5:8). It was sometimes associated with water baptism (Mk 1:4).<sup>1876</sup> In addition, James exhorts his readers, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed” (Jam 5:16). Zacchaeus was prepared to make restitution (Lk 19:8). Furthermore, both John the Baptist (Lk 3:8) and Paul (Acts 26:20) required acts corresponding to repentance. The new converts of Ephesus destroyed their books of magic (Acts 19:19).

Often, the repentant show deep emotion. Peter wept after He denied the Lord (Matt 26:75). After His encounter with Christ on the Damascus road, Paul did not eat for three days (Acts 9:9). At the same time, Paul cautioned that sincere repentance involves not only regret, but also motivates to action (2 Cor 7:9-11). For example, the prodigal son announced, “I will get up and go to my father” (Lk 15:18). Judas, though, went in the opposite direction: “He threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself” (Matt 27:5).

As it was in the Old Testament, in Jesus’ ministry many of His hearers failed to repent. Those who did repent, both at Jesus’ preaching and John’s, tended to be common people and “sinners” (Lk 7:29-30). The Pharisees and religious leaders, as a rule, did not sense a need to repent and rejected the call (Matt 21:28-32; 22:1-5; Acts 7:54-58). There were times when an entire town rejected Jesus or His disciples (Matt 11:20-24; Lk 8:37).

Jesus revealed that some people will not repent in any case (Matt 11:16-19), even after seeing miracles (Lk 16:27-31; Jn 11:47-53) or experiencing harsh chastisements (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9-21). Both Herod (Mk 6:20) and Felix (Acts 24:26) enjoyed hearing the Word, yet did not repent. Paul stated that such people fail to realize that “the kindness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom 2:4).

Repentance, of course, relates to the unbelieving world, who must “turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18; cf. 1 Thes 1:9). Yet, it applies to believers in Christ as well. Jesus called the churches in Asia Minor to repentance (Rev 3:3, 19; 2:5, 16, 21). The author of Hebrews warns that persistence in sin may hinder one’s ability to repent (Heb 6:4-8).<sup>1877</sup>

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<sup>1873</sup>Grudem W. Systematic Theology. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 809.

<sup>1874</sup>Behm, p. 643; Grudem, p. 713.

<sup>1875</sup>Behm, p. 643.

<sup>1876</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1877</sup>Goetzmann, p. 359.

## C. Theological Considerations

### 1. Element of Repentance

#### a. Participation of the Mind

The Bible speaks of various elements found in the repentance experience. First, the mind is involved in confessing sins to God. God says through Hosea, “I will go away {and} return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face” (Hos 5:15). The Psalmist confesses his sins to Yahweh: “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh’; And You forgave the guilt of my sin” (Ps 32:5). Mueller concurs that true repentance includes the involvement of the mind in acknowledging our need for forgiveness: “True contrition may be said to exist in every case where a penitent sinner regards himself as eternally lost on account of his sins.”<sup>1878</sup>

God’s law plays a special role in this regard. Romans 3:20 reveals that “through the Law {comes} the knowledge of sin.” When the Law convicts of sin, a person acknowledges his or her transgression before the Lord and the need for forgiveness. Correspondingly, Mueller correctly observes that for effective preaching of the gospel, people should also hear the Law so that they recognize their need for the good news of the gospel.<sup>1879</sup> So then, it is through the Law that people learn the truth about themselves and confess their sinfulness before God. Only then are they ready to hear the gospel. Only then does it become Good News to them.

We can cite the following comments on the role of the mind in repentance:<sup>1880</sup>

Repentance is that change of a sinner’s mind that leads him or her to turn from evil ways and live. Intellectually, human beings must apprehend sin as unutterably heinous, the divine law as perfect and binding, and themselves as falling short of the requirements of a holy God.

But the exhortations of the ancient prophets, of Jesus, and of the apostles show that the change of mind is the dominant idea of the words employed, while the accompanying grief and reform of life are necessary consequences.

#### b. Participation of the Emotions

Emotions also play a role in repentance. In a true experience of repentance, one not only acknowledges sin, but also has a feeling of shame for it. The sinner regrets their action. Bromiley writes, “Repentance, however, is more than recognition of sin. It is recognition that this sin is under the judgment of God.”<sup>1881</sup> It is often thought that the regret that the sinner experiences should be not because of the negative consequences of sin, but for the violation of God’s law and the insult to His nature.<sup>1882</sup>

The Bible speaks of instances when gospel preaching brought about a feeling of regret for sin. When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, his hearer’s response was one of contrition: “When they heard {this,} they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). The word “pierced” is *κατανύσσομαι* (*katanussomai*), which is located only here in the New Testament.

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<sup>1878</sup>Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 350.

<sup>1879</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 347-348.

<sup>1880</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1881</sup>Bromiley G. W. *Faith* // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 2. – P. 271.

<sup>1882</sup>See Erickson M. J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 309.



Its basic meaning is a sharp pain associated with anxiety or regret. In Acts 2:37, this term relates to regret in association with sin. When Peter's audience became aware of their rejection of Messiah Jesus, this feeling of remorse led to their repentance.

We also encounter examples where people did not repent. In Acts 5:33, the apostles testified before the Sanhedrin. Having heard the word, "they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them" (Acts 5:33). This word, διαπρίω (*diaprio*), literally means "saw in half" and is found with that meaning in 1 Chronicles 20:3 when David defeated the Ammonites: "He brought out the people who {were} in it, and cut (διαπρίω) {them} with saws and with sharp instruments and with axes." In response to Stephen's testimony, his hearers "were cut to the quick (διαπρίω), and they {began} gnashing their teeth at him" (Acts 7:54).

It is clear that the preaching of the gospel can effect both the mind and emotions. For those who respond positively to the Good News, the experience is described as καταλύσσομαι (*katanussomai*), i.e., "pierce" or "strike." For those who reject God's salvation plan, it is described as διαπρίω (*diaprio*), or "saw in half."

David provides us a good example of the emotion that accompanies repentance. After his sin with Bathsheba, he earnestly prays in Psalm 51, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight." David experienced shame for his sin and repented not only in mind, but also in soul.

We can compare David's example with that of Saul. In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul failed to carry out Yahweh's commission to exterminate the Amalekites. God had commanded, "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has" (v. 3). However, Saul spared the Amalekite king Agag and the best of the herds. When he met Samuel, he declared, "I have carried out the command of Yahweh" (v. 13). After Samuel reproved him, Saul continued to defend his innocence: "I did obey the voice of Yahweh, and went on the mission on which Yahweh sent me" (v. 20). After another correction from Samuel, Saul admitted, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of Yahweh and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice" (v. 24). Here, Saul repented in mind by acknowledging his sin.

Yet, it seems that Saul had not yet repented in feeling. Later, he requested of Samuel, "I have sinned; {but} please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship Yahweh your God" (v. 30). He apparently had not taken his transgression seriously. He was more concerned about his reputation than his position before the Lord. Saul's repentance appears incomplete – in mind, but without an accompanying sense of shame.<sup>1883</sup>

Dement and Smith make the following comment:

A change in emotional attitude is necessarily involved in genuine repentance. A penitent cannot be emotionally indifferent to sin. Before there can be a hearty turning away from unrighteousness, there must be a consciousness of sin's effect on humanity and its offensiveness to God.<sup>1884</sup>

At the same time, Chafer makes an important clarification.<sup>1885</sup> He warns that if we require deep emotion or tears in connection with repentance, we may actually hinder a person's conversion. Emotions are not subject to the will, and the will is the primary component in true repentance. Chafer cites Matthew 21:28-29, where he claims that in this parable, the most important thing was that the son *did* the will of his father.<sup>1886</sup> An

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<sup>1883</sup>Dement and Smith offer other examples of incomplete repentance: Pharaoh (Ex 9:27) and Balaam (Num 22:34). See Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1884</sup>Ibid., v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1885</sup>Chafer L. S. Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993. – V. 3. – P. 372-374.

<sup>1886</sup>In this case, Erickson reaches a contrary conclusion – emotions motivated the second son to repent (Erickson, p. 948). The word μεταμέλομαι (*metamelomai*), i.e., "repented" can mean either "rethink" or "regret" (Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-

overemphasis on emotion is also problematic in that a person is looking not to Christ for salvation, but within himself or herself in introspection for feelings of regret and sorrow.

Erickson also observes that the Bible records a variety of emotional responses. On the one hand, after encountering the Lord, Paul prayed and fasted for three days. On the other hand, Lydia simply opened her heart to the Lord (Acts 16:14). Erickson advises, "It is important not to insist that the incidentals or external factors of conversion be identical for everyone."<sup>1887</sup>

### **c. Participation of the Will**

The third aspect of repentance is the involvement of the will. Repentance consists not only in acknowledgement of sin and feelings of remorse, but also in action. It invariably leads to a change in behavior. A key verse for this concept is found in 2 Corinthians 7:9, where Paul refers to a rebuke he delivered to the church in Corinth: "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to {the point of} repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to {the will of} God." Verse 11 defines what that "sorrow" consisted of: "For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!"

Sorrow in accordance with the will of God motivates a person to correct his error and overcome his sin. Genuine repentance not only leads to acknowledgement of sin and remorse for it, but also to turning to the Lord for forgiveness and power to overcome sin.

In Luke chapter 3, John the Baptist laid stress on the fruit of repentance, or the actions resulting from it: "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (v. 10). When the people asked John what they should do, he responded, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise," "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to," and, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse {anyone} falsely, and be content with your wages" (v. 11-14). John expected that repentance would lead to life change.

Contrasting the behavior of Peter and Judas is of special interest. Peter denied Jesus three times. After this, "Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, 'Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly" (Matt 26:75). Clearly, Peter experienced repentance in mind and emotion. He remembered what Jesus had predicted he would do, and wept out of shame for it. Judas also admitted his wrongdoing: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (Matt 27:4). The Bible also records that he "threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed." He apparently also felt remorse for what he had done.

However, the difference between Peter and Judas was that the former returned to the Lord, while Judas "went away and hanged himself." Peter's repentance motivated him to receive forgiveness and restoration from the Lord. Judas, though, did not experience a complete repentance, but rather, in Paul's words, "the sorrow of the world" (2 Cor 7:10), which leads to death. The "sorrow of the world" drives a sinner away from the Lord, while true repentance brings him or her to the Lord. The "sorrow of the world" leads to despair, while genuine repentance brings hope. The "sorrow of the world" may involve mind and emotions, but lacks the motivating power that true repentance provides.<sup>1888</sup>

Dement and Smith offer the following conclusion:

But the type of grief that issues in repentance must be distinguished from that which simply plunges into remorse. There is a godly sorrow and a worldly sorrow; the former brings life, the latter death....

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English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 639. This resource is abbreviated BDAG).

<sup>1887</sup>Erickson, p. 947.

<sup>1888</sup>Grudem also cites the example of Esau, who repented in emotion, but not in will (Grudem, p. 713).

True repentance involves not only a conviction of personal sinfulness but also an earnest appeal to God to forgive according to His mercy.<sup>1889</sup>

Finally, Grudem makes a helpful distinction between repentance as a specific act and the fruit of repentance that issues from it.<sup>1890</sup>

#### d. Summary

We will attempt to summarize the above considerations in hopes of arriving at a general definition of repentance. An individual becomes aware of their sin, confesses it, experiences shame and remorse for the offense and turns to the Lord for forgiveness and the power to overcome sin. Kromminga proposes a similar definition:

Generally, however, *metanoia* can be said to denote that inward change of mind, affections, convictions, and commitment rooted in the fear of God and sorrow for offenses committed against him, which, when accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ, results in an outward turning from sin to God and his service in all of life.<sup>1891</sup>

Grudem so understands repentance as well:

Repentance, like faith, is an intellectual *understanding* (that sin is wrong), an emotional *approval* of the teachings of Scripture regarding sin (a sorrow for sin and a hatred of it), and a *personal decision* to turn from it (a renouncing of sin and a decision of the will to forsake it and lead a life of obedience to Christ instead).<sup>1892</sup>

## 2. Extent of Repentance

As far as the extent of repentance, that is, who needs to repent, the Bible clearly indicates that repentance is for all. The preaching of repentance in the New Testament began with John the Baptist. His teaching revealed that a new epoch was beginning in God's plan: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2). God was about to give new revelation through His Son and through the gospel. He will establish a new covenant and a new order among His people.

The appropriate response to the opening of this new epoch is repentance. John called both tax collectors and Pharisees to repent. In preparation for Messiah's coming, sinners must forsake their waywardness, and those who suppose themselves righteous – from their self-righteousness.

When Jesus came, He also preached repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). He applied repentance to all people again in Luke 13:4-5: "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were {worse} culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Jesus' disciples also preached repentance. When the Lord sent them to preach, the Bible records, "They went out and preached that {men} should repent" (Mk 6:12). In addition, after His death and resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers to preach repentance: "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:46-47).

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<sup>1889</sup>Dement, v. 4, p. 136.

<sup>1890</sup>Grudem, p. 713.

<sup>1891</sup>Kromminga, p. 870.

<sup>1892</sup>Grudem, p. 713.

In the book of Acts, the disciples continued in this same spirit. Peter declared to the people of Jerusalem, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Furthermore, Paul spoke to the inhabitants of Athens, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). The apostle to the Gentiles was “solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). Therefore, the Church’s message to the unbelieving world is, first of all, a message of repentance, i.e., a determination to forsake one’s old ways and center one’s life in God.

Jesus compared repentance with the condition of a child: “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3). In repentance, an individual turns not only from wrong behavior, but also from old ways of thinking, relating to others, etc., and becomes like a child again, ready to learn a new way of life. In other words, this person is ready to become a new creature in Christ.

Repentance applies to believers as well. The New Testament testifies of this, especially in the book of Revelation. In the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor, we encounter five calls to repentance. In addition, the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the Lord’s discipline: “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb 12:6). Grudem writes in this regard, “It is important to realize that faith and repentance are not confined to the beginning of the Christian life. They are rather attitudes of heart that continue throughout our lives as Christians.”<sup>1893</sup> Therefore, repentance serves both for conversion of sinners and purification of the Church.

In the Gospels and book of Acts, the call to repentance is a general one. For example, John the Baptist announced, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2). Peter proclaimed, “Repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Paul declared, “God is now declaring to men that all {people} everywhere should repent” (Acts 17:30). In these passages, no mention is made of specific sins. God’s call to the unbelieving world is to alter one’s entire worldview and lifestyle.

For those who have already turned to Christ, repentance involves specific areas of failure. In these cases, God is not calling to a radical reorientation of life, but to specific changes. Therefore, when we see in Scripture a call for believers to repent, the area in need of repentance is indicated. In the book of Revelation, for example, the Lord calls attention to the loss of “first love,” entertaining false teaching, and adultery as areas in need of repentance.

Jesus illustrated the difference between repentance for the unbelieving world and for the Church when He washed the disciples’ feet. In John 13:10, He stated, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean.” When persons turn to the Lord, they do not need to repeat their initial act of repentance. They are already clean. Yet, from time to time, they will need to confess and forsake certain sins in order to continue to grow in the Lord and enjoy free fellowship with Him.<sup>1894</sup>

God desires that repentance in the life of believers would result in their spiritual growth. Jesus said, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” (Rev 3:19). In addition, repentance can prevent believers from falling away from the Lord. In Paul’s words, “But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world” (1 Cor 11:32).

Erickson comments,

There may be other points when believers must abandon a particular practice or belief lest they revert to a life of sin. These events, however, are secondary, reaffirmations of the one major step that has

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<sup>1893</sup>Ibid., p. 717.

<sup>1894</sup>Chafer, p. 375.

been taken. We might say that there may be many conversions in the Christian's life, but only one Conversion.<sup>1895</sup>

### 3. Relationship of Repentance to Salvation

We affirm Erickson's summation of the relationship of repentance to salvation: "Conversion is a single entity which has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith. Repentance is the unbeliever's turning away from sin, and faith is his or her turning toward Christ."<sup>1896</sup> He adds, "The large number of verses and the variety of contexts in which repentance is stressed make clear that it is not optional but indispensable."<sup>1897</sup>

It is also worth clarifying that repentance alone is inadequate to receive salvation. Sometimes we hear the expression "I repented" as a synonym for "I was saved." The Bible, however, makes clear that both repentance and faith are required to receive eternal life. They are separate steps in the conversion event (Mk 1:15; Acts 20:21). The New Testament even distinguishes repentance from conversion (Acts 3:19; 26:20).<sup>1898</sup>

Calvin defends this distinction between repentance and faith: "But although they cannot be separated, they ought to be distinguished. As there is no faith without hope, and yet faith and hope are different, so repentance and faith, though constantly linked together, are only to be united, not confounded" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.5).<sup>1899</sup>

Several key texts link repentance with salvation. We again refer to Peter's preaching on Pentecost Day: "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Later he declared, "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19). Jesus Himself said, "Repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Lk 24:46-47). Finally, we cite Acts 11:18: "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance {that leads} to life."<sup>1900</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that the number of verses that link faith with salvation is much more than those that link repentance with faith. The New Testament contains about 140 texts that connect faith with salvation, in most of which no mention is made of repentance. For example: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God" (Eph 2:8); "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16); "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1); and, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Chafer also notes that in the Gospel of John, which was written to bring people to faith in Christ, the term "repentance" is absent. In addition, in the epistle to the Romans, where Paul exhaustively details God's plan of salvation, the word "repentance" is found only once (2:4-5).<sup>1901</sup> Therefore, it is fair to conclude with Mueller that the primary requirement for salvation is faith: "A person is truly converted only when he believes that God has graciously forgiven his sins for Christ's sake."<sup>1902</sup>

Moreover, we must keep in mind that individuals receive salvation in a moment of time, in an instant. Persons are either saved or not saved. Either they are in God's kingdom, or that are not. There is no middle ground between the two positions.

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<sup>1895</sup>Erickson, p. 308.

<sup>1896</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>1897</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>1898</sup>Kromminga, p. 1012.

<sup>1899</sup>Calvin J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997.

<sup>1900</sup>Comparing Acts 11:18 with 11:17, Chafer concludes that in 11:18, the word "repentance" is a synonym of "believed." He also sees this connection in Luke 24:46-27, since forgiveness of sins is usually associated with faith in Christ (Acts 10:43). See Chafer, p. 377.

<sup>1901</sup>Chafer, p. 376. Outside the epistle to the Romans, the words *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) and *μετανοέω* (*metanoëo*) are found in Paul's writings only in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 12:21; 2 Timothy 2:25 (Dunnett, p. 672).

<sup>1902</sup>Mueller, p. 337.

We appeal to Mueller for confirmation that salvation is received in a moment of time: “Conversion does not take place by stages, or degrees, but instantaneously.”<sup>1903</sup> Moreover, “According to Scripture, it is impossible for a person to be in a middle state even for a moment, for there is no middle ground between belief and unbelief, between life and death.”<sup>1904</sup> Therefore, we must determine the exact moment when a person transfers from death to life. Based on the evidence presented, we conclude that this occurs at the moment of belief.

Chafer makes an interesting observation about the relationship of repentance and faith.<sup>1905</sup> He claims that in conversion, people not so much turn from sin to God, but rather turn to God from sin. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, Paul writes, “You turned to God from idols.” Consequently, some teach that faith precedes repentance and that the latter is the fruit of the former.<sup>1906</sup> On the other hand, we also encounter the opposite order in Scripture – from sin to God (Acts 26:18). Erickson agrees that “In a sense, each is incomplete without the other, and each is motivated by the other.”<sup>1907</sup>

It is important to emphasize this relationship because a person could turn from sin, but still not receive salvation, unless this individual believes in Christ as well. Acts 20:21 speaks of both “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So then, the primary requirement for salvation is faith. What, then, is the role of repentance in God’s salvation plan? Without repentance, someone cannot truly believe. Repentance prepares the individual for belief. Mueller writes, “Contrition belongs to conversion only for the reason that faith cannot find entrance into the proud and secure heart; it is ‘the indispensable preparation for conversion.’”<sup>1908</sup>

The word “gospel” means “good news.” The good news is the Jesus died for our sins. For the unrepentant, though, the gospel does not seem to be so good. The unrepentant person does not value Christ’s death because he or she is not aware of their need for forgiveness. The repentant, on the other hand, experiences the weight of sin’s guilt and desires liberation from it and from slavery to sin. For such a person, the gospel is truly good news.

Corresponding to the above, Erickson comments, “If there is no conscious repentance, there is no real awareness of having been saved from the power of sin. There may be a corresponding lack of depth and commitment.”<sup>1909</sup> Jesus said, “He who is forgiven little, loves little” (Lk 7:47).

Evangelical writers note still one other important feature of the relationship between repentance and salvation. Kromminga believes that we may consider repentance a *condition* for receiving eternal life, but not its *basis*.<sup>1910</sup> In other words, although it is imperative that repentance precedes faith, people are not saved by their repentance, but by their faith alone. McGowan confirms that repentance should be considered “a non-meritorious, but necessary accompaniment to faith.”<sup>1911</sup>

## D. History of the Doctrine

Very early in its history, the Church embraced the understanding that water baptism provided forgiveness of sins committed before that time. If believers sinned after receiving baptism, they received further

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<sup>1903</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>1904</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>1905</sup>Chafer, p. 374-375.

<sup>1906</sup>Hodges Z. Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989. – P. 223.

<sup>1907</sup>Erickson, p. 308.

<sup>1908</sup>Mueller, p. 338.

<sup>1909</sup>Erickson, p. 309.

<sup>1910</sup>Kromminga, p. 1012.

<sup>1911</sup>McGowan A. T. B. Justification and the *ordo salutis* // McCormick B. L. Justification in Perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 156.

forgiveness through repentance.<sup>1912</sup> Repentance involved not only confession of sin, but also “weeping and wailing.”<sup>1913</sup> The Church began to distinguish “venial sins” from “mortal sins.”<sup>1914</sup> The latter required public repentance, while the former required only personal confession.<sup>1915</sup>

John Chrysostom lists five ways to express repentance (presumably, private repentance): condemnation of one’s sins, forgiving the sins of others, prayer, alms, and humility.<sup>1916</sup> The Eastern Church holds to this teaching to this day. Palachovsky and Vogel assert that venial sins can be forgiven by reading Psalm 51, giving alms, and fasting.<sup>1917</sup>

Public repentance also involved a period of church discipline, which restricted the participation of the offender in church affairs. The period of discipline could last years. From the third century, the Church accepted that the intercessors of confessors (those threatened with martyrdom, but not executed) was a way to shorten the sentence.<sup>1918</sup> In *The Pastor of Hermas*, we read about this disciplinary measure:

“Is repentance possible for all those stones which have been cast away and did not fit into the building of the tower, and will they yet have a place in this tower?” “Repentance,” said she, “is yet possible, but in this tower they cannot find a suitable place. But in another and much inferior place they will be laid, and that, too, only when they have been tortured and completed the days of their sins (*Visions*, 3.7).

The Early Church also held to the notion that after water baptism, a person could be afforded only one repentance (presumably, public repentance). Tertullian writes,

These poisons of his, therefore, God foreseeing, although the gate of forgiveness has been shut and fastened up with the bar of baptism, has permitted *it* still to stand somewhat open. In the vestibule He has stationed the second repentance for opening to such as knock: but now *once far all*, because now for the second time; but never more because the last time it had been in vain. For is not even this *once* enough? (*On Repentance*, 7).

The *Pastor of Hermas* also comments on this:

And therefore I say to you, that if any one is tempted by the devil, and sins after that great and holy calling, in which the Lord has called His people to everlasting life, he has opportunity to repent but once. But if he should sin frequently after this, and then repent, to such a man his repentance will be of no avail; for with difficulty will he live (*Commandments*, 4.3).

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<sup>1912</sup>Allison G. R. *Historical Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 620. He cites Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4.24; Tertullian, *On Repentance*, 9; *Apostolic Constitutions*, 2.39.

<sup>1913</sup>See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 141.3. Noted in Behm, p. 643-644.

<sup>1914</sup>Among mortal sins, Meyendorff lists murder, adultery, and apostasy (Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 196).

<sup>1915</sup>Franks R. S. *The Work of Christ*. – London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962. – P. 113.

<sup>1916</sup>John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Demons*, 2.6

<sup>1917</sup>From Palachovsky V., Vogel C. *Sin in the Orthodox Church and in the Protestant Churches* / Trans. C. Schalderbrand. – New York: Desclee, 1966. – P. 47. Noted in Horton M. *Response to Bradley Nassif* // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 136.

<sup>1918</sup>Cross F. L., Livingstone E. A. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. – 3rd ed. – Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. – P. 834-835.

Later on in its history, the Christian Church did allow more than one repentance, and replaced public repentance with a private act. One reason for this was scandals that arose as a result of public reproof.<sup>1919</sup> Another change was that believers could confess their sins not only to priests, but to monks as well.<sup>1920</sup>

The Eastern Church continues to practice confession of sin and the sacrament of penance. The priest's prayer of absolution effects the forgiveness of sins. Repentance consists of acknowledgement of one's offense, remorse for it, intention to mend one's ways, faith in forgiveness through Christ, and reconciliation with others and restitution if needed. The officiating priest may require acts of penance such as prayer or good works. He may also give counsel for overcoming future sin.<sup>1921</sup>

However, in Orthodox theology, the question of one forensic position before God is not primary. Consequently, this sacrament has a different nuance than in the West, and the disciplines applied are less severe. According to Meyendorff, "For this reason, confession and penance, at least ideally, persevered the character of liberation and healing rather than that of judgment."<sup>1922</sup>

The Western Church developed a more extensive penitential system.<sup>1923</sup> In Catholicism, in order to obtain forgiveness one must make confession to a priest, who has authority from God to forgive sins. Although Catholics recognize that "only God forgive sins," they also claim: "By virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name."<sup>1924</sup> In particular, they assert that Christ gave to the successors of the apostles, especially to Peter's successor, authority to "bind and loose" people's sins. This authority now resides in the Roman Catholic Church with the Pope at its head.

So then, through the sacrament of penance the repentant sinner received reconciliation with God and the Church: "Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God."<sup>1925</sup> Confession before a priest is mandatory for mortal sins, while it only recommended for venial sins. Nevertheless, the Roman Church requires all Catholics to come to confession at least once a year. Before absolution of mortal sins, the offender is denied the Eucharist. Excommunication can only be annulled by the bishop.

Another method of receiving forgiveness for mortal sins is by means of "perfect repentance." This means that the individual regrets their sinful act not because of its negative consequences, but out of love for God who was offended by it. Regret only for sin's consequences characterizes "incomplete repentance," which is adequate for remission of venial sins, but not for mortal ones without confession to a priest.

Forgiveness for venial sins is offered during special worship services dedicated to that purpose. During such services, the congregation members examine themselves and personally confess their sins to the Lord. The priest then declares the remission of their sins.

According to the Catholic view, true repentance is characterized by inner remorse for one's sins. After confession to a priest, the latter may require some act of penance, which usually consists of prayer, but may include fasting, giving alms, or other acts of mercy. Reconciliation with others and restitution may be required.

A unique feature of the Catholic system is the distinction between forgiveness of the eternal consequences of sin and experiencing temporal punishment for sins. It is taught that "the forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains."<sup>1926</sup> Therefore, individuals must make "redemption" for sins committed, even those remitted by a priest. They accomplish this "redemption" either in this life, or after death in purgatory.

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<sup>1919</sup>Elucidations on Tertullian's *On Repentance* // Roberts A., Donaldson J. Coxe A. C. The Ante-Nicene Fathers. – In 9 Vols. – Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885. – V. 3. – P. 666-668.

<sup>1920</sup>Meyendorff, p. 196.

<sup>1921</sup>Demetrakopoulos G. H. Dictionary of Orthodox Theology. – New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1964. – P. 56-57; Potessaro G. (Ed.) The Orthodox Doctrine of the Apostolic Eastern Church. – New York, NY: AMS Press, 1969. – P. 152-153.

<sup>1922</sup>Meyendorff, p. 198.

<sup>1923</sup>See Catechism of the Catholic Church. № 1431-1498. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

<sup>1924</sup>Ibid., № 1441.

<sup>1925</sup>Ibid., № 1445.

<sup>1926</sup>Ibid., № 1473.



As mentioned above, after confession to the priest, the latter may require some act of penance to redeem the temporal consequences of the confessed sin. Along with this, the Catholic Church offers its adherents another means to escape punishment in purgatory through the use of indulgences, which provides redemption of the temporal consequences of sin.

The Church supposedly extends the grace of indulgences to its members from the so-called “Treasury of Merit.” This consists of the merit that Jesus received from the Father for His sinless life and voluntary suffering, along with the merit earned by the prayers and good works of Mary and the Saints.

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.<sup>1927</sup>

Indulgences are given for special acts of dedication, including prayer, good works, and participation in the Eucharist.<sup>1928</sup> Catholics can obtain indulgences not only for themselves, but also for departed members. This is possible because:

...a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.<sup>1929</sup>

The practice of indulgences dates back to the eleventh century. In the Middle Ages, the sale of indulgences prompted a hostile reaction against them that eventually led to the Reformation and birth of Protestantism.

In assessing the Catholic penitential system, we note the following features. Some positive elements include the shame a repentant believer may experience in confessing sins before a priest, which may deter future sin. In addition, the individual may receive helpful counsel from the priest. James also speaks of confession of sin between church members (Jam 5:16).<sup>1930</sup>

On the other hand, some serious weakness are also apparent. First, the Bible nowhere mentions appealing to church leaders to receive forgiveness of sins. For example, in Acts 19:18 and James 5:16 no confession is made before church hierarchy.

Second, the Bible does not make a distinction between venial and mortal sins. According to Scripture, even the smallest transgression leads to condemnation (Jam 2:10). Therefore, all persons are under condemnation for their misdeeds (Rom 3:23) and stand in need of forgiveness and the gift of righteousness in Christ. These benefits come not through a supposed mediatorial function of the Church, but through personal faith in the redemptive work of Jesus (Rom 3:24-26).

Moreover, the Bible does not support the view that so-called “temporal consequences” remain after sin is forgiven. When persons receive remission of sins, they receive complete forgiveness. The blood of Jesus cleanses us “from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). Therefore, there is no need for “redemption” of personal sins through prayer, good works, or receiving indulgences.

Another error in this system is the teaching on purgatory as a place of temporary punishment, from which persons may be delivered through the prayers of the Church. It is even offensive to suggest that the sacrifice of God’s Son on the cross is somehow insufficient for complete redemption. The idea of a “self-redemption” through good deeds on earth or temporary punishment in purgatory directly contradicts the gospel message.

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<sup>1927</sup>Ibid., № 1471.

<sup>1928</sup>Cross, p. 1310.

<sup>1929</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church. № 1475.

<sup>1930</sup>Иларион, А. Таинство Веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – Р. 163.

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Chapter 20: The Role of Faith in Salvation

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). With these words, Paul responded to the Philippian jailer’s question, “What shall I do to be saved?” To be genuinely saved, one must genuinely believe. What exactly is faith? What are its characteristics? We seek the answers to these questions in this chapter.

A. Terminology

In his article on the theme of faith, Swartz lists six Hebrew terms that relate to this concept.¹⁹³¹ The words קָוָה (*kava*), יָחַל (*yahal*), and חָהָה (*haha*) mean “to wait,” and apply to an expectation of future aid. Weiser comments on the significance of these words, “Waiting is a faith which endures... waiting is a faith that does not yet see but still believes.”¹⁹³²

The word חָסָה (*hasa*) carries the meaning of dependence on another for protection (see Judg 9:15; Ps 7:1; Ps 118:8-9; 17:7). The term בָּטַח (*batah*) is found mainly in the books of Isaiah and the Psalms. Similarly, it emphasizes trust, especially before some type of threat from which one needs deliverance.¹⁹³³ The following texts serve as examples:

- O Israel, trust (בָּטַח) in Yahweh; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust (בָּטַח) in Yahweh; He is their help and their shield. You who fear Yahweh, trust (בָּטַח) in Yahweh; He is their help and their shield (Ps 115:9-11).
- For thus the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust (בָּטַח) is your strength (Isa 30:15).

In Oswalt’s research of this word, he confirms that its main denotation is “trust.” He writes, “*Bāṭaḥ* expresses that sense of well-being and security which results from having something or someone in whom to place confidence.”¹⁹³⁴ He also notes that in the Septuagint, this term is never translated with the Greek πίστις (*pistis*), because בָּטַח (*batah*) lacks the nuance of “participation of the will and reason,” which, along with the idea of “trust,” is communicated by πίστις (*pistis*). The term בָּטַח (*batah*) is simply “trust” in an emotional sense.¹⁹³⁵

We will look more closely at the word אָמֵן (*aman*),¹⁹³⁶ which is the most common Old Testament designation for faith, and from which our word “amen” derives. The essence of the term is “confidence.” We gain more insight by examining its various forms. In its basic verbal form (i.e., *Qal*), אָמַן (*aman*) means “support.” For example, it is used to describe a mother holding an infant who is secure in her care. Also, in 2 Kings 18:16, it refers to the pillars of the temple, i.e., to that which supports it. The word אָמַן (*aman*) is also found in the passive *Niphal* with the sense “be established” (2 Sam 7:16) or “be faithful” (Deut 7:9).

¹⁹³¹Swartz H. L. Faith // Elwell W. Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 236.

¹⁹³²Weiser A. *pisteuo*: The OT Concept // Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 851.

¹⁹³³Moberly R. W. L. *batach* // VanGemen W. New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. – P. 644-649.

¹⁹³⁴Oswalt J. N. בָּטַח // Harris R. L., Archer G. L. Jr., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. – P. 101.

¹⁹³⁵Ibid.

¹⁹³⁶Scott J. B. אָמַן // Harris R. L., Archer G. L. Jr., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. – P. 51-52; Moberly R. W. L. *'aman* // VanGemen W. New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. – P. 427-433; Weiser, p. 849-852.

The word אָמַן (*aman*) means “faith” only in the causative form (*Hiphil*), that is, to allow someone to give support. Therefore, the basic idea conferred by אָמַן (*aman*) is trust in the sense of allowing someone else to hold us up. Correspondingly, it often stands in parallel with בָּטַח (*batah*), which also means “trust” (Job 39:11-12; Mic 7:5; Ps 78:22).

A classic example of אָמַן (*aman*) in the *Hiphil* form is Genesis 15:6: “Then (Abraham) believed (אָמַן) in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Also interesting is Isaiah 7:9, where verb אָמַן (*aman*) is found in both the passive *Niphal* and causative *Hiphil* forms: “If you will not believe (*Hiphil*), you surely shall not last (*Niphal*).” Also significant is that the Septuagint translators render אָמַן (*aman*) with the prominent New Testament term for faith – πίστις (*pistis*).

The noun form of אָמַן (*aman*) is אֱמֶת (*emeth*), which means “truth.”¹⁹³⁷ Thus, we may fully trust God and completely rely on His Word, because He always speaks the truth. Another noun derived from this root is אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*). Unlike the verb אָמַן (*aman*), this noun is used in reference to faith only once – in Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous will live by his faith (אֱמוּנָה).” This term conventionally means “faithfulness” and is frequently encountered in descriptions not only of God’s faithfulness (Deut 32:4), but also of the faithfulness of people (Prov 12:22).¹⁹³⁸

Therefore, the more correct translation of Habakkuk 2:4 appears to be: “The righteous will live by his faithfulness (אֱמוּנָה).” This differs from Paul’s rendering of this text in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Moberly makes the following interpretation:

Yahweh does not answer Habakkuk’s lament in the terms in which it is posed (i.e., he does not justify his actions), but rather indicates that the only way for those committed to him (the righteous) to survive the coming disaster is to maintain personal integrity or “faithfulness.”¹⁹³⁹

Hermission suggests that the verb form of אָמַן (*aman*) is used more than the noun forms because in the Old Testament, faith is not just “a focus or posture,” but “rather over and above that a manner of behavior.”¹⁹⁴⁰

As mentioned above, the primary New Testament term for faith is πίστις (*pistis*), or in its verbal form, πίστεύω (*pisteuo*). In classical Greek, the terms denote “trust” and also sometimes carry the connotation of “obedience.” In Hellenistic Greek, along with indicating “trust,” they also refer to accepting certain dogmas. The adjectival form means “faithfulness.”

In Platonic philosophy, πίστις (*pistis*) is the highest form of knowledge, to which the philosopher attains after mastering the “logoi,” and by this means he becomes a partaker of the divine. The “mystery religions” understood faith as accepting certain teachings of the divine, receiving instruction from it, and relying on its protection.¹⁹⁴¹

In the New Testament, like the Hebrew אָמַן (*aman*) the word πίστις (*pistis*) basically indicates “trust.” Bultmann comments here, “Formally in the NT, as in Greek usage, *pisteúō* denotes reliance, trust, and belief.”¹⁹⁴² This meaning is brought out well in Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of {things} hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The key term, “conviction,” points to an attitude of trust. The term πίστις (*pistis*) in the sense of “trust” is found in the following texts as well: “Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting

¹⁹³⁷Moberly, ‘*aman*’, p. 428-429.

¹⁹³⁸Scott, p. 51; Packer J. I. Faith // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 431.

¹⁹³⁹Moberly, ‘*aman*’, p. 430.

¹⁹⁴⁰Hermission H., Lohse E. Faith / Trans. D. W. Scott. – Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981. – P. 12.

¹⁹⁴¹Bultmann R. *pisteuo* // Kittel G., Friedrich G., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985. – P. 849; Michel O. *pistis* // Brown C. New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. – P. 595.

¹⁹⁴²Bultmann, p. 853.

Himself to them, for He knew all men” (Jn 2:24), “(The Jews) were entrusted with the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), and Paul “had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised” (Gal 2:7).¹⁹⁴³

Unlike classical Greek or the Septuagint, in the New Testament the prepositions εἰς (*eis*) or ἐν (*en*) typically follow the verb form πιστεύω (*pisteuo*). Packer feels that this conveys “the thought of a movement of trust going out to, and laying hold of, the object of its confidence.”¹⁹⁴⁴ Classical Greek and Septuagint Greek tended to employ the construction “faith that (ὅτι),” and not “faith in (εἰς).”¹⁹⁴⁵

Along with their basic meaning, πίστις (*pistis*) and πιστεύω (*pisteuo*) also possess certain nuances that we will discuss in a later section, namely, in relation to Christian doctrine and its acceptance. Like the Hebrew אָמֵן (*aman*), πίστις (*pistis*) can also denote “faithfulness,” such as in Galatians 5:22.

B. Elements of Faith

1. Knowledge (What to Believe)

A necessary prerequisite to faith is knowledge. We do not just “believe,” but we believe in something or someone. We must possess knowledge of the object of our faith.

In order to truly believe in our Savior Jesus Christ, we must know something about Him and how He accomplished our redemption.¹⁹⁴⁶ During His earthly ministry, Jesus invited people to believe not only in Him, but also that the Father had sent Him.¹⁹⁴⁷

Similarly, the apostle John wrote, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1 Jn 5:1). So then, one must believe not only in Jesus, but also in something specific about Him – that He is Messiah. In this same vein, Paul states, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom 10:9). Again, we must embrace some facts about Jesus – that He is Lord and rose from the dead.

Even Rudolph Bultmann, the existential theologian who rejected the need for a historical faith (see below), nonetheless acknowledged the New Testament emphasis on a specific object of faith – the so-called “kerygma,” i.e., the gospel: “Faith in Christ means faith in his resurrection, and his resurrection implies his prior death for sin.”¹⁹⁴⁸

Since faith is informed by knowledge of the object of our faith, genuine believers in Jesus Christ must and will confess that He is the Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who became human, died on the cross for our sins, and rose from the dead. Martha is a good example of informed faith, when she confessed, “I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, {even} He who comes into the world” (Jn 11:27).¹⁹⁴⁹

Mueller confirms our conclusion: “Faith does not justify in itself... but in view of its object, because it apprehends the grace secured by Christ and offered in the Gospel.”¹⁹⁵⁰ Gospel preaching, then, is absolutely necessary. Paul speaks of this in Romans 10:17: “So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”¹⁹⁵¹

The question arises, however, as to how much knowledge one must have of the gospel in order to truly believe in Christ. We can affirm with Packer that, although certain knowledge of the object of our faith is

¹⁹⁴³Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 359.

¹⁹⁴⁴Packer, p. 431.

¹⁹⁴⁵*Ibid.*; Michel, p. 599.

¹⁹⁴⁶Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 325-326. Yet Mueller suggests that knowledge is not formally an *element* of faith, but better described as a *prerequisite* to faith.

¹⁹⁴⁷See Jn 5:24; 11:42; 12:44; 17:8, 21 (Hermission, p. 151).

¹⁹⁴⁸Bultmann, p. 854.

¹⁹⁴⁹Hodges Z. *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989. – P. 38.

¹⁹⁵⁰Mueller, p. 326-327.

¹⁹⁵¹Bromiley G. W. *Faith* // Bromiley G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 2. – P. 271.

necessary, it does not have to be exhaustive knowledge: “Faith in some form can exist where as yet information about Jesus is incomplete (Acts 19:1–7; cf. Matt 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; Luke 7:50) but not where his divine identity and Christhood are consciously denied (1 John 2:22-23; 2 John 7-9).¹⁹⁵²

In the New Testament, faith is sometimes equated with Christian doctrine itself. 1 Timothy 4:6 makes this identification of faith and doctrine: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, {constantly} nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”¹⁹⁵³ The term “faith” can go beyond its association with Christian doctrine to become a synonym for Christianity itself. We note the following examples: “...a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7), “To Timothy, {my} true child in {the} faith” (1 Tim 1:2), and, “We have received grace and apostleship to bring about {the} obedience of faith among all the Gentiles” (Rom 1:5).¹⁹⁵⁴

It is vital to consider the following thought. True acceptance of Christian doctrine includes not only intellectual (superficial) agreement with certain facts concerning Christ, but also a deep conviction of their truthfulness and a readiness to apply them to life.¹⁹⁵⁵ People believe with the “heart” (Rom 10:9-10). The church at Thessalonica is a model for those who properly receive the Word: “When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted {it} not {as} the word of men, but {for} what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thes 2:13). We will return to this thought in our section on “trust.”

Faith connotes not only accepting doctrine, but also Christian conversion and subsequent Christian living. We read, for example, that the “faith” (i.e., the conversion) of the Romans (Rom 1:8) and the Thessalonians (1 Thes 1:8) became known to many. At Paul’s preaching, the Corinthians “believed” and were converted (1 Cor 15:11). In Acts, the term “believed” became the designation for conversion to Christ (e.g., Acts 18:8; 9:42).¹⁹⁵⁶

2. Basis for Faith (Why Believe)

The next aspect of genuine faith is that it has a basis or reason for believing. The antithesis to this is fideism, which claims that we should simply believe without and reason or basis for our faith. As we shall see, however, fideism runs contrary to the biblical understanding of faith.

The New Testament abounds with examples of a rational foundation for faith. For example, in their preaching of the gospel, the apostles continually appeal to the accepted authority of the Old Testament (see Acts 26:27). The noted teacher Apollos appealed to reasoned arguments and as a result “he greatly helped those who had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). The apostles themselves had a basis for their personal faith, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim 1:12).

In addition, Bultmann mentions an interesting example when Zechariah was punished for not believing the words that had substantial justification for their acceptance, being brought directly by an angel sent from God’s presence (Lk 1:19-20).¹⁹⁵⁷ Zechariah had good reason to believe, but failed to do so.

Jesus also gave the people of His time reasons to believe His claims. In John 5:33-47, He appeals to the following support: the witness of John the Baptist, the witness of the Father, Holy Scripture, and miracles. Concerning miracles, on the one hand, before Jesus performed one, He conventionally required faith from its

¹⁹⁵²Packer, p. 432.

¹⁹⁵³Bultmann also cites the following texts, where “faith” is used in a similar fashion: Gal 1:23; 6:10; Eph 4:5; 1 Tim 1:2; 2:7; 3:9; 4:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 3 (Bultmann, p. 854). Hermission adds 1 Tim 6:21; 2 Tim 3:8; and Tit 1:13; 2:2 (Hermission, p. 150-151).

¹⁹⁵⁴In Romans 1:5, some interpreters understand the expression ὑπακοή πίστεως (“the obedience of faith”) in the sense of “obedience to the faith” (the objective genitive), while others understand it in the sense of “obedience to God that results from faith” (subjective genitive) (see Bromiley, v. 2, p. 270). We will look more into this later.

¹⁹⁵⁵Bromiley, v. 2, p. 271; Hodges, p. 31.

¹⁹⁵⁶Michel, p. 603-604; Swartz, p. 238.

¹⁹⁵⁷Bultmann, p. 853.

recipient (e.g., Matt 9:28). On the other hand, as the apostle John noted, miracles can inspire faith.¹⁹⁵⁸ So then, faith can both precede miracles and follow them.¹⁹⁵⁹

In John 4:47-53, we note an example of faith both preceding and following a miracle. The royal official “believed the word” that Jesus spoke concerning his son’s healing, then after the healing, “he himself believed and his whole household.” Faith in Jesus as Healer led to faith in Him as the Son of God.

When Paul preached to the people of Corinth, he preferred that they based their faith on God’s power rather than on eloquence in preaching, “so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:5).

Even in the Old Testament, God’s people did not follow “blind faith” – they had definite reasons to believe.¹⁹⁶⁰ For example, the Bible narrates that after the miracles done through Moses (Ex 4:31) and the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14:30), Israel “believed in Yahweh.”¹⁹⁶¹ God intended that Israel’s experience with His wondrous works in the wilderness would inspire them and motivate them to consistency in their faith (Deut 3:21-22; 11:2-7).

Unfortunately, Israel did not consider their experience with miracles in the wilderness a sufficient basis to continue in faith (Deut 9:22-23). The Psalmist summarized, “Then they believed His words; they sang His praise. They quickly forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel” (Ps 106:12-13). Through Hosea, Yahweh relates, “Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in My arms; but they did not know that I healed them” (Hos 11:3).

Beyond miracles, God’s Old Testament people grounded their faith on Yahweh’s covenant and promises, which they considered reliable because of His faithfulness. Hermission comments on Abraham’s faith:

(Abraham) “believed in the Lord” (which is the best rendering of the text), and that includes more than just the reference to words. These words of promise are only dependable if they are *simultaneously* there with the God whose promises and are believed.¹⁹⁶²

We find another example of basing faith on the Lord’s faithfulness in 2 Chronicles 20, when the Moabites and Ammonites threatened Israel. In answer to Jehoshaphat’s prayer, God answered, “You {need} not fight in this {battle;} station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of Yahweh on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for Yahweh is with you” (v. 17). Trusting in this promise, Jehoshaphat said to the people, “Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in Yahweh your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed” (v. 20). Then, the king sent singers ahead of the armed men to sing praises to Yahweh, and the Lord gave Israel a great victory. Jehoshaphat relied on God’s promises in spite of contrary circumstances, and the Lord proved Himself faithful.

The Old Testament saints drew their confidence not only from God personal promises, but also from their understanding of the covenant. When David faced Goliath, he had no personal promise from the Lord for success in this endeavor. Yet, David’s reply to Goliath’s challenge reveals that he relied on God’s covenant with Israel: “I come to you in the name of Yahweh of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day Yahweh will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you” (1 Sam 17:45-46). David understood that Canaan belonged to Israel, not to the Philistines. He also understood that God was jealous for His name and that Goliath had blasphemed. Therefore, David concluded that God’s

¹⁹⁵⁸See Jn 2:23; 7:31; 10:42; 11:15, 36, 42-45; 12:11.

¹⁹⁵⁹We admit that miracles do not always inspire faith: see Num 14:11; Ps 78:11, 32; 106:13-14 (Hermission, p. 29, 117).

¹⁹⁶⁰Oswalt J. N. תנ"ך // Harris R. L., Archer G. L. Jr., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, electronic ed. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999. – P. 102; Hermission, p. 41-99.

¹⁹⁶¹Hermission, p. 50.

¹⁹⁶²Ibid., p. 27-28.

will was for him to defeat the Philistine. Thus, David's faith enabled him to become God's instrument of victory.¹⁹⁶³

Christianity itself is based on a historical foundation: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day" (1 Cor 15:3-4).¹⁹⁶⁴ John wrote his narrative of Jesus' life and ministry to lay a historical foundation for faith: "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn 20:31).¹⁹⁶⁵

Packer well summarizes, "Beliefs, as such, are convictions held on grounds, not of self-evidence, but of testimony," and receiving that testimony "is to certify that God is true (John 3:33), and to reject it is to make God a liar (1 John 5:10). Christian faith rests on the recognition of apostolic and biblical testimony as God's own testimony to his Son."¹⁹⁶⁶ Hermission confirms, "For Christianity just as for ancient Israel, faith means confident trust that depends on God's promise."¹⁹⁶⁷

Farah wisely cautions that one must not simply rely on God's intervention without some basis for that expectation.¹⁹⁶⁸ The title of his book, *From the Pinnacle of the Temple*, reminds us of the time when Satan tempted the Lord Jesus to leap from the pinnacle of the temple so that the angels could catch Him (Matt 4:6-7). Farah also appeals to the case where certain individuals acted contrary to God's will, assuming that God would approve their actions (1 Sam 13:8-14; 1 Chr 15:12-13).

However, Farah mistakenly claims that we cannot always rely on God's promises in Scripture, but need a personal word from Him (the so-called "rhema" word). He fears that a direct appeal to Scripture as a basis for faith can give the impression that God is bound to the words of a book and is a slave to His Word, and not its author.¹⁹⁶⁹ Yet, such a view severely undermines the authority of the Bible and violates the biblical portrayal of God's faithfulness.

Finally, it is important to note that God gives sufficient evidence for faith and expects an appropriate response to it. For example, the Lord displayed His power to Israel for forty years in the wilderness, yet Israel failed to take it to heart.

The New Testament also testifies about how people reject the evidences given to inspire faith. After Jesus miraculously fed 5000+ people, the crowd demanded additional evidence that He was the Messiah (Jn 6:30-31). In addition, the Pharisees witnessed Christ's miracles for several years, yet they demanded more evidence before they would believe. Jesus responded to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah" (Matt 16:4). They already had sufficient cause to believe in Jesus the Messiah.

God gladly provides a sufficient basis for faith. Yet, when He has given good reason to believe, He expects people to respond in faith. Jesus condescended to Thomas' doubt by personally appearing to him. At the same time, He added the gentle rebuke, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed {are} they who did not see, and {yet} believed" (Jn 20:29).

3. Trust (How to Believe)

The third and most essential aspect of genuine faith is trust. It is not enough to simply have knowledge about Jesus or Christianity. A person can study and master Christian doctrine, but still lack salvation. There is a difference between a person who knows Christian truth, and one who applies it personally. The former is engaged in "intellectual assent," while the latter is exercising genuine trust. Even demons acknowledge God's

¹⁹⁶³It is also possible that the Spirit manifest through David the "gift of faith" (see section on "Gift of Faith").

¹⁹⁶⁴Michel, p. 601.

¹⁹⁶⁵Swartz, p. 239.

¹⁹⁶⁶Packer, p. 432.

¹⁹⁶⁷Hermission, p. 104.

¹⁹⁶⁸Farah C. Jr. *From the Pinnacle of the Temple*. – Plainfield, NJ: Logos. – 243 p.

¹⁹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 135.

existence (Jam 2:19), but they have no personal trust in Him. Those who believe God say their “amen” to His promises (2 Cor 1:20).

So then, true faith is having trust in the object of faith. Faith comes from the heart, as written in Romans 10:9-10: “If you confess with your mouth Jesus {as} Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes.” Faith expects to receive blessing from its intended object. Consequently, believers in Jesus Christ put their confidence in His saving work and anticipate deliverance from sin and death. When individuals believe in Jesus, they not only affirm certain doctrines about Him, but also rely on Him for the promise of eternal life.

We recall that the basic meaning of the Hebrew and Greek terms for “faith” was “trust.” In addition, both Swartz and Bultmann remind us of a unique construction used by John that indicates personal trust in the object of faith – the use of the prepositions εἰς (*eis*) or ἐν (*en*) after the verb πιστεῖω (*pisteuo*).¹⁹⁷⁰

We can express this concept of trust with the phrase “seeing the unseen.” In other words, faith relies on God’s Word even before the appearance of any visible evidence. Peter writes, “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8), and the author of Hebrews defines faith as “the assurance of {things} hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).¹⁹⁷¹ Hermission writes, “Faith shows its overcoming power by being persuaded of God’s reality, which cannot be perceived by the senses.”¹⁹⁷²

Genuine trust finds expression in our deeds. Scripture records instances where some act of faith was performed before God’s miracle deliverance took place. For example, in 2 Kin 3:16 the prophet Elisha ordered the digging of water pits before God sent rain. Naaman needed to dip seven times in the Jordan River to receive his healing from leprosy (2 Kin 5:14). Not infrequently, the Lord Jesus required some act of faith from those who sought healing from Him (Jn 9:7; Lk 17:14). Hebrews 11 narrates many cases where faith motivated certain actions.

The Psalms testifies of other expressions of trust. Faith is expressed in joyful expectation (Ps 68:4; 5:11; cf. Rom 15:13).¹⁹⁷³ Believers in the Lord verbally proclaim their confidence in God’s intervention (Ps 56:10; 25:1-3; 6:9-10). Additionally, Isaiah declares that people of faith have peace: “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You” (Isa 26:3).

The Old Testament often expresses trust in Yahweh with metaphors, especially in the Psalms. For example, God is a fortress (Ps 18:2), shield (Ps 18:30), hiding place (Ps 32:7), refuge (Ps 46:1), and stronghold (Ps 144:2). Isaiah exhorts us, “Trust in Yahweh forever, for in Yah, Yahweh, {we have} an everlasting Rock” (Isa 26:4).

Acts of faith demonstrate confidence in the Lord despite contrary circumstances. By faith, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. By faith, the walls of Jericho fell. By faith, Joshua “stopped” the sun. By faith, Gideon and 300 men defeated the hosts of Midian. By faith, David killed Goliath. By faith, Daniel and his comrades were delivered from death, etc. The heroes of the Old Testament were heroes of faith. They allowed the Lord to support them. In the face of danger, they trusted in Him.

In the biblical understanding, faith does not look at circumstances, but listens to what God says. Faith does not passively yield to difficult situations, but believes God for victory over them. Some mistakenly think that God directly controls all the situations of life and that we should interpret every event as the will of God and passively submit to it.

Such a passive approach is appropriate, of course, in relation to our suffering for Christ. This type of suffering is heroic (Matt 5:10-12; Acts 5:41). Hebrews 11 contrasts those who secured victory in this life (v. 1-34) with those who held onto the Lord in spite of persecution and suffering for His name (v. 35-38). In both cases, genuine faith was at work.

¹⁹⁷⁰Swartz, p. 239; Bultmann, p. 854.

¹⁹⁷¹Michel, p. 604.

¹⁹⁷²Hermission, p. 157.

¹⁹⁷³Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272.

Faith is also called into play when God promises blessing in the life to come. It is interesting to note in Hebrews 11 that even when Old Testament heroes received a glorious miracle from the Lord by faith, they did not glory in it as much as the future hope of inheriting God's eschatological kingdom (v. 13-16, 39-40).

In this sense, we observe an overlap between faith and hope, echoed also in the psalmist's words, "Wait for Yahweh; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for Yahweh" (Ps 27:14; cf. Isa 40:31; Lam 3:25). Faith can give birth to hope. Peter gives a classic example of hope birthed and sustained by faith:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to {obtain} an inheritance {which is} imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.... and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls (1 Pet 1:3-9; cf. Jam 5:7-8).

Nevertheless, a passive attitude toward circumstances that are contrary to God's will is inconsistent with the biblical portrait of faith. If the Old Testament heroes understood faith in this way, the people of Israel would still be standing on the bank of the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho would still be standing, and Goliath would still be defying the armies of Yahweh. Faith actualizes God's will and defies all that opposes its fulfillment.

Going on to the New Testament witness, we again recall how the Lord Jesus often required faith from those seeking His help. We cite Matthew 9:27-29 as an example:

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." Then He touched their eyes, saying, "It shall be done to you according to your faith."

When Jesus' disciples inquired as to why they could not cast out a certain demon, Jesus replied, "Because of the littleness of your faith" (Matt 17:19-20). Jesus then revealed that faith was the key to releasing God's miracle power: "Truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you" (Matt 17:20).

We also consider the time when Peter walked on water. When he saw the Lord walking on water, he requested, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." Jesus consented, "Come" (Matt 14:28-29). As long as Peter believed the Lord's word, he stayed on top. However, the story continues, "But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'" (Matt 14:30-31). Here, the connection between faith and power is plain. As long as Peter believed, he walked on water. When he began to doubt, he sank.

Besides the Gospels, other sections of the New Testament add their witness to the need for trusting the Lord. James teaches that to receive anything from the Lord, one "must ask in faith without any doubting" (Jam 1:6). James affirms the same in regard to divine healing: "The prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick" (Jam 5:15). The book of Acts also testifies that "on the basis of faith in His name, {it is} the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know" (Acts 3:16), and "(Paul) fixed his gaze on (a crippled man) and (saw) that he had faith to be made well" (Acts 14:9).

The New Testament associates faith with receiving the most remarkable miracle – the miracle of salvation. Before the elders of Ephesus, Paul announced the conditions for receiving eternal life: "Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). To the church in Rome, he declared, "(The gospel) is the

power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.... For in it {the} righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous {man} shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16-17).

The first instance of the Hebrew root *אמן* (*aman*) in the Old Testament is also the most significant. In Genesis 15:5-6, Yahweh promises Abraham, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.... So shall your descendants be. Then he believed in Yahweh” Here again, someone needed to exercise faith in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances – Abraham was old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. Nevertheless, Abraham considered God faithful and put his trust in Him. Paul describes the faith of Abraham in Rom 4:18-21:

In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations.... Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

Abraham received from the Lord more than an earthly blessing, i.e., children. He also obtained righteousness before Yahweh: “Then he believed in Yahweh; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). This instance became the precedent for the New Testament doctrine of salvation by faith. Believers in Christ receive righteousness from the Lord in the same way – through faith. Paul confirms this truth: “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:23-24).

Various Evangelical writers emphasize the biblical testimony that trust is the essence of faith: “Faith always includes trust, and there is no faith in the Old Testament without trust.”¹⁹⁷⁴ “As for the ancient Israelites so for the new people of God, faith means primarily confident trust based on God’s promise as understood through his Word.”¹⁹⁷⁵ “The main sense of the word ‘faith’ in the NT is that of trust or reliance.”¹⁹⁷⁶ “Faith, then, is taking God at His Word. Saving faith is taking God at His Word in the gospel.”¹⁹⁷⁷

In all respects, especially in regard to trust, faith can grow. Paul anticipates that the faith of the Corinthians will grow (2 Cor 10:15). Similarly, Paul hopes to “complete what is lacking” in the faith of the Thessalonians (1 Thes 3:10). Correspondingly, the Bible speaks of “little faith” (Matt 8:26; Rom 14:1) and of “great faith” (Matt 8:10; 15:28). A person can be “full of faith” (Acts 6:5; 11:24), can strive for faith (2 Tim 2:22), and can edify one’s own faith (Jude 20). Therefore, we join with the cry of the disciples, “Increase our faith” (Lk 17:5), and the plea of the possessed boy’s father, “Help my unbelief” (Mk 9:24).¹⁹⁷⁸

According to Scripture, trust has an interesting feature. To receive something from the Lord, one must put trust in Him alone. Through Isaiah, Yahweh strictly warned His people not to rely on any other source of help but Him (Isa 14:28-32; 22:8-11; 30:1-2; 31:1-3).¹⁹⁷⁹ Jeremiah repeats this thought: “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from Yahweh” (Jer 17:5; cf. Jer 2:37). We encounter the same theme in the prophecies of Micah (7:5-7), Amos (5:4-6), and Hosea (5:13; 7:11).

Unfortunately, the history of Israel is littered with many examples of God’s people putting their trust in others. Hosea calls this spiritual adultery (Hos 3:1). When Ahaziah was ill, he sought Baal instead of Yahweh. Instead of trusting in God, Ahaz appealed to Assyria for aid (2 Kin 16). Such people did not heed the wisdom of the Psalms, “How blessed is the man who has made Yahweh his trust, and has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood” (Ps 40:4).

¹⁹⁷⁴Hermission, p. 99.

¹⁹⁷⁵Swartz, p. 237.

¹⁹⁷⁶Bromiley, v. 2, p. 270.

¹⁹⁷⁷Hodges, p. 32

¹⁹⁷⁸Bultmann, p. 855; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 5.

¹⁹⁷⁹Hermission, p. 82-83.

Regarding salvation, a person must totally trust in Jesus Christ for eternal life and not rely on any other supposed “paths” to acceptance with God, such as religious activity, good works, etc. Paul strictly warns, “You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). In fact, Paul could have boasted in his many religious accomplishments, but rather chose the path of trust in Christ:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.... I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from {the} Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which {comes} from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:7-9).

Bromiley expresses it well:

(Faith) is a recognition of helplessness, a renunciation of all other trust than trust in God.... There is nothing and no one else upon whom we can rely. Our trust must be in God alone.¹⁹⁸⁰

Unbelief is the absence of a relationship of trust. The Bible narrates the tragic consequences of unbelief. For example, the account of the twelve spies sent out to spy the land of Canaan provides a stark contrast of faith and unbelief (Num 13-14). Ten of the spies “gave a bad report,” and only Caleb and Joshua put their trust in Yahweh. As a result, the ten spies, along with the congregation of Israel who accepted their report, perished in the wilderness. Caleb and Joshua, however, entered the Promised Land.

Unbelief was, unfortunately, an issue for Jesus’ disciples as well, prompting Him to rebuke them for it. After the miraculous feeding of thousands, the disciples worried that they lacked bread for their needs (Matt 16:5-12). In addition, they feared the storm at sea (Lk 8:25). Most tragically, they initially refused to believe that the Savior rose from the dead (Lk 24:11, 25-26). The unbelief of the people of His day even hindered Jesus from doing miracles among them (Mk 6:5-6).

Even Abraham, whom the Bible lauds for his great faith, twice lied about his wife Sarah because he feared the people of the land (Gen 12:10-13; 20:2). Unbelief often appears in the form of fear. The Lord actually forbade the fearful from participating in battle so that they would not discourage others (Deut 20:8; Judg 7:3). Faith and fear are mutually exclusive: “In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Ps 56:11). Isaiah concurs, “Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid” (Isa 12:2). Jesus Himself taught, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me” (Jn 14:1).

The Bible gives a grim picture of the level of true faith, even among believers. Jesus explained that faith the size of a mustard seed could move a mountain (Matt 17:20). Yet, we rarely see even that level of faith in our experience. Also significant is that even after Peter walked on the water, Jesus nonetheless said to him, “You of little faith” (Matt 14:31)! Jesus once announced, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk 18:8).

Finally, the Bible speaks of the inconsistency of one who openly sins, yet relies on God’s protection: “Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on Yahweh saying, ‘Is not Yahweh in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us’” (Mic 3:11).

4. Perseverance (Continuing in Faith)

When persons put their faith in Christ, they must keep that faith to the end. This requires steadfastness and perseverance, which are additional characteristics of genuine faith. In Hebrews 10:36-39, we read, “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was

¹⁹⁸⁰Bromiley, v. 2, p. 271.

promised.... My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”

The idea of “standing in faith” is a common theme in New Testament thought.¹⁹⁸¹ Paul urges the saints in Corinth, “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13), and the Thessalonians likewise, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught” (2 Thes 2:15). Other texts contain the same or a similar thought: Gal 5:1; Phil 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thes 3:8; Eph 6:11, 14; 1 Pet 5:9.¹⁹⁸² In like manner, Paul compares the life of faith with a sporting contest, where perseverance is necessary for victory (1 Tim 6:12). In addition, believers should look to David as a model, who “strengthened himself in Yahweh his God” (1 Sam 30:6; cf. 2 Chr 25:11).

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus compares persevering faith with building a tower or waging war (Lk 14:28-32). What people begin, they must see through to the end.

Perseverance in faith results in the development of another virtue – faithfulness.¹⁹⁸³ By no accident, the Hebrew and Greek terms for faith come from the same root as those for faithfulness. In Greek, both “faith” and “faithfulness” are even expressed by the same word – πίστις (*pistis*). These concepts are closely connected in the biblical context. For example, when Jesus predicts that the church in Smyrna will be tested in faith, He summons them to faithfulness: “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10).

Perseverance demonstrates true faith, which is tested through trials. Believers experience a “fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing” (1 Pet 4:12). Persons may think that they believe and claim to believe, but only the testing of faith will show faith’s true character.

Peter compares the testing of faith with purifying gold: “...so that the proof of your faith, {being} more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7). If a rock really contains gold, the latter will endure the purifying fire. If not, nothing will remain from the smelting process. Similarly, if one possesses genuine faith, that individual will endure testing and remain in Christ until the end. We find confirmation in the Savior’s words, “The one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Mk 13:13).

Along with Peter’s first epistle, several other New Testament books underscore the topic of testing and perseverance. The main theme of the epistle to the Hebrews is steadfastness in faith. It was composed to urge Jewish believers to hold fast to Messiah Jesus and not return to Judaism. The epistle contains many exhortations to perseverance in faith: Heb 3:6-14; 4:1; 6:13-20; 10:23, 35-39.

Paul states in Romans 8:18: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 we encounter a similar word of encouragement, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” It is remarkable to see what Paul considered “momentary, light affliction”:

...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine {lashes}. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. {I have been} on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from {my} countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; {I have been} in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and

¹⁹⁸¹Bultmann, p. 855.

¹⁹⁸²Paul speaks of perseverance in other texts as well: Rom 12:13; 1 Cor 15:1; 2 Cor 1:24; Col 1:11; 2 Thes 1:4; 2 Tim 2:12-13. He himself “fought the good fight... finished the course... kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7).

¹⁹⁸³Michel, p. 599-605.

thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from {such} external things, there is the daily pressure on me {of} concern for all the churches (2 Cor 11:22-28).

How can Paul think of such trials as “momentary, light affliction?” It is possible because he compared his sufferings with the glorious heavenly city that he saw with the eyes of faith. Do we believe in the promise of eternal life? Our response to testing will reveal the true nature of our faith.

The book of Revelation pursues the same objective. True faith endures opposition and holds on to the end (Rev 2:25; 14:12; 16:15). Such faith leads to victorious living (Rev 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). In another place, John writes, “This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).

Remarkable examples from the Old Testament include God’s testing of Abraham. Genesis 22:1 narrates, “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham.” He commanded Abraham to offer his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice. The author of Hebrews reveals that Abraham believed that God would keep his promise to make Isaac his heir, even if He had to raise him from the dead (Heb 11:17-19).

Joseph’s history is also instructive. God promised him a glorious future, but he ended up a slave in Egypt. During that time, when “the word of Yahweh tested him” (Ps 105:19), Joseph remained faithful and, in the end, received what had been promised. In another instance, God allowed some Gentiles to remain in Canaan: “They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of Yahweh” (Judg 3:4). Finally, Jeremiah declares to the Lord, “O Yahweh of hosts, You who test the righteous, Who see the mind and the heart” (Jer 20:12).

Habakkuk writes the following eloquent expression of faith in the face of opposition, which serves as a superb example of a right attitude toward testing:

Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, {though} the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in Yahweh, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation (Hab 3:17-18).

Unfortunately, the Scriptures record cases where people abandoned their faith. Paul writes about some who rejected a good conscience and “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith” (1 Tim 1:19). Others “will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). Still others deny their faith by their actions (1 Tim 4:4-8; Tit 1:16).

We must clarify, though, what constitutes the testing of faith. In general, faith is tested by persecutions and temptations. In nearly every text that refers to Christian suffering and the need for perseverance, the context speaks either of persecution or of temptation.

We see the same combination of factors in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt 13). Jesus’ goal in this parable is to emphasize the need for persistence in faith. The seeds that fall on the stony ground wither and die. Those that fall on thorny ground also fail to produce fruit. Those that fall in good soil bring forth good fruit. In the same way, there are those who receive Jesus, but lack persistence in faith. When persecution arises, they fall away from the Lord, or when they encounter temptation, they return to a life of sin. However, the one who endures to the end bears good fruit and inherits the kingdom of God.

We also observe examples of failing the testing of faith in Israel’s history. We recall that Yahweh promised Israel an inheritance in Canaan. At first, they rejoiced in this promise. Then, God led them through the wilderness. If Israel truly believed that a rich and bountiful land awaited them, they would have endured the temporary discomforts of the wilderness.

However, they constantly whined and complained. This revealed the true nature of their faith. Therefore, the Lord said of them, “Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tried {Me} by testing {Me,} and saw My works for forty years” (Heb 3:8-9), and,

“{So} we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19). Paul exhorts the Philippians not to repeat Israel’s mistake: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (Phil 2:14; cf. 1 Cor 10:9-10).

Followers of Christ enjoy a marvelous promise – eternal life, in which they rejoice. Yet, do we really believe this promise? We may think so, but the true nature of our faith will show under testing. If we truly believe in the promise of eternal life and the unspeakable glory of the age to come, we will strive to endure until the end.

Faith is also accompanied by perseverance when unexpected suffering comes into our lives and God gives no immediate explanation as to its cause. Hermission finds examples in the Psalms, where the psalmist prays to the Lord about difficult life situations and complains about His apparent disinterest (Ps 10:1; 44:24; 13:1; 42:9).¹⁹⁸⁴

The classic example of the situation described above is found in the book of Job. Although he was uninformed about the reason for his pain, nonetheless, Job did not curse God (Job 1:22; 2:10). In this instance, it is important to note that Job wrestled with doubt and experienced disillusionment (Job 4:5; 7:12-21; 13:15). Yet, he knew that he was being tested and anticipated eventual victory (Job 23:10; 19:25-27). As we know, his deliverance finally came (Job 42:10). James comments this history: “We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and {is} merciful” (Jam 5:11).

In the midst of affliction and doubts, genuine faith continues to rely on God, even when one does not understand what is happening. Moberly gives this insightful comment, “Indeed it is the logic of trust (and loyalty) that if it is genuine, then it should be shown when things go badly as well as when they go well.”¹⁹⁸⁵ In this vein, we also observe that the so-called “psalms of complaint” typically conclude with an expression of faith and praise to God for the anticipated answer. For example:

How long, O Yahweh? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, {having} sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider {and} answer me, O Yahweh my God; enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the {sleep of} death, and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,” {and} my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to Yahweh, because He has dealt bountifully with me (Ps 13).

Although it is uncomfortable and inconvenient to go through trials, the Bible does not leave us without words of comfort. The epistle to the Hebrews, which abounds with exhortations to persevere in faith, speaks of Jesus as “the author and finisher” of our faith (Heb 12:2).¹⁹⁸⁶ The epistle to the Philippians echoes this truth: “{For I am} confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). Paul also writes, “The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil {one}” (2 Thes 3:3). We also recall Christ’s words to Peter: “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:32).

5. Fruit of Faith

The Bible clearly teaches that genuine faith will produce fruit, i.e., is expressed by good works, especially love. The apostle James writes, “But someone may {well} say, ‘You have faith and I have works’; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (Jam 2:18). Paul affirms the same. In his letter to Titus, he often refers to the importance of good works in the life of faith (Tit 1:1, 16; 2:12-14; 3:8, 14). One can confirm one’s status as a genuine believer by examining the fruit of one’s faith (2 Cor 13:5-6).

¹⁹⁸⁴Hermission, p. 50-57

¹⁹⁸⁵Moberly, *batach*, p. 649.

¹⁹⁸⁶Michel, p. 604.

Other texts advance this truth as well. Jesus instructed His disciples, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). Just as a plant naturally grows and produces fruit, true believers grow in grace and bear the fruit of the Spirit: some one hundred-fold, others sixty-fold, others thirty-fold.

The absence of fruit indicates a state of spiritual death and the absence of faith. Such individuals are likened to unbelievers and are cut off from the vine (Jn 15:2). Other passages graphically portray the outcome of a fruitless life.

Hebrews 6:7-8 states, “For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.” Ephesians 5:5 teaches the same: “For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” We encounter similar warnings in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; and Colossians 3:5-6.

Martin Luther, the most ardent proponent of salvation by faith alone, nonetheless acknowledges the necessity of the works of faith: “It is impossible for (faith) not to do good continually.... It is impossible to separate works from faith, yea, just as impossible as it is for heat and light to be separated from fire.”¹⁹⁸⁷

In 2 Peter 1:5-11, the apostle masterfully details the relationship between faith and good works. He begins by grounding his instruction in faith: “For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of {the} divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” Only by receiving by faith God’s promises can an individual attain the knowledge of God and become a partaker of His nature.

Peter then takes his readers on from faith to its fruit: “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in {your} moral excellence, knowledge, and in {your} knowledge, self-control, and in {your} self-control, perseverance, and in {your} perseverance, godliness, and in {your} godliness, brotherly kindness, and in {your} brotherly kindness, love.” Bearing fruit is not a static experience, but a dynamic, ongoing one. In other words, those possessing genuine faith grow in the Lord: “For if these {qualities} are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul makes the same point in Philippians 1:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:58.¹⁹⁸⁸ Spiritual growth is a natural process in the life of believers who possess genuine faith.

In his epistles, Paul often connects faith with love (more than 20 times). For example, he writes to the Ephesians, “For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which {exists} among you and your love for all the saints” (Eph 1:15), to the Colossians, “...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints” (Col 1:4), and to the Thessalonians, “Your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows {ever} greater” (2 Thes 1:3; also see 1 Tim 1:5).

Clearly, Paul considers that true faith manifests itself in love. He directly states this in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.” We also note how Paul combines “faith,” “hope,” and “love” (see Rom 5:1-5; 1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thes 1:3; 1 Thes 5:8). In 1 Corinthians 13:13, he calls these the main Christian virtues. For John also, God’s two great commandments are faith and love (1 Jn 3:23).

Bultmann observes John’s strong emphasis on the fruit of faith.¹⁹⁸⁹ In his epistles, John outlines the primary characteristics of true Christianity to be righteousness, truth, and love. Finally, we cannot omit Hebrews 11, where we read that the heroes of faith displayed their faith in their heroic acts for the Lord.¹⁹⁹⁰ Earlier in the same epistle, the author notes how Israel’s faith failed to result in obedience when they refused to enter the Promised Land (Heb 3).

¹⁹⁸⁷Mueller, p. 386.

¹⁹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 397-398.

¹⁹⁸⁹Bultmann, p. 857.

¹⁹⁹⁰Hermission, p. 34.

Along with the biblical witness, Evangelical writers affirm the same view on the fruit of faith. Packer writes, “The nature of faith, according to the NT, is to live by the truth it receives; faith, resting on God’s promise, gives thanks for God’s grace by working for God’s glory.”¹⁹⁹¹ In the words of Hermission, “Faith without obedience, or a religiosity which still allows life in the community to degenerate, is a lie” (see Mic 3:11; Jer 7).¹⁹⁹² Bromiley eloquently expresses this truth: “Faith is the inward compulsion, not only to trust God, but, trusting Him, to obey Him, to do exploits in His name, to bring forth fruits of righteousness, to find expression in faithfulness.”¹⁹⁹³

Unlike the above quoted thinkers, Zane Hodges rejects the thesis that faith must inevitably display itself in works.¹⁹⁹⁴ He offers the following proofs for his position. He notes that in Romans 4:4 and 11:6, faith is contrasted with works. In addition, he feels that James speaks not of works that demonstrate saving faith, but of works that demonstrate spiritual victory in the believer’s life. Peter’s exhortation (2 Pet 1) concerning confirming faith with good works was written to people who were already in Christ, i.e., to those who already had saving faith.

Moreover, Jesus’ parable about the vine and branches is not about salvation, but about success in discipleship (Jn 15:8). Obedience does not result in salvation, but in fellowship with God (Jn 14:21), the glory of God (Jn 15:8), friendship with God (Jn 15:14-15), and a good testimony before the world (Jn 13:33-34). In summary, he writes, “Indeed, discipleship is neither a condition nor a proof of actual regeneration.”¹⁹⁹⁵

On the one hand, Hodges is correct in saying that doing good works is not a condition for salvation and that the presence of true faith in the heart of believers is already sufficient for salvation before any good works are performed. However, based on the biblical data shown above, Hodges is mistaken in his conviction that true faith is not necessarily expressed in good works.

C. Role of Faith in Receiving Salvation

1. Priority of Faith

We have earlier noted that Scripture connects salvation with repentance (Acts 2:38), faith (Acts 16:31), and water baptism (Acts 2:38). However, we must acknowledge that the number of texts relating faith to salvation far exceeds those linking it with repentance or water baptism.

The New Testament contains about 140 passages where “faith” or “believe” lead to salvation. In addition, most of these texts do not mention repentance or water baptism. We can cite the following key passages: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God” (Eph 2:8); “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16, cf. (cp. Jn 5:24; 6:47); “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Therefore, we may with confidence assert that the main condition for salvation is faith.

Mueller affirms this as well: “A person is truly converted only when he believes that God has graciously forgiven his sins for Christ’s sake.”¹⁹⁹⁶ Also: “Contrition belongs to conversion only for the reason that faith cannot find entrance into the proud and secure heart; it is ‘the indispensable preparation for conversion.’”¹⁹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁹¹Packer, p. 432.

¹⁹⁹²Hermission, p. 72.

¹⁹⁹³Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272.

¹⁹⁹⁴Hodges Z. Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989.

¹⁹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁹⁹⁶Mueller, p. 337.

¹⁹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 338.

Moreover, we must keep in mind that individuals receive salvation in a moment of time, in an instant. Persons are either saved or not saved. Either they are in God's kingdom, or that are not. There is no middle ground between the two positions.

Again, Mueller confirms our thesis: "Conversion does not take place by stages, or degrees, but instantaneously."¹⁹⁹⁸ Moreover, "According to Scripture, it is impossible for a person to be in a middle state even for a moment, for there is no middle ground between belief and unbelief, between life and death."¹⁹⁹⁹ Therefore, we must determine the exact moment when a person transfers from death to life. Based on the evidence presented, we conclude that this occurs at the moment of belief. We affirm with Hodges, "When a person believes, that person has assurance of life eternal."²⁰⁰⁰ Even if the moment of belief comes at the end of life, salvation is still secured, as with the thief on the cross (Lk 23:40-43).

The question arises, "Why does God require faith for obtaining salvation?" One who acquires eternal life by faith has nothing about which to boast (Eph 2:9; Rom 3:27). Humility is one of the key components in God's plan for His redeemed people. We can also recall the Fall, where Adam and Eve failed to put their trust in the Lord, but rather sought satisfaction in the created order itself. As a result of their loss of faith, they disobeyed God and brought a curse on us all. As we demonstrated in an earlier chapter, unbelief is one of the roots of sin. Therefore, we can better understand why faith is a key element for obtaining salvation. Just as unbelief opened the door to sin, faith opens the door to salvation.

2. The Relationship of Faith and Works in Salvation

All Christian confessions recognize the importance of both faith and good works in the Christian life. Yet, many confessions differ as to the relationship between them. Does faith alone save a soul, or are good works necessary for salvation as well? Let us investigate this question.

The issue is complicated when we compare the following passages in Paul and James. Paul taught, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom 3:28). Yet, James affirms, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jam 2:24). How can we explain this seeming contradiction?

Some resolutions to this dilemma do not find Scriptural support. We cannot affirm, for example, that people are justified by works. Paul's emphatic teaching on the subject precludes this conclusion. He writes to the Galatians, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (Gal 2:16). He repeats this theme in Romans 3:20: "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight." Moreover, Paul warns those who rely on works for salvation, "As many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse" (Gal 3:10).²⁰⁰¹

Abraham is the prime example of justification by faith alone. It is written of him, "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Rom 4:2-3). Moreover, Jesus told a parable about two individuals, one of whom boasted in his self-righteousness, while the other acknowledged himself a sinner. Only the latter was justified before God (Lk 18:14).²⁰⁰²

Another errant view, advanced by Roman Catholicism, is to distinguish *fides informis* ("unformed faith") from *fides caritate formata* ("formed faith"). According to Catholic teaching, "formed faith" is faith joined with love that enables one to do good deeds, thus making one worthy of receiving eternal life. At the time of water baptism, God "imparts" righteousness to the recipient's soul in the form of spiritual power that enables that

¹⁹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 339.

¹⁹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 351.

²⁰⁰⁰Hodges, p. 50.

²⁰⁰¹Mueller, p. 369.

²⁰⁰²Ibid.

person to do good. These good deeds are rewarded with “merit” from the Lord and become the basis for one’s justification. Therefore, salvation comes by works performed in the strength of this “imparted” righteousness.²⁰⁰³ The historian Berkhof describes the Catholic view as follows: “In the *gratia infusa* man receives the supernatural strength to do such works, and thus to merit with a merit of condignity all following grace and everlasting life.”²⁰⁰⁴

The Catholic view contradicts many Scriptural texts that teach justification by faith in the sense of trust in God’s promise of eternal life in Christ apart from works (see Eph 2:8-9; Gal 2:16; 3:10, Rom 3:20; 4:1-3 and others). Works done by “imparted” righteousness are still works. According to Scripture, works have no ability to save the soul.

Salvation is not based on works, but works are the natural expression of true faith and follow after one receives justification and eternal life by grace. We find confirmation of this thesis in the first eight chapters of the book of Romans. In chapters 3-5, Paul speaks of receiving justification as a gift of God’s grace. In chapters 6-8, he discusses right behavior that issues forth from this position of being justified.

Clearly, God justifies before a person begins doing good works. Works are not the means to justification, as Catholic teaching proposes, but are the result of a justification already fully received by faith. Spiritual fruit, especially love, is the evidence that genuine faith is present in the heart of the believer, but not the basis for that salvation. A person can be saved only on the basis of faith in Jesus.

The Lutheran theologian Mueller repudiates the Catholic doctrine of good works leading to salvation: “Good works done for this purpose insult and mock God, who in His Word offers to all sinners through faith the entire, perfect righteousness which His beloved Son has secured for the world by His vicarious satisfaction.”²⁰⁰⁵

A more recent attempt to redefine the Protestant understanding of the role of works in salvation was advanced by E. P. Sanders in his volume *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.²⁰⁰⁶ Sanders advanced the thesis that salvation begins by faith, but is preserved by works. In other words, by believing in Jesus believers are made right with God. However, in order to maintain that status, they must perform good works. James Dunn and N. T. Wright also support this view. This teaching is known as “covenantal nomism.”²⁰⁰⁷ We discuss this teaching in chapter 9, but it is worth repeating a few points here.

Sanders’ theory works off the model of Israel’s experience. According to Sanders, Abraham initially received from God the gift of righteousness. Later, God gave Israel the Law as a means to stay in covenant with Him. He required obedience as a condition to remain in covenant relationship. Similarly, faith in the redemptive work of Christ only provides an initiation into relationship with the Lord and the experience of salvation. In order to continue in that relationship and experience full justification, believers must obey God and perform good works.

Adherents of covenantal nomism posit that the problem with first-century Judaism was not that they misunderstood the relationship between faith and works, but rather that: (1) they rejected Messiah, (2) they boasted in their status as Jews, and (3) they required the Gentiles to keep the ceremonial Law of Moses. Therefore, Paul’s goal in his teaching on justification was not to insist on justification by faith alone, but rather to correct these distortions.

However, a closer examination of this theory reveals some serious deviations from biblical revelation. First, Paul affirms that works play no role in a person’s justification. From the book of Galatians, we learn that the Law does not justify: neither before conversion (2:16), nor after conversion (5:4; 3:3). Paul teaches in Romans 1:17 and 11:19-20 that justification comes exclusively by faith.

²⁰⁰³Noted in Berkhof L. *The History of Christian Doctrine*. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 213ff.

²⁰⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 215.

²⁰⁰⁵Mueller, p. 420-421.

²⁰⁰⁶Eddy P. R., Beilby J. K., Enderlein S. E. *Justification in the Contemporary Debate* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. – Kindle ed. 526-767.

²⁰⁰⁷“Nomism” comes from the Greek word νόμος (*nomos*), i.e., “law.” The phrase “covenantal nomism” means observing the Law in the context of the covenant.

Furthermore, in his letter to the Galatian congregations, Paul clearly explains the purpose of the Law. It was not given to maintain right relationship with the Lord, as Sanders suggests, but to demonstrate human sinfulness and inability to obey God. The goal of the Law was to lead persons to the righteousness of faith, of which Paul speaks in Galatians 3:17-24.

Romans 2:13 is also a key verse in this discussion. Defenders of covenantal nomism claim that Gentile believers were keeping the Law and thereby meriting their salvation.²⁰⁰⁸ Yet, if one examines the context of this verse, it becomes plain that Paul's goal here is not to show that Gentiles are justified by the Law, but to show that the Law condemns everyone as sinners, so that all will turn to Christ to receive mercy and redemption.

Moreover, Paul's teaching directly contradicts the covenantal nomism position that Abraham received only an initial justification through faith, but that final justification comes from obedience. Romans 4:1-6 reveals that Abraham received full justification by faith alone apart from works:

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Additionally, Paul addresses this issue in Galatians 3:17-18 as well. Here, he specifically rejects the suggestion that God's covenant with Abraham is somehow continued with observance of the Mosaic Law.²⁰⁰⁹ We read,

What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

It is also worth mentioning that in Paul's day, some were concerned that his teaching might lead to neglect of morals (see Rom 3:7-8; 6:1-2; Acts 21:21). If, as it is supposed, Paul taught "covenantal nomism," then no one would have accused him of this.²⁰¹⁰

Similarly, Gundry "sees much greater discontinuity between Paul and Judaism. In his estimation, for Palestinian Judaism, works are both a sign of and a condition for staying in; whereas for Paul, works are only evidential of, not instrumental for staying in," with "faith being the necessary and sufficient condition of staying in as well as getting in."²⁰¹¹ The Lutheran Piper also gives a firm response. He feels that we must "treat the necessity of obedience not as any part of the basis of justification, but strictly as the evidence and confirmation of our faith in Christ, whose blood and righteousness is the sole basis for justification."²⁰¹²

Another errant theory on this topic is the idea that faith can be equated with good works. In this view, when the Bible speaks of faith, it is really talking about good deeds. Faith is not expressed by good works, but is defined as the works themselves. Salvation is by faith, but faith is really acts of obedience. In actuality, then, people are saved by works, but these works are called "faith."²⁰¹³

In support of this theory, its adherents appeal to the phrase encountered in Scripture, "the obedience of faith." This phrase is found in Romans 1:5: "...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about {the} obedience of faith among all the Gentiles"; Acts 6:7: "...a great many of the priests were becoming

²⁰⁰⁸Bird, 1499-1524.

²⁰⁰⁹Horton, Traditional Reformed View, p. 204-206.

²⁰¹⁰Bird, 1129-1130.

²⁰¹¹Noted in Eddy, Justification in the Contemporary Debate, 622.

²⁰¹²Piper F. Future of Justification, p. 110, noted in Eddy, Justification in the Contemporary Debate, 644.

²⁰¹³Noted in Mueller, p. 324.

obedient to the faith”; and Rom 16:26: “...has been made known to all the nations, {leading} to obedience of faith.”

The following facts refute this theory. In Scripture, faith and works are never equated, but rather they stand in contrast. We see in Ephesians 2:8-9, for example, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Galatians 3:12 even more directly contradicts this teaching: “The Law is not of faith.” Later in this same chapter, Paul comments more on the relationship of faith and works:

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor {to lead us} to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Gal 3:23-25).

Moreover, according to Romans 11:6 the path of faith and grace and the path of works and the Law are mutually exclusive: “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.”

In addition, we must consider that according to Scripture, salvation is a gift. A gift, by definition, is something received without cost. Faith is the means to receive that gift. Faith for justification, therefore, is not an active doing, but a passive acceptance of the gift of eternal life.

Furthermore, the verses listed above in defense of this teaching actually fail to support it. As noted earlier, in Acts 6:7 and Romans 15:25 the word “faith” carries the sense “receiving doctrine” or “conversion to Christ.” Romans 1:5 has a similar connotation. Most likely, we are dealing here not with a subjective genitive (obedience to God issuing from faith), but an objective genitive (obedience to the faith, i.e., acceptance of Christianity).

Finally, some suggest that faith in Christ is an act that God rewards with salvation. In other words, faith is a heroic feat or spiritual achievement which qualifies one to merit eternal life. Horton successfully dismisses this claim, “Faith is merely the instrument, not the ground of our justification.”²⁰¹⁴ Moreover, he cites the wise words of Calvin that if faith is the basis for our justification, then our justification would be imperfect, since our faith is imperfect (see *Institutes*, 3.11.7). The grounds or basis for our salvation is Christ’s redemptive work.

In addition, Bromiley notes that according to the biblical understanding, faith itself does not save, but rather the object of faith does – the saving grace and mercy of God in Christ (Rom 4:16; Eph 2:8). He concludes, “Faith is justifying faith, not because it justifies, but because it grasps the justification God Himself has effected.”²⁰¹⁵

The final errant view on the relationship between faith and works, which was proposed by Zane Hodges, is discussed above.

Finally, Bromiley summarizes well the relationship of faith and works:

Faith is “a living and active thing which is naturally and necessarily accompanied by fruits of righteousness. These fruits are not a ground of justification. Justification and sanctification are not to be confused. On the other hand, the absence these fruits is a sign that there is no true faith. Justification and sanctification are not to be separated. Calvin put this aspect of the matter finely in a single judicious sentence when he said that ‘it is faith alone which justifies, but the faith which justifies is not alone.’”²⁰¹⁶

²⁰¹⁴Horton, Kindle ed. 808-813.

²⁰¹⁵Bromiley, v. 2, p. 271.

²⁰¹⁶Ibid., v. 2, p. 272.

D. The Gift of Faith

In 1 Corinthians 12:7-9, Paul lists a variety of spiritual gifts that God grants to His Church, including the gift of faith: "...to another faith by the same Spirit." The context makes clear that we are dealing here not with natural, but supernatural faith, by which a person can believe God for the miraculous. Although the Bible does not specifically mention the operation of this gift, we can assume that it manifested when Elijah withstood the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kin 18) and, possibly, when other heroic deeds were performed by men and women of God.

The fact that this faith is given "to another" indicates that it is not given to all, that is, it is not faith for salvation. Bromiley confirms,

That this is not the faith all Christians must have for salvation is clear from the latter verse, for the whole point of 1 Cor. 12 is that the Holy Spirit distributes different gifts to different people, and the "faith" of v 9 is one of these gifts.²⁰¹⁷

Cyril of Jerusalem highlights this gift of faith and writes,

This faith then which is given of grace from the Spirit is not merely doctrinal, but also worketh things above man's power. For whosoever hath this faith, *shall say to this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove* (*Catechetical Lectures*, 5.11).

Faith is associated with spiritual gifts in another sense. In Paul's letter to the Romans, in a context dealing with spiritual gifts, we read, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.... Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, {each of us is to exercise them accordingly}: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith" (Rom 12:3, 6).

Here, we learn that God gives special faith for the manifestation of all spiritual gifts. In other words, by virtue of the operation of this special faith, believers know intuitively what spiritual gift they are graced with. This faith also gives them confidence to operate in that gift. This passages does not teach, as Calvinists might suppose, that God gives saving faith only to the elect. In Romans 12:6, there is no mention of salvation.

E. Various Views on Faith

1. In the Intertestamental Period

What was the conception of faith among God's people in the intertestamental period?²⁰¹⁸ In the Qumran community, faith was loyalty to the community leader, i.e., the Teacher of Righteousness (1Qp Hab 8:1-3).

Philo of Alexandria applied the biblical concept of faith to his Platonic worldview. We exercise faith in the one God and His providence in our lives. A wise person is considered a "believer." Faith is expressed in wise conduct.

In the Apocrypha and pseudepigraphic literature, where conflict with evil is a common theme, faith is often associated with perseverance and faithfulness to the Lord in the face of suffering. "Believers" are contrasted with Gentiles or pagans.

However, the main school of thought in this period was to understand faith as obedience to the Law. Bultmann comments here, "The main difference from the OT is that faith is no longer to the same degree

²⁰¹⁷Ibid., v. 2, p. 270.

²⁰¹⁸Michel, p. 595; Hermission, p. 113-114; 139-140; Bultmann, p. 852.

either faithfulness to God's acts in history or trust in his future acts. It is much more strongly obedience to the law."²⁰¹⁹ We may cite several examples:

- He that observeth the Law guardeth himself, and he that trusteth in Jahveh shall not be brought to shame. (*Sirach*, 32.24).
- ...who in faith have submitted themselves to Thee and Thy law (2 *Baruch*, 54.5).
- He that shall bring the peril in that time will himself keep them that fall into the peril, even such as have works and faith toward (the Most High and) the Mighty One (4 *Ezra*, 13.23).

In the opinion of the rabbis, Abraham was justified by works, not by faith:

- (Abraham) kept the commandment of the Most High, and entered into a covenant with Him: in his flesh He engraved him an ordinance, and in trial he was found faithful. Therefore with an oath He promised him "To bless the nations in his seed" (*Sirach*, 44.20-22).
- Was not Abraham found faithful in temptation, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness? (1 *Macc*, 2.52).

2. In Church History

In church history, the idea of faith was understood in various ways at different times by different people. Some of these understandings did not line up with the biblical revelation. We will begin by looking at the Church Fathers, then go on to the Middle Ages and Reformation period.²⁰²⁰

The early years of Christianity witnessed an alteration in how faith was understood, which we observe in the writings of the Fathers. During that time, Christianity was threatened by several heresies, which forced teachers of the Church to give more precise definition to church dogma. Correspondingly, the concept of "faith" was identified more closely with doctrine than with personal trust in the Lord.²⁰²¹

Bromiley and Packer suggest other reasons why the aspect of "trust" was lost in early Christianity.²⁰²² At that time, the Church held to an errant soteriology. Instead of embracing the New Testament teaching of salvation by faith alone, church leaders ascribed to water baptism the initial engrafting into the Faith. Therefore, in the teachings of the Church Fathers personal faith (i.e., trust) played a lesser role in obtaining eternal life. Additionally, the teachers of the Church fell under the influence of Stoicism with its strict morality. Consequently, they placed greater stress on keeping commandments. Faith was interpreted in terms of obedience.

Nevertheless, the idea of faith as "trust" did not totally disappear. Acceptance of Christianity involved not only intellectual assent of Christian doctrine, but also personal faith in the Triune God. Moreover, in his teaching Augustine emphasized both acceptance of dogma and personal trust in God. Some comment that for Augustine, faith is "a psychological state of receptivity combined with the acceptance of certain specific revealed truths," while others understand his view of faith as a "self-surrender to God through Christ."²⁰²³

²⁰¹⁹Bultmann, p. 852.

²⁰²⁰See McKelway A. J. *The Systematic Theology of Faith: A Protestant Perspective* // Lee J. M. *Handbook of Faith*. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 168-181; Hellwig M. K. *A History of the Concept of Faith* // Lee J. M. *Handbook of Faith*. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 6-17; Bromiley, v. 2, p. 270-273; Packer, p. 433-434; Oden T. C. *The Living God: Systematic Theology*. – San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1992. – V. 1. – P. 397.

²⁰²¹Here we can highlight Tertullian's insistence on accepting the "rule of faith."

²⁰²²Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272; Packer, p. 433.

²⁰²³Hellwig M. K. *A History of the Concept of Faith* // Lee J. M. *Handbook of Faith*. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 9.

Augustine also introduced the teaching of predestination into the Church, which had a marked effect on the concept of faith. If God takes total initiative to draw the elect to Himself by His grace, then it is the Holy Spirit that gives birth to faith in our hearts. This view of the “gift of faith” was endorsed at the Second Council of Orange in 529. For more on the weaknesses of the predestination position, see the third volume of this series, chapter 18.

Some observe in the teachings of the Fathers another notable feature – faith as the means to knowing God. Here we encounter the issue of how faith relates to knowledge. John of Damascus considers it essential to know God through acceptance of divine revelation by faith:

For it is foolishness to those who do not receive in faith and who do not consider God’s goodness and omnipotence, but search out divine things with human and natural reasonings. For all the things that are of God are above nature and reason and conception (*An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 4.11).

Oden comments on the teaching of Maximus the Confessor, “Faith is to the unseen world what the senses are to the visible world.”²⁰²⁴ Oden also states, “Revelation addresses... the faculty of believing.”²⁰²⁵

At the same time, Basil the Great is ready to acknowledge that some “rudimentary” facts may precede faith:

Which is first in order, knowledge or faith? I reply that generally, in the case of disciples, faith precedes knowledge. But, in our teaching, if any one asserts knowledge to come before faith, I make no objection.... This knowledge is followed by faith, and this faith by worship (*Letters*, 235.1).

Moreover, Basil employs the rule of submitting reason to faith to the advantage of his apophatic approach to theology. In *Letter 234*, he attempts to prove that faith is based not on the revelation of God’s essence, which, in the opinion of the apophatists, is incomprehensible, but on the manifestations of His “energies.” We worship the unknowable God by faith in His power, which demonstrates His existence and dignity: “So worship follows faith, and faith is confirmed by power.... We know God from His power” (*Letters*, 234.3).

How did thinkers from the Middle Ages view faith?²⁰²⁶ In the West, the schoolmen preserved the teaching of the Fathers and developed it further. They taught that faith accepts God’s revelation, and that reason must submit to it. However, they added the thought that the Fall did not totally destroy people’s ability to know God. One can come to some correct conclusions about God through reason and by observing nature. So then, although revelation is primary in knowing God, reason began to occupy a greater role. Faith is based on both general and special revelation.

Additionally, they ascribed to faith two functions. First, before receiving water baptism (for adults), the new converts must accept the doctrines of Christianity. This type of faith, so-called *fides informis* (“unformed faith”), qualifies a person to receive baptism. Second, through baptism persons receive grace that enables them to walk in love. When faith is united with love, it becomes “formed faith” (*fides caritate formata*). In the strength of this “formed faith,” believers do good deeds that make them worthy to inherit eternal life.

Finally, in the Middle Ages theologians raised the question about to what degree a person must understand God’s salvation plan in order to be saved. Hugo of Saint Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux advanced the thesis that all that is required is faith in God’s “existence and providence” and the existence of some

²⁰²⁴Oden, v. 1, p. 399.

²⁰²⁵Ibid.

²⁰²⁶See Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272; Hellwig, p. 10-12; Packer, p. 433; McKelway, p. 169-170; Sanders J. No Other Name. – Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. – P. 157-159.

mediator between God and man.²⁰²⁷ Thomas Aquinas thought that people who lived before Christ's birth "could be saved only if they had some sort of vague knowledge of God's desire to save them."²⁰²⁸

During the Reformation, the Church returned to the biblical conception of faith as personal trust in the Lord. In the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon defined faith as "confidence in God and in the fulfillment of His promises."²⁰²⁹ Nonetheless, the Reformers did not deny that faith has a rational element in the sense of accepting Christian doctrine. Calvin comments here,

We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.7).

Nevertheless, the Reformers stressed the personal application of Christian doctrine, especially regarding justification before God through the redemptive sacrifice of the Son of God. One of the main maxims of the Reformation was "only faith," which means that one is justified before God only on the basis of faith and not good works. Persons must determine for themselves whom they will trust for eternal life: themselves or Christ. Luther states, "I can, therefore, not put my trust in both of them, but one must be expelled – either Christ or my own activity."²⁰³⁰

Unlike Catholic teaching, faith is not identified as some type of good work that gains merit before God, i.e., faith does not make one worthy of inheriting the kingdom of God. Faith is compared with an outstretched hand that receives the free gift of eternal life, provided by Christ. Bromiley well summarizes the Protestant understanding of faith: "The heart of it all is that faith is no mere acceptance of facts and doctrines. It is trust in Christ and His accomplished work as the only but all-sufficient ground of salvation."²⁰³¹

Protestants differ, however, in their understanding of the relationship between faith and works. Many retain the principle of the Reformation that good works are the natural expression of saving faith, but do not themselves lead to justification.²⁰³² In particular, Luther compared the relationship of faith and works to the relationship of flame and heat/light. They inseparably accompany one another. Calvin and Melanchthon, however, took a position closer to Catholicism – faith is completed by works.²⁰³³

In line with his doctrine of predestination, Calvin emphasized that faith is God's gift. In other words, people are not able to believe unless God grants them the gift of faith. This contrasts with the Arminian position that with the aid of God's "prevenient grace," which is available to all, people themselves are capable of acting in faith.

Moreover, concerning the relationship between faith and reason, the latter comes into play in the interpretation of God's revelation, which is accepted by faith. Oden communicates Wesley's thought, "Faith does not despise reason, but presents those evidences for revelation in history that are understandable to reason."²⁰³⁴

3. Some Modern Views

Having investigated the development in the Early and Medieval Church of its understanding of faith, we conclude this analysis by looking at several more modern views on faith, namely, further developments in the

²⁰²⁷Sanders, p. 159.

²⁰²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 157.

²⁰²⁹Hellwig, p. 15.

²⁰³⁰McKelway, p. 172.

²⁰³¹Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272.

²⁰³²Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272; Packer, p. 433.

²⁰³³McKelway, p. 171-181.

²⁰³⁴Oden, p. 400.

Catholic view since the Middle Ages, the liberal understanding of faith, and the contemporary “Word of Faith” movement.

a. Catholicism

In the sixteenth century and in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent was convened, where Protestant doctrine was condemned. The following excerpts make clear the Catholic insistence on good works as necessary for salvation.²⁰³⁵

Faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites man perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of his body. For which reason it is most truly said that faith without works is dead and of no profit.

If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except him who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema.

Moreover, Catholics draw a distinction between so-called “explicit faith” and “implicit faith.” The former is when persons understand and consciously accept Catholic teaching as their personal faith. The latter, though, is when persons know only the rudimentary elements of Catholic doctrine and beyond that, they simply affirm all that the Roman church teaches. Both types of faith are considered sufficient to receive God’s grace.²⁰³⁶

Dulles offers a comparison of the latest Catholic councils on their view of faith.²⁰³⁷ Trent, as noted above, emphasized the role of faith in justification. The First Vatican Council dealt more with the relationship of faith and reason. The Second Vatican Council discussed the question of personal faith (i.e., trust), the fruit of faith, and ecumenism.

For example, the First Vatican Council defined faith as a virtue, which, with the aid of grace, aids in receiving “what God has revealed as true,” and “as the stable disposition to perform acts of faith.”²⁰³⁸ At the Second Vatican Council, faith was considered an act of obedience, i.e., “the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals... and freely assenting to the revelation given by him.”²⁰³⁹ We must also take into consideration that according to the Catholic understanding of revelation, Scripture can only be interpreted in the light of church tradition and the determinations of the church hierarchy.

At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic hierarchy was ready to speak of faith more in terms of personal trust, which was the Reformation emphasis. This is certainly a step in the right direction, since faith is more than accepting doctrine, but includes personal trust in God’s revelation. Nevertheless, in spite of this advance in the Catholic understanding, Trent still rejects the Protestant position.

Finally, Dulles lists five qualities of faith advanced by the Catholic Church. First, faith is supernatural, i.e., it joins with grace to enable good deeds. Second, it is free. With the aid of grace, it enables one to make free choices. Third, it can produce confidence, since the object of our faith is reliable. Fourth, faith does not always

²⁰³⁵Quotation from Hellwig, p. 17.

²⁰³⁶Packer, p. 433; Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272.

²⁰³⁷Dulles A. *The Systematic Theology of Faith: A Catholic Perspective* // Lee J. M. *Handbook of Faith*. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 142-164.

²⁰³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

²⁰³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 144.

have to understand – it can accept certain things as mystery. Finally, faith can be reinforced by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit or by reason or sense perception.

b. Liberalism

Not all Protestants remained in the spirit of the Reformation. Some deviated in the direction of liberalism. Liberals understand faith in various ways, and their views often diverge from the biblical norm. We will investigate a few.²⁰⁴⁰

Albrecht Ritschl equated faith with morals and understood it in terms of devotion to God and obedience. He viewed faith as a “fixed resolve to follow Christ’s teaching.”²⁰⁴¹ Adolf Harnack shared this view. However, as we have shown earlier, we should not equate faith with works. Faith and works are not identical, but works are the *expression* of genuine faith. The essence of faith is trust.

The main thrust in liberal theology is stressing the subjective side of faith (the fact that someone believes in *something*) at the expense of a definite object of faith (*what* a person should believe in). In other words, liberals acknowledge the idea of faith as trust, but fail to recognize that faith must also have an object and a basis.²⁰⁴² Bromiley makes this criticism:

The main trend has been toward a subjectivizing of faith, as though it were simply a human psychological factor which in some form accomplishes of itself a right relationship with God and the world.²⁰⁴³

A figure widely known for his subjectivizing of faith is Friedrich Schleiermacher, who understood faith as an inner feeling of dependence on God. We can include Rudolf Bultmann in this discussion. He sees faith as an existential human experience without need for a concrete object of faith. It matters little to him whether Jesus even existed or not. What is important is that a person existentially experiences God. Again, Bromiley offers a refutation:

Not only is faith psychologized, it is completely divorced from any historically objective content (the message that evokes faith is also existential), so that faith in Christ is no longer real faith in the real person who has accomplished real work and who comes to us through the real Spirit in a real encounter.²⁰⁴⁴

On the other hand, in reaction to the radical stand of some liberals, a relatively new movement called “neorthodoxy,” headed by Karl Barth, emphasizes the divine factor. Faith is not a psychological condition or a feeling of dependence on the Lord, but a response to divine revelation. The weakness of this movement, though, is that God’s revelation is thought not to come in written form, as through the Bible, but through a personal spiritual encounter with God.

Paul Tillich presents us with a unique approach to the question of faith.²⁰⁴⁵ In brief, for Tillich, “Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man’s ultimate concern.”²⁰⁴⁶

²⁰⁴⁰Bromiley, v. 2, p. 272-273; Hellwig, p. 3-23; Packer, p. 433; McKelway, p. 189-196.

²⁰⁴¹In Packer’s words, p. 433.

²⁰⁴²In McKelway’s opinion, liberals share common ground with some early Protestant movements, namely the Pietists and early Methodists, who laid stress on the importance of personal faith and personal experience with God. The Quakers also promoted a more mystical fellowship with the Lord (McKelway, p. 184-186).

²⁰⁴³Bromiley, v. 2, p. 273.

²⁰⁴⁴Bromiley, v. 2, p. 273.

²⁰⁴⁵Tillich P. Dynamics of Faith. – New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1957. – 127 p.

²⁰⁴⁶Ibid., p. 1.

This occurs when persons are devoted to that which has ultimate meaning or importance. To devote oneself to anything besides the ultimate is idolatry. Tillich feels that all religions symbolically represent the “ultimate.” Yet, not one of them fully corresponds to it. Therefore, our devotion is to a “mystery.” We can never know for certain whether or not we are actually devoted to the “ultimate.” This doubt is unavoidable, though, since no one can precisely define this “ultimate.”

Tillich’s system is fraught with weaknesses. First, faith lacks the element of “trust.” For Tillich, faith’s essence lies in human devotion. His system is simply another form of moralism. Second, although he correctly observes that a comprehensive knowledge of God’s nature is unattainable and that there will always be an element of mystery in our faith, nevertheless, we have sufficient revelation of God’s nature to distinguish true from false religions. It is misguided to place Christianity on the same level with other so-called “paths” to God.

c. Word of Faith Movement

At the close of the twentieth century, a new movement arose in the Church, which has its roots in the Pentecostal Movement, called the Word of Faith Movement. Its founder was Kenneth E. Hagin. Other prominent voices include Kenneth Copeland, T. L. Osborn, Charles Capps, and others.

The key Scriptural text in this movement is Mark 11:23-24:

Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be {granted} him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be {granted} you.

When persons ask God for something, they must accept the answer to that prayer by faith before they actually see it. From the moment that someone receives the answer by faith, that person already possesses it (in a spiritual sense) and must wait until the thing requested appears in experience. Charles Capps asserts that if you have faith, then you have the *essence* of the thing you desire, but you do not yet have it physically.²⁰⁴⁷ In the words of Kenneth E. Hagin, “*Faith is grasping the unrealities of hope and bringing them into the realm of reality.*”²⁰⁴⁸ He also claims, “Too many want to get it first and then they will believe they have it. But Jesus said that you have to believe you’ve got it, and then you will have it.”²⁰⁴⁹

Hebrews 11:1 confirms this understanding of faith: “Now faith is the assurance of {things} hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Again, we see that faith precedes sight. Abraham is a classic example, who believed in the unseen promise of God (Rom 4:19-21).

Romans 4 underscores an important point – faith must be based on a concrete promise from the Lord, i.e., on the Word of God, the Bible. Faith begins with the Word: “So faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). God’s will is defined by His Word. The Scriptures declare to us all that God has given us in Christ. Our part is to acquire these blessings by faith. Capps states that since Jesus already made provision for us, all that we need already belongs to us – it is only a matter of receiving what God has already given.²⁰⁵⁰

Returning to Mark 11:23-24, we notice that a person must not doubt that the answer will come. Hagin teaches, “Constantly affirm, even in the face of contradictory evidence, that God has heard your prayer because the Word says so.”²⁰⁵¹ Unlike “Christian Science,” however, Word of Faith proponents do not deny the existence of evil or problems, but claim that the Word of God speaks of greater realities.

²⁰⁴⁷Capps C. How to Have Faith in Your Faith. – Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 1986. – P. 8.

²⁰⁴⁸Hagin K. Exceedingly Growing Faith. – Broken Arrow, OK: Rhema Bible Church, 1983. – P. 13.

²⁰⁴⁹Ibid., p. 50.

²⁰⁵⁰Capps, p. 14.

²⁰⁵¹Hagin, p. 23.

Moreover, according to Christ's words in Mark 11:23 persons must both believe with their hearts and confess verbally that they have received the answer to prayer from the Lord. It is thought that faith is expressed in words, and that words contain power to actualize the thing declared. Capps believes that our words give either God or the devil authority to act.²⁰⁵²

It is also claimed that faith can act, in a sense, independent from God. Adherents cite the case of the woman with chronic hemorrhage who touched the garment of Jesus, and God's power was released for her healing (Mk 5:25-34). Jesus did not say to her, "I have healed you," but "Your faith has made you well."²⁰⁵³

Finally, it is thought that several factors can hinder the effect of faith, namely, persistence in sin, feelings of guilt, unforgiveness of others, and lack of charity.

We note both strong and weak points in this teaching. On the positive side, we affirm with Word of Faith adherents that the essence of faith is trust. Moreover, unlike the liberal view of trust, in this system faith is based on concrete promises in God's Word. In addition, one must persevere in faith, holding fast to God's promises until they find fulfillment. Finally, faith must find expression in verbal confession or in some other external act. So then, this system preserves all of the elements of faith ascribed to it in the Bible.

On the other hand, we challenge the assertions that words have in themselves power to accomplish the thing spoken, and that faith can work independent from God. In order to avoid crossing boundaries into the realm of magical incantations, it is better to assert that words only express faith, and that faith does not release power mechanically, but God responds to faith by manifesting His might.

Some criticize the Word of Faith movement that it expects too much from God in this life. Yet, this question does not address the issue of faith, but the issue of faith's goal. The Word of Faith movement properly delineates the nature of faith. Which items we can believe God for in this life, however, should be discussed separately.

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²⁰⁵²Capps, p. 25.

²⁰⁵³Hagin, p. 5.

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Chapter 21: The Role of Sacraments in Salvation

The word “sacrament” refers to ordinances practiced in Christianity, which, in the opinion of some, communicate grace to the participants, while others feel that they simply symbolize that grace. The issue of communicating grace is actually the most essential and debated question for our understanding of sacraments. All Christian confessions agree that God sent His Son as Savior of the world. Disagreements, however, arise as to how that salvation is communicated to God’s people and the need for sacraments in that regard.

We can delineate several opinions among Christians on the question of the impartation of God’s grace. Some, as noted above, propose that sacraments themselves are God’s channel of the grace of Christ, while others feel that personal faith in the gospel is all that is necessary. Still others teach that grace can come to us through both channels: sacraments and gospel preaching.²⁰⁵⁴

In this chapter, we will describe and evaluate the attitude toward sacraments in major Christian movements, namely in Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, among the followers of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, and among the Quakers. We undertake a more detailed study on the primary sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in subsequent chapters.

A. Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Sacraments

Clark shares the following observation about the “pre-history” of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper: “Christ did not create the sacraments entirely *de novo*, but rather took existing rites and practices and creatively transformed them.”²⁰⁵⁵ In other words, water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are derived from the Old Testament practices of circumcision and Passover.

Wallace relates that in the first-century Church, water baptism and the Lord’s Supper were closely connected with the *kerygma*, that is, the preaching of the gospel.²⁰⁵⁶ They served as visible representations of what was preached in the *kerygma*. For those who observed these ordinances, the message of the *kerygma* became living.

In their original meaning, these ordinances connoted “the re-presentation of Christ as the fulfillment of God’s renewing and restoring purpose.”²⁰⁵⁷ Wallace comments, “These sacraments derive their force and meaning only from the reconciliation that Christ, the true sacrament, achieved once and for all in His own person and work.”²⁰⁵⁸

In time, the idea developed that these ordinances were comparable to the Incarnation of God’s Son, i.e., the Word who became flesh. In other words, the ordinances of the Church were considered an “incarnation” of God’s grace. They were part and parcel of the “mystery of Christ,” which was expressed by Paul in the words “(God) was revealed in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16). Therefore, these rituals became known as “mysteries” or “sacraments.”²⁰⁵⁹ This association of church ordinances with the incarnation led to the conviction that they contain God’s grace and communicate it to their recipients.

Bornkamm advances the thesis that this alteration in the Church’s understanding of sacraments is rooted in the Greek “mystery religions,” which were widespread at that time. According to the “mysteries,” through

²⁰⁵⁴Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 441ff.

²⁰⁵⁵Clark N. *An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments*. – London: SCM Press, 1956. – P. 74.

²⁰⁵⁶Wallace R. S. *Sacrament* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 1047; Wallace R. S., Bromiley G. W. *Sacraments* // *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. – V. 4. – P. 256-258.

²⁰⁵⁷Wallace, Bromiley, *Sacraments*, v. 4, p. 257.

²⁰⁵⁸*Ibid.*

²⁰⁵⁹*Ibid.*, v. 4, p. 256.

participation in certain rituals, mysterious, supernatural power flows to people, deifying them and bestowing on them immortality.²⁰⁶⁰

Gavin perceives some aspects of sacramental theology in Old Testament faith, which abounds in ritual worship of Yahweh.²⁰⁶¹ Yet, there was no understanding of any impartation of grace through them.

Moreover, in distinction from the contemporary understanding of sacraments, the Early Church considered any “sacred” act of God or His people to be a sacrament. They placed emphasis not on the physical items employed in the ritual, but on the action performed. For them, “*The sacraments are actions, not things*. They are actions, which the assembly performs, not ‘things’ that we ‘receive.’”²⁰⁶² However, later in church history, the Church began to understand sacraments not so much as an action, but as a thing that communicates grace.²⁰⁶³ Due to this change in perception, grace began to be understood as a substance infused into the soul of those who participate in the sacraments.²⁰⁶⁴

Augustine defined sacraments as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”²⁰⁶⁵ Wallace comments that due to that understanding, people began to think of sacraments not in their original sense in connection with the person of Christ, but as objects that communicate grace in and of themselves.²⁰⁶⁶

Augustine also promoted the concept *ex opere operato*, which means that sacraments operate autonomously, independent of the spiritual state of the one performing them. This history dates back to the Donatist controversy. At that time, the question arose as to whether sacraments were valid if they were performed by a bishop who compromised his faith during persecution. Augustine defended the position that such sacraments are indeed valid according to the principle of *ex opere operato* (see *On Baptism*, 4.16-18).²⁰⁶⁷

So then, according to Augustine, the validity of sacraments does not depend on the worthiness of the minister, but on the worthiness of the one who instituted them, i.e., God.²⁰⁶⁸ Lane comments, “The sacraments remain valid even when administered by an unholy minister because it is *Christ* who gives the sacrament.”²⁰⁶⁹ Augustine felt that sacraments performed outside of the Catholic Church are also valid (that is, they do not need to be repeated). Yet, they become effective (i.e., able to impart grace) only when the recipient returns to the fellowship of the Catholic Church.²⁰⁷⁰ In the West, the doctrine of *ex opere operato* was officially endorsed by the Council of Trent.²⁰⁷¹

At various times in church history, between five and thirty sacraments were recognized. Hugh of Saint Victor, for example, included among the sacraments: holy water, vessels used in the liturgy, liturgical garments, and the dedication of a house of worship. Augustine included: the kiss of peace, blessed salt, the confession of faith, the Lord’s prayer, and ashes for repentance.²⁰⁷² However, Wallace notes that although the Church Fathers recognized a variety of sacraments, they always gave pride of place to the ones Jesus Himself established: water baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²⁰⁷³

²⁰⁶⁰Bornkamm H. *Luther's World of Thought* (electronic ed.). – St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000. – P. 139-140.

²⁰⁶¹Gavin F. *The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments*. – New York, NY: KTAV Publishing, 1969. – 114 p.

²⁰⁶²Guzie T. *The Book of Sacramental Basics*. – New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981. – P. 31-32.

²⁰⁶³Guzie, p. 39.

²⁰⁶⁴Wallace, Bromiley, *Sacraments*, v. 4, p. 257.

²⁰⁶⁵Clark, p. 71.

²⁰⁶⁶Wallace, Bromiley, *Sacraments*, v. 4, p. 257.

²⁰⁶⁷McGrath A. E. *Historical Theology*. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. – P. 76ff.

²⁰⁶⁸McGrath A. *Christian Theology*. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 425.

²⁰⁶⁹Lane, T. *A Concise History of Christian Thought*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 49-50.

²⁰⁷⁰*Ibid*.

²⁰⁷¹McKim D. K. *Ex Opere Operato* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 427.

²⁰⁷²Guzie, p. 39-40.

²⁰⁷³Wallace, Bromiley, *Sacraments*, v. 4, p. 257.

The first mention of seven sacraments appears in the writings of Peter Lombard in the twelfth century and by Michael Palaiologos in thirteenth.²⁰⁷⁴ In the West, the seven sacraments were officially adopted in 1439.²⁰⁷⁵ Guzie makes this comment:

The numbering of the seven sacraments did not come out of reflection on biblical data or the life of the early church. It came from the actual liturgical practice of the medieval church and observation of what was universal in practice, with some influence from the fitting symbolism of the number seven.²⁰⁷⁶

It is also interesting how the timing of sacraments altered.²⁰⁷⁷ In the Early Church, candidates received water baptism and confirmation (or chrismation) at the same time. However, since the bishop, who must officiate at the confirmation ceremony, could not attend every baptismal service, the Western Church separated these rites. In the East, though, they are still observed together. The West began using the designation “confirmation” in the fifth century.

Another important fact from history is the debate between Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. Scotus taught that when sacraments are performed, God directly acts in the heart of the participant and applies His grace. Aquinas believed that God infuses the element itself with grace. The Catholic Church adopted Aquinas’ view.²⁰⁷⁸

B. Catholic View

The twelfth-century teacher Hugh of Saint Victor expresses the Catholic view of sacraments in the following statement: “A sacrament is a physical or material element set before the external senses, representing by likeness, signifying by its institution, and containing by sanctification, some invisible and spiritual grace.”²⁰⁷⁹

Let us clarify this teaching. A sacrament is a physical object or a physical action that is required for transmission of the grace from God that it pictorially represents. In Hugh’s definition, the phrase “representing by likeness” means that the physical properties of the object or action correspond to that which it represents. For example, wine is similar to blood, and bread is similar to the body, etc. Yet, the correspondence is more than symbolic – the sacrament actually contains and communicates this grace.²⁰⁸⁰

The sacrament’s effectiveness is due not only to the presence of grace within it, but also because Christ personally accomplishes the sacrament: “They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.”²⁰⁸¹ Here we see an acknowledgement of both Duns Scotus’ and Aquinas’ view.

A key element in the Catholic teaching on sacraments is their understanding of the idea of a “symbol.” For Catholics, a sacrament is a symbol that directly connects the worshiper with spiritual realities.²⁰⁸² Guzie defends this view: “A symbol is its own reality, and *in* its own reality it leads us into the profound mystery which it signifies.”²⁰⁸³

²⁰⁷⁴Иларион А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – Р. 144.

²⁰⁷⁵*Ibid.*

²⁰⁷⁶Guzie, p. 42.

²⁰⁷⁷Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic Theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 348-353.

²⁰⁷⁸Noted in Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 243.

²⁰⁷⁹McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 421.

²⁰⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 421-422.

²⁰⁸¹Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1127. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

²⁰⁸²Hill, p. 281-282.

²⁰⁸³Guzie, p. 50.

An ordained priest is authorized to perform the sacraments. He receives this authority from the bishop, who, in turn, is authorized by the pope. The pope, it is presumed, receives his authority from the apostles through the process of “apostolic succession.” The apostles, in turn, received their authority from Christ:

The ordained ministry or ministerial priesthood is at the service of the baptismal priesthood. The ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church. The saving mission entrusted by the Father to his incarnate Son was committed to the apostles and through them to their successors: they receive the Spirit of Jesus to act in his name and in his person.²⁰⁸⁴

The Catholic understanding of sacraments operates off the principle of *ex opere operato*. As previously explained, this Latin expression means that the sacraments are intrinsically able to pass on grace themselves. All that is necessary for a sacrament to accomplish its work of grace is the blessing of a priest who stands in the line of apostolic succession. The spiritual condition of the officiating priest has no effect on the communication of grace through the ritual.²⁰⁸⁵

In regard to the role of the participants in the sacramental rite, the traditional positions claims that according to the principle of *ex opere operato*, participants are guaranteed that physical participation in the sacrament secures the impartation of grace, except in cases where participants are guilty of a mortal sin.²⁰⁸⁶ Still, the Catechism of the Catholic Church qualifies, “The fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.”²⁰⁸⁷ The Council of Trent stipulated the need for a “minimal disposition” of the heart, but did not specify what that involves.²⁰⁸⁸ One must also consider that a person’s readiness to partake of a sacrament already indicates a positive heart’s attitude.²⁰⁸⁹

Also interesting is the Catholic’s view on the relationship between sacraments and faith. On the one hand, they claim that hearing the Word and believing prepares an individual to receive God’s grace that is offered in the sacraments: “The sacraments are sacraments of faith, drawing their origin and nourishment from the Word.”²⁰⁹⁰ In return, participation in the sacraments strengthens faith. On the other hand, “The Church’s faith precedes the faith of the believer who is invited to adhere to it.”²⁰⁹¹ This means that sacraments can aid recipients even without their exercising personal faith because the Church may exercise its faith on their behalf.

It is important to note that according to Catholic teaching, participation in the sacraments (in particular, baptism and the Eucharist) is necessary for salvation.²⁰⁹² The Council of Trent pronounced anathema on those who rejected this dogma.²⁰⁹³

The seven sacraments of the Roman Church are as follows:²⁰⁹⁴

1. Water baptism
2. Eucharist, i.e., the Lord’s Supper
3. Confirmation, by which an individual receives the power of the Holy Spirit for Christian life and service

²⁰⁸⁴Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1120.

²⁰⁸⁵Berkhof, p. 243-244.

²⁰⁸⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁸⁷Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1128.

²⁰⁸⁸Guzie, p. 54.

²⁰⁸⁹Berkouwer G. C. The Sacraments. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969. – P. 69.

²⁰⁹⁰Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1122.

²⁰⁹¹Ibid., № 1124.

²⁰⁹²Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1129; Guzie, p. 44.

²⁰⁹³Ankerberg J., Weldon J. Protestants and Catholics: Do They Now Agree? – Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub., 1995 – P. 72.

²⁰⁹⁴Berkhof, p. 243; Иларион, p. 144.

4. Penance, by which sins are forgiven
5. Holy Orders, i.e., ordination to ministry
6. Matrimony
7. Last Rights, or Reconciliation, which originally was a prayer for physical healing, but now is a sacrament to prepare for death

Catholics divide them into three groupings:²⁰⁹⁵

1. The Sacraments of Christian Initiation (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist);
2. The Sacraments of Healing (penance, reconciliation);
3. The Sacraments at the Service of Communion (holy orders, matrimony).

Three sacraments not only impart grace, but also leave an indelible spiritual mark on the soul: baptism, confirmation, and holy orders. Therefore, these sacraments cannot be repeated.²⁰⁹⁶ One can lose the grace of baptism through mortal sin, but it can be restored after confession. Confirmation and reconciliation strengthen the grace received at baptism.²⁰⁹⁷

In order for sacraments to be valid, they must have “sanction,” which means that they must be instituted by God.²⁰⁹⁸ Contrary to the Protestant claim that the only true sacraments are those instituted personally by Christ, namely, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, Catholicism asserts that the Church, as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, has the right to establish sacraments. Nevertheless, Catholics seek biblical sanction for all seven sacraments as well. For example, it is thought that the sanction for the sacrament of matrimony is given in John chapter 2, and for penance and holy orders in John chapter 20.²⁰⁹⁹ The Church itself is considered a sacrament in the sense that it is an expression of Christ and His work in the world.²¹⁰⁰

In addition, Catholicism sees a certain symmetry in the seven sacraments, since they cover the entire spectrum of a person’s life from birth to death: “The sacraments are the seven mouths into which the stream of divine life of grace, which has its spring in the cross of Christ, empties itself into the wilderness of human existence.”²¹⁰¹

What eventually became the sacrament of penance started with the practice, begun in the second century, of placing individuals who had committed serious sins under church discipline for a period of three years after confession before a bishop. (From the sixth century, the Church allowed private repentance after confession instead). In time, the concept of penance developed, where repentant persons must perform some act in connection with their repentance in order to “redeem” their transgression. Horton suggests that this practice found justification through an incorrect translation in the Vulgate of the Greek term *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*), i.e., “repentance,” with the Latin expression *poenitentium agite*, i.e., “perform redemption.”²¹⁰² In connection with this, the practice of indulgences also arose, where persons could give money to redeem their sins.

Starting in the 1970’s, emphasis was placed more on reconciliation with God and others than on listing personal sins committed. This sacrament of penance can be performed by a personal interview with a priest, or

²⁰⁹⁵Catechism of the Catholic Church

²⁰⁹⁶*Ibid.*, № 1121.

²⁰⁹⁷Berkouwer, p. 32-34.

²⁰⁹⁸McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 422.

²⁰⁹⁹Guzie, p. 41.

²¹⁰⁰Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1114-1118.

²¹⁰¹From E. Bizer, *Das Christusgeheimnis der Sakramente*, p. 16; in Berkouwer, p. 30.

²¹⁰²Horton M. S. *Traditional Reformed View* // Beilby J. K., Eddy P. R., Enderlein S. E. *Justification: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2011. Kindle edition, 881-882.

during a church service devoted to this theme.²¹⁰³ What is sought is not obtaining forgiveness, but accepting the forgiveness already offered by the Lord.²¹⁰⁴

Changes also occurred in the practice of “Last Rights,” now called “Reconciliation.” There is movement toward its original significance as a prayer for physical healing through anointing with oil.²¹⁰⁵

Besides the sacraments, Catholicism acknowledges so-called “sacramentals.” Examples include laying on of hands, sprinkling with holy water, the sign of the cross, various blessings, exorcism, and others. Sacramentals do not impart grace, but “by them men are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments.”²¹⁰⁶

Along with sacraments and sacramentals, the Catholic Church also recognizes some elements of popular piety. These latter practices occupy a lower level of sanctity than the former. They may include veneration of relics, visits to sanctuaries, pilgrimages, processions, the stations of the cross, religious dances, the rosary, medals, etc.²¹⁰⁷ The church hierarchy evaluates practices of popular piety to determine their appropriateness for sanction by the Church.

C. Eastern Orthodox View

From an Orthodox perspective, Demetrakopoulos defines sacraments as follows: “(Sacraments) consist of ceremonies, words, and material things and they produce an invisible action by the Holy Spirit.”²¹⁰⁸

Meyendorff offers the following, more detailed definition:

These sacraments are understood less as isolated acts through which a “particular” grace is bestowed upon individuals by properly appointed ministers acting with the proper intention, and more as the aspects of a unique mystery of the Church, in which God shares divine life with humanity, redeeming man from sin and death and bestowing upon him the glory of immortality.²¹⁰⁹

Orthodox theology shares with Catholicism many convictions about the nature of sacraments. In particular, Orthodoxy teaches that through partaking in the sacraments, God’s grace is imparted to the participant.

Metropolitan Ilarion writes, “In sacraments, God’s grace descends on us and sanctifies our being – both soul and flesh – communicating to it God’s nature, which animates, enriches, and edifies for eternal life.”²¹¹⁰

According to Mantzaridis, “The sacraments are created media which transmit the uncreated grace of God.”²¹¹¹

The Orthodox and Catholic also share a common understanding of a “symbol.” They both believe that the symbols used in sacraments not only represent the realities of redemption, but also have an ontological connection with them.²¹¹²

The Orthodox also acknowledge the same seven sacraments, although for many years they refrained from setting a specific number. Meyendorff comments here, “Byzantine theology ignores the Western distinction between ‘sacraments’ and ‘sacramentals.’ And never formally committed itself to any strict limitation of the

²¹⁰³Hill, p. 356-358.

²¹⁰⁴Guzie, p. 87.

²¹⁰⁵Hill, p. 359.

²¹⁰⁶Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1667.

²¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, № 1674.

²¹⁰⁸Demetrakopoulos G. H. Dictionary of Orthodox Theology. – New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1964. – P. 156.

²¹⁰⁹Meyendorff J. Byzantine Theology. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 191.

²¹¹⁰Иларион, p. 143. Author’s translation.

²¹¹¹Mantzaridis G. I. The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 41.

²¹¹²Burgess S. M. The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1989. – P. 178. Paul Tillich held to a similar view on the meaning of symbols (Thomas J. H. Paul Tillich // Nineham D. E. Robertson E. H. Makers of Contemporary Theology. – Richmond VA: John Knox, 1965. – P. 29).

number of sacraments.”²¹¹³ In 1267, though, Pope Clement IV required the emperor Michael Palaiologos accept the seven sacraments. From that time, Orthodoxy recognizes seven sacraments, especially due to the symbolic importance of the number seven.²¹¹⁴

The distinguishing mark of Orthodoxy, however, is the conviction that sacraments communicate grace for the deification of believers.²¹¹⁵ According to patristic theology, God became human so that humans could become god. The key element in this process of deification is participation in the sacraments, which impart deifying grace.²¹¹⁶ Archimandrite Nikon states, “Deification is accomplished in the Church by the Holy Spirit. The most powerful means for deification are the sacraments of the church.”²¹¹⁷ Quoting Lossky, Nikon writes, “We must feed on God – Lossky states – in order to attain deification.”²¹¹⁸

In connection with the above, we should add that this grace, which supposedly is transmitted through sacraments, is identified with God’s so-called “uncreated energies.” In chapter 1 of volume 3 in this series, we discuss in detail the Orthodox teaching about God’s “essence” and “energies.” The latter are equated with God’s actions and manifestations, yet they are still God Himself in one of the two “modes” of His existence. Since deification consists in the assimilation of God’s uncreated energies into human nature, it is necessary to “ingest” these energies by partaking of the sacraments in order to progress in this process.²¹¹⁹

Demetrakopoulos provides the following resume of the Orthodox sacraments.²¹²⁰

1. “In Baptism man is born again and made a member of the Church.”
2. “In Chrismation he receives the strength and Gifts of the Holy Spirit for his growth in holiness and perfection.”
3. “In the Holy Eucharist he is fed the bread and wine by which the life of the soul is maintained.”
4. “In confession he cleanses away all since committed after baptism.”
5. “Matrimony is the Sacrament to sanctify the union of man and woman.”
6. “Ordination is the Sacrament which was instituted that the Church might be ruled by those whom God set over her to lead, guide and bless the faithful.”
7. Holy Unction was instituted for the healing of physical and spiritual sickness.”

Along with Catholicism, Orthodoxy holds that three sacraments leave an “indelible mark” on the soul, and therefore cannot be repeated: baptism, chrismation, and ordination. The Catholics and Orthodox also agree that only priests ordained in the line of apostolic succession are authorized to perform the sacraments.

In conclusion, we will comment on the Orthodox practice of confession and Holy Unction.²¹²¹ Since Orthodox faith minimizes the forensic character of sin, they place less stress on a formal remission of sins: “For this reason, confession and penance, at least ideally, preserved the character of liberation and healing rather than that of judgment.”²¹²²

The Orthodox nevertheless practice the sacrament of confession. Meyendorff describes the historical process of this sacrament’s development:

²¹¹³Meyendorff, p. 191.

²¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 191-192.

²¹¹⁵Зайцев Евгений. Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе. – М.: Библейско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – Р. 75.

²¹¹⁶A thorough treatment of the doctrine of theosis (deification) is found in chapter 7 of this volume.

²¹¹⁷Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрита Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – М.: Сибирская Благозвонница, 2004. – Р. 64. Author’s translation.

²¹¹⁸From Лосского, *Догматическое богословие*, p. 248, in *Слове об обожении*, p. 186. Author’s translation.

²¹¹⁹Слово об обожении, p. 184.

²¹²⁰Demetrakopoulos G. H. *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*. – New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1964. – P. 156-157.

²¹²¹Meyendorff, p. 195-199.

²¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 196.

By the fifteenth century, however, private confessions to a priest, followed by a prayer of remission, was a generally accepted practice among laymen, with confession to lay monks existing as an alternative in monasteries.”²¹²³

Regarding Holy Unction, even though this sacrament was instituted for physical healing, accent has shifted to spiritual restoration:

Healing is requested only in a framework of repentance and spiritual salvation, and not as an end in itself. Whatever the outcome of the disease, the anointing symbolized divine pardon and liberation from the vicious cycle of sin, suffering, and death, in which fallen humanity is held captive.²¹²⁴

D. Lutheran View

We observe a marked similarity between the Lutheran and Catholic views of sacraments. Both confessions hold that they are a physical object or action “representing by likeness” the thing symbolized, by participation in which grace is transmitted. Consequently, sacraments contain in themselves grace and are able to impart it to those who partake of them.

In addition, sacraments require sanction, that is, some indication that God has instituted them. Lutherans insist that sanction is found only in God’s Word, the Bible. The Church has no right to institute sacraments without direct reference to them in Holy Scripture. Therefore, Lutheran faith limits the number of sacraments to two: water baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²¹²⁵ Luther originally designated penance as a sacrament as well, but later clarified, “It has seemed right to restrict the name of sacrament to those promises of God which have signs attached to them,” i.e., baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²¹²⁶

In accordance with Catholic and Orthodox doctrine, Lutherans also teach that grace is imparted through physical participation in the sacrament. Contrary to the Catholic dogma *ex opere operato*, Lutherans feel that partakers in the sacraments must exercise personal faith to receive benefit from them. Sacraments, in turn, strengthen the faith of the partakers.²¹²⁷ The Augsburg confession declares the importance of faith:²¹²⁸

Of the Use of the Sacraments they teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but rather to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Wherefore we must so use the Sacraments that faith be added to believe the promises which are offered and set forth through the Sacraments. They therefore condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify by the outward act, and who do not teach that, in the use of the Sacraments, faith which believes that sins are forgiven, is required (*Article 13*).

Lutherans compare Christian sacraments with so-called “Old Testament sacraments.” They propose that the Old Testament people of God also observed two sacraments: circumcision and Passover, which, in essence, correspond to the Christian sacraments of water baptism and the Lord’s Supper.²¹²⁹

²¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 196.

²¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 199.

²¹²⁵Mueller, p. 444.

²¹²⁶McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 423.

²¹²⁷Berkhof, p. 245-247; McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 427-428.

²¹²⁸https://www.concordianc.org/uploads/files/Augsburg_Confession.pdf

²¹²⁹Mueller, p. 466.

E. Reformed View

The Reformed view of sacraments is well represented by the phrase “signs and seals of salvation.” The term “sign” means that sacraments serve as visible and public signs of that which people receive spiritually by faith from God. “Seal” refers to the conviction that partaking of the sacraments strengthens the faith of the participants.

So then, through the sacraments participants do indeed obtain grace since there exists a “conjunction between sign and that which is signified.”²¹³⁰ However, we must qualify that grace come not through physical contact with the elements, but rather by means of the action of the Holy Spirit upon the participant.²¹³¹ God employs the figure of sacraments as a condescension to human weakness.²¹³²

According to Reformed teaching, sacraments are linked to God’s promises in Scripture and derive their effect from them: “The signs become sacraments only by virtue of the Word of God,” “The integrity of the sacrament is immediately dependent upon its relation to the Word of promise.”²¹³³ In addition, faith is essential for sacraments to have effect. This conviction, though, is complicated by the Reformed practice of baptizing infants. We will address the issue of infant baptism in a later chapter.

The Reformed theologian John Murray describes what is meant by a sacrament as a “sign” of salvation:

“(God) not only unites His people to Christ but He also advertises that great truth by an ordinance which portrays visibly to our senses the reality of this grace. It is a testimony which God has been pleased to give to us so that we may the better understand the high privilege of union with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²¹³⁴

Furthermore, Murray comments on the significance of sacraments as “seals” of salvation: “As a seal it authenticates, confirms, guarantees the reality and security of this covenant grace.”²¹³⁵

Wallace summarizes the general Reformed position in the following words:

(Sacraments) are thus visible words which, as adjuncts and seals of the preached word, confirm and stimulate the faith of participants. They do not take effect by their mere administration but only as God works in and through them by the Holy Spirit to bring believers into living fellowship with the incarnate, crucified, and risen Christ who is their proper substance, and as these believers receive them with the saving and justifying faith that finds its focus in Christ.²¹³⁶

Berkhof also provides a helpful summary: “As signs and seals they are means of grace, that is, means of strengthening the inward grace that is wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit.”²¹³⁷ Similar to Lutheran faith, the Reformed confessions acknowledge only two sacraments that serve as “signs and seals of salvation”: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

The Westminster Confession Faith provides the following declaration on the doctrine of the sacraments (Chapter 27):²¹³⁸

²¹³⁰Berkouwer, p. 159.

²¹³¹*Ibid.*, p. 87.

²¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 46, 76.

²¹³⁴Murray J. Christian Baptism. – Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1977. – P. 87.

²¹³⁵*Ibid.*

²¹³⁶Wallace, Bromiley, Sacraments, v. 4, p. 257.

²¹³⁷Berkhof L. Systematic Theology. – 3rd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1946. – P. 618.

²¹³⁸<https://westminsterstandards.org/westminster-confession-of-faith>.

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God to represent Christ and His benefits and to confirm our interest in Him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.
2. There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.
3. The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them; neither doth the efficacy of a sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him that doth administer it but upon the work of the Spirit and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers.
4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained.
5. The sacraments of the old testament in regard of the spiritual things thereby signified and exhibited, were, for substance, the same with those of the new.

F. Zwingli's View

The final Reformer whose view we will examine is Ulrich Zwingli. In his words, a sacrament is something that "God has instituted, commanded, and ordained with the Word, which is as firm and sure as if God had sworn an oath to this effect."²¹³⁹

Zwingli taught that sacraments were only symbols established by God for strengthening faith. They neither contain, nor transmit grace. Grace comes when the partaker's faith is inspired thought his or her participation. Sacraments are "visible sermons" that inspire faith.

Thus, Zwingli's understanding of "symbols" differs from that of Catholics or Orthodox. In Zwingli's view, a symbol has no ontological connection with the thing it symbolizes. Symbols act only on the human mind to direct thought to the thing designated and inspire faith. It is by faith that grace is received for spiritual edification.

Zwingli also felt that sacraments aided in enhancing Church unity since the entire Church participates in them. Along with other Protestant denominations, Zwingli recognized two sacraments: water baptism and the Lord's Supper.²¹⁴⁰

G. View of the Quakers

George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, advanced a unique view of sacraments in his time. Since they are mere symbols, Christians are not obligated to observe them. It is only necessary that one understands the significance of the symbol. Therefore, Quakers do not perform them in their meetings.

Wallace makes the following comment on the practice of the Quakers:

The Quakers took the extreme radical position of so focusing on the spiritual meaning that they dispensed with the external signs altogether, holding that Christ had instituted these signs only as temporary measures to enable the first believers to grasp the inner realities.²¹⁴¹

²¹³⁹McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 423.

²¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 429.

²¹⁴¹Wallace, Bromiley, *Sacraments*, v. 4, p. 258.

Quakers defend their position by citing several Scriptural texts. Romans 14:17 states, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.” In Colossians 2:16, we read the instruction, “Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink.” Quakers consider that such passages release believers from obligatory observance of sacraments. On the basis of Acts 15:29, Quakers believe that sacraments were useful during the early development of the Church, but now they are obsolete and have no value.²¹⁴²

H. Conclusions

In assessing the doctrine of sacraments, we must first consider that the word “sacrament” never appears in Scripture, nor does the concept it represents. Berkouwer agrees, “This word appears nowhere in Scripture, nor is there any mention of the sacraments in general.”²¹⁴³

The Bible does use the term *μυστήριον* (*musterion*), i.e., “mystery,” for example, in Ephesians 5:32, but “it is clear that Paul does not speak in Ephesians 5 of what we now call sacrament. The word *mysterion* is used in various contexts in the New Testament, and it certainly does not have the meaning of our ‘sacraments.’”²¹⁴⁴ The Church created the concept of “mysteries” as “sacraments.”

Therefore, we consider it mistaken to speak of “sacraments” as a special class of church ordinances that have “divine sanction” and “transmit grace.” It is more appropriate to simply speak of church ordinances specifically and separately from one another. That is, we can speak about *the biblical teaching on water baptism*, the Lord’s Supper, marriage, repentance, etc. Although some may note common features between some church ordinances, grouping them into an artificial class called “sacraments” can lead to misunderstandings and abuses, which we indeed have seen in connection with this doctrine.

Having said that, we admit that water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are central church ordinances, instituted by Christ Himself, which visually portray His redemptive work. Scripture speaks of other practices that also play an important role in the life of the Church, such as the laying on of hands (for various purposes like ordination, blessing, and healing).

Wallace summarizes the value of practicing symbolic rites:

When properly used, the sacraments discharge the same important function as biblical signs. Taking a more concrete form than the preached word, they make a wider appeal to the senses. Hence they set forth Christ and His promises with a new vividness and clarity, taking up the recipients themselves into an enactment of the word.²¹⁴⁵

In conclusion, we reject the extreme position of the Quakers, that church ordinances are without value and we need not observe them. We also consider errant the other extreme position, that sacraments contain grace within themselves that is transmitted by physical contact. We will refute this latter view in detail in subsequent chapters devoted to baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We find greatest resonance with Zwingli’s view that church ordinances are visible sermons that inspire faith in those partaking of them.

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²¹⁴²Mueller, p. 506.

²¹⁴³Berkouwer, p. 27.

²¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 27.

²¹⁴⁵Wallace, Bromiley, Sacraments, v. 4, p. 257.

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## Chapter 22: Water Baptism

Water baptism is an almost universally accepted practice among Christian denominations. Christians observe this ordinance in obedience to the command of Christ, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

Three groups exist, however, that do not practice water baptism: the Quakers, the Salvation Army, and “Ultra-Dispensationalists. We will say a few words about the first group.

The Quakers trace back to the ministry of the English minister George Fox (1624-1691), who emphasized the personal direction of the Spirit in the Christian life. Consequently, adherents of this movement refrain from formalism of every type, including church ordinances.<sup>2146</sup> In the opinion of Quakers, spiritually mature believers have no need for physical signs since these ordinances are essentially spiritual in nature.<sup>2147</sup>

We respond that water baptism was instituted by the Lord Jesus Himself, and that in New Testament times, it was strictly observed. Even the first apostles adhered to the Lord’s instruction to baptize. In addition, the physical act of water baptism, along with the Lord’s Supper, remind us of the historical basis of our faith – Jesus Christ truly came in the flesh, suffered on the cross, and rose from the dead.

### A. Origin of Water Baptism

Where did the practice of water baptism originate? Is it of human or divine origin? In the pre-Christian era, various ceremonial washings were practiced which symbolized purification and renewal. From the beginning of time, the human heart has desired to be clean before God and to obtain new life. Beasley-Murray comments, “Ritual cleansings in water were practiced from immemorial antiquity.”<sup>2148</sup> This should not surprise us, since fallen humanity truly needs cleansing and renewal. Since water is life-giving, useful for cleansing, and a method for burial, we can comprehend why it became a common means among ancient peoples for expressing these religious sentiments. So then, even before its appearance in Christianity, the symbolism of baptism was already understood.

We give special attention to the Greek “mystery religions.” The ceremonial cleansing in their rites bears some resemblance to the Christian ordinance. According to the research of Ferguson, the mysteries promised forgiveness of sins, participation in a mystical death, acquisition of new life, and spiritual enlightenment.<sup>2149</sup> On the other hand, significant differences also exist. The teaching and overall worldview of the mysteries radically differs from the Christian worldview. Moreover, baptism among the mysteries lacked emphasis on moral reform. Finally, it is unlikely that Hellenistic cults exerted a great influence on first-century Jews living in Palestine.

Along with the appearance of Christian baptism, Judaism enacted a similar practice: the baptism of proselytes (new converts to Judaism).<sup>2150</sup> The process of conversion to Judaism had three components: circumcision (for males), ceremonial washing, and offering a sacrifice to God. The Mishna (3rd c.) and the Talmud (6th c.) speak of baptism for proselytes, yet the traditions reflected in these passages predate them.

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<sup>2146</sup>Friends, Society of // Cross F. L., Livingstone E. A. The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church. – 3rd ed. – Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. – P. 645-646.

<sup>2147</sup>Note in Farstad A. L. We believe in water baptism // Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. 1990. 3. P. 4.

<sup>2148</sup>Beasley-Murray G. R. Baptism in the New Testament. – London: MacMillan, 1962. – P. 1.

<sup>2149</sup>Ferguson E. Baptism in the Early Church. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. – P. 29.

<sup>2150</sup>See Flemington W. F. The New Testament doctrine of baptism. – London: SPCK, 1957. – P. 4-11, 131; Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 25-26; Gilmore A. Jewish antecedents // Gilmore A. Christian baptism. – London: Lutterworth Press, 1959. – P. 68-71; Köstenberger A. J. Baptism in the Gospels // Schreiner T. R., Wright S. D. Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the new covenant in Christ. – Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006. – P. 12; Jeremias J. The origins of infant baptism / Trans. D. M. Barton. – Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1963. – P. 27, 32; Jeremias J. Infant baptism in the first four centuries / Trans. D. Cairns. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960. – P. 32-33; Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, p. 76-82.

In other writings composed around the time of Christ, namely by Philo of Alexandria and Josephus, there is no mention of proselyte baptism. Furthermore, in the Apocrypha, baptism is also absent. It seems unlikely, then, that Christian baptism originated with proselyte baptism in Judaism. All specific mentions of that rite among the Jews date after Christian baptism appeared.

Before Christianity, however, there existed a sect of Judaism called the “Essenes,” who lived in the Qumran community along the Dead Sea. They employed ceremonial washings in their worship.<sup>2151</sup> Although we cannot trace Christian baptism to the practice at Qumran, questions arise about the relationship of these rites with the baptism of John the Baptist.

In Old Testament times, ritual washings were employed, about which the author of Hebrews testifies (Heb 9:10).<sup>2152</sup> Besides ceremonial cleansing, the Psalms and the Prophets speak of washings in a metaphorical sense as an expression of repentance or of receiving forgiveness (Ps 51:2, 7; Isa 1:16; Jer 4:14). Finally, the Prophets speak of cleansing in the context of the eschatological hope when Yahweh will visit His people with future spiritual renewal (Isa 44:3; Zech 13:1; Ezek 36:25).

Since Christianity appeared in the context of Old Testament faith, it seems likely that Old Testament cleansing rites influenced the early Christians’ understanding of water baptism. Augustus Strong notes that another Old Testament rite, Passover, gave rise to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>2153</sup> Yet, as we will demonstrate, Old Testament washings exerted only an indirect influence on Christianity through the baptism of John the Baptist.

Clearly, Christian baptism derived directly from the baptism that John, the forerunner of Messiah, performed. Jesus Himself submitted to this baptism.<sup>2154</sup> John received his commission to baptize directly from the Lord in order to prepare the way for Messiah (Mk 1:2-5; Matt 3:1-3; Lk 3:2-6). John 1:33 records that God Himself charged John to baptize. Therefore, we can confidently conclude that God Himself is the initiator of the rite of baptism.

What can we say, then, about the relationship of John’s baptism to the forms of ceremonial cleansing already in practice in his day? We can see many similarities between John and the community at Qumran. Some feel that John actually belonged to the sect of Essenes and borrowed the practice of water baptism from them.

However, we can also note differences between John and Qumran. First, we lack data as to whether the Qumran community actually baptized its new members, or whether they merely practiced regular cleansing rites. John baptized each individual only once. Second, in Qumran, worshipers immersed themselves, while John performed the rite on seekers.<sup>2155</sup> Finally, John’s baptism was intended not for just one group, like the Essenes, but for all of Israel.<sup>2156</sup>

Others propose that John based his baptism, with adaptations, on the Jewish practice of proselyte baptism.<sup>2157</sup> On the other hand, John’s baptism differed in that it contained an ethical aspect, that is, repentance, and an eschatological element – preparation for Messiah’s coming and the appearance of God’s kingdom.<sup>2158</sup> In addition, the proselytes baptized themselves, whereas John baptized those coming to him.<sup>2159</sup>

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<sup>2151</sup>See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 11-16; Flemington, p. 3-4; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 68-81; Averbeck R. E. *The focus of baptism in the New Testament* // *Grace Theological Journal*. 1981. 2. P. 279-283.

<sup>2152</sup>See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 5-11; Brown H. F. *Baptism through the centuries*. – Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1965. – P. 2; Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 63-67, 88; Flemington, p. 3.

<sup>2153</sup>Strong A. H. *Systematic theology*. – Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907. – P. 932.

<sup>2154</sup>As in Beasley G. G. *Baptism in the New Testament* // *Mid-Stream*. 1966. 5. P. 59; and Hultgren A. J. *Baptism in the New Testament: Origins, formulas, and metaphors* // *Word & World*. 1994. 14. P. 8.

<sup>2155</sup>Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 87-88.

<sup>2156</sup>Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 40.

<sup>2157</sup>Gilmore, p. 71; Cullmann O. *Baptism in the New Testament* / Trans. J. K. S. Reid. – Chicago, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1950. – P. 9; Flemington, p. 17; Strong, p. 932.

<sup>2158</sup>Gilmore, p. 72-73; Köstenberger, p. 13; Flemington, p. 15-18.

<sup>2159</sup>Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 85-88; Flemington, p. 15-16.

Moreover, proselyte baptism was intended for Gentiles, while John's was for all people – Gentiles and Jews.<sup>2160</sup> Finally, it appears doubtful that Jews practiced proselyte baptism before John began his baptizing (see discussion above).

Some connect John's baptism with Old Testament ritual washings.<sup>2161</sup> As noted before, in the Old Testament washings and purifications served as symbols of spiritual renewal (Isa 44:3; Zech 13:1; Ezek 36:25). Lampe notes that the prophets predicted not only an eschatological cleansing from sin, but also an outpouring of the Spirit, which John the Baptist did as well.<sup>2162</sup>

In summary, we conclude that John's baptism in the Jordan was indeed closely connected to the Old Testament prophetic expectation of an eschatological cleansing from sin and an outpouring of the Spirit on God's people. John was certainly aware of this expectation. Nevertheless, we also assert that John did not initiate this ritual, but received it as a commission from the Lord. Water baptism is not merely a human invention, but originated in God. Although other similar rites existed before Christian baptism, God chose to use the cleansing power of water to accomplish His own unique purpose.

We must also touch on the theme of forgiveness of sins through John's baptism. We concur with McIntyre that since John required repentance before water baptism (Lk 3:7-8), forgiveness likely resulted from the act of repentance rather than the performance of water baptism.

## B. Significance of Water Baptism

The most important question concerning water baptism is its significance. What exactly happens during the performance of baptism? Do the participants truly receive grace from God by partaking in the physical act, or is baptism merely a symbol of what believers receive from the Lord through faith?

### 1. Biblical Data

The following biblical texts are often interpreted in support of the claim that water baptism has sacramental powers to transmit grace for forgiveness of sins and new birth.

**Mark 16:16** – *He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*

From this verse, it seems that along with faith, acceptance of water baptism is required for salvation. However, we must consider other factors here.<sup>2163</sup> First, this text does not address the question of those who believe, but do not receive baptism. In addition, it specifically condemns only those who reject the gospel.<sup>2164</sup>

Second, in many of the leading Greek manuscripts, the final part of Mark 16 is missing (v. 9-20).<sup>2165</sup> The possibility that these verses were not contained in the original writings is also supported by the following observations. In these questionable verses, we observe a different literary style than in the rest of the gospel of Mark. Also significant is that many words in this section do not appear elsewhere in Mark.<sup>2166</sup> Furthermore, some Greek manuscripts contain a different ending after verse 8, which may indicate that the original text ended there and editors to the text added one ending or another.

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<sup>2160</sup>Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 85-88; Flemington, p. 15-16; Averbeck, p. 287.

<sup>2161</sup>Gilmore, p. 75ff; Flemington, p. 20-22; Lampe G. W. H. *The seal of the Spirit*. – London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1951. – P. 23-31.

<sup>2162</sup>Lampe, p. 27.

<sup>2163</sup>Evans C. A. *Mark 8:27-16:20* // Hubbard D. *Word Biblical commentary*. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 549.

<sup>2164</sup>Gee D. *Baptism and salvation* // *Water baptism and the Trinity*. – Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, n.d. – P. 10.

<sup>2165</sup>See the discussion in Metzger B. M. *A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament*. – 4th ed. – London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. – P. 102-106.

<sup>2166</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 104.



In summary, we feel that in the light of the questionable reliability of Mark 16:9-20, it would be problematic to base such an important doctrine as water baptism on the foundation of this passage.

**John 3:5** – *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

Many feel that the phrase “born of water” refers to Christian baptism.<sup>2167</sup> Of note is that the words “water” and “Spirit” are joined by a single preposition ἐξ (*eks*), i.e., “of,” which may link the actions of these two nouns. Therefore, through water the Spirit gives new birth.<sup>2168</sup>

However, for Nicodemus, to whom these words were addressed, the idea of Christian baptism would make no sense. Furthermore, in John’s Gospel, little attention is paid to water baptism – its role is even minimized (see 3:22-26; 4:1-2).<sup>2169</sup> Even Jesus’ baptism is mentioned only indirectly (1:32-33). Moreover, in chapter 3 the role of the Spirit is emphasized, not the role of water. In fact, water is not mentioned again.<sup>2170</sup> Carson comments, “If water = baptism is so important for entering the kingdom, it is surprising that the rest of the discussion never mentions it again.”<sup>2171</sup>

An alternative interpretation is that the phrase in question refers to the baptism of John the Baptist. This would have made sense to Nicodemus, and he would have understood it to refer to repentance. He would have taken Jesus’ words in the following way: “Unless one repents and receives the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

Another possibility is a reference to Old Testament expectation of a future spiritual renewal, which is often expressed under the figure of an “outpouring” (see Joel 2:28-29; Isa 32:15; 44:3-5).<sup>2172</sup> In Ezekiel, water and Spirit are combined in such a context:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you... (Ezek 36:25-27).

**Acts 2:38-39** – *Peter {said} to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."*

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter summoned the crowd to repentance and water baptism. Many therefore conclude that water baptism is necessary for receiving forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit.<sup>2173</sup> We also read that immediately after the new converts received water baptism, “that day there were added about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41), which gives the impression that baptism qualified them to enter the Church and the Kingdom.<sup>2174</sup>

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<sup>2167</sup>For example, see Griffiths D. R. Baptism in the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John // Gilmore A. Christian baptism. – London: Lutterworth Press, 1959. – P. 156.

<sup>2168</sup>Cottrell J. W. Baptism: A biblical study. – Joplin, MO: College press, 1989. – P. 40-41.

<sup>2169</sup>Carson D. A. The Gospel according to John. – Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W. B. Eerdmans, 1991. – P. 193.

<sup>2170</sup>Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, p. 143-144.

<sup>2171</sup>Carson, p. 192.

<sup>2172</sup>Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>2173</sup>See Lampe, p. 52; Cottrell, Baptism: A Biblical study, p. 52-62.

<sup>2174</sup>Giblet J. Baptism – the sacrament of incorporation into the Church according to St. Paul / Trans. D. Askew // George A. et. al. Baptism in the New Testament: A symposium. – Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon, 1964. – P. 169; Phelan J. E. Baptism in the New Testament // The Covenant Quarterly 53. 1995-1996. P. 24.

Others challenge this interpretation. Averbeck argues that in John's baptism, the key element was repentance, and that the apostles stressed the same.<sup>2175</sup> So then, he concludes that repentance, not baptism, leads to forgiveness.

Also important to note is that in other passages in Acts, where Peter speaks of conditions for salvation, he fails to mention baptism again (Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43).<sup>2176</sup> Since the book of Acts was written by Luke, it will also prove insightful to look at other texts where Luke writes about requirements for salvation (see Lk 24:47, Acts 13:38-39, Acts 16:30-31, Acts 26:18). In such passages, we find no mention of water baptism.<sup>2177</sup> The only exception is Acts 22:16, which we will examine more closely in the next section. In his commentary on Acts 2:38, Buse confirms, "This is the only verse in Acts that explicitly links together baptism and the bestowal of the Spirit."<sup>2178</sup>

**Acts 22.16** – *Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.*

In this narrative passage, Ananias was sent by the Lord to pray for Saul. He announced that his purpose was for Saul to "regain (his) sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Many view this verse as teaching forgiveness of sins through water baptism. Before this time, Saul had been fasting, and only after his baptism did he take food (Acts 9:19), which may indicate the joy of his spiritual rebirth.<sup>2179</sup>

Those who reject this interpretation point out several features of this verse. First, it contains two imperatives: "be baptized" and "wash away." If Ananias had meant to communicate that baptism results in forgiveness of sins, he could have employed the conjunction *ἵνα* (*hina*), i.e., "in order to." The verse would then read, "Be baptized in order to wash away your sins." The fact that Ananias did not express himself in this way allows us to suggest that the imperatives "be baptized" and "wash away" refer to separate actions.

Second, these imperatives are associated with two participles: *ἀναστὰς* (*anastas*), i.e., "arise," and *ἐπικαλεσάμενος* (*epikalesamenos*), i.e., "call." Judging by their positions in the sentence, the first participle relates to the first imperative, and the second to the second.<sup>2180</sup> The second participle fulfills the function "means." So then, Saul "washed away" his sins by means of calling on the name of the Lord.

Third, we must clearly delineate Saul's spiritual condition at the time. Was he already saved or not? On the one hand, Ananias invited him to "wash away your sins," which would apply to an unsaved person.<sup>2181</sup> On the other hand, as a result of his meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he became convinced that Jesus had risen and called Him "Lord" (*κύριος*).<sup>2182</sup> Also noteworthy is that Ananias did not preach the gospel to Saul, which one would expect if Saul was still an unbeliever. Finally, Ananias addresses Saul as "brother."<sup>2183</sup>

Fourth, the participle *ἐπικαλεσάμενος* (*epikalesamenos*), i.e., "call," stands in the grammatical tense "aorist," which usually indicates an event occurring before the action of the main verb. So then, Saul had called upon the name of the Lord *before* he received forgiveness of sins and, consequently, before he received water

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<sup>2175</sup>Averbeck, p. 292.

<sup>2176</sup>Кучурян К. Студенческий доклад, Евангельская теологическая семинария, Киев, 2007.

<sup>2177</sup>Polhill J. B. Acts // Dockery D. The new American commentary. – Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. – P. 117; McIntyre, p. 60.

<sup>2178</sup>Buse S. I. Baptism in other New Testament writings // Gilmore A. Christian baptism. – London: Lutterworth Press, 1959. – P. 117.

<sup>2179</sup>Noted in Tanton, L. T. The Gospel and water baptism: A study of Acts 22:16 // Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society. 1991. 4. P. 25-29.

<sup>2180</sup>McIntyre, p. 61.

<sup>2181</sup>Dunn J. D. G. – Baptism in the Holy Spirit. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1970. – P. 74-77.

<sup>2182</sup>Yet, we acknowledge that the word *κύριος* (*kurios*) can also denote a title of respect, like "sir."

<sup>2183</sup>Peterson D. G. The Acts of the Apostles // Carson D. A. The Pillar New Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 2009. – P. 601. However, we also take into consideration that in the book of Acts, the word "brother" is used not only between Christians, but also between Jews (e.g. Acts 2:37; 3:17 and others). See Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, p. 74, noted in Ervin, p. 47.

baptism. It is very possible that Ananias was inviting Saul to make his *formal*, but not his *actual/effectual* appeal for salvation (see discussion in section B-4).

Fifth, Ananias came so that Saul would “regain (his) sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). In light of the fact that in the New Testament narrative, both healing and receiving the Spirit were administered by laying on of hands, we may conclude that Saul received the Spirit by Ananias laying his hands on him. If so, then Saul received gift of the Holy Spirit before he received water baptism.<sup>2184</sup>

**1 Peter 3:21** – *Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you--not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience--through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Without doubt, the most debated verse on water baptism in the New Testament epistles is 1 Peter 3:21. Many see in this verse the requirement of baptism for salvation. What did Peter intend to communicate here? It is important to note that, except for Acts 2:38, he does not mention elsewhere water baptism in connection with salvation (see Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43).

This passage is located in a context of suffering for righteousness (3:8-4:6). The supreme example of such suffering is the Lord Jesus (3:18). At the same time, Peter deviates from this theme to outline the redemptive work of the Savior in general. Four stages are delineated:

1. Christ's death – for forgiveness of sins (v. 18)
2. Christ's descent into Hades – to preach to spirits in prison (v. 19-20)
3. Christ's resurrection – for salvation, connected with water baptism (v. 21)
4. Christ's ascension and exaltation – for overthrowing demonic powers (v. 22).

In this light, we can better understand why Peter introduces the topic of water baptism in this passage. Peter's goal was to connect his second and third points – from the descent of Christ to His resurrection. He found this connection in the rite of baptism. Baptism has common ground with Noah's flood in that both involve water, and is connected with Christ's resurrection in the symbolic “resurrection” from the baptismal water.

In addition, we also underscore that Peter makes two qualifications to the claim that baptism saves. First, he clarifies that it saves “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Therefore, the effective element in salvation is not the baptismal rite, but Christ's resurrection. Second, Peter stresses the inner attitude of the candidate to this event and downplays the external washing: “...not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.” This prompts Beasley-Murray to conclude that these qualifications give more precision to Peter's claim that baptism saves.<sup>2185</sup>

Taking into consideration: (1) that Peter's main goal in mentioning baptism in this passage is to link Christ's descent into Hades with His resurrection, and (2) his two qualifications about the role of baptism in salvation, it is fair to conclude that in this passage, water baptism plays not a primary, but a secondary role in God's salvation plan.

Another factor that complicates the interpretation of this verse is the translation of the Greek term ἐπερώτημα (*eperotema*), which is sometimes translated “promise,” yet the basic meaning of the word is “request.”<sup>2186</sup> Connected with this is the interpretation of the genitive case here: “appeal (of) a good conscience.” If we define ἐπερώτημα (*eperotema*) as “promise,” the verse refers to promising God a good conscience. The problem here is that promising God a good conscience does not explain why “baptism saves you,” which is Peter's goal here. If salvation comes by promising God a good conscience, then salvation is by

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<sup>2184</sup>Bruce F. F. The Epistle to the Galatians. – Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 185; Ervin H. M. Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984. – P. 49.

<sup>2185</sup>Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 260.

<sup>2186</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W., Gingrich F. W. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 362.

works.<sup>2187</sup> The more common translation, “an appeal to God for a good conscience,” is preferred, although this involves an irregular use of the genitive – “for.”

**Romans 6:3-5** – *Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be {in the likeness} of His resurrection.*

Some hold to the view that the phrase “baptized into Christ Jesus” refers not to water baptism, but to “baptism into Christ” in the sense of the union of believers with Christ in His death and resurrection. In other words, God in His grace made believers participants in the historical events of Christ’s death and resurrection, and Paul here is expressing that spiritual reality under the figure of baptism.<sup>2188</sup> On the other hand, some defend the position that, according to Romans 6, one must be physically baptized to be included in Christ’s redemptive work.

In assessment of these views, we make the following comments. It is hard to see that Paul is merely talking about a “spiritual” baptism here, that is, a participation in union with Christ. He is more likely appealing to the universal experience among believers of being water baptized.<sup>2189</sup>

On the other hand, we also cannot support the view that Paul obligated his readers to receive God’s grace through the baptismal rite. Of note is that after Paul “connects” with his audience by referring to their experience of baptism in verses 3-4, he does not mention it again. Beginning from verse 5, Paul transitions from the topic of water baptism to that which it represents – our real participation in Christ’s death and resurrection. Clearly, the power of God for sanctification is linked not with the baptismal rite, but with the spiritual union believers enjoy with Christ, which is actualized in them not by receiving baptism, but through faith (see v. 11).

Also significant is that in his thorough exposition of the doctrine of justification (Rom 1-5), Paul makes no mention of baptism in water. If baptism was required for justification, Paul made a massive and inexcusable omission in these key chapters.<sup>2190</sup>

**Colossians 2:11-13** – *In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.*

In verse 12, Paul employs the figure of circumcision to describe the believer’s liberation from the power of sin. The question arises, then, is water baptism the means by which Christ accomplishes this spiritual circumcision in the hearts of believers?

Several arguments serve to refute this idea. First, we examine the parallel Paul draws between circumcision and baptism. Physical circumcision failed to introduce any change of heart in God’s Old Testament people. It merely symbolically represented the removal of the sinful nature, that is, the “circumcision of the heart” (see Deut 10:6). According to Romans 6, water baptism accomplishes the same goal – to symbolically

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<sup>2187</sup>Noted in Cottrell J. W. The biblical consensus: historical backgrounds to Reformed theology // Fletcher D. Baptism and the remission of sins: an historical perspective. – Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990. – P. 26.

<sup>2188</sup>Dunn, Romans 1–8, p. 311.

<sup>2189</sup>Moo arrives at this conclusion (Moo D. J. Exegetical notes Romans 6:1–14 // Trinity Journal. 1982. 3. P. 218).

<sup>2190</sup>Moo concurs (Moo, Romans 6:1–14, p. 217).

represent the removal of the old man and the beginning of a spiritual renewal. Melick concurs, “Circumcision and baptism are two illustrations of salvation.”<sup>2191</sup>

The relationship between baptism and circumcision noted in Colossians 2:11-12 is not one reflecting the *means* of accomplishing this spiritual circumcision, but rather one that draws a parallel – both circumcision and baptism are symbols of victory over the flesh, that is, the human sinful nature.

We find support for this conviction by noting that Paul, who vigorously opposed the requirement of physical circumcision for salvation, would hardly replace it with another physical requirement – water baptism. In addition, Paul adds, “in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God.” Thus, we experience the power of the resurrection when we respond *in faith* to the redemptive work of Christ. Moreover, just as we observed in Romans 6, after a brief mention of water baptism, Paul immediately transitions to the theme of our real participation in the resurrection of Christ and mentions baptism no more.<sup>2192</sup>

**Titus 3:5-6** – *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*

In this verse, the term that stands out is “washing.” Is this referring to water baptism, and, if so, is Paul claiming that baptism saves? We note that the Greek term here is λουτρόν (*loutron*), not βάπτισμα (*baptisma*). It is most likely that we should understand λουτρόν (*loutron*) in a metaphorical sense and not as physical washing.

Nettles directs our attention to the Old Testament roots of the concept λουτρόν (*loutron*), i.e., “washings.” Water was often used in the Old Testament for ceremonial cleansing and symbolically to represent eschatological renewal (e.g. Ezek 36:25-27). Most likely, Paul is not thinking of water baptism here, but rather of Old Testament ritual cleansing.<sup>2193</sup>

We also bear in mind that in verse 6, God “poured out” His Spirit on us. The Holy Spirit is thus represented by water which is poured out on believers. This observation resonates with verse 5 – that the Spirit is the means for accomplishing this “washing” of the believer. In Acts 2:17-18, 33 as well (a quotation of Joel 2), the Spirit is “poured out.”<sup>2194</sup>

Therefore, we conclude that in verse 5 the believer is washed not in the baptismal font, but by the Holy Spirit in a spiritual outpouring. Finally, Paul’s assertion that God saved us “not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness” tends to rule out the claim that one must perform a personal, physical act to obtain salvation.<sup>2195</sup>

**Ephesians 5:25-26** – *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.*

Some seek to defend baptismal regeneration by appealing to Ephesians 5:25-26, where it is thought that the words “washing” and “water” refer to baptism. Both words have the Greek article, which indicates a

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<sup>2191</sup>Melick R. R. Philippians, Colossians, Philemon // Dockery D. The new American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1991. – P. 261. Gee teaches likewise, p. 10-11.

<sup>2192</sup>Also noted in Dunn J. D. G. The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon. – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996. – P. 160; Melick, p. 259.

<sup>2193</sup>Nettles T. J. Baptist view // Armstrong J. H., Engle P. E. Understanding four views on baptism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. – P. 74.

<sup>2194</sup>Knight G. W. The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text // The new international Greek Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W. B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992. – P. 344-345.

<sup>2195</sup>Also noted in Lea T. D., Griffin H. P. 1, 2 Timothy, Titus // Dockery D. The new American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. – P. 323-324.

specific object or action, that is, the reader could take it to mean that Paul has a specific cleansing in mind, i.e., water baptism.<sup>2196</sup>

In response, we first of all need to clarify that baptism does not cleanse God's people, but the blood of Christ does. He is the one who "gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her."<sup>2197</sup> We also keep in mind that the Greek term for "washing," i.e., λουτρόν (*lutron*), differs from the Greek term for baptism, i.e., βάπτισμα (*baptisma*). As we concluded in the previous passage, Paul may be thinking here not of baptism, but of Old Testament cleansing rituals.<sup>2198</sup>

Also of note is that in this passage, we learn of the two means whereby the Church is purified and sanctified: the blood of Christ and the Word of God (the gospel). It appears doubtful that Paul would add a third means – water baptism. The word order here reflects Paul's train of thought: Christ purified the Church with the "washing of water," that is, "with the word." Furthermore, the passage does not speak of *individual believers* receiving water baptism, but of the *entire Church* being purified.

Moreover, both in ancient Greece and in ancient Israel, the bride took a ceremonial bath before the wedding ceremony in order to "cleanse" herself for her future husband. It may be that in saying "the washing of water," Paul is referring to this custom, applying it to the bride of Christ. In this connection, we cite the following prophetic word concerning God's Old Testament people, which may have served as the starting point for Paul's thinking.<sup>2199</sup>

"Then I passed by you and saw you, and behold, you were at the time for love; so I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness. I also swore to you and entered into a covenant with you so that you became Mine," declares the Lord Yahweh. "Then I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil" (Ezek 16:8-9).

**Hebrews 10:22** – *Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled {clean} from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

According to Hebrews 10:22, "having our hearts sprinkled {clean}" is associated with "our bodies washed with pure water." Does this mean that the blood of Jesus is made effective at the time the body is immersed in water?<sup>2200</sup>

When interpreting this verse, one must respect its context. In verses 19-22, access to God's presence is described under the figure of entering the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament. Jesus is our high priest, who shed His blood as a sacrifice for sin and inaugurated a new and living way "through the veil, that is, His flesh." Our response to His redemptive work is also expressed in terms of the Old Testament sacrificial system – we receive the sprinkling of blood (see Ex 24:8) and the washing of water (see Lev 14:9; Num 19:8; Deut 23:11). However, the text does not indicate that this Old Testament ritual is fulfilled now through water baptism.

We also know that the entire Old Testament sacrificial system was fulfilled in Christ and is no longer in effect. The author of Hebrews is simply employing an Old Testament figure to dramatize our salvation.<sup>2201</sup> Even if the words "our bodies washed with pure water" refers to water baptism, that action follows the "sprinkling of hearts" and may well merely serve as a confirmation of a salvation already received by faith.

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<sup>2196</sup>Cottrell, Baptism: A Biblical study, p. 121-123.

<sup>2197</sup>See Flemington, p. 65.

<sup>2198</sup>Nettles concurs (p. 74).

<sup>2199</sup>O'Brien P. T. Ephesians // Carson D. A. The Pillar New Testament commentary. – Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: Eerdmans, 1999. – P. 422.

<sup>2200</sup>Also supporting this view: Cottrell, Baptism: A Biblical study, p. 74; Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, p. 188; Buse, Baptism in other New Testament writings, p. 183; Flemington, p. 98.

<sup>2201</sup>Lane W. L. Hebrews 9-13 // Hubbard D. Word Biblical commentary. – Dallas: Word, 2002. – P. 287.

**1 Corinthians 6:11** – *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 we note that the term “washed” is associated with “sanctified” and “justified,” which may indicate that the latter are attained through the former, that is, through water baptism.<sup>2202</sup>

Gordon Fee responds, “Paul does not in fact say ‘you were baptized,’ which he was perfectly capable of doing if baptism were his concern.”<sup>2203</sup> He concludes that the phrases “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “in the Spirit of God” refer not to the baptismal formula, but to the means by which the “washing,” sanctification” and “justification” takes place – through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>2204</sup> It is also significant to remember what cleanses the believer – the blood of Jesus (Heb 9:14).

**Galatians 3:26-27** – *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

In chapter 3 of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, he discusses the role of the Law in the life of believers. It serves as a “tutor” to bring us to Christ by faith. Since we acquire salvation and adoption into God’s family exclusively through Christ, the apostle can confidently claim, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Here of note is that faith alone qualifies us for this adoption.

We must further examine the context of this passage. Paul’s goal is to define the true descendants of Abraham and the heirs of his promise. Earlier in chapter 3, Paul revealed that Abraham’s only descendant and heir is his “seed,” i.e., Jesus Christ. Therefore, to be Abraham’s heir, one must be “in Christ.”

In order to assure believers that they are truly “in Him,” Paul appeals to the universal practice of water baptism. Notice that he already declared that his readers are children of God by faith alone without mentioning baptism. Then, he introduces baptism into the discussion: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” He describes those in Christ under the figure of “immersion” into Him – typified first through water baptism, then through adorning clothing. In this pictorial fashion, Paul assists his readers to visualize themselves as those *located in* the “seed of Abraham” and thereby see themselves as heirs of Abraham’s promise.

## **2. Baptism as a Means of Forgiveness of Sins and Regeneration**

Quite early in church history, the teaching of salvation through baptism appeared.<sup>2205</sup> Some Church Fathers associated water baptism with forgiveness of sins<sup>2206</sup> and deliverance from death and condemnation.<sup>2207</sup> In addition, baptism was thought to result in rebirth<sup>2208</sup> and receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>2209</sup> It unites the baptized individual with Christ.<sup>2210</sup> The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed declares, “We acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.” At times, Church Fathers attributed to the baptismal waters themselves sanctifying

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<sup>2202</sup>Opinion voiced by Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical study*, p. 73.

<sup>2203</sup>Fee G. D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* // Stonehouse N.B., Bruce F. F., Fee G. D., Green J. B. *The new international commentary on the New Testament*. – Rev. ed. – Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2014. – P. 273.

<sup>2204</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2205</sup>The following material taken from Allison G. R. *Historical theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 614-615, and Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 109-115. Also see Needham N. *Justification in the Early Church Fathers* // McCormick B. L. *Justification in perspective*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 41-42.

<sup>2206</sup>For example, Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.28; Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, introduction; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 61; Barnabas, 11; The Pastor of Hermas, *Visions*, 3.3; Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 3; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical lectures*, 3.2[4].

<sup>2207</sup>For example, Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 2.5; Cyprian, *Epistles*, 51.22; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. John*, 25.3; 27.1; Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 12.28; Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 1.6; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, 35-36.

<sup>2208</sup>For example, Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 12; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 13.27, Cyprian, *Epistles* 73.6; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.15.3; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, 2.16.

<sup>2209</sup>For example, Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 1.28; Cyprian, *Epistles*, 73.7; Origen, *Commentary on John*, 6.17.

<sup>2210</sup>For example, Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 15.35; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 68.1.

powers.<sup>2211</sup> However, the Fathers taught that baptism was the *means* of salvation, but not its *basis*. Its basis is Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. In addition, repentance and faith were required before reception of water baptism.

We will examine the views of several Christian denominations, especially in regard to the necessity of baptism for salvation.

### **a. Eastern Orthodox Teaching**

One of the main commentators on the Eastern Church's view of the relationship between baptism and salvation was John of Damascus, author of *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*. He writes, "We confess one baptism for the remission of sins and for life eternal.... We receive the first fruits of the Holy Spirit through baptism, and the second birth is for us the beginning and seal and security and illumination of another life."<sup>2212</sup>

Sergey Bulgakov describes the Orthodox view in more detail.<sup>2213</sup> Along with the Damascene, he claims that baptism results in the salvation of the soul: "*Baptism is spiritual rebirth, by which in Christ the natural man is put to death, along with his innate original sin, by the power that is supplied by Him, and is born again. It is the assimilation of the saving power of the redemptive work of Christ.*" Furthermore, only a priest ordained in the apostolic succession has the right to perform baptisms. However, unlike the opinion of some others, Bulgakov allows that "*Every baptism in the Name of the Holy Trinity is valid, not only in Orthodoxy, but beyond it as well.*" In addition, in the absence of a priest, a lay person may baptize "by virtue of the general Christian priesthood."

Metropolitan Ilarion further clarifies this position. He explains why Orthodox immerse the candidate three times: "The threefold baptism represents the three days that Jesus spent in the earth after His death on the cross."<sup>2214</sup> Yet, like John of Damascus, he asserts that baptism cannot be repeated (if done in the name of the Holy Trinity): "Christ did not die three times, but once. Therefore, baptism is performed only once."<sup>2215</sup> Ilarion also comments on the sanctifying power of the baptismal waters. They receive grace by virtue of Christ being immersed in water: "Christ came to John to be baptized... in order to sanctify the waters of the river by His immersion in the Jordan, to bestow on them His energy and power, and to make them life-giving and life-bearing."<sup>2216</sup>

Moreover, Ilarion speaks of the necessity to forsake one's old manner of life after baptism. Baptism is a covenant between God and its recipients, so that they, in the words of Gregory Nazianzen, would achieve "great purity."<sup>2217</sup> In addition, those who receive water baptism have died with Christ to sin and were raised with Him to new life.

Ilarion insists, "Without baptism, salvation is impossible," except in cases of "baptism by blood," i.e., martyrdom.<sup>2218</sup> However, Orthodox Tradition fails to comment on the fate of the non-baptized. Furthermore, in distinction from the Western Church, chrismation (i.e., confirmation) follows immediately after water baptism. Even though immersion is the preferred method, "in the Orthodox Church pouring is often performed."<sup>2219</sup>

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<sup>2211</sup>See Ignatius, *To the Ephesians*, 18; Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 4; John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.9; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations*, 38.16, John Chrysostom, *On the Baptism of Christ*, 2, Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Baptism of Christ*.

<sup>2212</sup>*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.9

<sup>2213</sup>Булгаков С. Православие: Очерки учения православной церкви. – М.: Терра, 1991. – Р ? Author's translation.

<sup>2214</sup>Иларион (Алфеев). Православие. – <http://www.hilarion.ru/materials/books>. – V. 2. – P. 341. Author's translation.

<sup>2215</sup>*Ibid.* Author's translation.

<sup>2216</sup>Иларион, А. Таинство веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 146. Author's translation.

<sup>2217</sup>Иларион, Православие, v. 2. – p. 341.

<sup>2218</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 2. – p. 346.

<sup>2219</sup>*Ibid.*



According to Orthodoxy, water baptism results not only in regeneration (which is called the “first resurrection”),<sup>2220</sup> but also liberation from slavery to sin and participation in so-called “God’s energies,” which enter the soul and begin the process of deification.<sup>2221</sup> Water baptism begins the restoration of God’s image in people, yet the sinful nature is not eradicated immediately, since God desires the free participation of His people in the quest for overcoming sin.<sup>2222</sup>

As far as the transmission of grace through water baptism, the Orthodox and Catholics share the concept of *ex opere operato*,<sup>2223</sup> according to which, if sacraments are properly performed, they act independently of the spiritual condition of either the officiating priest or the recipient (with some exceptions).<sup>2224</sup>

In general, Orthodoxy rejects the need for faith in administering sacraments. Nevertheless, some Orthodox theologians do ascribe importance to that element. Nassif, for example, defends the position that faith is necessary for baptism to be effective – either the faith of the one receiving baptism, or the faith of that individual’s godparents.<sup>2225</sup>

## **b. Roman Catholic Teaching**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church provides this summary statement about the effect of water baptism:

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.<sup>2226</sup>

So then, Catholics teach that baptism is necessary for salvation.<sup>2227</sup> If people failed to receive baptism, they can still benefit from the sacrament if they desired to receive it (the baptism of desire) or if they suffered martyrdom (baptism of blood).<sup>2228</sup>

Although baptism provides forgiveness of sins, Catholics teach that “temporary consequences” of sins committed remain, such as sickness, death, the flesh, and vices.<sup>2229</sup> Therefore, after baptism the newly baptized must strive for holiness, submitting to the Catholic hierarchy. He or she must remain in the grace of baptism until death.<sup>2230</sup>

The Catholic writer D. Mollat comments on the sanctifying power of the water.<sup>2231</sup> The waters of baptism possess “supernatural power.” It is “a divine water, poured out on the body only in order to purify the heart.”

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<sup>2220</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. The deification of man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox tradition. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 47.

<sup>2221</sup>Meyendorff J. Byzantine Theology. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 192-195.

<sup>2222</sup>Mantzaridis, p. 46.

<sup>2223</sup>Augustine especially advanced this understanding. See *On Baptism*, 5.28.39; 6.10.15; 7.53,102, 3.14.19 (Allison, p. 620-621).

<sup>2224</sup>Noted in Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969. – P. 248-251; also see Иларион, Православие, v. 2, p. 342; Schmemmann A. Of water and the Spirit. – Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1974. – P. 68; noted in Nassif B. The Evangelical theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church // Gundry S., Stamoolis J. Three views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. – P. 71.

<sup>2225</sup>Nassif, p. 71.

<sup>2226</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1279. – [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

<sup>2227</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1257.

<sup>2228</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1258.

<sup>2229</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1264.

<sup>2230</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1269-1274.

<sup>2231</sup>Mollat D. Baptismal symbolism in St. Paul / Trans. D. Askew // George A. et. al. Baptism in the New Testament: A symposium. – Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon, 1964. – P. 71-74. Also see Tremel Y. B. Baptism – the incorporation of the Christian into Christ / Trans. D. Askew // George A. et. al. Baptism in the New Testament: A symposium. – Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon, 1964. – P. 202; Gibley, p. 184.

Nevertheless, he clarifies that the water becomes life-giving not by magic, but in connection with the redemptive work of Christ.

In the Catholic Church, newly baptized adults immediately receive the sacraments of confirmation and the Eucharist. Infants receive only a “preliminary” anointing, which differs from confirmation. Confirmation is conferred at age 12.

As we have stated, Catholics share with Orthodoxy the concept of *ex opere operato*.<sup>2232</sup> They differ, though, in that Catholics give a greater place to faith. We read in the Catholic Catechism, “Always, Baptism is seen as connected with faith,”<sup>2233</sup> and, “Baptism is the sacrament of faith.”<sup>2234</sup> However, the faith that baptism requires is the faith of the Church: “The catechumen or the godparent is asked: ‘What do you ask of God's Church?’ the response is: ‘Faith!’”<sup>2235</sup> Duplacy explains, “By his baptism, man shares fully in the baptism of the Church and of Christ. His personal faith then becomes the faith of Christ and of the Church.... It is this sort of faith that saves.”<sup>2236</sup>

### c. Lutheran Teaching

Along with the Catholics, Lutherans also affirm that baptism provides forgiveness of original sin and spiritual rebirth. Together with the Church Fathers, Luther believed that water baptism was necessary for salvation. He said, “If a person wants to be saved, let him be baptized.”<sup>2237</sup> At the same time, Luther insisted that baptism must be accompanied by faith in the recipient: “Even if a person is baptized, but is without faith, he is lost.”<sup>2238</sup> Additionally, Luther considered water baptism to be a dying to sin and a rising to new life.<sup>2239</sup> Finally, according to the Augsburg Confession, “Of Baptism they teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God's grace” (*Article 9*).

Unlike Luther's teaching, modern Lutherans in general defend the view that adults are saved by faith alone and the baptism is a means to strengthen faith.<sup>2240</sup> Mueller defines the role of baptism for adults: “Baptism is not absolutely necessary.... On the other hand, it is likewise true that a sincere believer never despises the ordinances of Christ... so that a true member of the Church neglects neither Baptism nor the Lord's Supper.”<sup>2241</sup>

Unlike Catholic or Orthodox faith, Lutherans ascribe the effects of baptism not to apostolic succession, but to the efficacy of God's Word. Water baptism benefits the recipients because it is performed according to the words of Christ, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Luther taught that the water does not save, but the “Word in the water,” which is received by faith: “Baptism is water with the Word of God, and this is the essence and whole substance of Baptism.”<sup>2242</sup>

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<sup>2232</sup>Augustine especially advanced this understanding. See *On Baptism*, 5.28.39; 6.10.15; 7.53,102, 3.14.19 (Allison, p. 620-621).

<sup>2233</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1226.

<sup>2234</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1253.

<sup>2235</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1253.

<sup>2236</sup>Duplacy J. Salvation by faith and baptism in the New Testament / Trans. D. Askew // George A. et. al. Baptism in the New Testament: A symposium. – Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon, 1964. – P. 153.

<sup>2237</sup>Luther M. Luther's works // Ed. H. T. Lehmann. – Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959. – V. 51. – P. 183.

<sup>2238</sup>*Ibid.*, v. 51, p. 182.

<sup>2239</sup>Trueman C. Martin Luther and justification // McCormick B. L. Justification in perspective. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2006. – P. 84.

<sup>2240</sup>Mueller J. T. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 495.

<sup>2241</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 543. Also see Pieper F. Christian Dogmatics. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1953. – V. 3. – P. 255; Kolb R. Lutheran view // Armstrong J. H., Engle P. E. Understanding four views on baptism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. – P. 105.

<sup>2242</sup>Luther's works, 51.185; noted in Haight R. Eight views of baptism – Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. – P. 78.

#### d. Restoration Movement

In the 19th century in the USA, a new movement arose called the “Restoration Movement” headed by Alexander Campbell. At the present time, this movement is represented by two Christian denominations: the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ. Let us examine their history and teachings.<sup>2243</sup>

At that time, newly converted individuals typically received Christ as Savior at the conclusion of the preaching service through earnest prayer at the “altar.” Campbell objected that this custom gave the new convert only a *subjective* assurance of salvation. He felt that a more *objective* assurance was needed, which the rite of baptism provides. Although it was agreed that individuals are saved by faith alone in Christ, their salvation received confirmation through baptism leading to a greater level of assurance. In Campbell’s words, “Ministers of the gospel ought to use baptism as a means of formally assuring the believer that his sins have been forgiven.”<sup>2244</sup>

However, Campbell eventually abandoned his original views and began to teach that salvation occurred at the moment of water baptism. At present, some adherents of this movement have already minimized the importance of water baptism in regard to salvation, namely among the Disciples of Christ.<sup>2245</sup>

According to the teachings of the Restoration Movement, salvation comes exclusively by grace through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is acquired exclusively by faith. Yet, faith receives salvation at the moment of water baptism. In this way, baptism “saves.”<sup>2246</sup> So then, a distinction is made between the *means* of salvation (grace through faith) and the *moment* of salvation (the moment of receiving baptism). The baptismal candidate can experience both simultaneously.

The Restoration Movement refuses to baptize infants – only adults and older children that are able to consciously believe. In addition, some members of this movement believe that one must be baptized in line with the teachings of this movement in order to have a valid baptism.<sup>2247</sup>

#### e. James Dunn

The well known English theologian, James Dunn, proposed a novel approach to understanding water baptism that he called “conversion-initiation.” He observed in the New Testament that conversion to Christ involves four elements: repentance, faith, water baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit. In every biblical example, these items are mentioned or implied, and they occur over a short period of time.

Based on this observation, Dunn concluded that one may view these events holistically – as one event. Together, they make up a single experience of conversion to Christ. All are necessary for a complete and genuine experience of conversion. Water baptism, then, is necessary as an expression of saving faith. In Dunn’s words,

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<sup>2243</sup>See Hicks J. M. The recovery of the ancient gospel: Alexander Campbell and the design of baptism // Fletcher D. Baptism and the remission of sins: an historical perspective. – Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990. – P. 112-158; Hicks J. M., Weedman M. Believers’ baptism among Churches of Christ and Christian Churches // The Ecumenical Review. 2015. 67. P. 374-380; Greene M. D. Barton W. Stone and baptism for the remission of sins // Fletcher D. Baptism and the remission of sins: an historical perspective. – Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990. – P. 241-292.

<sup>2244</sup>Hicks, p. 134.

<sup>2245</sup>Hicks, Weedman, p. 380; Castelein J. D. Christian Churches/Church of Christ view // Armstrong J. H., Engle P. E. Understanding four views on baptism. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. – P. 142.

<sup>2246</sup>Fletcher D., Hicks J. M. Introduction // Fletcher D. Baptism and the remission of sins: an historical perspective. – Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990. – P. 11.

<sup>2247</sup>Hicks, Weedman, p. 384.

Baptism properly performed is for the NT essentially the act of faith and repentance – the actualization of saving faith without which, usually, commitment to Jesus as Lord does not come to its necessary expression.<sup>2248</sup>

### 3. Baptism as a Sign and Seal of Salvation

The Reformed and Presbyterian congregations express their view of water baptism by the phrase “sign and seal of salvation.” The term “sign” indicates that baptism is a visible sign of the salvation that believers have received by faith. In the words of R. C. Sproul, “(Baptism) is a sign of cleansing and the remission of our sins. It also signifies being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, being buried and raised together with Christ, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, being adopted into the family of God, and being sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2249</sup> He adds that baptism itself does not transmit grace for salvation, but only symbolizes the grace already received from God by faith.

The Reformed theologian John Murray describes the idea of “sign of salvation” in the following words: “(God) not only unites His people to Christ but He also advertises that great truth by an ordinance which portrays visibly to our senses the reality of this grace.”<sup>2250</sup>

Furthermore, baptism is also a “seal” of salvation. Shedd comments on this: “It is like the official seal on a legal document. The presence of the seal inspires confidence in the genuineness of the title deed; the absence of the seal awakens doubts and fears.”<sup>2251</sup> Baptism is God’s guarantee that salvation is in Christ. Murray also unpacks the idea of “seal”: “As a seal it authenticates, confirms, guarantees the reality and security of this covenant grace.”<sup>2252</sup> Thus, water baptism strengthens the faith of the baptized individual and establishes this individual in the Lord.

Until now, we have described the Reformed position in symbolic terms as the “sign and seal” of salvation. Some Reformed thinkers, though, suggest that baptism may indeed communicate grace from God. The Westminster Confession states, “By the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time” (28.6).<sup>2253</sup>

The former president of Princeton University, Charles Hodges, joins with this opinion:

Baptism, however, is not only a sign and seal; it is also a means of grace, because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal, are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe.<sup>2254</sup>

Along with others, Hodge qualifies that God may apply the benefits of baptism to the one baptized at any time of life. He may even save an individual independent of the grace received at baptism: “The Reformed, at least, do not believe that those blessings are tied to the ordinance of baptism, so that the reception of baptism is necessary to a participation of the spiritual benefits which it symbolizes.”<sup>2255</sup>

### 4. Baptism as a Symbol of Salvation

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<sup>2248</sup>Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, p. 227.

<sup>2249</sup>Sproul R. C. Essential truths of the Christian faith. – Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992.

<sup>2250</sup>Murray J. Christian baptism. – Presbyterian and Reformed Pub., 1977. – P. 87.

<sup>2251</sup>Shedd W. G. T. Dogmatic theology / Ed. A. W. Gomes. – 3rd ed. – Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub, 2003. – P. 817.

<sup>2252</sup>Murray, p. 87.

<sup>2253</sup><https://westminsterstandards.org/westminster-confession-of-faith>

<sup>2254</sup>Hodge C. Systematic theology. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. – V. 3. – P. 589.

<sup>2255</sup>Ibid., v. 3, p. 557-558.

The most widespread opinion among Evangelical believers in Christ (especially Baptists and Pentecostals) is that water baptism is a symbolic representation of cleansing from sin and identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.

During the Reformation, Ulrich Zwingli restored this teaching to the Church. He wrote, “Water baptism cannot contribute in any way to the washing away of sin,”<sup>2256</sup> and, “nor is the one born again by baptism.”<sup>2257</sup> Cottrell comments, “Without a doubt Zwingli’s doctrine of baptism was a radical revision of 1500 years of Christian thinking.”<sup>2258</sup>

Several proofs are offered in favor of the position that water baptism is a symbol of salvation already received. Scripture connects salvation with repentance, faith, and sacraments, namely with water baptism. However, contrary to Dunn’s teaching, salvation is not a process consisting of several events, but is actualized in one moment of time. There must exist one point in time when a person transfers from death to life, from an unsaved state to a saved state. The Lutheran theologian Mueller correctly asserts, “Conversion does not take place by stages, or degrees, but instantaneously.”<sup>2259</sup> Moreover, “According to Scripture, it is impossible for a person to be in a middle state even for a moment, for there is no middle ground between belief and unbelief, between life and death.”<sup>2260</sup>

Therefore, we must determine in what exact moment a person receives salvation: at the moment of repentance, faith, or water baptism. Since the great majority of verses about salvation mention faith, and usually faith alone, we conclude that salvation occurs at the moment when an individual believes in Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Savior.<sup>2261</sup>

We can confirm this thesis with specific passages of Scripture. Cocoris lists the following: “At the point of faith a person is said to be saved (Acts 16:31), given eternal life (John 3:16), becomes a child of God (Galatians 3:26; John 1:12), passes from death to life (John 5:24), is justified (Romans 3:28; 5:1), receives the righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:3–5; Philippians 3:9), is forgiven (Acts 10:43; Luke 7:48–50), etc.”<sup>2262</sup>

Also significant is that the apostle Paul did not lay great weight on the necessity of baptism. In 1 Corinthians 1:17, he writes, “Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” Clearly, for Paul preaching the gospel was primary and water baptism was secondary. Cocoris points out that Paul did not even consider baptism to be one of the components of the gospel: “Christ did not send me to *baptize*, but to *preach the gospel*,” thus making a distinction between them.<sup>2263</sup> In the words of B. Pass, “Paul could never say that he was not sent to baptize if baptism were necessary for membership in the New Covenant.”<sup>2264</sup>

We also take into consideration that Cornelius’ household was saved without experiencing water baptism, which was evidenced by their receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47). Subsequently, the Jerusalem church considered as evidence of their salvation not their reception of baptism, but their reception of the Spirit (Acts 11:17-18).<sup>2265</sup> Hull adds that Abraham received justification by faith before receiving the rite of

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<sup>2256</sup>Zwingli H. Of baptism / Ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley // Zwingli and Bullinger. Library of Christian classics. – Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1953. – V. 24. – P. 153. Taken from Cottrell J. W. Baptism according to the Reformed tradition // Fletcher D. Baptism and the remission of sins: an historical perspective. – Joplin, MO: College Press, 1990. – P. 41.

<sup>2257</sup>Zwingli H. Questiones de sacramento baptismi / Ed. M. Schuler and J. Schulthess (SS). – III:579. Taken from Cottrell, Baptism according to the Reformed tradition, p. 41.

<sup>2258</sup>Cottrell, Baptism according to the Reformed tradition, p. 62.

<sup>2259</sup>Mueller., p. 339.

<sup>2260</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>2261</sup>Hull feels similarly (Hull W. E. Baptism in the New Testament: a hermeneutical critique // Review & Expositor. 1968. 65. P. 10).

<sup>2262</sup>Cocoris G. M. Is Water Baptism necessary for salvation? // Chafer Theological Seminary Journal. 1997. 3. P. 7.

<sup>2263</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2264</sup>Pass B. R. Why would I baptize my child? // Churchman 2014. 128. P. 310.

<sup>2265</sup>Dunn, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, p. 100.

circumcision.<sup>2266</sup> Buse notes that the 120 disciples of Jesus who received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost likely never received Christian baptism, yet, undoubtedly, they were saved.<sup>2267</sup>

Another argument against the sacramental position is that Paul, who so vigorously opposed circumcision as a requirement for salvation, would hardly substitute one rite, i.e., circumcision, for another – water baptism. Finally, from a logical point of view, those who come for water baptism have already repented and believed. Otherwise, they would not seek baptism. Therefore, they have already demonstrated true conversion to Christ and are therefore already saved before baptism.<sup>2268</sup>

If water baptism is a symbol, then what does it symbolize? It symbolizes washing away sin (see Acts 22:16), burial of the old man, and resurrection into new life (see Rom 6:4).

Why is baptism important to observe? First, the Lord Jesus Himself commanded His disciples to practice it (see Matt 28:19). Therefore, submitting to baptism is a step of obedience to Christ. Second, baptism has been the custom of the Church for two thousand years and practiced in almost every Christian denomination. It serves as an expression of the unity of the Church. Third, water baptism is an external expression of the internal change that occurs in new believers – they have received forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ.

In addition, baptism also draws attention to the historical character of Christian faith. Christian faith radically differs from other religions. Other faiths base their doctrines on the personal convictions of their leaders. Christianity, however, is based on what God has done in history. The coming of God's Son to earth was a historical event, as was His death and resurrection from the dead. In order to underscore the objective nature of Christian faith, God requires believers to observe this practice and participate in a physical symbol of Christ's completed work. Finally, the Church takes opportunity through this public ceremony to give new believers a platform for testifying of their faith.

So then, we conclude that baptism is a means to express our faith and serves as a symbol the salvation already received by faith. It is not required for obtaining eternal life. At the same time, we wish to modify our position to include helpful insight from other viewpoints and thus embrace the entire biblical witness.

Although the "symbolic" position is the most convincing, we should not underestimate the close connection between salvation and baptism to which Scripture testifies. Some passages advanced in defense of the sacramental position are difficult to completely explain as symbolic, such as Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and 1 Pet 3:21. In addition, in Romans 6:3-5 and Colossians 2:11-13, Paul makes a close connection between water baptism and the believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

We also note that in the New Testament Church, new converts were baptized immediately upon conversion. This suggests that new converts benefited not only from an inner, subjective experience of conversion to Christ, but also from the outer, objective experience of water baptism for establishing their faith. It is interesting to note that Martin Luther also shared this concern. Although his theory of "Word in water" lacks biblical support, he shows insight in the following statement. In order to strengthen and establish faith, "it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart."<sup>2269</sup>

We can concur with Alexander Campbell, then, in his earlier view of baptism, that the call to repentance conventionally practiced in the Church may be inadequate to confirm a person in faith. It is desirable to add a physical act. Water baptism is meant to fill that role. It is highly likely that our failure to baptize immediately after conversion, which was the norm in early Christianity, is one of the reasons why many new converts do not continue in the faith. However, we do not embrace Campbell's later view that salvation *depends* on baptism.

Our conclusion finds resonance with Reformed theology, that water baptism is the "sign and seal" of salvation. In other words, baptism serves as a means to strengthen and establish the faith of a new convert. By this means, God confirms His promise of salvation and thereby more firmly grounds the faith of the new

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<sup>2266</sup>Hull, p. 6-7.

<sup>2267</sup>Buse S. I. Baptism in the Acts of the Apostles // Gilmore A. Christian baptism. – London: Lutterworth Press, 1959. – P. 116.

<sup>2268</sup>Strong, p. 946; Bromiley G. W. Baptism // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 131.

<sup>2269</sup>Luther, *Large Catechism*, 13.30.

believer. At the same time, we do not support the view of some Reformed thinkers, that water baptism actually transmits God's grace.

So then, we support the symbolic view that a new convert is saved at the moment of faith before submitting to baptism. Yet, approximating the time of conversion to the event of baptism can provide the new believer with a more objective experience of conversion. Therefore, persons experience *actual* salvation before baptism, but receive *practical* benefit from associating (but not equating) their salvation experience with water baptism.

This is possibly what Ananias had in mind when he said to repentant Saul, "Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). The New Testament Church may have employed the moment of receiving baptism to perform the *formal* act of "calling on His name" (Acts 22:16) and "appealing to God for a good conscience" (1 Pet 3:21).

We can illustrate this view by reflecting on the marriage customs in the Slavic world. In order to officially register one's marriage, the couple must appear before the marriage bureau where they legally form the union. From that moment, they are fully married. Then, a Christian couple will appear before their local church in a marriage ceremony. Thus, the couple is *officially* married before the marriage bureau, but *formally* declare their marriage in a church ceremony.

We conclude our discussion with one more consideration on baptism. Some equate baptism with making a covenant with God, appealing to 1 Peter 3:21: "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you – not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." This conviction is reinforced by the fact that the term "appeal" can also be translated "promise" or "pledge." Nevertheless, the New Testament never speaks of baptism as a covenant relationship. At the time of baptism, the candidates do indeed dedicate their lives to the Lord, but it is misguided to call this a covenant. The only covenant that the New Testament speaks of is the one established by the shedding of Christ's blood for the forgiveness of sins (Lk 22:20).

## C. Candidates for Water Baptism

Another controversial issue in the application of water baptism is the question, "Who can be baptized?" Some support infant baptism, while others insist that baptism can only be administered to those who have displayed personal faith.

This question is related to our previous discussion of the significance of water baptism. Those who adhere to infant baptism believe that it communicates to them grace for salvation, while those who baptize only believers see it as a symbol that the candidate is already saved. In addition, those who baptize only believers debate as to the age baptism is permitted. In other words, should we baptize older children, or just adults?

### 1. Infants or Only Believers?

Many proponents of infant baptism feel that water baptism is necessary for forgiveness of original sin and for the salvation of souls. Augustine was a leading figure in this regard.<sup>2270</sup> The Catholic Church (along with several more traditional Protestant denominations) believe that infants inherit the guilt of Adam and need forgiveness of original sin through baptism. Eastern Orthodox, however, feel that infants are not subject to inherited guilt, yet water baptism does provide them with the new birth. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession states, "Children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God's grace" (Article 9).<sup>2271</sup>

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<sup>2270</sup>See *On the merits and forgiveness of sins, and on the baptism of infants*, 3.39.

<sup>2271</sup>[https://www.concordianc.org/uploads/files/Augsburg\\_Confession.pdf](https://www.concordianc.org/uploads/files/Augsburg_Confession.pdf)

However, on biblical grounds adherents of believer's baptism reject the thesis that infants receive salvation through the baptismal rite. Our examination of key biblical texts performed earlier leads us to conclude that water baptism does not communicate saving grace. We will go on to show as well that baptism of infants is inappropriate.

Reformed denominations work off the assumption by Calvin and Zwingli that children of believing parents are automatically included in the covenant with God as it was in the Old Testament and are worthy candidates for infant baptism. Charles Hodge defends this view: "When a believer adopts the covenant of grace, he brings his children within that covenant, in the sense that God promises to give them, in his own good time, all the benefits of redemption, provided they do not willingly renounce their baptismal engagements."<sup>2272</sup>

The grace proffered through baptism remains in the baptized child, yet it does not act until the child exercises personal faith. At that moment, the grace of baptism is released to regenerate the child (see our qualification later<sup>2273</sup>). In Calvin's words, "Children are baptized for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit."<sup>2274</sup>

In addition, a close association is made between baptism and circumcision. In the Old Testament, circumcision served as a sign of the infant's acceptance into the people of God. In a similar fashion, water baptism is thought to fulfill the same role – inclusion of the infant into God's New Testament people.

In refutation of the Reformed position on circumcision, we note that infant baptism does not replace physical circumcision. This is shown by the fact that Christian Jewish parents in the first century both circumcised and baptized their children. Additionally, in Paul's battle against those who required circumcision for salvation, he never argues that circumcision is not necessary because baptism has replaced it.<sup>2275</sup> We must also consider the unlikely possibility that Paul, after vigorously refuting the teaching of the necessity of circumcision for salvation, would have replaced it with a requirement for another physical act – water baptism.

The truth is that circumcision not only indicated inclusion in the covenant, but also symbolized the removal of the sinful nature and spiritual rebirth (Deut 34:6). According to Scripture, water baptism corresponds only to the second aspect – a symbol of the removal of the sinful nature and spiritual rebirth (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12-13). Ware agrees:

The parallel, then, between circumcision and baptism in the new covenant is not between physical circumcision and infant baptism; rather, the parallel is between spiritual circumcision of the heart and baptism which signifies regeneration, faith and union with Christ.<sup>2276</sup>

We also argue that the New Testament established a new means for inclusion in God's people – not in a physical sense by being born into a certain family, but by spiritual rebirth through faith in Jesus, with whom God the Father established the covenant (see Gal 3:16, 29). Wellum correctly claims, "To be a member of Abraham's family now is not tied to a specific physical lineage... only through faith union in Christ."<sup>2277</sup>

Adherents of infant baptism appeal to Jesus' attitude toward children. He always received them warmly and rebuked those who attempted to hinder them from coming to Him. In Matthew 19:14, our Lord said of children, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Then, He laid His hands on them, which some interpret as a symbol of water baptism.

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<sup>2272</sup>Hodge, v. 3, p. 555. Also see Shedd, p. 817-818.

<sup>2273</sup>More precisely, according to Reformed theology no one is able to turn to Christ without the action of God's grace, which is granted only to His elect. Consequently, the power of baptism is released *before* the exercise of personal faith and causes it to act. This "release of grace" occurs at God's initiative according to His election.

<sup>2274</sup>Calvin J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.16.20.

<sup>2275</sup>Ware B. A. Believer's baptism view // Wright D. F. *Baptism: Three views* // Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009. – P. 47, 115.

<sup>2276</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>2277</sup>Wellum S. J. *Baptism and the relationship between the covenants* // Schreiner T. R., Wright S. D. *Believer's baptism: Sign of the new covenant in Christ*. – Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2006. – P. 135.



On the other hand, we must consider the following. First, in Hebrew culture it was customary to invoke blessings on descendants (see Gen 9:26-27; 27; 28:1-4; 48:14-18; *Soferim*, 18.5). Therefore, Jesus' actions here were typical of the times and do not validate infant baptism. Second, most commentators agree that Jesus' goal here was not to set a precedent for water baptism, but rather to make the point that adults need to become as children to enter the kingdom of God.

A key consideration in this discussion is that the book of Acts records several instances where an entire household received water baptism. Did this include baptism of infants as well? Such "household baptisms" occurred in Acts 10:47-48 (the household of Cornelius), Acts 16:13-15 (the household of Lydia), and Acts 16:30-33 (the household of the Philippian jailer). Another instance is noted in 1 Corinthians 1:16 (the household of Stephanas).

On the other hand, Acts 18:8 sheds more light on the question: "Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household." Here, the expression "all household" refers only to those who understood the Word and believed. We see a similar example in the case of the Philippian jailer, when Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house... and immediately he was baptized, he and all his {household}... having believed in God with his whole household" (Acts 16:32-34). In this example, the entire household heard the Word, believed, and was baptized. It is logical to conclude that we are dealing here with individuals older than infants. Finally, Cornelius and "all his household" feared the Lord (Acts 10:2), which again rules out infants.<sup>2278</sup>

We can cite other New Testament examples outside the book of Acts where the expression "all household" excludes infants. In John 4:53, the royal official believed with his whole household. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, we learn that the household of Stephanas had dedicated themselves to serve the saints.<sup>2279</sup>

In Acts 2:39, Peter announced that the promise of salvation extends to "you and your children and for all who are far off." Some conclude that Peter claimed that forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit was being offered to children (including infants) of these new converts through water baptism.

However, although Peter did offer the promise of the Spirit to the children of new converts, he did not indicate how they would receive that blessing.<sup>2280</sup> It is fair to assume that the children of these newly converted must fulfill the same conditions that their parents did on Pentecost Day, including repentance. Peter also added, "...as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." Only individuals older than infants can personally respond to God's call.<sup>2281</sup> More likely, when Peter said "you and your children and for all who are far off," he meant that the gospel will spread over time and space. It will be available both to future generations and to those geographically distant from Jerusalem.

Next, in 1 Corinthians 7:14 we read that children of believers are "holy." Does this mean that they qualify for the rite of baptism? The *Westminster Confession of Faith* declares, "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized."<sup>2282</sup>

Here we must note that the same word that describes the condition of children of believing parents, that is ἁγία (*hagia*), i.e., "holy," is used in its verbal form in relation to the unbelieving spouse: "The unbelieving husband is *sanctified* through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is *sanctified* through her believing husband." Yet, verse 16 informs us, "How do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

So then, the "sanctification" of the unbelieving spouse does not mean he or she is saved and a worthy candidate for water baptism. Similarly, the "sanctification" of the children of believers does not mean that they

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<sup>2278</sup>Aland K. Did the Early Church baptize infants? / Trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray. – London: SCM Press, 1963. – P. 89.

<sup>2279</sup>Noted in Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 316.

<sup>2280</sup>Pass, p. 298.

<sup>2281</sup>Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, p. 342.

<sup>2282</sup>*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28.4.

are saved or candidates for baptism. It simply refers to the fact that the believing spouse has a *sanctifying influence* on the family.

Another key question in the discussion of infant baptism is that of faith. Does the infant need faith to be baptized? Catholics and Orthodox believe that sacraments operate automatically without the absolute need for faith.<sup>2283</sup> Catholics also hold, though, that a candidate can be baptized through the faith of the Church,<sup>2284</sup> or believe that the absence of active resistance by the candidate is sufficient for grace to be transmitted.<sup>2285</sup>

Lutherans, in general, hold that infants themselves have the ability to believe.<sup>2286</sup> They cite the following Scriptures in support: Matthew 18:6; 19:14; Psalm 8:2; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16-17.<sup>2287</sup> Luther himself stated that he could not justify the baptism of infants if they could not, in fact, believe.<sup>2288</sup> The Lutheran theologian Jacobs suggests that for an infant, knowing about the object of faith is not as important as having an attitude of trust, which infants do possess.<sup>2289</sup> Some Lutherans propose that faith itself can be communicated to the infant during the act of baptism.<sup>2290</sup>

Beasley-Murray, though, affirms that infants cannot meet the conditions for receiving baptism.<sup>2291</sup> In particular, they cannot “appeal to God for a good conscience” (1 Pet 3:21), repent (Acts 2:39), believe (Gal 3:26; Col 2:12), or call on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Furthermore, in Scripture we often encounter the phrase “believe and be baptized,” and faith is always mentioned first (e.g. Acts 2:38; 8:12).

Some defenders of infant baptism fail to appreciate that faith without an object of faith is useless. Scripture demands, “Believe *in the Lord Jesus*, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Genuine faith requires a certain knowledge of the object of faith (see 2 Tim 3:15). Infants are not able to believe in Jesus, and therefore they are not suitable candidates for the ordinance of baptism.

Infant baptism has a long history in the church and finds support in church tradition and the teaching of the Fathers. We can cite the following:<sup>2292</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions*, 21 (3rd c.), Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, 5.9, and *Homilies on Luke*, 19 (3rd c.); Cyprian, *Letters*, 58, 63 (3rd c.); Jerome, *Epistles*, 107.6 (4th-5th c.); and Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 2.51, and *On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin*, 21 (4th-5th c.). The Council of Carthage (418 r.) anathematized those who forbade the baptism of infants.

In spite of the historical considerations just mentioned, it is problematic to validate infant baptism. From a biblical perspective, we know that all baptisms recorded in Scripture were performed on believers. The New Testament contains neither a concrete teaching on infant baptism, nor a clear example of that practice. Although the practice of infant baptism dates back to an early period of church history, it does not predate the New Testament, which is the only reliable source for Christian doctrine and practice.

Other historical arguments weight against infant baptism as well. Among some early witnesses, we see no mention of the practice, such as: Clement of Rome, Polycarp, *Epistle of “Barnabas,” Pastor of Hermas*, Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>2293</sup> In this regard, George Beasley-Murray states that the desire to baptize

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<sup>2283</sup>Иларион, Таинство Веры, p. 147.

<sup>2284</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1253; Duplacy, p. 153-156.

<sup>2285</sup>Schrotenboer P., ed. An Evangelical response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* // Evangelical Review of Theology. 1989. 13. P. 298.

<sup>2286</sup>Mueller, p. 498.

<sup>2287</sup>Erickson M. J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 359.

<sup>2288</sup>Noted in Pieper, v. 3, p. 267.

<sup>2289</sup>Jacobs H. A summary of the Christian faith – P. 234-235. Taken from Hamilton A. H. *The doctrine of infant salvation* // Bibliotheca Sacra. 1944. 101. P. 355.

<sup>2290</sup>Noted in Pannenberg W. *Systematic theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998. – V. 3. – P. 622-623. Also see Kolb, p. 98-99; Pieper, v. 3, p. 285.

<sup>2291</sup>Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 361-365.

<sup>2292</sup>Иларион, Таинство веры, p. 147; Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – P. 109; Allison, p. 619; Hamilton, p. 347; Warfield B. B. *Two studies in the history of doctrine : Augustine and the Pelagian controversy : the development of the doctrine of infant salvation*. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897. – P. 148.

<sup>2293</sup>Pickering H. *Christian baptism* // *Water baptism and the Trinity*. – Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, n.d. – P. 28.

infants grew steadily among the laity, and the church hierarchy failed to curb that desire, but rather endorsed the practice.<sup>2294</sup>

In addition, some Church Fathers actually challenged the practice of infant baptism. For example, Tertullian wrote about baptizing infants, “Let them ‘come,’ then, while they are growing up; let them ‘come’ while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ” (*On Baptism*, 18). Gregory Nazianzen shared this opinion:

But in respect of others (i.e., not in immediate mortal danger) I give my advice to wait till the end of the third year, or a little more or less, when they may be able to listen and to answer something about the Sacrament; that, even though they do not perfectly understand it, yet at any rate they may know the outlines; and then to sanctify them in soul and body with the great sacrament of our consecration (*Orations*, 40.28).

We can add to this testimony the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which makes reference to “one Baptism for the remission of sins.” Wright observes that the Eastern Fathers, who hosted this Council, did not believe in inherited depravity of children or in their need of forgiveness. Therefore, in their mind the “one Baptism for the remission of sins” can only apply to those who have consciously sinned, which excludes infants.<sup>2295</sup>

Another evidence for early church practices is found in graveyard inscriptions, dated from the third century, which provide us insight into the Early Church practice.<sup>2296</sup> Often (but not always), these inscriptions inform us when a child died and when he or she was baptized. In every case where these dates are given, the parents baptized the child soon before death. No instance was discovered where parents baptized a child earlier. We also see examples where young people or adults were baptized right before death, which indicates that they did not receive baptism as infants.

Also important to note is that the issue of baptizing only believers caused a serious conflict between the so-called “Magisterial Reformation” and the “Radical Reformation.” The latter, which consisted basically of Anabaptists, rejected the baptism of infants and was consequently persecuted by the former. Zwingli initially baptized only believers since he considered baptism to be a symbol of grace already received. However, in reaction to the Anabaptists, he altered his view and began to baptize infants.<sup>2297</sup>

It is curious to note that one of the most famous and influential Reformed theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth, held to views on baptism contrary to his theological comrades and, in the end, rejected the practice of infant baptism since it was not supported by the biblical witness.<sup>2298</sup>

The final item in our refutation of infant baptism is that in our experience, we observe that those who receive baptism as infants do not always become true believers or demonstrate a Christian lifestyle. Therefore, infant baptism actually creates the danger of deceiving people into thinking that they are Christians by virtue of their water baptism when they, in fact, have never truly been born again.<sup>2299</sup>

In light of our discussion above, we conclude that water baptism is appropriate only for those who have consciously believed in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, which excludes infants. We will discuss the fate of infants who die in infancy or early childhood in a later chapter.

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<sup>2294</sup>Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, p. 354-357. Also see Lampe, p. 130.

<sup>2295</sup>Wright D. F. One baptism or two? Reflections on the history of Christian baptism // *Evangelical Review of Theology*. 1989. 13. P. 329.

<sup>2296</sup>See. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 377; Ferguson E. Inscriptions and the origin of infant baptism // Ferguson E. *Conversion, catechumenate, and baptism in the Early Church*. – Vol. 11 of *Studies in Early Christianity*. – New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1993. – P. 398; Aland, p. 75-76.

<sup>2297</sup>Allison, p. 625-626.

<sup>2298</sup>Haitch, p. 132-155.

<sup>2299</sup>Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. *Across the spectrum: Understanding issues in Evangelical theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 206.

## 2. Youth?

The Bible does not give specific instructions about the baptism of older children and youth. Therefore, we must rely on basic principles and common sense. If we claim that water baptism is an expression of faith for the newly converted individual, then we must allow that the requirement for baptism be as follows.

First, the individual must be sufficiently mature to make a personal decision for Christ. Second, this person must be able to conceptualize the significance of baptism, that is, what it symbolizes. Thus, an individual of any age who meets these conditions is a candidate for water baptism. It is best not to set a specific age limit, but rather to assess each situation independently. The determination depends totally on the maturity level of that individual.

### D. Methods of Baptizing

#### 1. When to Baptize?

In determining the right method for baptism, we must also consider the timing of the event. In other words, how soon after conversion should one seek baptism?

In the Early Church, the so-called “catechumens” went through a three year period of study and preparation for this rite.<sup>2300</sup> It was sometimes thought that sins committed after water baptism could not be forgiven.<sup>2301</sup> Therefore, catechumens were subjected to an intense preparatory period. In this way, the Church could be assured that this person’s conversion was genuine and sincere. In addition, the participants in the Council of Nicaea were concerned that a quick baptism would allow new converts to obtain high posts in the Church before they were ready. Additionally, a thorough doctrinal preparation of new converts would prevent the spread of Gnosticism, which was a major threat to the Church at that time.<sup>2302</sup> The contemporary Church follows a similar model – adults typically complete a preparatory class in Christian faith before receiving baptism.

Although this practice appears reasonable and is supported by age-old Christian tradition, it deviates from the clear biblical model, where a new believer received water baptism as soon as possible after conversion. We note that new believers in the apostolic time needed instruction in the faith just as much as new believers today. Yet, the earliest disciples of Jesus thought it more necessary to baptize immediately than to subject converts to preliminary teaching.

In addition, we must understand that one does not need an exhaustive grasp of Christian doctrine to be baptized, but merely a comprehension and acceptance of the basic gospel facts. Water baptism is no more than a pictorial representation of cleansing from sin, the death and burial of the old person, and resurrection into newness of life. Therefore, if persons understand the gospel (which is essential for being saved anyway), they can also understand the significance of water baptism.

#### 2. How to Baptize?

##### a. Sprinkling and Pouring

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<sup>2300</sup>Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 343.

<sup>2301</sup>See Tertullian, *On repentance*, 7, and *Pastor of Hermas, Commandments*, 4.3. Noted in Allison, p. 617. Also see Stander, Louw, p. 38; and Quick O. C. Original sin and baptism // *Anglican Theological Review*. 1929. 11. P. 322.

<sup>2302</sup>Булатова О. А. Водное крещение в истории христианской церкви // Студенческая работа, Московский Теологический Институт. – Москва, 2017.

One method employed for performing the baptismal rite is sprinkling or pouring water on the candidate.<sup>2303</sup> Adherents of this view argue that in some biblical examples of water baptism, the amount of water available was insufficient to perform immersion. For example, 3000 persons required baptism on Pentecost Day (Acts 2). A little later, 5000 persons believed at one time (Acts 4). Phillip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert (Acts 8). They also cite the baptism of Cornelius' household and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16).<sup>2304</sup>

We find this argument unconvincing, being merely an assumption. The biblical narrative does not always give such details about the events it records. The biblical writers thought it unnecessary to comment on the availability of water. Moreover, the amount of water needed to baptize one individual is not much. If many are baptized in the same water, the amount of water needed does not increase.

Another argument employed in defense of sprinkling or pouring is the mention of sprinkling in the Old Testament.<sup>2305</sup> For example, in Ezekiel 36:25 God sprinkles pure water to purify His people from idols. On the other hand, we are dealing in Ezekiel 36 with a metaphor that symbolizes purification of the soul. The reference here is not to water baptism.

Other Old Testament examples of cleansing by sprinkling are found in the following texts: Exodus 24:6-8; Leviticus 14:4-7, 49-53; and Numbers 8:7; 19:18-19; 31:19-23.<sup>2306</sup> Some presume that John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples would naturally follow the Old Testament precedent of sprinkling. However, this is another assumption. Jesus and His disciples did not always blindly follow Old Testament practices or rabbinic traditions (see Mk 2:18-22ff). Unlike Old Testament cleansing rites, John's baptism and Christian baptism represent a radical life-change, which is poorly reflected in sprinkling.

It is also argued that the figure of sprinkling is used for how the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin (Heb 9:13, 14, 22; 10:22; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2). Since water baptism also represents forgiveness of sins, why not perform it by sprinkling?<sup>2307</sup> In response, we recall that the references to the sprinkling of Christ's blood are not associated with water baptism, but with the Old Testament sacrificial system, where the blood of sacrificial animals was sprinkled.

Hodge claims that the biblical summons to "wash yourselves" can be done in various ways – by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring: "By washing is meant any such application of water to the body as effects its purification. This may be done by immersion, affusion, or sprinkling."<sup>2308</sup> Yet, Hodge fails to appreciate that baptism also represents burial and resurrection (Rom 6:4-5), which is better demonstrated by immersion.

Furthermore, proponents of sprinkling or pouring compare water baptism with the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is often depicted in Scripture as an "outpouring" (see Acts 2:17; Isa 32:15; Joel 2:28; Prov 1:23). This is better reflected by performing baptism by pouring or sprinkling.<sup>2309</sup> Nevertheless, the gift of the Spirit is also compared with the baptism of John (Matt 3:11), which was done by immersion.

We must also consider in our discussion the Greek term βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*), i.e., "baptism," and its related forms.<sup>2310</sup> In classical Greek, this word meant "immersion," but with some exceptions. First, in Luke 11:38 the word βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) is used in the sense of washing hands, which is short of total body immersion.<sup>2311</sup> In addition, in Mark 7:4 we read, "...and {when they come} from the market place, they do not eat unless they

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<sup>2303</sup>For example, see *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28.3.

<sup>2304</sup>Murray, p. 20-21; Hodge, v. 3, p. 526.

<sup>2305</sup>Murray, p. 20-21.

<sup>2306</sup>Shedd, p. 819-820.

<sup>2307</sup>Murray, p. 20-21.

<sup>2308</sup>Hodge, v. 3, p. 526.

<sup>2309</sup>Murray p. 20-21.

<sup>2310</sup>See Beazley, p. 65; Averbeck, p. 266-272; Chafer L. S. *Systematic theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993. – V. 7. – P. 32-38; Hodge C. *Systematic theology*. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997. – V. 3. – P. 528-533; Shedd, p. 820; Rayburn R. S. *Baptism, Modes of* // Elwell W. A. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 134; Strong, p. 934.

<sup>2311</sup>*Ibid*.

cleansed themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots).” Shedd claims that the Jews washed their hands by pouring water on them, and that they cleansed vessels by pouring or sprinkling.<sup>2312</sup>

Additionally, in the Apocryphal books of the Septuagint, we encounter the term βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) again, namely in *Judith*, 12.7 and *Sircah*, 31[34].25. Hodge suggests that in the latter passage, immersion is not in view since the text is dealing with cleansing from ceremonial defilement, which, according to Numbers 19:13, is accomplished by sprinkling.<sup>2313</sup> Shedd advances a similar position that in *Judith*, 12.7, immersion is again not in view, since Judith would not take a bath outside in a spring near the camp – she would have just washed up.<sup>2314</sup> We will delay a further discussion on the word βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) until the section on immersion (see below).

The final argument in favor of sprinkling or pouring is found in early Christian art dating from the second century. Baptism is depicted as being performed by pouring.<sup>2315</sup> Typically, the candidate is standing naked in water which may suggest immersion, yet sometimes the water is not deep and is being poured on the head. On the other hand, all the early Church Fathers who wrote about the topic speak of immersion.<sup>2316</sup> If we encounter a discrepancy between specific teaching on baptism by the Church Fathers and a representation of it in art, we give preference to the former.

## **b. Immersion**

Immersion is supported by the symbolism of the baptismal event. According to Scripture, it represents cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16) and burial/resurrection with Christ (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:11-13). Both symbols are best depicted by complete immersion.

Furthermore, the Bible contains several clear examples of baptism by immersion. When John baptized Jesus, the latter “came up out of the water” (Mk 1:10). In Acts 8, when the Ethiopian eunuch turned to the Lord he and Phillip went down into the water, and Phillip baptized him (Acts 8:36). Additionally, in John 3:23 we read that John “was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there,” which implies immersion.

We return to our discussion of the key term βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*), which is the conventional designation for baptism in water. In classical Greek, it denotes immersion.<sup>2317</sup> In the Old Testament, we witness the same: “(Naaman) he went down and dipped {himself} (βαπτίζω) seven times in the Jordan” (2 Kin 5:14). Also significant is how βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) is used metaphorically. In 1 Corinthians 10:2, where the children of Israel “were baptized (βαπτίζω) into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” although neither the waters of the sea, nor the cloud touched them, we can nonetheless picture immersion here. Moreover, in Mark 10:38-39 Jesus described His sufferings under the figure of baptism. In light of the cruel sufferings He endured, the picture of “immersion” fits better than either “pouring” or “sprinkling.” Finally, in Galatians 3:27 the verb βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) stands in parallel with “clothed,” that is, a complete “immersion” in clothing.

We recall that our discussion of sprinkling and pouring revealed that the verb βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) and its related forms can refer to those practices as well. Nevertheless, even though βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) can at times indicate sprinkling or pouring, the existence of other terms carrying those connotations makes the claim unlikely that βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) was used regularly for sprinkling or pouring.

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<sup>2312</sup>Shedd, p. 820.

<sup>2313</sup>Hodge, v. 3, p. 528-529.

<sup>2314</sup>Shedd, p. 820-821.

<sup>2315</sup>Stander, Louw, p. 172ff; Brown H. F., p. 91-93; Rayburn R. S. Baptism, Modes of // Elwell W. A. Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. – 2nd ed. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001. – P. 135.

<sup>2316</sup>The following witnesses describe baptism as immersion: *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Pastor of Hermas*, Irenaeus, Serapion of Antioch, Cyprian, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, and others. The Eastern Church continues to practice immersion. Even Luther, who did not require immersion, saw value in it.

<sup>2317</sup>Strong, p. 934.

Therefore, without a specific mention in the text that it means otherwise, it is advisable to ascribe to βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) and its related forms the sense of immersion. So then, when in the New Testament the word βαπτίζω (*baptidzo*) applies to water baptism, it is referring to immersion.<sup>2318</sup>

Moreover, from a historical perspective Brown mentions that from the seventh century, we observe a decrease in the size of baptisteries, which corresponds to an alteration in how congregations performed baptism – no longer by immersion, but by sprinkling or pouring.<sup>2319</sup> It is also interesting that the Early Church's method of immersion differed from ours. The candidate knelt in the water and bowed face first into the water.<sup>2320</sup>

## 2. In Which Name to Baptize?

In which name should we baptize: in the name of Jesus, or in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? In the Scriptures, one can find support for both variants. For example, in Matthew 28:19 Jesus commissioned His disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." In the book of Acts, though, the apostles baptized in the name of Jesus (see Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). How can this discrepancy be resolved?

In favor of the Trinitarian formula, we note that Matthew 28:19 is a concrete injunction from the Lord Himself. On the other hand, in Acts we have not a specific teaching, but examples from church practice.

The second century non-canonical book, *Didache*, echoes Jesus' injunction to use the Trinitarian formula: "Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water" (*Didache*, 7). The Church Fathers did the same. In fact, they consider baptisms performed without the Trinitarian formula invalid. Curiously, though, later in the *Didache* baptism is done "in the name of the Lord" (chp. 9). Harrison makes this comment, "There is no more need to see contradiction between Matt 28:19 and the language of Acts than to see it between the two passages in the *Didache*."<sup>2321</sup>

Nonetheless, if baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is more appropriate, then why did the apostles in Acts baptize in Jesus' name? It may be helpful to observe that the phrase "in the name of Jesus" was also employed in prayer and in performing miracles (including exorcisms). In these cases, the expression "in the name of Jesus" refers to His authority. Therefore, baptism in Jesus' name may be understood not as a baptismal formula, but as indicating the authority by which baptism is performed.<sup>2322</sup>

Moreover, this phrase may point to the object of baptismal candidate's faith. In other words, Jesus is the one the baptismal candidate is relying on for salvation. For example, in Acts 22:16 Ananias said to Saul, "Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, *calling on His name*." It is also possible that baptism "in Jesus' name" simply distinguishes Christian baptism from non-Christian ones.<sup>2323</sup>

Furthermore, this phrase may point to the One to whom the baptismal candidates are devoting their lives.<sup>2324</sup> Paul commented in 1 Corinthians 1:12-13: "Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ.' Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" In other words, to be baptized in Paul's name is to be "of Paul," and to be baptized in Jesus' name is to be "of Jesus." Therefore, baptism "in the name of Jesus" could refer to one's commitment to be His disciple.

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<sup>2318</sup>Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, p. 59.

<sup>2319</sup>Brown H. F., p. 75-85.

<sup>2320</sup>Argyle, p. 194-195.

<sup>2321</sup>Harrison E. F. Did Christ command world evangelism? // *Christianity Today*. – November 23, 1973. P. 9. Taken from Plaster D. R. Baptism by triune immersion // *Grace Theological Journal*. 1985. 6. P. 385.

<sup>2322</sup>Pickering so taught (Pickering, p. 32).

<sup>2323</sup>So teach: Hultgren, p. 9; Dockery D. S. Baptism in the New Testament // *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. 2001. 43. p. 12.

<sup>2324</sup>So teach: Plaster, p. 385; Flemington, p. 45.

We conclude that according to the command of the Lord Jesus Himself, the proper method for baptism is to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Several plausible alternative explanations exist for the other variant, as noted above.

We can also mention an event related to this question. In the contemporary church, a movement called “Jesus only” has arisen that baptizes exclusively in the name of Jesus. This group denies the existence of the Trinity and teaches that Jesus is the only Person of the Godhead. Yet, the clear biblical teaching on the Trinity overturns this false teaching.

### 3. How Many Times to Baptize?

Also entering the discussion on baptism is the issue of how many immersions should be performed: one or three? Some interpret Matthew 28:19, “...baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,” to say that three immersions are prescribed, one for each Person of the Trinity. This is the Eastern Orthodox view and practice. John of Damascus defended this approach: “For by the three immersions, baptism signifies the three days of our Lord’s entombment.”<sup>2325</sup> Catholics also practice this, but with three sprinkles rather than with three immersions.<sup>2326</sup>

Others prescribe a threefold immersion, such as Tertullian (*The Chaplet*, 3), Basil the Great (*On the Holy Spirit*, 27.66, 67), Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom. In fact, the Second Ecumenical Council speaks critically of a certain sect, “Eunomians, who are baptized with only one immersion.”<sup>2327</sup>

On the other hand, we have in Scripture no example of such a practice. Again, baptism represents cleansing (Acts 22:16) and burial/resurrection (Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:11-13). If an individual has already bathed, that person is clean and need not dip again. If an individual has already died, there is no reason to rebury that person. Baptism is not done primarily to acknowledge the Trinity or to recall the three days that Jesus spent in the tomb. Therefore, a single immersion is adequate.

### 4. Who Can Perform Baptism?

The next question for our consideration is who can perform baptisms? Some Christian denominations, namely Catholics and Orthodox, hold the view that only clergy in the apostolic succession have this right.<sup>2328</sup> Other confessions teach that apostolic succession is not needed, yet the baptizer must nonetheless be an ordained minister.<sup>2329</sup> However, the above mentioned groups will allow for the so-called “laity” to baptize in an emergency.<sup>2330</sup>

We must consider, though, that when Jesus commissioned His disciples to perform water baptism (Matt 28:19), this did not imply that they alone had the right to do so. Those who feel that the Great Commission limits the right to baptize will, at the same time, not hesitate to acknowledge that other elements of the Great Commission, i.e., to evangelize and make disciples, are applicable to all Christians.

The Bible gives no specific instructions on the question of qualifications to baptize. It is interesting to note that Paul, who had the highest authority in the Church as an apostle, delegated that ministry to others (1 Cor 1:14). Most likely, the teaching among Protestants that baptism requires an ordained minister is an unconscious carryover from the sacramental understanding of baptism practiced earlier in church history.

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<sup>2325</sup> John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.9. Cyril of Jerusalem also so taught. See *The Catechetical Lectures*, 20.

<sup>2326</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1239.

<sup>2327</sup> *The Canons of the Second Ecumenical Council, Constantinople (381)*, 1, 7.

<sup>2328</sup> Catholics also allow deacons to baptize (Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1256).

<sup>2329</sup> Mueller, p. 499. Also see *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28.2.

<sup>2330</sup> Mueller, p. 499. Also see *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 28.2; Pieper, v. 3, p. 279; Kolb, p. 108.



In summary, we claim that theoretically any believer can perform water baptism. Nevertheless, for the sake of order, it is reasonable to assign that task to church leaders. In any case, since the Bible does not prescribe baptism by clergy alone, one cannot insist on that order.

## 5. The Question of Re-Baptism

Christians also ponder the question of re-baptism. The apostles encountered that dilemma as well. We recall the instance in Ephesus where Paul met some disciples of John the Baptist. He determined that John's baptism was insufficient and re-baptized these individuals in Christian baptism (Acts 19:5).

During the time of the Reformation, the Anabaptist bravely advanced the view that believers who were baptized as infants should be re-baptized as believers. Wright comments on the consequences of their stand: "For this Anabaptists suffered, being branded frequently as 'Donatists' and subjected to the sanctions of the anti-Donatist legislation of the early Christian Roman emperors."<sup>2331</sup>

Protestants who do not recognize infant baptism teach that persons should receive water baptism after a conscious decision to follow Christ, even if they received baptism as infants. Since the Bible does not sanction infant baptism, this baptism is considered invalid.

At the same time, those who baptize only believers usually allow only one such event. Nonetheless, not all share this view. If persons considered themselves believers at the time of their initial baptism, but really were not and later truly come to Christ, should they be re-baptized? The Baptist theologian Strong feels that re-baptism in such cases is not necessary.<sup>2332</sup> Others may allow or even require it. The present author supports the latter view.

## 6. Additions to the Baptismal Ceremony

The final topic for our investigation concerning proper methodology in baptism is the presence of certain additions to the baptismal ceremony that have accrued over the centuries. How appropriate are they?

Before the third century, the baptismal rite had already been embellished, as described in the work *Apostolic Constitutions*. The candidates would go out to a place with running water, remove all clothing, and receive an anointing, the "oil of exorcism," for cleansing from demons. Before the ceremony, the bishop sanctified the water and the oil. When the catechumens received the anointing, they renounced the devil. Then, they were immersed three times. On consecutive immersion, they confessed their faith in the Father, then the Son, then the Holy Spirit respectively. The bishop anointed them again, this time with the "oil of blessing." He then laid hands on the catechumens to impart the Holy Spirit to them. This was followed by another anointing, a sealing, and a "kiss of peace." The congregation then received the newly baptized and they shared communion together with a partaking of milk and honey.

Tertullian mentioned still another custom: "From that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week" (*The Chaplet*, 3), and newly baptized clothe themselves in white garments, which were donned after the ordinance.<sup>2333</sup> In the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem introduced into our discussion still other additions. When the catechumens renounce Satan, they stand with their face to the West (and other authors add that they spit three times<sup>2334</sup>), but when then confess their faith, they face to the East.<sup>2335</sup>

Are such adaptations appropriate for the baptismal ceremony today? Even though these customs may contain meaningful symbolism, nonetheless these additions give the ceremony pagan overtones. If these elements were necessary for baptism to be meaningful, then why did the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>2331</sup>Wright D. F., p. 333.

<sup>2332</sup>Strong, p. 950.

<sup>2333</sup>George T. Galatians // Dockery D. The new American commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994. – P. 787.

<sup>2334</sup>Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church, p. 856; George T., p. 280-281.

<sup>2335</sup>Argyle, p. 208.

not introduce these practices themselves? It seems that such additions more distract from the main thrust of the event than enrich it.

We prefer the simple biblical model – a single immersion of candidates in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit upon their confession of personal faith in Christ.

## **E. Application of Baptism**

At the close of our discussion about baptism, it is important to make a statement about its application to the Christian life. Until now, we have spoken of baptism as a symbol of cleansing from sin and burial/resurrection with Christ. In this sense, the ordinance of baptism serves as a source of comfort and strength. Yet, this ordinance promotes ethical living as well. Baptism is a summons to dedicate oneself to the Lord. We must take into consideration several key passages that urge the baptized to conduct a life consistent with the gospel.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:1-4).

In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul again raises the topic of baptism and makes the point that the deliverance from the power of sin provided through Christ's sacrifice and represented by baptism should lead to life-transformation:

...and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead (Col 2:11-12).

Furthermore, we heed Paul's instruction to his co-worker Titus. After Paul encourages good deeds and turning from evil (3:1-2), he describes the former manner of life of believers (3:3), and then appeals to water baptism as a stimulus to sanctification:

But when the kindness of God our Savior and {His} love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to {the} hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds (Tit 3:4-8).

Finally, Paul gives the example of the nation of Israel, who, after experiencing "baptism into Moses," neglected their covenant relationship with Yahweh and turned away from Him:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.... Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us...» (1 Cor 10:1-6).

Let us hold to a true understanding of water baptism and apply its call to holiness and dedication to the Lord to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose name we are baptized.

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## Chapter 23: The Lord's Supper

Before His crucifixion, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matt 26:26). He then took the cup, blessed it, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:27-28). From that time, nearly all Christian denominations have celebrated the Lord's Supper, recalling the redemptive work of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Scripture, this commemoration is known by various names: the breaking of bread, the Lord's Supper, the table of the Lord, and fellowship in the body and blood of Christ. Often it is called the Eucharist, which derives from the Greek word εὐχαριστία (*eucharistia*), the verbal form of which is translated in Mark 14:23, "give thanks," recounting when our Lord blessed the bread at the Last Supper.<sup>2336</sup> In church history, other designations were added: "communion" (the traditional Protestant designation), "religious service," "love feast," "liturgy," "sacrifice," "offering," and "mass."<sup>2337</sup>

In our discussion of the Lord's Supper, we will be focusing almost exclusively on the question of Christ's physical presence in the elements (i.e., "transubstantiation"). In order to do this formidable topic justice, we will briefly present the arguments for and against transubstantiation and then follow with a discussion of the development of this topic throughout the course of church history.

### A. The Question of Transubstantiation

The significance of this ordinance has concerned Christians over the course of church history. All would agree that the participants receive grace through it, but many disagree as to how that grace is imparted. Does one experience God's grace through the actual eating of the communion elements, or do they merely inspire faith, which is means by which grace comes? The question of the transmission of grace is directly linked to question of the real, physical presence of Christ in the sacrament.

If the elements actually become the body and blood of Christ (i.e., "transubstantiation"), then one may expect a direct, physical impartation of grace through partaking in communion. If the elements remain merely bread and wine, then they only serve to inspire reflection on the sacrifice accomplished on Calvary. So then, the answer to our question of the transmission of grace depends on determining whether the Lord is actually present in the elements of communion.

#### 1. Evidence for Transubstantiation

The following verses are employed in favor of the doctrine of transubstantiation:

When He had taken {some} bread {and} given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way {He took} the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Lk 22:19-20).

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<sup>2336</sup>Gavin proposes that the term εὐχαριστία (*eucharistia*) possibly traces back to the Hebrew בָּרַךְ (*barach*), i.e., to the blessing done at the Passover meal (see Gavin F. *The Jewish Antecedents of the Christian Sacraments*. – New York, NY: KTAV Publishing, 1969. – P. 71-72). However, it is more likely that the use of the term εὐχαριστήσας (*eucharistesas*) later in church practice derives from the Greek text of Mark 14:23.

<sup>2337</sup>Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 507.

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink” (Jn 6:53-55).

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27).

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16).

Other proofs are offered.<sup>2338</sup> Jesus spoke of His future presence among His disciples (Matt 18:20; 28:20). Furthermore, when Jesus spoke in parables, He often explained their meaning. If the Lord’s Supper is symbolic, then why did He not explain its symbolism? Additionally, if Jesus wished to symbolize His death, then why did He employ bread and wine and not the Passover lamb? Defenders of transubstantiation do not deny that the Lord’s Supper is done in remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice, but claim that this does not exclude the possibility of the real impartation of grace through the sacrament as well. Opponents of Christianity in the first century accused Christians of cannibalism. Why did the Church not answer that accusation by explaining that the Lord’s Supper was merely symbolic? Finally, adherents of transubstantiation also appeal to the Church Fathers for support (see below).

## **2. Refutation of Transubstantiation**

### **a. Re-examination of Key Biblical Texts**

Traditional opposition to the theory of transubstantiation can be found in examining alternative explanations for the key passages mentioned above which support a symbolic view of the Lord’s Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:27, we observe that in verses 26-28 Paul calls the elements of communion not the body and blood of Christ, but the bread and the cup:

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the *bread* and drink of the *cup*.

We also note that in verse 26, Paul explains the purpose of communion: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.” Here, it is clear that communion’s goal is remembrance of Christ, in particular, of His sacrificial death for our salvation. Neither Paul, nor Jesus, ever stated that by eating the bread and drinking the cup one would receive forgiveness of sins or spiritual power. No passage of Scripture supports this.

We next comment on 1 Corinthians 10:16: “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” We are interested in the phrase “sharing in the blood of Christ.” Does this mean that there is a real participation in Christ’s body and blood through communion?

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<sup>2338</sup>Stephenson J. R. The Lutheran View // Smith G. T. The Lord’s Supper: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008. – P. 48-50; Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 197.

In this text, the word “sharing” is *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*). The word involves sharing or having something in common. It carries various nuances and does not always mean physical participation. For example, in Philippians 3:10 Paul states that he wishes to partake of “the fellowship of His sufferings.” This does not mean that Paul wished to partake of the very same sufferings that Jesus did, but to have a share in similar afflictions. Therefore, when Paul writes that we have *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*), i.e., a sharing in the body and blood of Christ, he is not necessarily saying that we partake of the actual body and blood of our Lord. It is very possible that we simply share in elements that remind us of Him.

In addition, we can more clearly define Paul’s thought in light of the context of this passage. In 1 Corinthians 10:18, we read, “Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar?” Here, Paul compares partaking in communion with the altar and sacrifices of the Old Testament. God’s Old Testament people did not physically partake of the altar, but rather participated in it indirectly by means of the sacrifices offered on it. In other words, having *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) with the altar does not mean ingesting it. Similarly, having *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) with the body of Christ does not necessarily mean ingesting Him.

Furthermore, in verse 20 we read, “[I say] that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.” Paul is now contrasting the Lord’s Supper with partaking of demons through participation in idolatrous sacrifices. Again, this does not involve the physical ingestion of demons, but indirect fellowship with them by participation in idol worship. In a similar way, *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) with the body of Christ does not involve ingesting His body or drinking His blood.

Based on these observations, we can safely conclude that in this context having *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) with Christ’s body and blood does not have to involve a physical partaking. We have fellowship with the body and blood of Christ indirectly through reflection on His sufferings prompted by the symbols of bread and wine.

The next text for our consideration in John chapter 6, where Jesus said, “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.” Some interpret this text in a sacramental sense as a physical partaking of Christ’s flesh and blood in communion. Yet, we must consider the context of this passage. Jesus had just fed more than five thousand people, and the crowd was seeking Him in order to receive more. Jesus utilized the occasion to compare human physical need with human spiritual need. He employed a figure of speech, “I am the bread of life,” in order to communicate that He came not only to provide physical nourishment, but also spiritual life.

In John 6:35, Jesus Himself explains the intention of His saying: “I am the bread of life; he who *comes* to Me will not hunger, and he who *believes* in Me will never thirst.” Persons receive eternal life when they come to Christ and believe in Him. This verse sheds light on Jesus words in verses 54 and 55 as well: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.” Jesus is speaking of a spiritual partaking through faith, just as He declared to His disciples in verse 63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”

Schweizer comments that throughout the Gospel of John, the Spirit contrasts with the flesh. The flesh is associated with the world and the devil, but the Spirit – with God. Therefore, Schweizer cautions about seeing a sacramental reference in John 6: “We are not to try to take the external element spiritually (cf. the sacraments), nor to seek life in it alone; we can discern glory and find life only in the Spirit’s power.”<sup>2339</sup>

In conclusion, we observe that in John’s Gospel we encounter other symbols of salvation beside the image of bread. Water, for example, is connected with the rebirth. Jesus used a variety of images to depict the truths of salvation.<sup>2340</sup>

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<sup>2339</sup>Schweizer E. πνεῦμα, πνευματικός // Gerhard F., Bromiley G. W. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament / trans. Bromiley G. W. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968. – P. 892.

<sup>2340</sup>Riles K. What’s the Difference: Comparing the Beliefs of Catholics, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox. – P. 84.

Finally, we must examine Jesus' words in Lk 22:19-20: "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.... This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." First, we note that Jesus declared, "Do this in remembrance of Me." This reminds us of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11 that "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (v. 26). Both Jesus and Paul taught that the goal of communion was not to create a new sacrifice of His body and blood, but to recall that once-for-all-time sacrifice on Calvary.

Jesus words, "This is My body," and, "This is... the new covenant in My blood," are also to be taken figuratively. In other passages, Jesus speaks of Himself in metaphors. For example: "I am the door of the sheep," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the light of the world," and "I am the vine." He is also the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price. Therefore, it is fair to say that Jesus is speaking metaphorically of bread and wine as His body and blood.

Also significant is that the Lord's Supper was performed during the Passover Feast. It was clear to all that Passover represented the exodus from Egypt. Every year, the people of Israel celebrated Passover in remembrance of that event. All understood that the blood of the Passover lamb shed during the feast had no power to save, but merely reminded the Israelites of the deliverance that Yahweh accomplished when He struck the first born of Egypt.

The New Testament reveals that the true meaning of Passover includes not only a remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, but also a prediction of Jesus' sacrifice. John the Baptist announced, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Paul penned the following, "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7).

When our Lord celebrated the Passover that we call the Lord's Supper, He knew well that it represented His redemptive suffering. Therefore, He took advantage of the occasion to show His disciples that Passover, which they considered a feast of remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt, also represented His redemptive sacrifice. So then, He took bread and declared (in paraphrase), "This bread, which you break every year, in reality represents My body, which is broken for you. And this cup, which you drink from each year, in reality represents My blood, which is shed for you."

In light of the symbolic nature of the feast He was celebrating, it is not difficult to see the symbolic nature of Jesus' actions here. His intention was not to transform bread and wine into His body and blood, but to explain the deeper symbolism of Passover. Thiessen concurs, "The bread was the body of Christ in the same sense as the flesh in the Passover lamb was His body. The Passover lamb pointed forward to Christ."<sup>2341</sup>

## **b. Other Arguments in Refutation**

Another important argument concerns the physical presence of Jesus on this earth after his accession. If Jesus' body is now in heaven, how could it simultaneously be present in the communion elements? After His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. Acts 1:9-11 describes this event: "He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.... This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

Note that the angel promised that Jesus would return in the same way that He departed. Jesus Himself predicted the manner of His return, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mk 13:26). Therefore, the Bible informs us not to expect the physical presence of Jesus until He returns in the clouds. The Lord warned us, "If they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, {or,} 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe {them}" (Matt 24:26). If Christ is actually present in the elements of bread and wine, then in a certain sense the Second Coming of Jesus has already occurred.

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<sup>2341</sup>Thiessen H. C. Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 428.

If one objects that the Lord's body present in communion is not the same body that is now in heaven, then another difficulty arises. If the Lord's body in communion is only similar to His body in heaven, then it serves as a symbol of His true body, and thereby support is gained for the symbolic view of communion.

In connection with the incarnation, we note another problem. In John 1:14, we read, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." This is the key verse for the doctrine of the Son's incarnation. According to this doctrine, the eternal Son of God came to earth and was born of a virgin. He is truly God and truly human. If transubstantiation really takes place, then we are dealing with another incarnation of the Son of God. If multiple incarnations are allowed, this threatens the uniqueness of the historical incarnation of God's Son.

Finally, Boyd notes the following arguments against transubstantiation.<sup>2342</sup> First, it is customary for God to establish certain symbols of the covenants He makes with His people (see Gen 9:11-16; 17:9-10; Ex 12:14). Communion, then, serves as a symbol of the new covenant. Second, according to the teaching of Scripture, Jesus is always with us in spirit (Matt 28:20). Why, then, is His physical presence in the elements of communion necessary?

## **B. History of the Doctrine and Confessional Positions**

### **1. Early Church**

The second-century work *Didache* makes mention of the observance of the Lord's Supper (see *Didache*, 9, 14). It indicates that communion was observed each Sunday. It was accompanied by a special prayer of thanksgiving and petition. Only those baptized could partake, and the partakers must confess their sins and reconcile with others before receiving the elements so that their "sacrifice may not be profaned."

Justin Martyr (2nd c.) finds symbolism of the Lord's Supper in the Old Testament (see *Dialogue*, 41, 70). He claims the same regarding the man cleansed by Jesus of leprosy, since the latter presented a meal offering for His cleansing (Matt 8:1-4). Now, Justin feels that believers are those cleansed from sin. Communion is also the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy that among the nations will be "offered to My name... a grain offering {that is} pure." The mention of bread in Isaiah 33:16 is also understood in this way.

In Justin's *First Apology*, he details the order of the communion service (see chapters 65-67). The bread and wine, mixed with water, are brought to the "president of the brethren," who offers prayers with thanksgiving of his own creation (not by rote, as in the *Didache*). At the conclusion of his prayer, the congregation adds their "Amen." Then, the deacons distribute the elements and keep back a portion for those absent from the service. Only those baptized and living consecrated Christian lives may partake.

Justin also testifies to belief in the transformation of the elements:

For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh (*1 Apology*, 66).

Ignatius (2nd c.), who first called this celebration the "Eucharist," prescribes that only the bishop is authorized to perform it. He also calls it the "love feast," which likely refers not only to the Eucharist celebration, but to the feast that accompanied it.<sup>2343</sup> Ignatius speaks of the bread as the "medicine of

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<sup>2342</sup>Boyd, p. 200.

<sup>2343</sup>*To the Smyrneans*, 8.

immortality.”<sup>2344</sup> He insists even more fervently than Justin that the communion elements become the body and blood of Christ:

I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life (*To the Romans*, 7).

They (heretics) abstain from the Eucharist and from prayer, because they confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father, of His goodness, raised up again (*To the Smyrneans*, 7)

Next, we examine Irenaeus’ view of the Lord’s Supper. Along with others, he calls this ordinance the “Eucharist” and also speaks of it as a “sacrifice.”<sup>2345</sup> Moreover, he equates the bread and wine with the body and blood of the Savior.<sup>2346</sup> In the following excerpt, Irenaeus hints at the mechanism of this transformation:

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity (*Against Heresies*, 4.18.5).

Here, Irenaeus also attempts to explain the value of the Eucharist – it gives “the hope of the resurrection.” Irenaeus links participation in the Eucharist with the resurrection in other passages as well: “...our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God.”<sup>2347</sup> Irenaeus also states that partakers of the Eucharist receive “remission of sins and life eternal.”<sup>2348</sup>

Although Irenaeus refers to the Eucharist as a sacrifice, we must also keep in mind that for him this sacrifice is apparently a merely symbolic one. In Fragment 37, he states, “The oblation of the Eucharist is not a carnal one, but a spiritual.”

In the works of Tertullian (3rd c.) we encounter an enigma. On the one hand, in his tract *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, he writes, “The flesh feeds on the body and blood of Christ, that the soul likewise may fatten on *its* God” (8). On the other hand, at times Tertullian seems to refer to a symbolic representation of the body of Christ: “Then, having taken the bread and given it to His disciples, He made it His own body, by saying, ‘This is my body,’ that is, the figure of my body” (*Against Marcion*, 4.40).

Tertullian’s symbolic view is even more evident in the following passage:<sup>2349</sup>

Because they thought His discourse was harsh and intolerable, supposing that He had really and literally enjoined on them to eat his flesh, He... set out with the principle, “It is the spirit that quickeneth;” and then added, “The flesh profiteth nothing” ... devour Him with the ear, and to ruminate on Him with the understanding, and to digest Him by faith (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 37).

The early Alexandrian Fathers, Clement (2nd c.) and Origen (3rd c.), speak of the mystical and symbolic meaning of the Eucharist:

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<sup>2344</sup>*To the Ephesians*, 20.

<sup>2345</sup>*Against Heresies*, 4.18.1.

<sup>2346</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.2.2-3; 4.17.5; 5.11.3.

<sup>2347</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.2.3.

<sup>2348</sup>*Fragments*, 37.

<sup>2349</sup>Riles, p. 86.

And the blood of the Lord is twofold. For there is the blood of His flesh, by which we are redeemed from corruption; and the spiritual, that by which we are anointed. And to drink the blood of Jesus, is to become partaker of the Lord's immortality; the Spirit being the energetic principle of the Word, as blood is of flesh. Accordingly, as wine is blended with water, so is the Spirit with man. And the one, the mixture of wine and water, nourishes to faith; while the other, the Spirit, conducts to immortality (Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 2.2).

Elsewhere the Lord, in the Gospel according to John, brought this out by symbols, when He said: "Eat ye my flesh, and drink my blood;" describing distinctly by metaphor the drinkable properties of faith and the promise (Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 1.6).

Origen wrote, "We have a symbol of gratitude to God in the bread which we call the Eucharist" (*Against Celsus*, 8:57). He also asserts that the bread and wine are sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, but they do not sanctify those who do not partake of them worthily (*Commentary on Matt 11:14*). On the other hand, in his homily on Exodus 13.3, he nevertheless acknowledges the real presence of Jesus in the bread.<sup>2350</sup>

In his day, Cyprian (3rd c.) made a significant contribution to a sacramental understanding of the Eucharist, considering it to be a true sacrifice of Christ. He wrote:

For if Jesus Christ, our Lord and God, is Himself the chief priest of God the Father, and has first offered Himself a sacrifice to the Father, and has commanded this to be done in commemoration of Himself, certainly that priest truly discharges the office of Christ, who imitates that which Christ did; and he then offers a true and full sacrifice in the Church to God the Father, when he proceeds to offer it according to what he sees Christ Himself to have offered (*Epistles*, 62.14).

Hill comments that in the fourth century, Christian writers began to treat the Eucharist as a true sacrifice, citing Paul in support – the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ's death (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>2351</sup> Hill feels that considering ministers as "priests" promoted an understanding the Eucharist in an Old Testament sacrificial sense.<sup>2352</sup>

Ambrose advances the idea that the transformation of the elements occurs through pronouncing the words of the blessing: "The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed."<sup>2353</sup> A similar understanding already existed in the Eastern Church as seen in the teaching of John Chrysostom (4th c.), who claims, "The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered."<sup>2354</sup>

Another adherent of the sacramental view of communion was Augustine (4th-5th c.): "That bread that you see on the altar, sanctified by the Word of God, is Christ's body. That cup, or rather the contents of that cup, sanctified by the Word of God, is Christ's blood. By these elements the Lord Christ willed to convey his body and his blood, which he shed for us" (*Sermons*, 227).<sup>2355</sup> He also considers the worship of the elements appropriate (see *Exposition on the Psalms*, 99.8). At times, though, Augustine seems to defend a symbolic view as well (see *Exposition on the Psalms*, 99.8; *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 26.18).

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<sup>2350</sup> Кураев А. Протестантам о православии. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – Р. 250; Иларион, А. Таинство Веры. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – Р. 152.

<sup>2351</sup> Hill B. R. Exploring Catholic Theology. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 291-292.

<sup>2352</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>2353</sup> Noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1375. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM).

<sup>2354</sup> Noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1375. Also see Lane T. A Concise History of Christian Thought – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006. – P. 42.

<sup>2355</sup> Taken from Allison G. R. Historical Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. – P. 640.

Augustine introduces into the Church the concept of *ex opere operato*, which means that sacraments communicate grace automatically, independent of the spiritual quality of the one who administers them. In Augustine's opinion, the priest does not perform the ordinance, but rather Christ Himself. Therefore, it is always effective.<sup>2356</sup>

In reflection on the Early Church teaching on the Lord's Supper, we observe a definite movement toward a sacramental understanding of the ordinance. Early on, the *Didache* only mentions how to conduct the Lord's Supper. Justin discusses this as well, but also claims that the elements become the body and blood of Christ. Ignatius intensifies this teaching and adds that only a bishop can perform the rite.

Moreover, Irenaeus details the mechanism of the elements' transformation and claims forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the sacrament. Allison comments on the view of the early Fathers on the Eucharist as a sacrifice: "While it is clear that sacrificial language was associated with the Lord's Supper, it is not as clear what the early church believed about the nature of the sacrifice."<sup>2357</sup> Cyprian went to the extreme of asserting that the Eucharist is an actual sacrifice of Jesus for sins. Ambrose emphasized the power of the words of blessing to transform the elements. Finally, Augustine advanced the theory of *ex opere operato*.

Clearly, in the course of time the Church Fathers increasingly ascribed to the Lord's Supper a mystical and sacramental meaning. This marks a deviation from the biblical view of communion as symbol of Christ's death. However, not all of the Fathers embraced this view. Some, such as Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and possibly Origen tended toward a symbolic view.

## 2. Roman Catholicism<sup>2358</sup>

For Catholics, the Eucharist, along with water baptism and confirmation, is considered a sacrament of "initiation." The Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday, but can be performed more frequently. Members of the Catholic Church must partake of communion once a year. Only baptized Catholics can participate, who walk in the ways of Christ.<sup>2359</sup> Before partaking in the sacrament, Catholics confess their sins before God and sometimes observe a short fast.

Catholics are among those who believe that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus: "In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"<sup>2360</sup> Furthermore, they claim that the Eucharist is not only the "body and blood," but also "the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained."<sup>2361</sup>

Catholics assign the term "transubstantiation" to the transformation of the communion elements. According to this theory, the external aspects of the bread and wine do not change. They continue to look like and taste like bread and wine. Yet, their essence is changed to the body and blood of Jesus. This teaching became Catholic dogma at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.<sup>2362</sup>

The doctrine of transubstantiation works off of Aristotle's philosophical conception of "substance and accidents."<sup>2363</sup> The "substance" is the essential nature of the object, while its "accidents" are its external features. So then, the transformation of the elements occurs not in their accidents, but only in their substance. They retain the look and taste of bread and wine, but in essence they are transformed into Christ's body and blood.

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<sup>2356</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2357</sup>Ibid., p. 638.

<sup>2358</sup>Noted in Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1322-1419.

<sup>2359</sup>Under certain conditions, Eastern Orthodox may participate in the Roman Eucharist, but Protestants may not.

<sup>2360</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1365.

<sup>2361</sup>Ibid., № 1374.

<sup>2362</sup>Allison, p. 644.

<sup>2363</sup>This view dates back to the theology of Thomas Aquinas (Hill, p. 300).



The priest alone has the authority to perform the Eucharistic rite. He received this authority from the bishop, who received it from the pope, who supposedly received it from the apostles via the so-called “apostolic succession.” The apostles, in turn, allegedly received this authority from Christ during the original Lord’s Supper when He said to them, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk 22:19).

The Catholic Church continues to affirm the doctrine of *ex opere operato*, where grace is automatically communicated by the sacrament. All that is necessary for the Eucharist to be effective is the blessing of the elements by a priest in the apostolic succession and their reception by the worshiper. The spiritual quality of the priest and the recipient have no effect on the Eucharist’s efficacy, except in the case of mortal sin committed by the recipient.

During the Catholic worship service, called the “mass,”<sup>2364</sup> the priest, as noted above, utters a special prayer that effects the transformation of the elements. Then, he offers up the bread and wine in sacrifice, which in Catholic thought is an actual sacrifice of Jesus for sins. For this reason, the table on which the mass is performed is called an “altar.” According to the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic priest is truly a priest, who offers a genuine sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. Christ Himself is felt to stand behind this act.

We may further clarify the Catholic understanding of the mass as a sacrifice. It is thought that the unique sacrifice of Christ accomplished on Calvary is reenacted during the mass. In this way, the benefits of Calvary are offered to the recipient of the Eucharist. So then, formally this is not a new sacrifice, but the realization of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary in a new historical context. Unlike Calvary, though, the mass is called a “bloodless sacrifice.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church claims that Christ gave the Eucharist “in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again,”<sup>2365</sup> and moreover, “As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which ‘Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed’ is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out.”<sup>2366</sup>

Catholics assert that, although Jesus accomplished a single sacrifice on the cross, it is necessary that this one sacrifice becomes actualized in the life of the believer through participation in the Eucharist: “This redemption does not have its full effect immediately... (it is necessary) that man individually come into vital contact with the cross-offering and that thus the merits of it are applied to him.”<sup>2367</sup>

In addition, the Church as the Body of Christ also participates with Him in this sacrifice: “(The Church) unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men.... The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work, are united with those of Christ.”<sup>2368</sup> This “unification” includes the departed saints and Mary as well.

According to Roman Catholic teaching, participants in the Eucharist receive forgiveness of sins. However, this applies only to so-called “venial sins.” More serious transgressions, called “mortal sins,” require confession before a priest. The Eucharistic rite benefits not only living believers, but departed souls in purgatory as well.

Along with providing forgiveness of sins, participation in the Eucharist also strengthens relationships with Christ and His Church, demonstrates the unity of the Church, transmits grace for spiritual growth, cleanses from depravity, motivates to good works, and is a foretaste of Jesus’ Second Coming. It also serves as an offering of thanksgiving for God’s gift of creation.

The Catholic Church also teaches that the entire sacrament is represented in each of the elements. This means that one may partake of either the bread or the wine in order to benefit from the full measure of the

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<sup>2364</sup>The term “mass” comes from the Latin word “*missa*,” meaning “sent” (Gros J. The Roman Catholic View // Smith G. T. The Lord’s Supper: Five Views. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008. – P. 16).

<sup>2365</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1323.

<sup>2366</sup>*Ibid.*, № 1364.

<sup>2367</sup>From *Mediator Dei*, noted in Berkouwer G. C. The Sacraments. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969. – P. 269-270.

<sup>2368</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1368.

sacrament's grace.<sup>2369</sup> Consequently, in the Catholic communion service typically the bread only was offered. The Second Vatican Council, however, approved partaking of both elements.<sup>2370</sup>

Since the bread and wine are considered the very body and blood of Christ, the priest is very careful in handling them. For example, he must not drop them, and all the elements must either be consumed, or stored in a specially designated container. The elements are also considered worthy of homage and worship. Catholics are required to genuflect (bow on one knee) when entering and leaving the sanctuary in respect for the communion elements that are stored at the altar. Worship is also performed before the elements themselves. The Council of Trent insisted this practice: "In view of the presence of Christ in the eucharist the adoration of the host and the festival of the *Corpus Christi* are but natural."<sup>2371</sup> According to Catholic teaching, then, worship is given not to the accidents of the bread and wine, but to Christ.<sup>2372</sup>

Let us trace the history of this doctrine's overall development in the history of Roman Catholicism. The decisive event occurred in the ninth century, when the nature of Eucharist was debated. The main players in this debate were Radbertus and Ratramnus, two French monks who both wrote a work entitled *On the Body and Blood of Christ*. Radbertus believed in the transformation of the communion elements into the body and blood of Christ, while Ratramnus saw them as symbols. After heated debates, the Roman Church hierarchy endorsed Radbertus' view.

Radbertus summarized his view as follows: "The same who created the human being Jesus Christ in the womb of Virgin Mary without any human seed daily creates the flesh and blood of Christ by his invisible power through the consecration of this sacrament."<sup>2373</sup> In Ratramnus' opinion, however, during the Lord's Supper, "the Body of Christ is – revealed. This is not perceived or received or consumed by the physical senses, but only in the sight of the believer."<sup>2374</sup>

In the Catholic teaching on communion, we witness a continuation of the sacramentalism of the Church Fathers. All the elements of the later are present: the transformation of the elements, the need for the bishop's participation, a real sacrifice of Christ, the transmission of grace, and the forgiveness of sins.

Moreover, with the aid of Aristotelian philosophy, Catholics outlined the mechanism of transubstantiation. They also specified the nature of the sacrifice of the mass – it is not a new sacrifice, but the realization of the sacrifice on Calvary in a new historical context. They also enacted various rules about who can partake of the Eucharist and when. Finally, they introduced the novelty that the entire Church is offered up with Christ in sacrifice. However, each of these claims lack biblical support. They are based on patristic theology, which also lacks support from Scripture in this regard.

For example, the teaching on the sacrifice of the mass contradicts the Bible. There is no need for the sacrifice of Calvary to be reenacted or "realized" in a new historical context. Hebrews 10:14-18 clearly states, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.... Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer {any} offering for sin." According to Scripture, the single sacrifice of Jesus Christ is sufficient for the salvation of all humanity. It does not need to be repeated or "actualized." The benefits of Calvary are received by faith.

The Catholic's insistence on the performance of sacraments only by a priest in the apostolic succession and of the "realization" of Christ's sacrifice for forgiveness of sins during the mass makes the Church the necessary mediator of the grace of salvation. Yet, the Bible declares, "For there is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

### 3. Eastern Orthodoxy

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<sup>2369</sup>Berkhof L. The History of Christian Doctrine. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1937. – P. 253-254.

<sup>2370</sup>Hill, p. 296.

<sup>2371</sup>Berkhof, p. 254.

<sup>2372</sup>Note in Gross, p. 28.

<sup>2373</sup>McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 434.

<sup>2374</sup>Ibid.

The Orthodox system shares common features with the Catholic view, but several difference are nonetheless worth pointing out. They are similar in the conviction that the communion elements become Christ's body and blood. Metropolitan Ilarion comments, "The Orthodox Church unconditionally believes that in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the real Body and Blood of Christ and not only a symbol or figure of the Body and Blood."<sup>2375</sup>

John of Damascus (7th-8th c.) affirmed the same: "The bread and the wine are not merely figures of the body and blood of Christ (God forbid!) but the deified body of the Lord itself."<sup>2376</sup> He justifies his conviction as follows:<sup>2377</sup>

If God the Word of His own will became man and the pure and undefiled blood of the holy and ever-virginal One made His flesh without the aid of seed, can He not then make the bread His body and the wine and water His blood?

He said in the beginning, *Let the earth bring forth grass*, and even until this present day, when the rain comes it brings forth its proper fruits, urged on and strengthened by the divine command. God said, *This is My body*, and *This is My blood*.

According to Catholic faith, the essence of the bread and wine change, but not their external features. The Orthodox feel, however, that their essence does not change, but rather their orientation or mode of existence changes. Just as through the Fall, Adam and Eve's life-orientation was altered from God to nature, when the priest sanctifies the communion elements, their orientation changes from nature to God. Their existence is no longer derived from nature, but from God. In this way, they become an incarnation of God and the actual body and blood of Jesus.

Sergey Bulgakov gives special attention to this idea.<sup>2378</sup> On the one hand, he speaks of the Eucharist as a mystery into which even the Church Fathers did not delve.<sup>2379</sup> On the other hand, he offers the following interpretation. In line with his theory of the "dynamic body" of Christ (see chapter 15), Bulgakov holds that the glorified, "unworldly" body of Christ is not material, but spiritual, and may take on any form, even the form of bread and wine. Although He has already departed this world, by virtue of His incarnation He is still connected to the world, which permits Him to manifest Himself in the form of bread and wine. Therefore, "the Eucharistic elements are the mediatorial form of this manifestation."<sup>2380</sup>

So then, no actual transformation of the elements occurs. The bread and wine merely change their orientation or mode of existence: "The bread and wine, which are elements of this world, remain completely unaltered. However, they no longer belong to themselves or to this world, but to the spiritual, glorified body of Christ."<sup>2381</sup> Therefore, the transformation is "not physical, but metaphysical, it is beyond the bounds of this world."<sup>2382</sup>

Bulgakov also writes,

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<sup>2375</sup>Иларион, р. 163. Author's translation.

<sup>2376</sup>*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.13.

<sup>2377</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2378</sup>Булгаков С. Евхаристический догмат, часть 1-я // Журнал "Путь" №20, 1930. Р. 1-48.

<http://www.odinblago.ru/path/20/1>.

<sup>2379</sup>John of Damascus writes that this mystery "surpass reason and thought" (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.13).

<sup>2380</sup>Булгаков, р. 11. Author's translation.

<sup>2381</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 5. Author's translation.

<sup>2382</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 6. Author's translation.

Here we must not distinguish substance, which allegedly changes, and accidents, which do not change but remain the same. The bread and wine wholly and completely, without any limitation, become the saving body and blood.<sup>2383</sup>

We mention still another special feature of Orthodox thought. Although the communion elements truly become the body and blood of Christ, the participants do not partake of God's essence, but rather of the "glorified humanity of Christ."<sup>2384</sup> Kuraev echoes this thought, claiming that communion is participation in the "deified flesh of Christ."<sup>2385</sup> The conviction that communicants partake of the "glorified humanity of Christ" requires the use of leavened bread. In this regard, Meyendorff writes, "The Eucharistic bread had to be leavened in order to symbolize the *animated* humanity of Christ."<sup>2386</sup>

Another distinctive feature of the Orthodox Eucharist is that it is not the words of the priest that effect the transformation of the elements, but the words of Christ uttered at the first Lord's Supper. His words effect this transformation for all subsequent occasions of the Eucharistic celebration. Kuraev defends this view: "The miracle of the Eucharist is that we can participate in the very same Supper, during which Christ gave his Cup 'to all of you,' not just the apostles."<sup>2387</sup>

The Orthodox position is somewhat complicated by the fact that some prominent Orthodox theologians fail to affirm it. Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, called the elements "symbols." Maximus the Confessor also spoke of the symbolic nature of communion.<sup>2388</sup>

Since the Eucharist is considered a real participation in Christ, Orthodoxy insists that it is necessary for salvation. In the words of Ilarion, "Without the Eucharist, there is no salvation, no deification, no true life, no resurrection in eternity."<sup>2389</sup>

Orthodox faith coincides with Catholic dogma in that both consider the Eucharist to be a true sacrifice of Jesus for sins. Ilarion writes, "Not only the Mysterious Supper, but also the sacrifice of Calvary is renewed at every Liturgy."<sup>2390</sup> Lossky concurs, "Christ presents to the heavenly throne the single sacrifice, which is accomplished on the earth at many earthly thrones in the Eucharistic mystery."<sup>2391</sup>

Bulgakov adds the thought that at death, the body and blood of Jesus were separated one from another, i.e., He shed His blood. At the Eucharist, however, the bread and wine are taken together – the body and blood of the Savior are re-united, which can serve as a figure of the Lord's resurrection.<sup>2392</sup>

Along with the Catholics, the Orthodox also do homage to the communion elements, considering them to be the body and blood of Jesus. Unlike the Catholic practice, this homage is appropriate only during the performance of the rite itself. Only at that time is Christ really present in the sacrament.<sup>2393</sup> In addition, in distinction from the traditional Catholic practice, the Orthodox Eucharist involves partaking of both bread and wine.<sup>2394</sup>

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<sup>2383</sup>Ibid. p. 5. Author's translation.

<sup>2384</sup>Meyendorff J. *Byzantine Theology*. – New York: Fordham University, 1974. – P. 203.

<sup>2385</sup>Куряев, p. 98. Author's translation.

<sup>2386</sup>Meyendorff, p. 204.

<sup>2387</sup>Куряев, p. 251. Author's translation.

<sup>2388</sup>Meyendorff, p. 203.

<sup>2389</sup>Иларион, p. 156. Author's translation.

<sup>2390</sup>Ibid. Author's translation.

<sup>2391</sup>Лосский В. Н. *Богословие и Боговидение* / Общ. ред. Владимира Пислякова. – М.: Издательство Свято-Владимирского Братства, 2000. – P. 281-282. Author's translation.

<sup>2392</sup>Булгаков, p. 7-8.

<sup>2393</sup>Ibid., p. 13-17.

<sup>2394</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1390.

The Orthodox understanding of the Eucharist departs from the Catholic view in still another respect. The main benefit that the Eucharist offers, in Catholic thought, is forgiveness of sins.<sup>2395</sup> Orthodox, however, anticipate receiving spiritual power for sanctification and deification. Through the sacrament, the human will is liberated from the effect of the Fall and becomes responsive to God. Kuraev comments here, “Christ healed in Himself, in His Divine Person, the human nature that He received, and gives it, which is now healed, to us in Communion, in order to heal each of us through the healing of nature.”<sup>2396</sup>

According to Orthodox teaching, the permeation of Christ’s presence into the bread and cup is analogous to the effect of the sacrament on its partakers.<sup>2397</sup> Ilarion explains, “As Christ permeates the bread and wine with Himself, filling them with His Deity, He also enters into a person, filling his flesh and soul with His life-giving presence and Divine energies.”<sup>2398</sup> John of Damascus comments as well,

The body and blood of Christ are making for the support of our soul and body, without being consumed or suffering corruption, not making for the draught (God forbid!) but for our being and preservation, a protection against all kinds of injury, a purging from all uncleanness.<sup>2399</sup>

As already stated, this permeation of the human soul by Christ’s presence (more specifically, His “uncreated energies”) serves the goal of deification. Concerning this, Mantzaridis writes, “This sacramental union is a real union with His deifying grace and energy.”<sup>2400</sup> In addition, Vishnevskaya writes,

Thus, through the Eucharistic gifts, the Logos inhabits the soul of the believer and spiritually assimilates it to Divinity. In eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood, the faithful are infused with the divine properties that render them like God, save for the essence of being.<sup>2401</sup>

Since the Orthodox system in essence coincides with Catholic teaching, the arguments already advanced in refutation of the latter apply to the former as well. In addition, one may challenge Bulgakov’s teaching of the “dynamic” body of Christ (see chp. 15). Finally, we refute the doctrine of deification in chapter 7.

#### 4. Lutheranism

How do Lutherans view the Lord’s Supper? First, they reject the idea that only priests or bishops of the Catholic or Orthodox confessions have the right to execute the sacrament. Any minister of the gospel can perform the rite. Lutherans also reject the suggestion that communion is an actual sacrifice of God’s Son. They also reject the teaching of *ex opere operato*. Faith is necessary to receive benefit from the ordinance. Furthermore, the congregation may partake of both the bread and the wine. Finally, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in no way benefits the departed.<sup>2402</sup>

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<sup>2395</sup>Nonetheless, Orthodoxy does not deny the forgiveness of sins as well. In the words of John of Damascus, “Wherefore to those who partake worthily with faith, it is for the remission of sins and for life everlasting and for the safe-guarding of soul and body” (*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.13).

<sup>2396</sup>Курьев, p. 271-273. Author’s translation.

<sup>2397</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2398</sup>Иларион, p. 156. Author’s translation.

<sup>2399</sup>*An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, 4.13.

<sup>2400</sup>Mantzaridis G. I. *The Deification of Man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. – Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984. – P. 53.

<sup>2401</sup>Vishnevskaya T. *Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 138-139.

<sup>2402</sup>Allison, p. 48-49, 647-649.

However, Lutherans do affirm that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus. In the Augsburg Confession, we read, “About the Lord’s Supper our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present under the forms of the bread and wine and are given to those who eat the Lord’s Supper” (*Article 10*).<sup>2403</sup>

In defense of this teaching, Luther argued that if Christ is the God-man, then He enjoys omnipresence. So then, He can be present at the Lord’s Supper.<sup>2404</sup> Divine attributes (in particular, omnipresence) can be communicated to Jesus’ human nature. Luther also thought that Paul’s warning about partaking of communion unworthily (1 Cor 11) makes sense only if Jesus was truly present. Melancthon’s view differed, though. He felt that the body and blood are only associated with the bread and wine.<sup>2405</sup>

Luther’s teaching corresponds to the Catholic view in that Christ is present in the elements in a supernatural fashion. Therefore, He can be fully present in each piece of the bread and sip of the wine.<sup>2406</sup> Moreover, in line with the Catholic understanding, Lutherans also anticipate receiving forgiveness of sins and “life and salvation” through the sacrament.<sup>2407</sup>

Lutherans teach that the transformation of the elements takes place by the mechanism of “consubstantiation.” According to this theory, after the prayer of consecration the elements are thought to both remain bread and wine, and also to become the body and blood of Christ. The body and blood of the Lord are “in” the elements, “with” the elements, and “under” the elements.<sup>2408</sup> The elements have at the same time two essences: one from nature and one from God.

Here is how Luther describes the concept of consubstantiation: “The very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are, by the word of Christ, instituted and given to us Christians to be eaten and drunk in and under bread and wine.”<sup>2409</sup>

Although this formula differs from the Catholic concept of “transubstantiation,” Luther preferred the latter more than the formulation of other Protestant groups. He would rather agree with the pope that the wine is *only* blood, than with the Reformed view that it is *only* wine.<sup>2410</sup>

Other benefits expected from participation in the Lord’s Supper include: “strengthening of faith, union with Christ and the Church, growth in holiness, progress in love, increase in perseverance and hope, and joy in confessing Christ.”<sup>2411</sup>

Lutherans, although they recognize the real, physical presence of Christ in the communion elements, nonetheless refrain from doing them homage. Mueller comments, “The sacramental union occurs only in the sacramental action and not outside of it.”<sup>2412</sup> This means that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ only at the moment when the sacrament is performed. Lutherans take the words of Jesus as a confirmation of this idea: “Take, eat... This is My body.” The bread becomes the body only when it is taken and eaten.

In assessing the Lutheran view, we must affirm with many Evangelical believers who feel that Luther began, but did not complete the Reformation.<sup>2413</sup> Lutherans rightly reject the more extreme distortions of the doctrine, such as the Eucharist as a sacrifice, the necessity of an officiating priest, benefits for the departed, the concept of *ex opere operato*, worship of the elements, and others. Yet, they fail to correct the root cause for these errors – the conviction that the elements are the actual body and blood of Christ.

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<sup>2403</sup>[https://www.concordianc.org/uploads/files/Augsburg\\_Confession.pdf](https://www.concordianc.org/uploads/files/Augsburg_Confession.pdf)

<sup>2404</sup>Allison, p. 649.

<sup>2405</sup>Stephenson, p. 45-46.

<sup>2406</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>2407</sup>Mueller, p. 536.

<sup>2408</sup>Allison, p. 635.

<sup>2409</sup>Berkhof, p. 254.

<sup>2410</sup>Stephenson, p. 51.

<sup>2411</sup>Mueller, p. 536.

<sup>2412</sup>Mueller, p. 525.

<sup>2413</sup>Boyd, p. 200.

## 5. Reformed Faith

We will next describe the Reformed and Presbyterian understandings of the Lord's Supper. They reject the teaching that the communion elements become the literal body and blood of Jesus. They remain simply bread and wine. Nevertheless, the elements contain within themselves the spiritual presence of our Lord. These confessions compare the presence of Christ in communion with the relationship of the sun to its rays. The sun is in the heavens, but its rays reach the earth. In a similar way, the Lord Jesus is in heaven, but His presence is also on earth in the communion elements. Partakers "receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually."<sup>2414</sup>

Calvin explained that Christ is present in the Lord's Supper by the power of the Holy Spirit. Although he called the bread and wine symbols, he also believed that they are not "empty symbols," but rather point to a spiritual reality, that is, the body and blood of Christ: "His flesh is meat indeed, and that his blood is drink indeed: by this food believers are reared to eternal life."<sup>2415</sup> The visible symbols of bread and wine are given to inspire faith.<sup>2416</sup> Receiving communion results in grace being transmitted from God to the believing heart.<sup>2417</sup>

Thanks to the spiritual presence of Christ, believers anticipate receiving through the Lord's Supper spiritual strength for fruitful Christian living. In particular, the Westminster Confession of Faith details the benefits of communion: "...their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body."<sup>2418</sup>

Along with rejecting the physical transformation of the communion elements, Reformed confessions also reject the pretension that the Lord's Supper is an actual sacrifice of Jesus for sins. Instead, it is simply a remembrance of what Jesus accomplished on Calvary.<sup>2419</sup>

In comparison with the Lutheran view, Calvin and his followers took a step forward in restoring the biblical teaching on the Lord's Supper. In their understanding, the bread and wine only symbolically represent the body and blood of Christ. Nevertheless, they posit an ontological connection with the body and blood in a spiritual sense. Therefore, we observe in Calvin's doctrine a remnant of the Catholic view, including the proposition that physical participation in communion communicates grace.

## 6. Teaching of Zwingli

The final position for our investigation was advanced by the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli. It is the preferred view among most Evangelicals today. The benefits of communion are equated with that which one receives by hearing the preaching of the Word or reading the Bible. The Lord's Supper is a "visible sermon" that demonstrates the completed work of Christ for our salvation. Zwingli wrote, "To eat the body of Christ spiritually is equivalent to trusting with heart and soul upon the mercy and goodness of God through Christ."<sup>2420</sup>

So then, communion symbolically represents the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Believers reflect on His work during the Lord's Supper and receive inspiration and strengthening of faith. By faith, then, the participant

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<sup>2414</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 29.7. Westminster Confession of Faith. – <https://westminsterstandards.org/westminster-confession-of-faith>

<sup>2415</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.8.

<sup>2416</sup> Allison, p. 654.

<sup>2417</sup> Dyk L. V. *The Reformed View* // Smith G. T. *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008. – P. 74.

<sup>2418</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 29.1.

<sup>2419</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2420</sup> Zwingli. *An Exposition of Faith* // Bromiley. Zwingli and Bullinger. – P. 258. Noted in Dyk, p. 71.

acquires grace from the Lord. Therefore, through communion the partakers receive spiritual strengthening from God, not by means of physically partaking of the elements, but indirectly through inspiration.

Similar to the Reformed position, Zwingli taught that there is no physical transformation of the communion elements. When Jesus said, “This is My Body” and “This is My blood,” He was speaking figurative, as if to say, “This symbolizes my body...” The bread and wine serve merely as symbols and have no ontological connection with the actual body and blood of the Savior.<sup>2421</sup> The elements contain neither the spiritual presence of Christ, nor saving grace. Participants receive grace by the inspiration of their faith.

Zwingli would not deny, however, that Christ is present during the communion service.<sup>2422</sup> In support, Olson describes the Lord’s Supper as “a commemorative and as a memorial meal in which Christ is present to faith through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2423</sup> Christ may give a special manifestation of His presence during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, but not in connection with the communion elements. Olsen wisely states, “Surely the grace of Christ can be experienced and Christ himself personally encountered without any change in the elements.”<sup>2424</sup>

The successor of Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, continued the former’s insistence on the symbolic nature of the Lord’s Supper. At the same time, he attempted to make a closer connection between the action of the Spirit in the believers’ hearts and their physical partaking of the elements. In his opinion, “The sacramental signs correspond to simultaneous divine activity.”<sup>2425</sup>

Yet, if physical partaking of the elements does not transmit grace, then why did Jesus establish the ordinance? The Lord desired that His people would have a physical symbol of their faith. In this way, believers would not only hear the gospel, but also “see” it. Although the effect of communion does not essentially differ from preaching, nevertheless Olson insists, “This God-ordained ceremony cannot be dispensed with or replaced by something else without losing an important experience of transforming grace.”<sup>2426</sup>

Along with inspiring faith, such physical ordinances underscore the historical character of Christian faith. A direct participation in the Lord’s Supper brings to mind that the sufferings of our Savior were real and physical. Some Pentecostals and Charismatics, in fact, expect God’s power to flow during communion for the healing of bodies.<sup>2427</sup> The symbolic breaking of Christ’s body can inspire the participants to receive a miracle from the Lord, who suffered for their sicknesses as well.

Finally, we must mention the benefit that the Lord’s Supper provides to promote Christian unity. Martens correctly states, “All believers partake of the bread; all believers partake of the cup. One message from this symbolic action is that members of the community belong together.”<sup>2428</sup>

### C. Participation in the Lord’s Supper

The question arises as to whether the unbaptized and children can participate in the Lord’s Supper and partake of the elements of communion. We affirm that the only qualification for partaking in the Lord’s Supper is having received salvation (i.e., the new birth), since if a person has already received salvation itself, he or she is certainly ready to receive the symbols of salvation and give thanks to God for it. Participation in the Lord’s

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<sup>2421</sup>Noted in Dyk. p. 69.

<sup>2422</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>2423</sup>Olson R. E. *The Baptist View* // Smith G. T. *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008. – P. 98.

<sup>2424</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>2425</sup>Noted in Dyk, p. 74.

<sup>2426</sup>Olson, p. 88.

<sup>2427</sup>Kärkkäinen V. *The Pentecostal View* // Smith G. T. *The Lord’s Supper: Five Views*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2008. – P. 126-127.

<sup>2428</sup>Martens E. A. *The People of God* // Hafemann S. J., House P. R. *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007. – P. 239.



Supper is not something one earns or deserves by having previously been water baptized, but rather a means of spiritual growth that all born again Christians can benefit from.

This does not mean that we should neglect water baptism, but the Bible does not teach that it is a requirement for salvation (see chp. 22). Neither is it a requirement for participation in the Lord's Supper. The practice of reserving partaking of communion only for the baptized is a throwback to the post-apostolic church, where catechumens completed a three-year preparatory period before being admitted to water baptism. During that probationary period, they could participate in worship services, but not in communion. When the communion service commenced, catechumens were required to exit the sanctuary.

Concerning children, we follow the same principle. As soon as children are truly converted (and, therefore, understand the meaning of salvation), they are ready to fully participate in the communion service.

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Chapter 24: The Salvation of Infants

Many are concerned about the fate of children who die in infancy or early childhood. Do they inherit the guilt of Adam, and if so, are they eternally condemned as a result? If they are saved, then on what basis are they considered right with God? This question is highly relevant in light of the fact that historically about half the human population has died in infancy.²⁴²⁹

We will begin our investigation by studying the development of this theme in church history, then we will describe and assess the views of various Christian denominations with the goal of determining the biblical teaching.

A. Historical Survey

From his research on the topic, Warfield learned that the early Fathers did not doubt that children who died in infancy were saved.²⁴³⁰ Aristides of Athens (2nd c.), for example, wrote, “If moreover (a child) happens to die in childhood, they give thanks to God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins” (*Апология*, 15). Accordingly, Irenaeus (2nd c.) taught that Jesus is the Savior of every age group:

He came to save all through means of Himself – all, I say, who through Him are born again to God – infants, and children, and boys, and youths, and old men. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age...” (*Against Heresies*, 2.22.4).

However, as we know, very early in church history the Church departed from the gospel of grace and fell into legalism – salvation by works. Correspondingly, the question of dying infants, who never performed good works, became problematic. Gregory Nazianzen, for example, taught that such infants deserved neither punishment nor reward.

Gregory of Nyssa, author of *On Infants’ Early Deaths*, affirmed the same, yet believed that departed infants were nonetheless saved. Gregory believed that persons’ relationship with God was ordered by the principle of “retribution.” In other words, people receive from the Lord according to their conduct in this life. However, departed infants can receive no retribution from God – neither for evil nor good. Gregory then theorized that God grants to each individual a certain “natural right” to enjoy eternal life. Since no personal sin interferes with infants inheriting this right, they will obtain it.

Nevertheless, such an infant’s condition in eternity will differ from those who successfully passed through the tests and trial of this life. Therefore, the latter’s enjoyment of God’s kingdom will exceed the former’s. However, in time the departed infants will gain spiritual experience in God’s presence resulting in increasing enjoyment of their eternal state.

Gregory attempted to delve into the mystery of why the Lord takes some infants home prematurely. He reasoned that God, who knew their future, in this way prevented them from falling into sin. If asked why God does not do so for all infants who eventually turn to evil as adults, Gregory responded that it is necessary for some people to be evil in order for God’s plan concerning the righteous to be fulfilled.

²⁴²⁹Sanders J. No Other Name. – Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. – P. 288.

²⁴³⁰Warfield B. B. Two studies in the history of doctrine : Augustine and the Pelagian controversy : the development of the doctrine of infant salvation. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897. – P. 144-145. Sanders adds that the Fathers often refrained from commenting on this theme (Sanders J. No Other Name. – Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. – P. 291).

The Early Church's conviction that baptism was necessary for salvation further complicated the picture. What happens, then, with unbaptized infants? Warfield comments, "The whole Patristic Church agreed that, martyrs excepted, no infant dying unbaptized could enter the kingdom of heaven."²⁴³¹

Ambrose also held to the party line: "No one ascends into the kingdom of heaven, except by means of the sacrament of baptism.... Moreover to this there is no exception, not the infant, nor he who is unavoidably prevented." Yet, he adds, "They have however immunity from pains."²⁴³²

The definitive view in the Western Church was advanced by Augustine, who taught that unbaptized infants indeed do perish eternally because they inherit the guilt of Adam (i.e., original sin). Yet, their punishment is less severe. We cite several excerpts from Augustine's *On the Baptism of Infants*:

Now, inasmuch as infants are only able to become His sheep by baptism, it must needs come to pass that they perish if they are not baptized, because they will not have that eternal life which He gives to His sheep (1:40).

Let there be then no eternal salvation promised to infants *out* of our own opinion, without Christ's baptism (1.33).

Now, since their tender age could not possibly have contracted sin in its own life, it remains for us, even if we are as yet unable to understand, at least to believe that infants inherit original sin (3.7).

It may therefore be correctly affirmed, that such infants as quit the body without being baptized will be involved in the mildest condemnation of all (1.21).

Augustine's views found support with Gregory I (6th c.), who affirmed, "Those who have done nothing here of themselves, but have not been freed by the sacrament of salvation, enter there into torments."²⁴³³ This verdict was confirmed at the Second Council of Lyons (13th c.) and the Council of Florence (14th c.).²⁴³⁴

Augustine's protagonist, Pelagius, felt that unbaptized infants went to a "middle" zone between heaven and hell.²⁴³⁵ According to Semi-Pelagianism, God judges departed infants on the basis of His foreknowledge, that is, based on His knowledge of what they would have done if they had lived on.²⁴³⁶ It is also assumed that when such infants grow up in heaven, they must put their personal trust in the Savior.²⁴³⁷

In the Middle Ages, Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas made their contributions to this theme. Unlike Augustine and Gregory I, both Lombard and Aquinas taught that, although unbaptized infants forfeit the beatific vision of God, they suffer no punishment or torment. Even though limbo is a part of hell, it is better characterized as a "natural paradise." Lombard differed from Aquinas, though, in that he felt that these infants do suffer from the knowledge that they cannot see God, while Aquinas denied this.²⁴³⁸

Next, we will examine various confessional views on the fate of departed infants, which, in fact, are simply the continuation of this doctrine's development.

B. Catholic Position

²⁴³¹Warfield, p. 148.

²⁴³²Infants, Salvation of // Geisler N. L. Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999. – P. 360.

²⁴³³*Moralium*, 9 in Warfield, p. 150.

²⁴³⁴Warfield, p. 151.

²⁴³⁵Sanders, p. 292.

²⁴³⁶Warfield, p. 149.

²⁴³⁷Geisler, p. 362-363.

²⁴³⁸McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 442; Warfield, 1897, p. 152.

We have already received an introduction to the Catholic view, which we can sum up as follows. In traditional Catholic thought, the sin of Adam leaves its mark on all his descendants resulting in them inheriting of the guilt of his sin. Therefore, infants are guilty from birth of Adam's transgression (original sin). Water baptism, though, provides forgiveness of original sin. For this reason, the Catholic Church baptizes infants.

If children die before receiving baptism, they depart to a place called "limbo," which is a part of hell, but a place without torment. It is a sort of "natural paradise," where all individuals who have committed no personal sin reside.²⁴³⁹ Infants who go there have no access to God's presence or the vision of His glory. They suffer no pain, but spend eternity without God.

The following excerpt from the Catholic Encyclopedia details the Catholic view before Vatican II:

The Catholic teaching is uncompromising on this point, that all who depart this life without baptism be it of water, or blood, or desire, are perpetually excluded from the vision of God.... As to the exact state of these [infant] souls in the next world they are not agreed.... While it is certain that unbaptized infants must endure the pain of loss, it is not at all certain that they are subject to the pain of sense.... Since the twelfth century, the opinion of the majority of theologians has been that unbaptized infants are immune from all pain of sense.²⁴⁴⁰

In evaluation of this view, we first note that Catholics correctly acknowledge our participation in Adam's sin and the resultant inherited guilt that it entails. This resonates with Paul's teaching in Romans chapter 5. In addition, Catholics correctly stress that infants' salvation must come through Christ and not by their personal innocence.

On the other hand, Catholics reduce the severity of inherited guilt. Personal sin can lead to condemnation in hell, while inherited guilt results only in confinement in limbo. Moreover, although infants do not experience pain in limbo, they will still spend eternity separated from the Lord. In addition, this teaching distorts the biblical doctrine of water baptism, asserting that by it God forgives original sin. Furthermore, the Catholic view has no biblical support. The Bible nowhere mentions a place called limbo. Finally, this teaching undervalues God's mercy to departed infants, who had no opportunity to turn to Jesus. Even some Catholic theologians looked with suspicion on this doctrine.²⁴⁴¹

These post-Vatican II declarations, though, offer more hope for the fate of unbaptized infants:

God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.²⁴⁴²

As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.²⁴⁴³

Interestingly, in the above cited statement no mention is made of limbo. In addition, the role of God's mercy is accentuated. This new position resembles the Lutheran "agnostic" theory that we will soon discuss.

²⁴³⁹Ibid., p. 165.

²⁴⁴⁰Catholic Encyclopedia, v. 2, p. 266-267, in Hamilton A. H. The Doctrine of Infant Salvation // Bibliotheca Sacra. 1944. Vol. 101. P. 353.

²⁴⁴¹Geisler, p. 365.

²⁴⁴²Catechism of the Catholic Church. № 1257. https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

²⁴⁴³Catechism of the Catholic Church, № 1261.

Many Catholics now embrace the “universal opportunity” view – that God grants departed infants at some future time after death opportunity to believe in the Savior.²⁴⁴⁴ Some Protestants also hold to this teaching. Leckie, for example, claims that God allows infants to grow up in heaven until they are able to make a conscious decision to trust in Christ as Savior.²⁴⁴⁵ However, Leckie’s theory encounters several problems. First, the Bible does not hold out the hope of an opportunity for salvation after death (see Heb 9:27). Second, these infants will be in heaven possessing an inborn sinful nature.²⁴⁴⁶

C. Lutheran and Anglican View

As noted above, we may term the Lutheran position as “agnostic.” They concur with the Catholics that infants are born with original sin. Therefore, they need forgiveness through water baptism. The Augsburg Confession states the following:

About original sin: our churches also teach that since Adam’s fall into sin, all men who are fathered in the normal physical way are conceived and born with sin. This means that they are born without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with evil desires. This disease, or original sin, truly is sin. It condemns and brings eternal death to those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit (*Article 2*).

About Baptism our churches teach that it is necessary for salvation, and that through Baptism God offers us his grace. Also, children ought to be baptized. Those brought to God through Baptism are received into God’s grace (*Article 9*).

Yet, Lutherans reject the teaching of limbo. In answer to the question, “What happens to unbaptized infants who prematurely expire,” Lutheran faith has no definite response. In the case of infants of believing parents, Luther was ready to acknowledge a “baptism by desire,” which means that the unfulfilled desire and intent to baptize the child is acceptable to God as the act itself.²⁴⁴⁷ In the seventeenth century, the Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard stated, “In the event of privation of impossibility the children of Christians are saved by an extraordinary and peculiar divine dispensation. For the necessity of baptism is not absolute, but ordinary.”²⁴⁴⁸

Luther comments on the fate of children of believing parents:

The Holy and Merciful God will think kindly of them. What he will do with them he has revealed to no one, that baptism may not be despised, but has reserved to his own mercy. God does wrong to no man.”²⁴⁴⁹

So then, the conventional Lutheran approach to the question infants’ fate is to consider it a mystery and to rely on God’s mercy. Lutherans hesitate to openly confess that departed infants are saved for fear of compromising the importance of water baptism.²⁴⁵⁰

²⁴⁴⁴Horton S. The Last Things // Horton S. M. Systematic Theology. – Rev. Ed. – BookMasters. Kindle Edition. – P. 692.

²⁴⁴⁵Sanders, p. 197.

²⁴⁴⁶Strong A. H. Systematic Theology. – Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907. – P. 664.

²⁴⁴⁷Sanders, p. 296.

²⁴⁴⁸Warfield, p. 169.

²⁴⁴⁹Ibid., p. 168.

²⁴⁵⁰Sanders, p. 297.

The Lutheran theologian Mueller makes the following comments on departed infants from Christian homes: “It is best to commend them to God’s infinite mercy, who has power to work faith also without the ordained means of grace.” Concerning unbaptized infants from non-Christian homes, he states, “We dare not affirm that they are saved.... Here rather we confront the unsearchable judgments of God alone.”²⁴⁵¹

The Anglican Church advances a similar view. Water baptism washes away the stain of original sin. Therefore, infants must be baptized. Originally, Anglicans denied that unbaptized infants could be saved. In time, however, they began to refrain from commenting on this topic and removed from their doctrinal statements references to the condemnation of unbaptized infants.²⁴⁵²

Some Anglicans are ready to defend the claim that God receives unbaptized infants. John Hooper, for example, comments, “It shall not be against the faith of a Christian to say, that Christ’s death and passion extendeth as far for the salvation of infants, as Adam’s fall made all his posterity culpable of damnation.”²⁴⁵³

In assessing the Lutheran and Anglican teaching, we note a proper appreciation of the biblical truth of inherited guilt from Adam and salvation through Christ. They also rightly reject the unscriptural doctrine of limbo. Unlike the biblical revelation, though, they regard that baptism saves infants from original sin. They are also unjustified in assuming the salvation of infants from Christian homes. Finally, many who are seeking a definite biblical answer to such a painful question would likely find the agnostic approach unsatisfactory.

D. Reformed Understanding

Reformed theology is characterized by so-called “covenant theology,” according to which departed infants of believing parents are saved. Adherents of this view appeal to God’s dealings with His Old Testament people, Israel. From birth, children born into a Hebrew family are considered members of God’s people. Reformed thinkers also cite Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where children of a believing parent are called “holy.”

On the other hand, we challenge the assumption that the Old Testament order transfers to the New. Israel’s inheritance was based on physical descent. New Testament salvation, on the other hand, is by faith. The physical descendants of Abraham received the inheritance. Yet, Jesus has no physical offspring. Co-heirs with Christ become so by believing in Him. Consequently, if salvation through Christ is not transmitted by physical means, then adherents of this theory have no basis for their claim.

Concerning 1 Corinthians 7:14, it is important to note that the same word that describes the condition of children of believing parents, that is ἁγία (*hagia*), i.e., “holy,” is used in its verbal form in relation to the unbelieving spouse: “The unbelieving husband is *sanctified* through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is *sanctified* through her believing husband.” Yet, verse 16 informs us, “How do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” So then, the “sanctification” of the unbelieving spouse does not mean he or she is saved. Similarly, the “sanctification” of the children of believers does not mean that they are saved. It simply refers to the fact that the believing spouse has a *sanctifying influence* on the family.

Another important aspect of Reformed theology is the doctrine of predestination. According to the Calvinistic teaching, God predestines all things. The elect are saved, and the non-elect perish. Therefore, the elect child, if dying in infancy, is saved, while the non-elect child perishes. The salvation of infants depends, then, not on personal faith or water baptism, but on God’s election. God unilaterally applies the redemptive work of Christ to elect children.

Most contemporary Calvinists propose that if an infant of believing parents dies, this is a sign from God that He elected this child for salvation. This interpretation is extended to apply to all children who perish in infancy. Therefore, it is thought that all departed infants are saved. This interpretation became generally

²⁴⁵¹Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 498.

²⁴⁵²Warfield, p. 175-189.

²⁴⁵³*Ibid.*, c. 191.

accepted by Calvinists in the nineteenth century, but it dates back to Calvin himself.²⁴⁵⁴ The great French reformer wrote, “I do not doubt that the infants whom the Lord gathers together from this life are regenerated by a secret operation of the Holy Spirit.”²⁴⁵⁵

Hodge supports this view in the following manner.²⁴⁵⁶ First, according to Romans 5, God, who has already provided salvation in Christ, has the right to apply that salvation to any individual. Second, Jesus’ statement that few find the way to life (Matt 7:14) does not exclude the salvation of all infants – He was speaking here of adults. Third, this theory coincides with God’s nature – He takes no pleasure when a soul perishes.

We affirm along with Reformed theology that the human race in general is included in the guilt assigned to Adam’s sin as Paul clearly taught in Romans 5. We also agree that one may enter heaven only by virtue of Christ’s shed blood. However, Reformed theologians distort the true understanding of God’s love, claiming that God unconditionally elects who will be saved and who will perish. In their view, God does not will the salvation of all people. This conviction runs contrary to the biblical representation of God’s love for humanity and desire to save all.

We also note that the salvation of all infants is inconsistent with Calvinistic theology in general. Calvinists teach that God’s election is unconditional – it does not depend on any factors inherent to the elect. Yet, if the Lord saves all departed infants, then His election is conditioned upon the fact that they die in early childhood. In addition, they have no biblical support for the assertion that premature death is a sign of God’s election.

Moreover, according to this understanding God seemingly allows all non-elect individuals to reach the age of accountability, since those who died sooner than that are believed to be elect children. Yet, if, as Calvinists teach, God is ready to condemn the non-elect who survive to the age of accountability by withholding from them the grace to repent and believe, why would He hesitate to condemn the non-elect before they reach that age? The helpless situation of non-elect adults does not differ from the helpless condition of non-elect infants.²⁴⁵⁷

E. Other Evangelical Views

The final theories for our examination basically reflect an Arminian perspective. The first of these is the so-called “theory of innocence,” and the other – “the unilateral application of Christ’s redemptive work.”²⁴⁵⁸

1. Theory of Innocence

This theory claims that departed infants are saved because they committed no personal sin and are therefore innocent before God. Infants are saved, then, thanks to their personal sinlessness. This theory also honors the concept of the “age of accountability,” which means that children are not held responsible for sins committed before the age when they can assess the moral value of their actions. Before this age, children do sin in the sense of breaking God’s commandments. However, since they cannot conceptualize this as personal sin, God does not hold them accountable. Anabaptists are among those who held this view.²⁴⁵⁹

The Bible hints at the existence of the age of accountability (see Deut 1:39; Isa 7:14-16; Rom 9:11).²⁴⁶⁰ Based on these passages, proponents of this teaching conclude that before children know how “to refuse evil

²⁴⁵⁴Sanders, p. 294-295, 300-301. Sanders notes that Zwingli so taught.

²⁴⁵⁵*The Works of John Calvin*, 8.522 (Amsterdam edition) in Strong, p. 663. Yet, Warfield (p. 200) and Sanders challenge the claim that Calvin believed all departed infants were saved.

²⁴⁵⁶Hodge C. *Systematic Theology*. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997. – V. 1. – P. 26-27

²⁴⁵⁷Clark D. K. Warfield, *Infant Salvation, and the Logic of Calvinism* // *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 1984. Vol. 27.4. P. 461-462.

²⁴⁵⁸Warfield, p. 222-223.

²⁴⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁴⁶⁰Strong, p. 661.

and choose good,” they are not responsible for personal sin. Children who die before this time all go to heaven. So then, all departed infants are saved. In line with the theory, infants do not inherit Adam’s guilt. Each person is responsible only for his or her own sins.

The value of this theory lies in that it recognizes an age of accountability, which the Bible does support. Before reaching this age, children are not responsible for personal sin. On the other hand, this teaching contradicts Paul’s clear teaching on inherited guilt in Romans chapter 5.

Another difficulty with this view is that people can gain heaven based on their personal innocence and not by virtue of the blood of Christ. Such a person is not “redeemed,” and can never call Jesus “Savior” from the guilt of sin – only from depravity and mortality. However, Paul stated in 1 Timothy 4:10 that God is the “Savior of all men.” Warfield agrees that this teaching “is no less than a denial that Jesus is, in any proper sense, the Saviour of those who die infancy.”²⁴⁶¹

Finally, this approach violates the biblical concept of the believer’s union with Christ. Just as we are held liable for Adam’s sin, resulting in our condemnation, we receive through Christ the gift of righteousness, which leads to eternal life. If we reject inherited guilt from Adam, are we not in danger of rejecting the corresponding gift of righteousness in Christ?

If, in connection with our union with Christ, we receive only depravity of nature, then the following will result. Since we inherit depravity from Adam, we commit sins. Our personal sins, then, lead to condemnation. If this parallels with our union with Christ, then we receive from Christ only regeneration that leads to good works resulting in salvation. This scenario directly contradicts the biblical teaching of justification by faith and undermines the true gospel of grace. If we insist that we are justified by God’s grace in Christ, then it follows that we must affirm that we are condemned due to the guilt of another, namely, Adam.

Millard Erickson defends the theory of innocence as follows. He is ready to concede that Romans 5 teaches inherited guilt. Yet, he feels that children do not inherit Adam’s guilt until they commit their first personal transgression. In this way, they “approve” of their sinful nature inherited from Adam and thus become culpable both for their personal sin and for that of their father Adam.²⁴⁶²

Erickson’s approach is certainly creative, but boasts no support from Scripture. We read nowhere that people inherit guilt from Adam merely as a confirmation of their depraved human nature. In addition, if depravity and mortality are transmitted to Adam’s offspring, then why not his guilt as well? Moreover, what sense is there in adding Adam’s guilt to children only at the point when they are already guilty of personal sin?

2. Unilateral Application of Christ’s Redemptive Work

The final and most probable theory, which is also found among Evangelicals, affirms that people do indeed inherit the guilt of Adam’s transgression and on that basis are born in a state of condemnation. Yet, in His mercy God delivers those who die in infancy from the eternal consequences of Adam’s sin, i.e., from condemnation. God unilaterally applies to such individuals the redemptive work of Jesus without the requirement for personal repentance and faith. Departed infants are guilty of Adam’s sin, but also forgiven through Christ’s blood.

So then, children are not in danger of condemnation until they commit their first personal sin. Children inherit the other aspects of original sin as well, namely depravity and mortality. Yet, their depravity is removed at the time of their premature death, and new birth is imparted to them.

We can note several advantages to this approach. Paul’s teaching on inherited guilt in Romans 5 is duly recognized. Moreover, we preserve the parallel between our union with Adam in condemnation and our union with Christ in righteousness. In addition, departed infants are saved not by their own innocence, but by the blood of Jesus.

²⁴⁶¹Warfield, p. 229.

²⁴⁶²Erickson M. J. *How Shall They Be Saved?* – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 251-252.

We also find support in the observation that during His earthly ministry, Jesus displayed a positive attitude toward children: "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt 19:14). The primary thrust of Jesus' words here is that God's kingdom belongs to those who have childlike faith. At the same time, we would be amiss to dismiss the literal application of His favor to little ones.

Matthew 18:14 contains a similar thought: "So it is not {the} will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." We recognized, of course, that Jesus was referring primarily to children "of faith." Nevertheless, Hamilton points out that Jesus said these words after He set a child before the disciples, which may indicate a direct application to small children as well.²⁴⁶³ Kendrick concurs that, although Jesus was referring to "spiritual children," He could also be including literal ones:

The persons that thus, as a class, typify the subjects of God's spiritual kingdom cannot be in themselves objects of indifference to him, or be regarded otherwise than with intense interest.... The class that in its very nature thus shadows forth the brightest features of Christian excellence must be subjects of God's special concern and care.²⁴⁶⁴

Additionally, to support the claim of universal infant salvation, we can cite 2 Samuel 12:23, where we read that David expected to see his departed infant after his death.²⁴⁶⁵

Hamilton advances still another convincing proof.²⁴⁶⁶ He relates that God's love for humanity is so great that He gave His only begotten Son to redeem the world. It stands to reason, then, that He will work to ensure the salvation of many souls, including departed infants. Moreover, according to Romans 5:19, "Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous." God has already provided salvation in Christ for all humanity and can apply the benefits of Christ's work to any individual He pleases.

In the case of infants, God does not require personal faith to obtain salvation. Hamilton argues,

Since the Scriptures are intended to be read and heard by those capable of such functions, it is to be expected that the usual statement of the way of salvation includes the requirement of faith on the part of reader or hearer, but this must not outlaw the possibility that God is free, on the just basis of a salvation complete in Christ, to save whom He will.²⁴⁶⁷

Moreover, based on Paul's statement in Romans 3:24, "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus," Hamilton concludes, "Salvation is provided for every man in the work of Christ; God is free on that ground to save apart from any cause in the individual sinner; therefore God can justly save those who die in infancy."²⁴⁶⁸

Strong adds the following argument: "As without personal act of theirs infants inherited corruption from Adam, so without personal act of theirs salvation is provided for them in Christ."²⁴⁶⁹ Strong also asserts,

²⁴⁶³Hamilton A. H. *The Doctrine of Infant Salvation* // Bibliotheca Sacra. 1945. Vol. 102. P. 108.

²⁴⁶⁴Strong, p. 661.

²⁴⁶⁵Sanders notes the following objections to these arguments. First, we do not know the ages of the children that Jesus blessed. In addition, possibly David simply meant that he would be with his child in death (Sanders, p. 289-290). Geisler claims, though, that David anticipated the resurrection from the dead (Geisler, p. 363).

²⁴⁶⁶Hamilton, v. 102, p. 105-107.

²⁴⁶⁷Ibid., p. 106-107.

²⁴⁶⁸Ibid. p. 107.

²⁴⁶⁹Strong, p. 662.

The condition of salvation for adults is personal faith. Infants are incapable of fulfilling this condition. Since Christ has died for all, we have reason to believe that provision is made for their reception of Christ in some other way.²⁴⁷⁰

Even as early as the fifteenth century, at the Council of Constance John Gerson stated,

“God... has not so tied the mercy of his salvation to common laws and sacraments, but without prejudice to his law he can sanctify children not yet born, by the baptism of his grace or the power of the Holy Ghost.”²⁴⁷¹

If some object that the Bible requires faith for salvation, we can safely assume that faith is the *conventional* requirement for salvation, but not the *absolute* requirement. God is free to apply salvation unilaterally, if He so desires. If others object that God will not save infants against their will, we may respond that He does not save them *against* their will, but *regardless* of their will.²⁴⁷²

Warfield objects that if God unilaterally cancels the inherited guilt of infants, then why do the other effects of the fall still remain, i.e., depravity and mortality?²⁴⁷³ We respond that God does not revoke any of the consequences of the Fall until the moment of infant death.

Warfield also argues that if Arminians are ready to accept that God unconditionally saves departed infants, then why do they reject the Calvinistic teaching of God’s unconditional election of adults?²⁴⁷⁴ God saving departed infants in no way excludes others from salvation. The Calvinistic view of predestination, though, involves the exclusion of the non-elect from salvation. God accepts departed infants unconditionally, since they have no opportunity to personally believe.

We may also apply this solution to those afflicted with psychological illness or mental retardation to the degree that they never mentally progress beyond the level of small children. Because of their inability to conceptualize their sinfulness or God’s plan of salvation, we affirm that God, in His mercy, forgives their sins by virtue of Christ’s death.

F. Conclusions

Since the Bible does not give a specific answer to the question of the fate of departed infants, many various theories appeared in the course of church history. We have discussed:

1. the theory of limbo
2. the theory of universal opportunity
3. the agnostic theory
4. the salvation of infants of believing parents
5. the salvation of elect infants
6. the theory of innocence
7. the unilateral application of Christ’s redemptive work.

Based on our discussion of this topic, we conclude that the most plausible theory is the final one – the unilateral application of Christ’s redemptive work. It enjoys more biblical support and avoids certain theological complications that characterize the other theories.

²⁴⁷⁰Ibid.

²⁴⁷¹Warfield, p. 153.

²⁴⁷²Geisler, p. 364.

²⁴⁷³Warfield, p. 227.

²⁴⁷⁴Ibid., p. 222.

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## Chapter 25: The Salvation of the Unreached

What will happen to those who have never heard about Jesus? Can a person be saved without knowing about Him or expressing personal faith in Him? Several theories exist which attempt to solve this dilemma: universalism, universal opportunity, pluralism, inclusivism, implicit faith, and exclusivism. We will attempt to determine the most probable of these theories.

Sanders underscores the relevance of this topic: "It is safe to conclude that the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived have never heard the good news of grace regarding the God of Israel and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>2475</sup> Geisler adds that at the conclusion of the twentieth century, only one-half of the world's population had heard the good news about Jesus, and many others have heard very little about Him.<sup>2476</sup> Therefore, this is an important topic for our consideration.

### A. Universalism

Universalism is the teaching that all people in the end will be saved regardless of their faith or lack thereof in this life. A famous proponent of this teaching in the Early Church was Origen, who believed that even Satan would eventually be saved. In Origen's opinion, God's design is to restore all things. By means of discipline, the Lord will bring all to repentance, even after death. Origen writes,

...all things shall be re-established in a state of unity, and when God shall be all in all. And this result must be understood as being brought about, not suddenly, but slowly and gradually, seeing that the process of amendment and correction will take place imperceptibly in the individual instances during the lapse of countless and unmeasured ages, some outstripping others, and tending by a swifter course towards perfection, while others again follow close at hand, and some again a long way behind; and thus, through the numerous and uncounted orders of progressive beings who are being reconciled to God from a state of enmity, the last enemy is finally reached, who is called death (Origen, *De Principiis*, 3.6.3. Also see 1.6.1-3).

Several passages of Scripture may seem to support this understanding:<sup>2477</sup>

- For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers (1 Tim 4:10).
- For it was the {Father's} good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, {I say,} whether things on earth or things in heaven (Col 1:19-20).
- ...with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, {that is,} the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth (Eph 1:10).
- And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, {be} blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev 5:13).
- And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself (Jn 12:32).

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<sup>2475</sup>Sanders J. No Other Name. – Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001. – P. 16.

<sup>2476</sup>Geisler N. L. "Heathen," Salvation of // Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999. – P. 301.

<sup>2477</sup>Noted in Erickson M. J. How Shall They Be Saved? – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996. – P. 198.

- ...and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until {the} period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time (Acts 3:20-21).
- ...so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11).

We can also cite 1 Corinthians 15:22-25, where Paul states,

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then {comes} the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

It is thought that one of the enemies that Christ will subdue is unbelief.<sup>2478</sup> The result will be a universal turning to Him.

Adherents of universalism diverge as to the mechanism of how God will accomplish universal salvation.<sup>2479</sup> Some, like Schleiermacher, believe that God will overpower the will of unbelievers and compel them to believe. Others feel that all people will eventually believe voluntarily. Still others assert that unbelievers will undergo a period of punishment until they accept salvation in God's Kingdom.

Universalism operates on the assumption that if persons are subject to eternal punishment, then God's salvation plan is unsuccessful. Dodd argues that if judgement is God's final word, then love was ineffective.<sup>2480</sup> Boring claims that if we accept exclusivism, yet do not take seriously the passages that seem to indicate universal salvation, we get a picture of a "frustrated God who brought all creation into being but despite his best efforts could only salvage some of it."<sup>2481</sup>

In Chauncy's opinion, it is "ridiculous to accuse an omniscient God of creating people he knew would be finally impenitent."<sup>2482</sup> Chauncy himself states,

As the First Cause of all things is infinitely benevolent, it is not easy to conceive that he should bring mankind into existence unless he intended to make them finally happy. And if this was his intention, it cannot well be supposed, as he is infinitely intelligent and wise, that he should be unable to propose, or carry into execution, a scheme that would be effectual to secure, sooner or later, the certain accomplishment of it.<sup>2483</sup>

Other arguments are advanced to support the teaching of universal salvation.<sup>2484</sup> John Hick claims that since God created people for Himself and people find their ultimate satisfaction only in Him, all will eventually come to Him. Psalm 139:7-8 is interpreted to say that God will pursue people even to hell until they turn to Him. It is thought that "no persons have ever existed who can eternally spurn God's love."<sup>2485</sup> Furthermore, if

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<sup>2478</sup>Noted in B Sanders, p. 85.

<sup>2479</sup>Ibid., p. 81-82.

<sup>2480</sup>Noted in Erickson, p. 74.

<sup>2481</sup>Boring M. E. The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul // Journal of Biblical Literature. 105(2). 1986. P. 291.

<sup>2482</sup>Chauncy C. The Mystery Hid from Ages and Generations. – New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1784, reprint 1969.

Noted in Sanders, p. 102.

<sup>2483</sup>Chauncy, p. 1.

<sup>2484</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 92-103, and Erickson, p. 67-73.

<sup>2485</sup>From Dalton, *Salvation and Damnation*, p. 82; noted in Sanders, p. 94.

certain persons are to remain in sin eternally, then the dualism between good and evil will exist eternally as well. Yet, Jesus came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8).

Moreover, the saints will not be able to enjoy eternal bliss knowing that others are in torment. In addition, the Bible claims that “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), i.e., everything and everybody will be in God. Furthermore, it seems to some unfair to punish finite transgression for an infinite duration. Adherents of universalism also cite Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, which the shepherd sought until he found it. It is also suggested that nothing can prevent an omnipotent God from accomplishing His plan to save all.

Defenders of this view also appeal to Paul’s letter to the Romans. In chapter 5, he compares the scope of the Fall with that of salvation – both phenomena encompass all of humanity: “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom 5:18). Moreover, just as the Lord will eventually save all Israel (Rom 11:26), He is able to save all humanity. In that same chapter, Paul concludes, “For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all” (Rom 11:32).

In answer to the question, “Why, then, evangelize?” universalists respond that conversion in this life will spare individuals from many ills and afford them many blessings. In addition, the New Testament commands us to evangelize. Furthermore, Calvinists evangelize, even though they believe that all the elect will somehow eventually come to faith.<sup>2486</sup>

Without a doubt, however, the Bible often makes mention of those who perish. For example, on Judgement Day, “if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15). We can also appeal to 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:19; and Matthew 7:21-23; 25:46.<sup>2487</sup> Defenders of universalism, however, assume that God’s goal in these passages is to motivate people to obedience in this life. If punishment will be dealt out at all, it will be temporary and corrective. When the Scriptures speak of eternal punishment, they are employing hyperbole.<sup>2488</sup>

Some proponents of universalism attempt to explain the biblical teaching on eternal punishment by means of the concept “progressive revelation,” which is when God progressively reveals His truths throughout the course of biblical history. They feel that Paul’s most advanced teachings are in his later writings, and these writings contain verses that are thought to support universal salvation (Rom 11:32, Col 1:19-20, Eph 1:10).

We respond to universalism in the following way. The Bible does teach that God has reconciled all things to Himself in His Son. Yet, that does not imply that salvation comes automatically. One must personally receive the gift of eternal life through repentance and faith. Paul charged his readers, “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

We concur that in Romans 5, Paul applies the consequences of the Fall to all humanity. Yet, the benefits of union with Christ come through faith: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who *receive* the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). Only those who receive the abundance of grace experience salvation.

Sanders offers the following critique of universalism.<sup>2489</sup> First, in verses that seem to support this view, one must distinguish the availability of salvation from accepting salvation, as we did in Romans 5:17. Second, we must also make a distinction between reconciliation with God and submission to Him. The fact that someday everyone will submit to the Lord (as in Philippians 2:10 and Ephesians 1:10) does not mean that they are also reconciled to Him. Third, in Matthew 12:32 we learn that the unpardonable sin is not forgiven “either in this age or in the {age} to come.” In addition, the Bible abounds with examples where humanity is divided into two groups: the unrighteous and righteous, unbelievers and believers, etc. Finally, if people are genuinely free, then God cannot force them to accept salvation.

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<sup>2486</sup>Erickson, p. 259; Sanders, p. 95.

<sup>2487</sup>Erickson, p. 200-201.

<sup>2488</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 88-89 and Erickson, p. 72.

<sup>2489</sup>Sanders, p. 107-111.



Erickson adds the following thoughts.<sup>2490</sup> In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus speaks of two paths: one to life, and the other to perdition. Most people travel the latter path (cf. Matt 22:14). Commenting on Philippians 2:9-11, Erickson notes that even demons acknowledge the lordship of Jesus (Mk 3:11). So then, acknowledging Jesus as Lord in Philippians 2:9-11 does not necessarily result in salvation. In Erickson's opinion, 1 Corinthians 15:22 refers not to a universal spiritual rebirth, but of the physical resurrection of all people. Finally, in Romans 11:32 Paul is not speaking of the salvation of each individual, but of the opportunity for salvation to all people groups, in particular, to Jews and Gentiles.

The following facts contradict the claim that "eternal" punishment is only temporary. First, a number of passages indicate that people suffer eternally (Isa 66:24; Matt 25:46; Mk 9:44, 46, 48; Rev 14:11). The use of the term αἰώνιος (*aiōnios*) in Matthew 25:46 is highly significant. It refers both to the eternal bliss of the saints and the eternal punishment of the lost. If believers enjoy eternal blessing, then unbelievers experience torment without end.

In answer to the claim that in the traditional understanding of eternal punishment, good does not conquer evil, we respond that good can overcome evil not only through redemption, but also through judgment.<sup>2491</sup> Finally, in Acts 3:21 the phrase "[the] period of restoration" refers not to the restoration of sinners, but the millennial kingdom, about which the prophets often spoke.<sup>2492</sup>

## B. Universal Opportunity

"Universal opportunity" means that all people will have the opportunity to hear the gospel, either before or after death. Some adherents of this position posit that this applies only to those who had no opportunity to hear in this life, while others are willing to extend this privilege even to those who rejected Christ during their time on earth. This latter theory resembles universalism, except that there is no guarantee that these individuals will in fact turn to the Lord.

Still another variant of this theory suggests that at the time of death, Jesus personally visits those who have never heard to give them a chance to believe. The decision made at that moment, however, is irreversible.<sup>2493</sup>

Several figures from church history held this view.<sup>2494</sup> From the second century, the conviction existed that Jesus liberated souls from "prison" (see 1 Pet 3:18-20). Some Fathers taught that when Jesus rose from the dead, He liberated only Old Testament saints.<sup>2495</sup> Others proposed that at that time He liberated all who were willing.<sup>2496</sup> The liturgy of the Early Church contained a prayer for the deceased.

Some contemporary thinkers also support this view.<sup>2497</sup> C. S. Lewis and Clark Pinnock taught that opportunity to hear the gospel after death is granted only to those who positively responded to general revelation in this life. In the opinion of David Bloesch, only those who eternally persist in rejecting God's grace will be lost.<sup>2498</sup>

Defenders of "universal opportunity" appeal to 1 Peter 4:6, where we read, "For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may

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<sup>2490</sup>Erickson, p. 67, 198-201.

<sup>2491</sup>Mueller J. T. *Christian Dogmatics*. – St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1934. – P. 634, 637.

<sup>2492</sup>Thiessen H. C. *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949. – P. 504.

<sup>2493</sup>Sanders, p. 165.

<sup>2494</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 177-184.

<sup>2495</sup>Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian

<sup>2496</sup>Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Athanasius, Jerome?, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Gregory Nazianzen.

<sup>2497</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>2498</sup>Erickson, p. 160.

live in the spirit according to {the} {will of} God.” Opponents of this teaching respond that Peter is speaking of spiritual dead people still alive in the world.

Another passage used in support is 1 Peter 3:18-20, where Peter records that Jesus was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation (κηρύσσω) to the spirits {now} in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark.” It appears that these individuals had opportunity to receive salvation after death (cf. Eph 4:8-9).

Several alternative explanations are proposed for this difficult passage.<sup>2499</sup> First, some suggest that the word “spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, who preached through Noah to the people of his day. However, the text identifies Christ as the preacher, not Noah. Second, Jesus preached only to those individuals who repented in Noah’s day. On the other hand, the Genesis narrative does not record any conversions at that time. Third, Jesus preached salvation just to those who perished in Noah’s day. Yet, we ask, “Why only these spirits and not all?”

A more plausible option is that Jesus did not preach salvation to these spirits, but rather declared His victory to lost souls (or possibly evil spirits) in hell. Nonetheless, we must take into consideration that the verb κηρύσσω (*kerusso*) in the New Testament nearly always denotes preaching with the intent of conversion.<sup>2500</sup>

Proponents of universal opportunity refer us to passages of Scripture where the damned are those who actively reject the gospel of Christ (Mk 16:15; Matt 10:32-33; 2 Thes 1:8; Jn 3:18; 3:36; 16:8-9; 15:22). Since a person’s eternal destiny hinges on their response to the gospel, at some point they must hear the gospel, before or after death, in order to accept or reject it. On the other hand, other passages indicate that people are condemned for sin in general, without reference to their response to the gospel (see Rev 20:12-13; Jn 5:29; Rom 2:6-10).<sup>2501</sup>

Others defend this theory by claiming that since Jesus has the keys of hell and death, He can free people from the nether world (Rev 1:18; Heb 2:14). Also of note is that those “under the earth” will confess Jesus as Lord (Phil 2:10-11; Rev 5:13). In addition, the gates of the New Jerusalem “will never be closed” (Rev 21:25; cf. Isa 60:11).<sup>2502</sup> Does this indicate that people can still repent after death? However, Hebrews 9:27 declares, “It is appointed for men to die once and after this {comes} judgment.”<sup>2503</sup> Other passages support the claim that there is no hope for redemption after death (Ps 48; Rev 20:11-15).<sup>2504</sup>

Other arguments favoring universal opportunity are also advanced.<sup>2505</sup> In Matthew 12:32, Jesus declares that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven “either in this age or in the {age} to come.” Could this indicate that other sins can be forgiven in the age to come? In addition, in John 5:25 we read, “An hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” Yet, in subsequent verses it becomes clear that Jesus is speaking about the physical resurrection of both the saved and the lost.

Jesus’ saying in Luke 16:27-29 provides a strong refutation of the theory of universal opportunity. Jesus relates the story of a man in hell appealing to Abraham, “I beg you, father, that you send him to my father’s house – for I have five brothers – in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Abraham responds, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” Clearly, neither the man in hell, nor Abraham expected that these brothers would have opportunity to repent after death.

Also in refutation of this teaching, its opponents ask the question, “Why did Peter, writing with the goal of encouraging persecuted believers to hold fast to their faith, allow an opportunity to find salvation after death?

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<sup>2499</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 168-169.

<sup>2500</sup>Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. – P. 543-544.

<sup>2501</sup>Sanders, p. 179-182, 208.

<sup>2502</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 179-182, 191.

<sup>2503</sup>Noted in Boyd G. A., Eddy P. R. Across the Spectrum. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. – P. 188.

<sup>2504</sup>Erickson, p. 173.

<sup>2505</sup>Boyd, p. 186-188.

Would this not have undermined his readers' steadfastness in persecution?<sup>2506</sup> Another objection is the negative effect this teaching might have on motivating for evangelization and missions.<sup>2507</sup> Finally, the Bible repeatedly calls people to come to God in this life (Prov 29:1; Jn 8:24; Heb 3:7-13; 2 Pet 3:9).

### C. Pluralism

The term "pluralism" can have different meanings in different contexts. One can speak of cultural pluralism, philosophical pluralism, or religious pluralism. In this section, we will devote our attention to religious pluralism. According to normative religious pluralism, one God stands behind all religions, and each of them contributes one piece of the total picture of Him and His truth. Therefore, all religions lead to God, and there is no one special messenger from Him. All great religious figures taught some aspect of His truth. In addition, this theory holds that God is so great and unfathomable, that no one religion can comprehend or describe Him adequately.

In answer to the question why religions differ, pluralists appeal to the influence of culture. In different cultures, people perceive God differently, which leads to differing faith systems. Since a single religion can only partially apprehend God's nature and plan, we must unite all religions to better know and understand Him. Therefore, all world religions must, first of all, acknowledge that they all speak of the same Divine Being and, secondly, find common ground between themselves, eliminating all contradictory doctrines.

Some of the more notable proponents of pluralism include John Hick, Paul Knitter, and William Cantwell Smith. We will devote special attention to how these three approach pluralism. Like all pluralists, Hick believes that one Supreme Being stands behind all world religions. God is so unfathomable that humans cannot know His essence or describe Him in human language. Hick theorizes that people understand God differently because in various cultures He is perceived from different cultural perspectives.<sup>2508</sup> This supposedly explains why people usually adopt the religion of their culture. Conversion to a religion foreign to one's culture is an infrequent phenomenon.<sup>2509</sup>

To describe God, Hick uses his unique formulation "the Real." He writes, "We do not worship the Real in itself but always one or other of its manifestations to humanity."<sup>2510</sup> According to Hick, the task of all religions should be to eliminate all contradictions between themselves in recognition of the fact that they all speak of the same God.

Hick calls for a radical change in religious thinking, like what occurred during the Copernican revolution, when the general worldview changed from an earth-centered to a sun-centered model. Similarly, Hick recommends giving center stage not to Christianity, but to God: "We have to realize that the universe of faiths centers upon *God*, and not upon Christianity or upon any other religion."<sup>2511</sup>

Hick feels that Christianity does not surpass other world religions and occupies no pride of place among them. He claims to know many fine, morally upright people from non-Christian faiths. He sees no great difference in moral character among followers of different religions. Hick also accuses Christianity of failing to transform the world. He writes:

But if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered on

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<sup>2506</sup>Sanders, p. 186-188, 207.

<sup>2507</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>2508</sup>However, Erickson notes that Hick himself abandoned the faith in which he was raised, that is, the Anglican faith. Therefore, people's faith is not always determined by their upbringing in a certain culture (Erickson, p. 101).

<sup>2509</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 105-106.

<sup>2510</sup>Hick J. A pluralistic view // Gundry S.N., Okholm D. L., Phillips T. R. Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 50.

<sup>2511</sup>Hick J. God has many names. – London: MacMillan Press, 1980. – P. 52.

God and manifested in the “fruit of the Spirit,” then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world’s religions – and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent.<sup>2512</sup>

Hick also observes that even within Christianity, different movements exist. Christianity itself is not a unified faith.<sup>2513</sup> Moreover, Hick feels that if Christianity is the only true religion, then it should have found universal acceptance. He thinks that misunderstanding is the reason that Christians distinguish themselves from non-Christians.<sup>2514</sup>

When critics of pluralism claim that progress in European countries resulted from the positive presence and influence of Christianity, Hick responds that the keys to Europe’s development, rather, were factors like the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Christianity, in fact, opposed these movements. Hick also cites examples in world history of harm caused by Christians, such as the Crusades, persecution of Jews, etc. Furthermore, Hick cannot tolerate the idea that a loving God would condemn those who never heard the gospel. He believes that in the end all people will be saved.<sup>2515</sup>

Hick rejects the Christian teaching of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ. This idea, he feels, derives from ancient pagan culture. It would be unjust for the innocent to die for the guilty. In addition, if God required a sacrifice for sin, then the pardon He offers is not true forgiveness, since He received retribution for sin – the death of Christ.<sup>2516</sup> Hick rejects the Deity of Christ as well. The Early Church, under the influence of Greek philosophy, ascribed to Him this exalted status.<sup>2517</sup>

Paul Knitter also believes that behind all religions stands one Supreme Being, who He is so unfathomable that humans cannot comprehend Him, and that no one religion can fully describe Him. Knitter names this Being “Mystery.” He has revealed Himself to different religious groups in different ways. Each religion expresses only a partial understanding of this “Mystery.” Therefore, we must treat all religions with respect and seek unity between them.

Knitter defends the position that the most important tasks for religions to accomplish are eliminating poverty and oppression in the world and protecting the environment. He evaluates the quality of world religions by their success in accomplishing these goals. Regarding Christianity, the death of Christ is interpreted as His identification with all who suffer in the world. The resurrection of Christ points to and guarantees ultimate victory for those who suffer now.

Knitter feels that pursuing the above-mentioned goals will secure religious unity as well. In order to effectively deal with poverty, oppression, and pollution of the planet, followers of all religions must cooperate and participate. As they begin to work together on these issues, Knitter assumes, they will discover how much they have in common, and walls between them will start to come down. The end result will be the unification of all religions.<sup>2518</sup>

The final figure we will highlight is William Cantwell Smith. The unique feature of his brand of pluralism is his defense of the practice of idolatry. He claims we wrongfully charge idol worshipers with the worship of objects. They actually worship the gods represented by the idols.<sup>2519</sup> Since God is unfathomable and exceeds all human understanding, idols are useful, Smith believes, in that they provide the worshiper with a visible image to worship the invisible God. In his opinion, all religions, including Christianity, utilize symbols (i.e. “idols”) in

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<sup>2512</sup>Hick, A pluralistic view, p. 43.

<sup>2513</sup>Hick, God has many names, p. 48.

<sup>2514</sup>Noted in Erickson, p. 89-91.

<sup>2515</sup>Hick, A pluralistic view, p. 45.

<sup>2516</sup>Hick, The non-absoluteness of Christianity, p. 33.

<sup>2517</sup>Hick J. Is Christianity the only true religion, or one among other? // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. – P. 108.

<sup>2518</sup>Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? Considering this question // Stewart R. B. Can only one religion be true? – Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013. – P. 12.

<sup>2519</sup>Erickson, How shall they be saved, p. 95-96.

worship. Idol worship is detrimental only when one insists that his or her idol is the only genuine reflection of the true God.<sup>2520</sup>

We will begin our evaluation and refutation of pluralism by focusing first on its inconsistencies. Pluralists claim that no one religion can proclaim the whole truth about God. Yet, if all religions are limited in their perception of God and His truth, then how can proponents of pluralism claim that their understanding of God is true and comprehensive? Are they not limited in their perspective as well? If their perception is limited, then why should we accept their system as the true approach to religion and consider other views incomplete?<sup>2521</sup>

Pluralism also underestimates God's ability to reveal Himself. The knowledge of God depends more on His ability to reveal Himself than on people's ability to perceive His revelation. If we properly assess God's ability to reveal Himself, then it behooves us not to unite all religions, but seek that religion in which God has truly made Himself known. Another factor weighing against pluralism is the fact that the basic doctrines of various religions sharply differ from one another. How can one conclude that they all testify of the same Supreme Being?<sup>2522</sup>

Furthermore, because of the substantial differences between religions, any attempt to unite them will unavoidably lead to compromise. As a result, each religion will lose its uniqueness and essentially cease to exist, at least in its traditional form. So then, the religion that results from the merging of all existing religions is, in fact, a new religion, which fundamentally differs from the faiths that preceded it and replaces them. Pluralism does not unite religions, but replaces them with a new religion – pluralism.

We can also appeal to Scripture to refute pluralism. First, the biblical attitude toward other religions, in both Old and New Testaments, is consistently negative.<sup>2523</sup> The apostle Paul, in fact, engaged in turning adherents of other religions "from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). Jesus called leaders of other faiths not "coworkers" or "brothers," but "thieves and robbers" (Jn 10:8). He claimed to be the exclusive path to God (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Another key passage concerns Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2), a God-fearing man, but still in need of the gospel of Christ to be saved. Peter did say that "the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35), but earlier the angel announced to Cornelius that Peter would speak "words to you by which you will be saved" (Acts 11:14). This means that the phrase "is welcome to Him" refers not to salvation without Christ, but to God's willingness to receive all who accept the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.

Finally, Church history rejects pluralism. Early Christianity was birthed in a pluralistic milieu, but the Early Church recognized no other religion as valid. Pluralism thus runs contrary to the historical position of the Church in regards to other faith traditions.

For a more comprehensive analysis of pluralism, see chapter 10 in volume 1 of this series.

## D. Inclusivism

The teaching of "inclusivism" is similar to pluralism in that sincere devotees of any religion can be saved in the context of their religious convictions. The difference with pluralism is that in pluralism, God recognizes all religions as equal. There are many paths to God. According to inclusivism, Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. Yet, those who have not had opportunity to hear about Jesus, but were nonetheless devoted to their own religion, will be acceptable to God, who will apply the benefits of redemption in Christ to such individuals.

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<sup>2520</sup>ibid.

<sup>2521</sup>Hick responds to this objection by saying that pluralists do not claim to have a "privileged position" in knowing the truth, but simply attempt to make sense of religious life as such (Hick, *A Pluralistic View*, p. 182-183). Still, can Hick guarantee that the pluralist's solution to the religious question is superior to others?

<sup>2522</sup>Nash R. H. *Is Jesus the only savior?* – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 44.

<sup>2523</sup>See 2 Chr 13:9; Isa 20:3-6; 37:18-19; 40; Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Acts 19:26; 26:17-18; 1 Cor 1:21; 8:6; 10:19-20; Gal 4:8; Col 1:13; 1 Thes 1:9; 2:16; 2 Thes 1:8.

Thus, they are saved by the blood of Jesus.<sup>2524</sup> It is mandatory, though, that such people have never rejected the gospel, but are merely ignorant of it.

Acts 17:23 is cited in support of inclusivism, where in his preaching in Athens, Paul finds a point of contact with his pagan Greek audience: "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown God.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." On the other hand, before Paul came upon this altar, he had already passed by many statues and altars devoted to Greek gods. Yet, he refrained from mentioning any of them since he could find little commonality between them and the true God. Also significant is that when Paul preached the gospel to them, few responded in faith. It seems that their pagan faith was inadequate to prepare them to recognize and receive the Christian God.

There are two types of inclusivism: objective and subjective. Objective inclusivism is the conviction that God accepts faith in another religion as faith in Himself. Consequently, sincere worshipers in other faith traditions are actually worshiping the true God. Subjective inclusivism asserts that the "object" of faith is not important. What is vital is faith itself. It does not matter what or whom a person believes in, but rather the presence of sincere faith.

Let us discuss objective inclusivism in more detail. Its leading proponent is Jacques Dupius. In his view, God revealed Himself not only to Jews, but also to all peoples. For example, every individual can know about God through conscience and observation of nature. In addition, people in antiquity could learn about God through Noah's encounters with Him. John 1:9 is also interpreted to say that God gives special revelation to everyone who comes into the world. It is also thought that ancient religions have preserved revelation received from the Lord. Paul's appeal to Greek poets (Acts 17:22-28) may serve to confirm this claim, as does the account of Melchizedek, who worshiped and served the true God among the Gentiles.

At the same time, Dupius fails to appreciate the marked differences between Christian and non-Christian religion. This makes the claim that ancient religions have preserved revelation from God suspect. Furthermore, the Bible does not endorse other religions. Ultimate truth is found only in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Additionally, there is no evidence that Melchizedek was a *pagan* priest. He did indeed serve and worship the true God, but we have no information about his relation to pagan religion. Finally, John 1:9 relates how Jesus the Messiah brings people the knowledge of God through His earthly teaching ministry.

A teacher of subjective inclusivism, Christoph Schwöbel, works off the Reformation principle of salvation by "grace alone" through "faith alone." Therefore, he considers it inconsequential what or whom a person believes in. All that matters is that a person has faith. If we require people to hold to certain doctrines, then we violate the principle of salvation by grace alone, since acceptance of doctrine is considered a "work" that results in salvation by works.

However, this approach encounters serious logical and theological inconsistencies. "Faith" without an object of faith is meaningless. One must believe in something or someone. The Bible declares, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

Leslie Newbigin, another proponent of subjective inclusivism, is troubled that many Christians confess Christian doctrine without the presence of active faith, which is necessary for salvation. Christians often resemble Pharisees, whom Jesus rebuked for hypocrisy. Additionally, in Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warns those who lack living faith:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven {will enter.} Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

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<sup>2524</sup>In comparing inclusivism and exclusivism, Boyd makes an interesting observation. According to inclusivism, Jesus fills the role of Savior ontologically, but not epistemologically. According to exclusivism, Jesus fills the role of Savior both ontologically and epistemologically. In pluralism, He fills neither role (Boyd, c. 179).

And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt 7:21-23).

We differ from Newbigin, though, because the acceptance of doctrine and living faith are not mutually exclusive entities. In fact, they compliment one another. Like Newbigin, the apostles John and James speak against an empty confession of Christian doctrine (1 Jn 2:4; Jam 2:14). At the same time, they do not reject the need for correct doctrine in Christian faith.

The last teacher in this camp that we will investigate is Clark Pinnock. He argues that genuine believers in Jesus have imperfect faith, yet they are nonetheless saved. It follows, then, that the imperfect faith of non-Christians can save them as well. Both Christians and non-Christians know God only in part and believe in Him according to what they know of Him. Pinnock also points out that Jesus was not the object of faith of the Old Testament saints (Heb 11).<sup>2525</sup> Romans 4 teaches likewise – the object of Abraham’s faith was not Christ, but Yahweh.<sup>2526</sup>

We respond to Pinnock by noting that the important factors are not only the “quality” of our faith, but its “object” as well. It is true that our faith is imperfect, yet our faith is in Jesus Christ. Non-Christians do not direct their faith to the same object. Additionally, the faith of Abraham and the Old Testaments saints was not aimless, but based on God’s revelation and promises.<sup>2527</sup>

We also take into consideration the New Testament’s negative assessment of non-Christian religions.<sup>2528</sup> Jesus spoke of the religious leaders who preceded Him as thieves and robbers (Jn 10:8). God called Paul to turn adherents of other faiths “from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). The Scriptures repeatedly insist that there is only one way to the Father – through the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Jn 5:12).

From a historical perspective, we observe the existence of various religious faiths in the early Christian centuries. Yet, the Church did not recognize any of them. In other words, the Early Church was very exclusive. If sincere believers in other religions could be saved in the context of their own faith, then what fueled the aggressive missionary movement of the apostolic age?

Finally, we must consider some of the defects of pagan religions.<sup>2529</sup> Non-Christian faiths distort the true knowledge of God that is available through general revelation. Instead of acknowledging the true God, they create gods of their own liking. The sacrifices they offer are not propitiatory to receive forgiveness of sin, but an attempt to manipulate the gods to be favorable to them.

## **E. Implicit Faith (or Moderate Exclusivism)**

### **1. Basic Position**

This theory suggests that there exists in the world people who would believe in Jesus if they had the opportunity. This view differs from inclusivism in that such persons do not embrace their native religion, but seek God outside of it. Such individuals respond to God’s “general revelation,” that is, what one can know about God from observation of nature, conscience, and life experience. On this basis, they can surmise that God exists, that He is holy, and that they are sinful and in need of forgiveness. They simply are not cognizant that Jesus died for their sins. Yet, that does not prevent God from applying to them the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus. The response such people make to general revelation qualifies them to receive salvation.

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<sup>2525</sup>Erickson, p. 183.

<sup>2526</sup>Sanders, p. 227

<sup>2527</sup>Erickson, p. 187-188.

<sup>2528</sup>See 2 Chr 13:9; Isa 20:3-6; 37:18- 19; chp. 40; Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Acts 19:26; 26:17-18; 1 Cor 1:21; 8:6; 10:19-20; Gal 4:8; Col 1:13; 1 Thes 1:9; 2:16; 2 Thes 1:8.

<sup>2529</sup>Taken from Hendrick Kraemer

## 2. History

Several well-known and influential figures embraced this theory, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, the Roman Catholic Church, Ulrich Zwingli, John Wesley, and C. S. Lewis. The following excerpts testify of this teaching in the Early Church:

We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others (Justin Martyr, *1 Apology*, 46).

For it was not merely for those who believed on Him in the time of Tiberius Cæsar that Christ came, nor did the Father exercise His providence for the men only who are now alive, but for all men altogether, who from the beginning, according to their capacity, in their generation have both feared and loved God, and practiced justice and piety towards their neighbors, and have earnestly desired to see Christ, and to hear His voice. Wherefore He shall, at His second coming, first rouse from their sleep all persons of this description, and shall raise them up, as well as the rest who shall be judged, and give them a place in His kingdom (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.22.2).

The Catholic view is most remarkable.<sup>2530</sup> For the longest time, Catholics taught that outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation. Participation in the sacraments was obligatory. In the twelfth century, both Pope Innocent III and the Fourth Lateran Council confirmed it, as well as the Council of Florence (15th c.) and the Council of Trent (16th c.).<sup>2531</sup>

However, this definition generally applied to Jews and heretics, and not to those who had never heard the gospel. In addition, some prominent Catholic thinkers, such as Hugo of Saint Victor and Bernard of Clairvaux (13th c.), taught that all God required from the unreached was faith in “God’s existence and providence” and “an implicit faith in a mediator.”<sup>2532</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX (and after him, Pius XII) determined that people who could not have known of Christ could be saved. Such persons, although they can not be part of the “body” of Christ, could nonetheless be part of the “soul” of the Church. Pius IX wrote:

*We and you know* that those who lie under invincible ignorance as regards our most Holy Religion, and who, diligently observing the natural law and its precepts, which are engraven by God on the hearts of all, and prepared to obey God, lead a good and upright life, are able, by the operation of the power of divine light and grace, to obtain eternal life.<sup>2533</sup>

Moreover, the Roman Catholic Encyclopedia of 1913 requires of the unreached love and repentance. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we read,

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<sup>2530</sup>Erickson, p. 33-46, 87-119; Dulles A. *The Systematic Theology of Faith: A Catholic Perspective* // Lee J. M. *Handbook of Faith*. – Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1990. – P. 159-160; Hill B. R. *Exploring Catholic Theology*. – Mystic, CN: Twenty Third Publishers, 1995. – P. 224, 259; Warfield B. B. *Two studies in the history of doctrine : Augustine and the Pelagian controversy : the development of the doctrine of infant salvation*. – New York: Christian Literature Company, 1897. – P. 159.

<sup>2531</sup>The Catholic view so radically changed that in 1953, Father Leonid Finney was excommunicated from the church for teaching that outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation (Erickson, p. 103-104).

<sup>2532</sup>Sanders, p. 159.

<sup>2533</sup>Warfield, *Infant Salvation*, p. 159.



Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.<sup>2534</sup>

The Catholic Church not only endorses implicit faith, but also teaches that such individuals can embrace not only God's general revelation, but also positive elements of one's non-Christian religion. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* states, "In the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour" (№ 29). Additionally, "They may in many cases have already responded implicitly to God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ, a sign of this being the sincere practice of their own religious traditions, insofar as these contain authentic religious values" (№ 68).<sup>2535</sup> Here we see shades of inclusivism as well.

We also note the contribution of the respected contemporary Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, author of the work *Anonymous Christians*. He claims that there are true Christians in other religions, yet they simply do not know that God considers them such. He also teaches that since God became incarnate in Christ, humanity itself became an expression of God. Consequently, those who strive to be genuinely human (in an honorable sense of the word) are genuinely open to God's grace.<sup>2536</sup>

The Catholic Church now divides all humanity into four groups: Catholics, Protestants, the Unreached, and those who reject the gospel. Only the final group has no hope for salvation as long as they continue in unbelief. Regarding the first three, "Each of these groups participate in the grace of God, but to various degrees and with varying experience and enjoyment of that grace."<sup>2537</sup>

Catholics justify their new approach by creating a distinction between the Church and the Body of Christ. Previously, they shared the conviction with the Orthodox that participation in the Eucharist, that is the "body of Christ," made one a participant in the "Body of Christ," i.e., the Church.<sup>2538</sup> The new view is that, although the Body of Christ has its basis in the Church, it transcends its boundaries to include members of other Christian denominations and religious groups.<sup>2539</sup>

Zwingli is an example of a Protestant who embraced implicit faith. He believed "in the salvation of those heathen who loved truth and righteousness in this life, and were, so to say, unconscious Christians, or pre-Christian Christians," and that "no good and holy man, no faithful soul, from the beginning to the end of the world, that shall not see God in his glory."<sup>2540</sup>

Even Luther, who at times openly insisted that people have personal faith in the gospel, wrote in his commentary on Romans in 1515,

Original sin God could forgive them (i.e., those who have not heard) (even though they may have not recognized it and confessed it) on account of some act of humility toward God as the highest being they know. Neither were they bound to the Gospel and to Christ as specifically recognized, as the Jews were not either. Or one can say that all people of this type have been given so much light and grace by an act

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<sup>2534</sup>Catechism of the Catholic Church. № 1260.

<sup>2535</sup>[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html)

<sup>2536</sup>Erickson, p. 110-112.

<sup>2537</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>2538</sup>Pannenberg W. Systematic Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1991-1998. – V. 3. – P. 467-468.

<sup>2539</sup>Smedes L. B. Union with Christ. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983. – P. 174.

<sup>2540</sup>Schaff P., Schaff D. S. History of the Christian Church. – New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910. – V. 8. – P. 95.

of prevenient mercy of God as is sufficient for their salvation in their situation, as in the case of Job, Naaman, Jethro, and others.<sup>2541</sup>

In his day, Wesley penned the following:

Such a divine conviction of God, and the things of God, as, even in its infant state, enables every one that possesses it to fear God and work righteousness. And whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle declares is acceptable (From the Sermon “On Faith”).<sup>2542</sup>

We have great reason to hope, although they lived among the heathen, yet (many of them) were quite of another spirit, being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion.<sup>2543</sup>

C. S. Lewis adds that such individuals may embrace positive elements of their non-Christian faith:

There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it.<sup>2544</sup>

### 3. Support and Counterarguments

#### a. The Sufficiency of General Revelation

In defense of this theory, its adherents point out that God has granted to all humanity knowledge of Himself through general revelation. They suggest that such knowledge is adequate to save those who respond appropriately to it. Psalm 19:1-2 declares, “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.”

Romans 1:19-29 also asserts that God revealed Himself through creation to the people of the world, demonstrating His “eternal power and divine nature.” The word “divine nature” here is *θειότης* (*theiotes*). Millard Erickson comments that it can apply to any aspect of God’s nature. In this text, Paul also claims, “That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.” So then, one allegedly can gain a substantial knowledge of the Most High by means of general revelation.<sup>2545</sup> Also significant is the phrase “without excuse” in verse 20. If God can condemn Gentiles on the basis of general revelation, then it must provide sufficient knowledge to lead to salvation as well.

Opponents to this teaching object that in Romans 1, Paul never mentions people finding salvation through general revelation, only condemnation. General revelation only shows a person their need for salvation. Only special revelation can lead a person to Christ.<sup>2546</sup> In addition, Gentiles reject the knowledge afforded them through general revelation (Rom 1:21).<sup>2547</sup> Geisler adds that Paul cites Psalm 19 in a context where he insists on the need for gospel preaching (Rom 10:14, 18).<sup>2548</sup> Warfield observes in Psalm 19, which comments on both of

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<sup>2541</sup>Luther’s works // Ed. H. C. Oswald. – Philadelphia, PA: Concordia, 1972. – V. 25. – P. 181.

<sup>2542</sup>McGrath A. Christian Theology. – 4th ed. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. – P. 358.

<sup>2543</sup>Pinnock C. An Inclusivist View // Gundry S.N. Okholm D. L. Phillips T. R. Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 119.

<sup>2544</sup>From *Mere Christianity*, noted in McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 358.

<sup>2545</sup>Erickson, p. 147-148.

<sup>2546</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 46.

<sup>2547</sup>Phillips W. G., Geivett R. D. A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach // Gundry S.N. Okholm D. L. Phillips T. R. Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – C. 134.

<sup>2548</sup>Geisler, p. 302.

general (vv. 1-6) and special revelation (vv. 7-11), that only the latter context speaks of redemption (vv. 12-14).<sup>2549</sup>

In response to these objections, we note that Romans 1-3 deals not only with the condemnation of the Gentiles who received general revelation, but also the condemnation of the Jews who received special revelation (i.e., the Scriptures). Yet, we know from the Old Testament that, although most of the Israelites rejected God's revelation, there were genuine believers among them as well (see Heb 11). Can we not assume that among Gentiles who received general revelation there were genuine believers as well? Dale Moody assumes so, who "questions what kind of a God would make enough known about Himself to make persons guilty, but not to save them."<sup>2550</sup>

In addition, God gives to "those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Rom 2:7). Is Paul describing here Gentiles that attempt to respond properly to general revelation?<sup>2551</sup>

Those defending implicit faith appeal to Paul's words in Acts 14:16-17, where he reminds his hearers of the testimony God left in the natural world.

In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:16-17).

Moreover, when preaching to the people of Athens, Paul explains that in the light of general revelation, persons should seek God.

He made from one {man} every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined {their} appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).

Acts 17:30, though, depicts the weakness of general revelation as a means to know God. It is called the "times of ignorance." Through special revelation, the Lord calls all to repentance. Others voice the objection that the word "seek" in 17:27 stands in the Greek verb mood "optative." This tense can express a possible, but very doubtful action. Therefore, even though the nations were given opportunity to seek the Lord, it is very doubtful that they actually did so. On the other hand, the optative can be used for possible or likely actions as well.<sup>2552</sup> It is also objected that the phrase, "though He is not far from each one of us," implies that people poorly respond to general revelation. God is near to all of us, but Gentiles do not recognize Him or acknowledge Him.

## **b. Salvation in the Old Testament**

The theory of implicit faith provides a very plausible explanation of how Old Testament saints were saved. They were saved without knowing about Jesus the Messiah, but on the basis of their faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel. According to Romans 4, Abraham received justification in this way. He never heard the gospel, but merely trusted in God's promise to give him offspring. This faith was reckoned as righteousness. Hebrews 11 gives us a list of individuals whom God counted righteous through faith, though they never specifically believed in Jesus of Nazareth.

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<sup>2549</sup>Warfield B. B. The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield, Volume 1: Revelation and Inspiration. – Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008. – P. 5-7.

<sup>2550</sup>Erickson, p. 130.

<sup>2551</sup>Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>2552</sup>See 2 Pet 1:2; 1 Thes 3:11; 5:23; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:16; Mk 11:14; Lk 1:38; 2 Thes 2:17; 3:5; Jude 9.

Anderson adds the thought that, although the Old Testament faithful did know about a coming Messiah, they did not likely believe that He would be a sacrifice for their sins. Their faith was more primitive than that of New Testament believers. Nevertheless, their faith was sufficient for salvation. Anderson writes, “Believing Jews under the Old Testament dispensation enjoyed forgiveness and salvation through the saving work of God in Christ.... Their knowledge was deficient, their assurance often fitful, but their forgiven status identical with ours.”<sup>2553</sup>

The Old Testament sacrificial system is also significant for our discussion. According to Mosaic Law, God forgave sins through the various sin-offerings. The blood of animals served as a prophetic type of the blood of Jesus. Can we not conclude, then, that since forgiveness was available to those who brought animal sacrifices without the knowledge of the coming Redeemer, the unreached who depend on God’s mercy can also benefit from God’s forgiveness without knowing the name of Jesus?

Objections are raised to these proofs as well.<sup>2554</sup> Old Testament saints differ from the unreached in that they were responding to special revelation (the Law and Prophets), not to general revelation. In addition, Hebrews 11 reveals that the heroes of Old Testament faith had special insight into God’s plan. They anticipated the coming of Messiah and God’s kingdom (Heb 11:13). According to Hebrews 11:26, Moses endured the sufferings of Christ. Moreover, Jesus declared that Abraham somehow “saw His day” and rejoiced in it (Jn 8:56). Furthermore, the prophets knew of Messiah’s suffering (1 Pet 1:10-12).<sup>2555</sup>

However, even with the aid of special revelation, it is doubtful that Old Testament saints fully comprehended God’s plan of salvation. For the longest time, even Jesus’ disciples did not grasp it. It is true that some Old Testament heroes of faith had special insight into God’s plan (Heb 11:13, 26; Jn 8:56; 1 Pet 1:10-12), but it is highly unlikely that all Israel was blessed with such insights. So then, if through the writings of Moses and the Prophets most Israelites were not aware of the coming sacrifice of Messiah for their sins, then it seems that their faith was “implicit.” We concur with Ryrie that in the course of time, the *content* of faith can change, that is, what a person must believe in order to be saved, but the *object* of faith, that is the Lord, does not change.<sup>2556</sup>

Norman Geisler raises an interesting question about Paul’s ministry in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19:1-6. There, he found “disciples” who only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist. They received salvation only after Paul preached the gospel to them. Geisler posits that there was a “transitional time” during which salvation could be obtained through John’s baptism. Since that transitional time was expiring, it was necessary for these disciples of John to accept Jesus.<sup>2557</sup> Is it not possible, though, to posit that that God allows not only a transitional “time,” but also a transitional “space.” Those who are geographically distant from the gospel may be shown extra mercy, just as those temporally prior to the gospel were.<sup>2558</sup>

### c. History of Gentile Salvation

Defenders of implicit faith appeal to this system to explain how certain Gentiles, who knew not of Messiah or the Mosaic Law, nonetheless believed in the true God and served Him. We can mention Abel, Enoch, Noah, Lot, Jethro, Melchizedek, the magi, and Job. If these came to a true knowledge of God apart from the gospel, could not others do so as well? Even if some of these received some special revelation from the Lord,<sup>2559</sup> that

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<sup>2553</sup>Anderson J. N. D. *Christianity and Comparative Religion*. – Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970. – P. 98-99.

<sup>2554</sup>Grudem W. *Systematic Theology*. – Leicester, England: Intervarsity; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994. – P. 116ff.

<sup>2555</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 44.

<sup>2556</sup>Sanders, p. 44.

<sup>2557</sup>Geisler, p. 301, 303.

<sup>2558</sup>Erickson, p. 132.

<sup>2559</sup>For example, Enoch (Gen 5:22); Job (Job chps. 39-42); Noah (Gen 6:13); Jethro (Ex 18:11); the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5); the Queen of Sheba (2 Chr 9:8). It is never stated that Melchizedek received special revelation (Erickson, p. 149).

does not mean that they understood God's salvation plan as presented in the New Testament.<sup>2560</sup> Those who claim that these "Gentile believers" were trusting in God's promise to Eve of a future Deliverer cannot demonstrate that such a tradition was ever passed down to them.

We can focus more on Job's case. It seems that both he and Elihu responded appropriately to God's general revelation and possessed a correct knowledge of the Lord, to the degree that it was possible.<sup>2561</sup> Job's other "friends" distorted God's general revelation and had "not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has" (Job 42:7). We can conclude, then, that an appropriate response to God depends more on the spiritual condition of the responder than on the quality of the revelation.

The story of Cornelius is key for our discussion as well. He is described as "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the {Jewish} people and prayed to God continually" (Acts 10:2). Peter comments, "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35). At the same time, in Acts 11:14 Cornelius was told, "He (Peter) will speak words to you by which you will be saved." It appears the Cornelius was not saved until he heard and believed the gospel. In Geisler's opinion, the "transitional time" to be saved under the old system was now passed. Time to believe the gospel!<sup>2562</sup>

#### **d. Concluding arguments**

Sanders offers more proofs for implicit faith.<sup>2563</sup> God's grace for salvation is appointed for all people (Tit 2:11). We see God's care for the Gentiles in action when He sent Jonah to preach to Nineveh. The Bible often testifies that those who seek God will find Him.<sup>2564</sup>

Boyd relates more arguments.<sup>2565</sup> Jesus taught that persons are condemned on the basis of what they know (Lk 12:47-48). He also mentions God's love and desire to save all (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). Some, therefore, conclude, "If God wagers a person's eternal destiny... on the contingent vicissitudes of where and when that person happens to be born, it is difficult to confess with integrity that God is all-loving and all-good."<sup>2566</sup>

Finally, if God is ready to save departed infants who have no chance to trust in Jesus, it follows that He will judge adults who have no access to the gospel on the basis of their response to general revelation. One can also draw a parallel between the unreached and those mentioned in Matthew 25:37-40, who served Christ, but were unaware of it.<sup>2567</sup>

### **F. Exclusivism**

#### **1. Basic Position**

Exclusivists claims that only those who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe in Him will be saved. Those who do not believe, or who have never heard, will be condemned. Unlike inclusivism, salvation come not only exclusively through Christ, but is also received exclusively through personal faith in Him. In other words,

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<sup>2560</sup>Erickson, p. 126.

<sup>2561</sup>It is significant that Job received no "special revelation" until chapter 38. Yet, even before that he was regarded by God as "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8).

<sup>2562</sup>Geisler, p. 303. Sanders looks at this from a different point of view. He feels that Cornelius was already saved just like other Old Testament saints. Gospel preaching merely brought him into a fuller experience of salvation (Sanders, p. 66).

<sup>2563</sup>Sanders, p. 132, 137, 236-246; 284-285.

<sup>2564</sup>See Deut 4:29; 2 Chr 15:2; Prov 8:17; Isa 55:6; Jer 29:13; Lam 3:25; Amos 5:6; Lk 11:9-10; Acts 17:27; Heb 11:6.

<sup>2565</sup>Boyd, p. 209-212.

<sup>2566</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>2567</sup>Erickson, p. 106-107.

Christ is needed for salvation not only ontologically, but also epistemologically. Exclusivism is the narrow path to salvation. All followers of other religions and the totally unreached will eternally perish.

## 2. History

Church history records several well known exponents of exclusivism, including Tertullian and Ambrose.<sup>2568</sup> The Athanasius Creed leaves that impression as well. We read in the introduction, “Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”<sup>2569</sup>

Augustine also advanced this theory.<sup>2570</sup> He felt that general revelation was inadequate to communicate the way of salvation, taking into consideration the darkened state of the human mind. We need a more concrete expression of the gospel. Even if persons had no access to the message of salvation, they are still guilty of sin, and God is just in condemning them. Augustine suggested that possibility God did not send the gospel to the Gentiles earlier because He knew that they would reject it. Contrary to Augustine, Thomas Aquinas allowed that if someone was open to God, the Lord would make sure that the gospel would somehow reach that individual. Jacob Arminius shared that conviction.<sup>2571</sup>

John Calvin taught that general revelation could only condemn, but not save a person. The natural world merely reveals “God the Creator.” The gospel unveils “God the Redeemer.”<sup>2572</sup> Therefore, people must hear the gospel message in order to be saved. In Calvin’s words,

The more shameful therefore is the presumption of those who throw heaven open to the unbelieving and profane, in the absence of that grace which Scripture uniformly describes as the only door by which we enter into life.... Now, it were most incongruous to give the place and rank of sons to any who have not been engrafted into the body of the only begotten Son. And John distinctly testifies that those become the sons of God who believe in his name (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.6.1).

Since in Calvin’s teaching, all elect individual will unquestionably be saved, God will ensure that they will hear the gospel of grace.<sup>2573</sup>

## 3. Support and Counterarguments

Several key Bible verses support the theory of exclusivism, indicating that God requires faith in Jesus Christ for salvation: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me’” (Jn 14:6); “There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 Jn 5:12); “There is one God, {and} one mediator also between God and men, {the} man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). According to John 3:18, those who do not believe in the Son are condemned.<sup>2574</sup>

Exponents of exclusivism stress the importance of evangelization and missions. The urgency to fulfill the Great Commission underscores the nations’ need to hear the gospel. Paul affirms, “How then will they call on

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<sup>2568</sup>Erickson, p. 34; Sanders, p. 74.

<sup>2569</sup><https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/109017/Athanasian-Creed.pdf>

<sup>2570</sup>Sanders, p. 36, 51-55.

<sup>2571</sup>Ibid., p. 152, 155. Some regard Martin Luther as an exclusivist (Geisler, p. 302; Erickson, p. 49). However, his statements quoted in our section on “implicit faith” seem to indicate otherwise.

<sup>2572</sup>McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 164.

<sup>2573</sup>Sanders, p. 58.

<sup>2574</sup>Boyd, p. 181; Phillips, p. 218-242.

Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). In the same context, Paul reveals, “Faith {comes} from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).<sup>2575</sup>

We also recall the case of Cornelius noted above. Even such a God-fearing man as he could not be saved without hearing the gospel (Acts 11:14). The theory of exclusivism also aligns with the saying of Jesus, “The gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt 7:14). It appears that Peter also expects that few will be saved, comparing salvation with the outcome of Noah’s flood (1 Pet 3:20-21; 2 Pet 3:6-7).<sup>2576</sup>

Erickson also supports this view. He observes the comparison in Matthew 7 of the many who are lost with the few who are saved. We see this phenomenon worked out in history – a minority of people actually turn to Christ. Also notable is that at the end of time, when the world population will be at a maximum, there will be a great turning away from God (Matt 24:9-14). Erickson writes,

Nonetheless, (believers) will be, when compared to the great number of unbelievers, a minority. It is not with any satisfaction that we arrive at this conclusion. On the contrary, it is with a great sense of sorrow that we conclude this. We could wish that it were otherwise. Yet, in the final analysis, it is not our wishes or desires that determine what is true. There is a sufficient number of reasonably clear biblical texts teaching this that we have no choice but to reach this conclusion.<sup>2577</sup>

In support of exclusivism, Phillips and Geivett add the following thoughts.<sup>2578</sup> People come to faith through the preaching of the Word (Jn 17:20). The New Testament relates that even devoted Jews need to come to Messiah Jesus for salvation (Acts 2:5, 38). They also note that verses referring to God’s desire to save all people (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4; Acts 10:35) occur in contexts speaking of special revelation and the mediatorial work of the Son.

Adherents of exclusivism respond to the objection that God is unfair for condemning the unreached in the following manner. God is just in so doing, because the unreached, in spite of the witness of creation and conscience, nonetheless sin and therefore deserve condemnation.<sup>2579</sup> They reject the light they do have and therefore deserve no more light.<sup>2580</sup> Calvinists defend exclusivism by claiming that since all the elect will certainly be saved, then the unreached must be among the non-elect.

Some exclusivists work off the concept of God’s so-called “middle knowledge.” This refers to God’s ability to know all that could have been had conditions been different. Therefore, since God knows who would accept the gospel if they had opportunity, He will ensure that such people have a chance to hear it.<sup>2581</sup> God will certainly be found by those who sincerely seek Him (Matt 7:7-8; Heb 11:6) and will do everything possible to bring souls to Himself (Isa 5:4; Rom 10:21; Matt 23:37-39).<sup>2582</sup> At times, He gave dreams to Gentiles (Gen 20; Dan 2) or sent them angels (Acts 10). Some exclusivists indict the Church for its lack of zeal in reaching the unreached, blaming God’s people for their lost condition.

In refutation of exclusivism, Sanders interprets verses cited in support of this teaching as simply pointing to Jesus as the only mediator between God and people. Jesus is needed for salvation ontologically, but not epistemologically. In other words, salvation comes only through Jesus, but it is not absolutely necessary to

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<sup>2575</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 43.

<sup>2576</sup>Phillips, p. 218-242.

<sup>2577</sup>Erickson, p. 215.

<sup>2578</sup>Phillips, p. 218-242.

<sup>2579</sup>Note in Boyd, p. 182.

<sup>2580</sup>Geisler, p. 304.

<sup>2581</sup>Noted in Sanders, p. 168-174.

<sup>2582</sup>Boyd, p. 183.

know about Him. He also feels that those verses that speak of condemnation of unbelievers refer to those who reject the gospel, not to those who have never heard it.<sup>2583</sup>

Moreover, although Erickson defends the exclusivist position, he nevertheless recognizes other verses that speak of a large number of converts, such as Genesis 13:16 and Revelation 7:9. He also considers the huge dimensions of the New Jerusalem and of the Old Testament prediction of nations coming to God in the end times (Ps 47; Isa 4:1-4; 11:9).<sup>2584</sup>

Exclusivism encounters several difficulties as well. First, how can exclusivists reconcile this view with the love of God and His stated desire to save all (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8)? Second, it seems inconsistent with God's justice for Him to eternally condemn the unreached because of the failure of the Church to reach them. McGrath concurs, that God does not condition the salvation of the unreached on the success of the Church's missionary enterprise: "We must never, by our inadequate theological formulations, imply that God's work of salvation is somehow dependent on us."<sup>2585</sup>

Third, the Calvinists' suggestion that the unreached are among the non-elect is clearly far-fetched. The condition of the unreached is not due to God's election or lack thereof, but on the historical consequence that the gospel simply has not fully penetrated certain geographical locals. It is also problematic to suppose that God will reach the elect among the unreached by dreams or angels. In Scripture, God sends the gospel message exclusively through human messengers (see Acts 10:5-6).<sup>2586</sup>

## G. Conclusions

Our topic is both vital and complex. The Bible does not provide us with a straightforward answer as to the fate of the unreached. Therefore, we must piece together a response from indirect implications in the text and general biblical principles. We can well understand why various views have arisen in the course of church history. Some commentators resort to the agnostic approach, claiming that all we can say in the end is, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" (Gen 18:25).

Assessing the theories proposed above, it is problematic to affirm universalism, since the Bible gives clear indication that some will perish eternally. On the other hand, although exclusivism boasts solid biblical support, it violates the biblical principle of God's mercy and desire to save all. Pluralism and inclusivism give an overly optimistic assessment of the value of non-Christian religions. Both biblical and ecclesiastical writers look negatively on other religions.

It appears that implicit faith and universal opportunity hold the most promise for solving our dilemma. Between them, we would give preference to the former. Although the theory of implicit faith has its weak points as well, it introduces less difficulties into the overall Christian worldview in comparison with the other options. At the same time, we must admit that our two preferred theories can indeed dampen enthusiasm for evangelization. Therefore, adherents to these theories should give proper attention to this avenue of Christian service.

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<sup>2583</sup>Sanders, p. 62-64.

<sup>2584</sup>Ibid., p. 208-209.

<sup>2585</sup>McGrath A. *A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach* // Gundry S.N. Okholm D. L. Phillips T. R. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. – P. 179.

<sup>2586</sup>Sanders, p. 172.



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Appendices

Appendix A: Leadership in the Family

A. Introduction

This material will discuss and seek to answer the question of male leadership in the home. Does the husband have authority as final-decision maker in family affairs (the traditionalists' position), or are husband and wife co-equal in authority (the egalitarians' position).

The theology of relationships in marriage must be studied in the overall context of Christian virtue. No matter what else is said on the subject, the biblical instruction concerning love for neighbor will be the overriding guide. Thus the relationship between husband and wife should always be characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Husbands and wives should always be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven them (Eph 4:32). Marriage partners should be patient, kind, not jealous, not brag, not be arrogant, not act unbecomingly, not seek their own, not be provoked, not to take into account a wrong suffered, not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoice with the truth, bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Specific biblical instruction about marital relationships must never be used as justification for violating these fundamental principles of Christian behavior. In fact, the need for authoritative rule in the home is greatly minimized when these virtues are practiced. Lea and Griffin write, "When these prescribed biblical attitudes between husband and wife prevail, there will be little (if any) need for resorting to God's intended order for establishing authority within the home."²⁵⁸⁷

At the same time the Bible's insistence on observing these and other principles does not automatically exclude the concept of leadership in the home.²⁵⁸⁸ They can all be observed in the context of a hierarchical relationship. Leadership *per se* is never equated with oppression or favoritism and is itself one of the spiritual giftings God gives to the church. Love and leadership are not mutually exclusive. Adoption into God's family ushers us into the closest of relationships, which makes it possible for us to address our Father as "Abba." Yet, at the same time we recognize Him as Lord and God.

B. The Old Testament Witness

We begin our investigation at the beginning, examining the book of Genesis and God's creation order.²⁵⁸⁹ Our first major passage for consideration, Gen 1:26-28, gives us God's basic plan for humanity. Here the word אָדָם (*adam*) refers to humanity in its entirety.²⁵⁹⁰ In light of the context of Genesis 1, we can conclude that אָדָם

²⁵⁸⁷Lea T. D., Griffin H. P. 1, 2 Timothy, Titus // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. – P. 302.

²⁵⁸⁸Other principles that are sometimes considered when dealing with the question of leadership include servanthood (Matt. 7:12; 20:25-28; 23:8-12; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27; Rom. 12:3,10; Eph. 5:21; Phil. 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:8), avoiding favoritism (Acts 10:34-35; Rom. 2:11; James 2:1-9), spiritual giftings regardless of gender (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18), the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), and freedom from oppression (Evans M. J. *Woman in the Bible*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1983. – P. 23).

²⁵⁸⁹We will not take time to defend the historicity of the Genesis narrative. We refer you to the discussion in Wenham G. J. *Genesis 1-15* // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 91.

²⁵⁹⁰There is uncertainty about the significance of the use of the article with this word. Generally, in the Pentateuch the articular form is used to designate humanity in general. Yet, the initial references to humanity, in Genesis 1:26 and 2:5, are anarticular (the article in 1:27 is likely anaphoric). The same phenomenon is seen in the allusion to Genesis 1:26 in Deuteronomy 4:32. Later in chapter 2, the article appears before אָדָם (*adam*) in reference to the first man, but then disappears in Genesis 5 in the multiple references to Adam in that chapter. Another ambiguity is the disappearance of the article in connection with the preposition ל in 2:20; 3:17 and 3:21, a phenomenon that Wenham notes in connection with אֱלֹהִים (Wenham, p. 32).

(*adam*) was created as the last and greatest of God's creation, alone possessing the divine image. אָדָם (*adam*) was to serve as God's agent in managing the earth. Next, we see that אָדָם (*adam*), or humanity, consists of men and women: "Male and female he created them." Both are created in God's image and are co-commissioned to carry out the work of populating and subduing the planet, the divine image providing both of them with the competence to rule. This corporate work of populating and subduing will thus require the cooperation of all the members of the human race, both among sexes and between sexes. In light of the Mosaic authorship of this passage, one can see in it a corrective toward those (as in the ancient world) who ascribe to woman a lower status than man before God or creation.²⁵⁹¹

Genesis 2 presents us with a somewhat different perspective on the man-woman relationship than chapter one. The passage in question is Gen 2:18-24. It is found in a context where man begins the work of managing God's creation – he is placed in the garden to keep it. Yet, God observes that man is not at his best alone – he needs a helper to accomplish his task, one who will join him as a co-worker in fulfilling the divine plan.²⁵⁹²

Several features of the passage have led many commentators to conclude that male leadership is taught or at least implied by this passage. First, the woman being brought to the man and his choosing her name is thought to reflect a position of male leadership in the relationship.²⁵⁹³ Additionally, that the man assumes the name, אָדָם (*adam*), that previously designated all humanity, again may underscore his leadership role.²⁵⁹⁴ Also significant is the order of creation – man was created first and initially entrusted with the keeping of the garden. Subsequently, woman is created as a "helper" for man. Finally, when the first couple sins, God seeks out Adam, as head of the relationship, to answer for their behavior (Gen. 3:9, 11).²⁵⁹⁵ God holds Adam primarily responsible for the failure in the garden, reflecting that the primary responsibility was his to manage its affairs.²⁵⁹⁶

However, the narrative is also careful to introduce factors that provide needed checks and balances in the proposed hierarchical system. Genesis 2:20 reveals that woman was "suitable for man." This phrase translates the Hebrew כִּנְגֻדוֹ (*kinegdo*) which is literally "corresponds to man." The similarity of names, אִישׁ (*ish*) and אִשָּׁה (*ishah*) in Genesis 2:23, also point to this correspondence. As Matthew comments, "Adam responds by a shout affirming that he and the woman, indeed, are made up of the same 'stuff.'"²⁵⁹⁷ Many also see significance in the act of woman's creation from the rib (side) of man. Keil and Delitzsch write, "The woman was created, not of dust of the earth, but from a rib of Adam, because she was formed for an inseparable unity and fellowship of life with the man."²⁵⁹⁸

Girdlestone expresses the same thought, "Instead of being isolated and without a fellow, having God far above him, and the beasts of the earth below him, Adam found that he had a companion of a nature congenial

²⁵⁹¹Matthews writes, "The Hebrews' lofty estimation of womanhood and its place in creation was not widely held by ancient civilizations, and Israel itself failed at times to give proper recognition and honor to women" (Mathews K. A. Genesis 1-11:26 // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995. – P. 212).

²⁵⁹²Of note here is the use of the preposition ל in relation to the purpose of woman's creation. Often this preposition carries the meaning "for the benefit or advantage of." Keil and Delitzsch write, "Of such a help the man stood in need, in order that he might fulfill his calling, not only to perpetuate and multiply his race, but to cultivate and govern the earth" (Keil C. F., Delitzsch F. Commentary on the Old Testament. – Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002. – V. 1 – P. 12). Similarly, Matthew comments, "'Helper,' as we have seen from its Old Testament usage, means the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes" (Mathews, p. 214).

²⁵⁹³Matthews writes, "Naming indicates authority in the Old Testament" (Mathews, p. 221). Wenham likewise comments, "That man names woman (cf. 3:20) indicates that she is expected to be subordinate to him" (Wenham, p. 70). In addition, according to Motyer, "To give a name is the prerogative of a superior, as when Adam exercised his dominion over the animals...." (Motyer J. A. "Name," // Douglas J. D. The New Bible Dictionary. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962. – P. 862)

²⁵⁹⁴Stitzinger M. F. Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship // Grace Theological Journal. 1981. Vol. 2:1. P. 30.

²⁵⁹⁵Stitzinger, p. 33

²⁵⁹⁶Mathews, p. 221.

²⁵⁹⁷Ibid., p. 218.

²⁵⁹⁸Keil and Delitzsch, v. 1, p. 12.

to his own, ‘a help.’”²⁵⁹⁹ Thus man is never to regard woman as inferior by nature. She is his equal in nature and dignity. A similar “check” in the system appears in Genesis 2:24, where the man will leave father and mother to cleave to his wife, becoming one flesh with her. This interdependence between the marriage partners, notably his dependence on her, can potentially deter the man from abusing his position of leadership.²⁶⁰⁰

Several objections have been raised in defense of the idea that only the egalitarian presentation of the sexes in Genesis 1 is normative for all time. First, it is claimed that the purpose of chapter 2 is not to teach the subordination of wives to their husbands, but simply to emphasize the woman’s likeness to man in distinction from the animals.²⁶⁰¹ Our preceding paragraph, in fact, points out most of the textual markers that lead to this conclusion. Indeed, the thrust of the text does appear to be woman’s congeniality with man.

Yet, this does not exclude the presence of secondary themes in the text. As discussed in an earlier paragraph, other items from this text also suggest male leadership in the relationship. We also note that this conclusion does not depend on Genesis 2 alone. God’s holding Adam responsible for the couple’s failure in the garden in chapter 3 also supports this conclusion. One might also make the observation that in the order of creation mentioned in Genesis 1:26 the man is mentioned first – a point that alone proves nothing, but is nonetheless consistent with the tenor of chapters 1-3, which, as a whole, points to male leadership. Additionally, as we will see in our examination of the New Testament, New Testament authors saw the theme of male leadership in Genesis 2 in spite of its contextual thrust of congeniality between the sexes.

It is also claimed that since the Genesis narrative progresses from lower degrees to higher degrees of precision and complexity, as is clear in chapter 1, then woman must be superior to man, being created after him.²⁶⁰² While we must recognize this progression in the narrative, extending it to the relationship of women and men violates other, clearer contextual markers pointing to the woman’s subordinate position.²⁶⁰³ Also, after Genesis 2:3 a new context begins. The progression noted in Gen 1:1-2:3 does not necessarily apply to the next context. In fact, no evidence of its existence can be seen.

At the same time, the opposite objection can be made – if man’s creation before woman indicates male leadership, then the beasts’ creation before humans must indicate their headship over them. Of course, the second is not true. But if not, then male leadership based on creation order is also suspect. In response to this objection, Matthew writes, “The sense of the entire narrative makes it indisputable that all human life is superior to the lower orders. It is *within* the human family that leadership-fellowship is indicated in the garden account.”²⁶⁰⁴

A more substantial objection is that God created Adam and Eve at different times to show that it was not good for man to be alone, not to demonstrate headship in their relationship.²⁶⁰⁵ This explanation is supported contextually, since God is addressing Adam’s isolation when he creates Eve. Here, though, we return to the discussion of an earlier paragraph, where it was claimed that the secondary theme of male leadership, even though not the main contextual thrust of Genesis 2:18-25, is strongly implied by a number of features throughout the first three chapters. Adam, as first created, acts in a leadership role in naming the animals,

²⁵⁹⁹Girdlestone R. B. Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Doctrine. – Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1998. – P. 48.

²⁶⁰⁰Stitzinger sees in the verse an example of male leadership – taking the initiative to establish the family relationship (Stitzinger, p. 33).

²⁶⁰¹Jewett P. K. Man as Male and Female. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975. – P. 22-24; Mollenkott V. R. Evangelicalism: A Feminist Perspective // USQR 32.1970. P. 532-542.

²⁶⁰²From Gundry P. Woman Be Free! – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1977. – P. 23; also see p. 61.

²⁶⁰³Stitzinger comments, “Chronologically, it may be granted that there is an ascending order in chapter 1, with mankind as the zenith of creation. However, it is conjecture to argue that this ascending order extends into the events within each particular day. To assume that the events of the sixth day, which culminate in the creation of the woman, are chronologically ascending in importance cannot be substantiated” (Stitzinger, p. 30).

²⁶⁰⁴Mathews, p. 221.

²⁶⁰⁵Groothues R. M. Good News for Women. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977. – P. 137.

naming the woman, and being held responsible for the couples' disobedience. In the New Testament, Paul felt the creation order had ramifications for male leadership (1 Tim 2:13).

Some have suggested that the woman being taken from man's side reflects their equal authority in the marriage relationship. However, first we note that varying interpretations have been offered for this phenomenon, revealing the difficulty in determining the significance of woman being taken from man's "side."²⁶⁰⁶ Paul alludes to Genesis 2:22-23 in Ephesians 5:28-29: "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies (allusion to Gen 2:22-23). He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." In this passage, Paul considers the creation of woman from man's body (side) not as an indication of equal authority, but as a stimulus for the man to care deeply for the woman.²⁶⁰⁷ It is also significant that in the same Ephesian context, Paul describes the relation of husband to wife by a different bodily relationship – the husband as head of the wife. Matthews likely summarizes best of all the significance of woman's creation from man's side: "The symbolic significance of the 'rib' is that the man and woman are fit for one another as companions sexually and socially."²⁶⁰⁸ Similarly, Thompson insightfully notes that the reuniting of the couple in marriage to become "one flesh" in part reverses their separation in creation. The event, then, does not appear to address issue of authority as much as of intimacy.

In respect to the use of the term *ἄνθρωπος* (*adam*) both for man and humanity, Groothues feels that this simply reflects a nuance of Hebrew language and has no real theological significance.²⁶⁰⁹ Her observation does point out the linguistic complexity of the question, since it is likely that Adam did not speak Hebrew, and that the terms which designated man, woman, and human at that time are unknown to us. At the same time, a survey of languages in general (at least European languages) shows a consistent correspondence between the terms for man and for humanity,²⁶¹⁰ with some exceptions where they are different terms.²⁶¹¹ It appears that only rarely does a designation for woman correspond to the term for humanity.²⁶¹² More language families need to be included in this analysis, of course, but our data here does suggest the possibility that the correspondence between the terms "man" and "human" reflect an original correspondence between these terms in the primal language of Eden. In addition, the standard approach to interpretation is to accept the words of Scripture as inspired in their original languages in spite of the fact that they may be translating an earlier account in a different language. Thus we commonly interpret and analyze the words of Christ recorded in Greek, accepting them as verbally inspired, although it is most likely that He spoke Aramaic. Thus, the word choice in Hebrew is significant for interpretation.

²⁶⁰⁶Matthews comments, "Commentators from antiquity to the present have made much of the body image where the woman is derived from the man's side as opposed to some other part of the anatomy. Does it indicate that the woman is the man's equal in position as opposed to his 'helper'? In the mind of the modern feminist, 'side' may suggest equality, but the rabbis could well take the same 'side' and make it suit their patriarchal presumption. *Genesis Rabbah* (18.2) reads, 'He [God] thought to himself: "We should not create her beginning with the head, so that she not be frivolous, nor from the eye, that she not be a starrer [at men], nor from the ear, that she not be an eavesdropper, nor from the mouth, that she not talk too much [a gossip], nor from the heart, that she not be jealous, nor from the hand, that she not be light-fingered, nor from the foot, that she not be a gadabout, but from a covered up place on man. For even when a man is standing naked, that spot is covered up.'" One must beware, then, reading too much into the significance of the 'side.' Perhaps the best-known explication is Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* (1a, 92, 3c): 'For since the woman should not have "authority over the man" (1 Tim 2:12) it would not have been fitting for her to have been formed from his head, nor since she is not to be despised by the man, as if she were but his servile subject, would it have been fitting for her to be formed from his feet.'" (Mathews, p. 217).

²⁶⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁶⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁰⁹Groothues, p. 124.

²⁶¹⁰French, *homme* (man) and *humain* (human); German *mann* (man) and *menshlich* (human); English man and mankind (or human); Greek *ἄνθρωπος* (man or human), Italian *persona* or *uomo* (man) and *persona* or *umano* (human).

²⁶¹¹The Russian man is *мужчина* (*muzhchina*), and the human being is *человек* (*chilovyek*). However, in the related language, the Ukrainian man is *чоловік* (*cholvik*).

²⁶¹²Spanish human is *humano*, and the female is *hembra*, but man is also related to human (*hombre*)

A more formidable objection in respect to this word correspondence is that אָדָם (*adam*) was used for both man and humanity because man was originally the only member of the human race – אָדָם (man) was אָדָם (humanity) until Eve was made.²⁶¹³ This claim finds support in the observation that in the Old Testament as a whole, אָדָם (*adam*) is used primarily when humans are contrasted with creation, while אִשׁ (*ish*) is used when man is contrasted with woman. Thus אָדָם (*adam*) may indicate more humanity's domination over creation than man's leadership over woman.²⁶¹⁴

Both the traditionalist's and egalitarian's explanations of אָדָם (*adam*) have merit. The most one can say in defense of traditionalism here, then, is that their interpretation is consistent with the idea of male leadership, but is not a strong proof in favor of it.

Egalitarians offer another explanation for Adam's naming Eve as well. It is felt that the first instance, where he calls her "woman" (Gen 2:23), is not naming as such, but just a means of identifying her.²⁶¹⁵ Adam does not give her a personal name until after the Fall (Gen 3:10). It is also noted that usually the noun "name" appears in a formulistic way in other occurrences of naming (Gen 2:19f; 3:20; 4:17, 25, 26, 5:2).²⁶¹⁶ Therefore, in woman's case, this is not to be considered an official exercise of authority of the namer over the named.

Yet, the presence or absence of the noun "name" is inconsequential in face of the fact that Adam did assign to her a designation. Also, since this event is recorded immediately after Adam names the animals the impression is clear that it was part of the same process and an exercise of his authority. Also notable is that Adam did not give the animals personal names at this time either, but more likely gave them more general designations by class, as he did subsequently to the woman in 2:23.

Another debated point is the referent for the term כִּנְגֶדוֹ (*kinegdo*), "corresponding to." Egalitarians feel it may refer to correspondence in authority.²⁶¹⁷ However, there is nothing in the context that inherently makes this interpretation preferable to the one advanced above – that woman corresponds to man in nature and dignity.

Egalitarians also suggest that the lack of a reference to male authority in Genesis 2:24, where marriage was first instituted, is significant. Instead of picturing man in an authoritarian light, he cleaves to his wife and becomes one flesh with her.²⁶¹⁸ Still, the lack of reference to the husband's authority in this passage does not nullify or minimize other such references that do affirm it, which occur both before and after this passage.

Egalitarians explain the fact that God spoke to Adam first after the sin in the garden by noting that he was the first created and knew of the sinfulness of the act before Eve did.²⁶¹⁹ Yet this assumes that the command was somehow difficult to understand, and required some time to assimilate. But the command was extremely simple, so Adam had no advantage over Eve by virtue of his knowing of it earlier.

In regard to woman as "helper," egalitarians point out that the word itself does not connote inferior status, since seventeen of its twenty Old Testament occurrences describe God's helping man.²⁶²⁰ It is conceivable in human relationships as well to think of helpers who are not under the authority of those they help.²⁶²¹ At the same time the term "helper" indicates that the one being helped has the primary responsibility to accomplish a certain task. This responsibility may not necessarily imply authority over those who help, but it does indicate that the responsible party will be making the final decisions in regard to how the project is carried out. Groothues objects that even if woman's role as helper is understood in this way, it should only

²⁶¹³Groothues, p. 124

²⁶¹⁴Also important to note is that אָדָם (*adam*) became the personal name for Adam. This contrasts with the naming of Eve, who was first described as "woman" then later given the personal name "Eve." The fact that Adam was never given another personal name likely indicates his representation of all humanity, which was a role unique to him, and not transferred to other men.

²⁶¹⁵Groothues, p. 128.

²⁶¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 128f.

²⁶¹⁷Vos C. L. *Woman in Old Testament Worship*. – P. 16.

²⁶¹⁸Groothues, p. 136, 186, 21.

²⁶¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁶²⁰Evans, 16; Scanzoni L., Hardesty N. *All We're Meant to Be*. – Waco, TX: Word, 1974. – P. 26.

²⁶²¹Evans gives the example of a doctor helping a patient (p. 16)

then apply to the husband's work life, not necessarily his home life.²⁶²² Yet the nature of Adam's work – filling and subduing the earth – is too comprehensive to make such a distinction meaningful.

Finally, egalitarians note that all the items above are inferences – no text directly says that woman was created in subordination to man. This omission appears more significant in the light of the fact that direct references are found to God's authority over man (Gen 2:16) and to humankind's authority over creation (Gen 1:28).²⁶²³ In response, it can be said that the number of inferences is nonetheless significant, and their accumulated weight appears significant enough to lead to a conclusion. Also, when we look later at New Testament teaching it will show that the apostles, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, drew the same conclusions about male leadership from some of the inferences mentioned above.

The Fall of humanity and subsequent curse brought about negative changes that would hinder mankind in accomplishing its mission. Nature will fight people's efforts to subdue it. The woman will have pain in multiplication. The Fall also had certain implications for the marriage relationship. Addressing Eve, God says, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Several interpretations are offered for this verse. Before introducing them, a brief glance at some features of this passage will be helpful.

Two key words in the passage require comment. The word translated "desire," תַּשׁוּקָה (*tishuka*), is found only three times in the Old Testament (Gen 3:16; Gen 4:7; Song of Sol 7:11). In Song of Solomon 7:11, the meaning is clearly desire for intimacy between a man and a woman. In Genesis 4:7, the context requires the interpretation "desire for mastery/control." The other key term is מַשָּׁל (*mashal*), "rule, master." TWOT, in discussing this term, correctly relates that it is non-specific, and one cannot discern a special nuance of rulership, whether kind or cruel, on the basis of this term's usage alone: "*Māšāl* usually receives the translation 'to rule,' but the precise nature of the rule is as varied as the real situations in which the action or state so designated occurs."²⁶²⁴

The proposed interpretations of Genesis 3:16 are as follows:

- 1) In spite of the pain that will accompany childbirth, woman will continue to feel sexual desire for her husband. This option links the phrase "your desire will be for your husband" to the previous lines about pain in childbirth. The conjunction beginning the clause would thus be translated as a concessive "yet." This statement would not be understood, then, so much as part of the curse, but as a statement that the reproductive process will be preserved in spite of the pain it will cause.²⁶²⁵ One problem here is that the subsequent phrase "your husband will rule over you" seems out of place in a discussion purely of a woman's reproductive process. One suggested solution is that a homonym for מַשָּׁל (*mashal*), meaning "be like," be preferred. The resulting translation, "he will be like you," would then reflect the reciprocal sexual desire of the man for the woman.²⁶²⁶ Yet מַשָּׁל (*mashal*) as "be like" appears only in derivative stems, whereas it is used here in its basic form (*qal*).²⁶²⁷
- 2) The woman's desire for her husband will be not only sexual, but emotional as well. She will become heavily dependent on him, leading to his domination in the relationship.²⁶²⁸ Her over dependence is a fit punishment for the independence she demonstrated in eating the fruit.²⁶²⁹ One problem with this

²⁶²²Groothues, p. 131.

²⁶²³Groothues, p. 135-136, 123.

²⁶²⁴Harris R. L., Archer G. L., Waltke B. K. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. – Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980. – P. 534.

²⁶²⁵Mathews, p. 250.

²⁶²⁶Schmitt J. J. Like Eve, Like Adam: מַשָּׁל in Gen 3:16 // Biblica Sacra. 1991. Vol. 72. P. 1–22.

²⁶²⁷Mathews, p. 248ff.

²⁶²⁸See Keil and Delitzsch, v. 1, p. 12, and Wenham, p. 81. Also the view of Clarence J. Vos.

²⁶²⁹Mathews, p. 250. Busenitz objects that none of the other curses corresponds to the act of disobedience, so Eve's likely does not as well (Irvin A. Busenitz, Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered, *GTJ* 7:2 (Fall 86) p. 206). In addition, her sin was not in asserting independence from her husband, but in disobeying a direct command of God (208). These objections, however, do not

interpretation is that the woman's condition is hard to characterize as punishment if her desires promote her submission to her husband. Submission is punishment only when it is unwilling.²⁶³⁰ One response is that the husband will sometimes take advantage of her passiveness to treat her abusively.²⁶³¹

- 3) The woman's desires will be "to her husband" in the sense that her desires will correspond to his. She will intuitively adopt all his desires and become passively submissive to his leadership.²⁶³² Yet this explanation hardly corresponds to reality. Wives often have desires contrary to their husbands.²⁶³³ One response is that this is not a statement of future fact, but a reminder to the wife of her ongoing state of submission to the husband.²⁶³⁴
- 4) The woman will desire to control or master her husband, and he must seek to rule over her in spite of her tendency to insubordination.²⁶³⁵ This interpretation is based on a similarity between Genesis 3:16 and Genesis 4:7. Commentators note that the exact wording (except for changes in gender and person) in Genesis 3:16 appears in Genesis 4:7:

וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁקָה וְהוּא יִמְשָׁלְךָ

for your husband will be your desire, and he will rule over you (Gen 3:16)

וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁקָה וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁלְהָ

for you is its (sin's) desire, but you must rule over it (Gen 4:7)

If the exact wording in these passages, not far from one another in the text, reflects similarity in meaning, then Eve's desire to control her husband will be similar to sin's desire to control Cain. Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 share other similarities: they both use the same preposition "for" (ל) in distinction from the preposition "for" (על) in Song of Solomon 7:10, where תְּשׁוּקָה (*tishuka*) means not desire for control, but sexual desire.²⁶³⁶ Additionally, the Septuagint translators translate תְּשׁוּקָה (*tishuka*) in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 with a single Greek term ἀποστροφή (*apostrophe*), but with a different term, ἐπιστροφή (*epistrophe*), in Song of Solomon 7:10.²⁶³⁷ On the other hand, Genesis 3:16 and Song of Solomon 7:10 have an important common factor – they both discuss relationships between men and women, whereas Genesis 4:7 does not.²⁶³⁸

Another factor counts in favor of this fourth interpretation: the personal pronoun הוּא (hu), positioned at the head of the second clause, indicates a contrast between the clauses: "You will want to rule him, but he will rule you."

One objection is that such a reading describes a curse not to the woman, but to the man, who must attempt to rule an insubordinate wife. The curse on the man does not begin until verse 17.²⁶³⁹ Yet the situation

defeat this position in that the assertion that woman received a punishment corresponding to her offense is not vital to the position itself – one can hold this position without embracing this element.

²⁶³⁰Foh, S. T. What is the Woman's Desire? // Westminster Theological Journal. 1975. Vol. 37.3. P. 379.

²⁶³¹Mathews, p. 250.

²⁶³²The view of John Calvin

²⁶³³Foh, p. 382

²⁶³⁴Stitzinger, p. 42.

²⁶³⁵Advanced by Foh, p. 376ff

²⁶³⁶This last consideration is not likely of great import since Hebrew prepositions are frequently interchanged without a corresponding change in meaning. See Busenitz, p. 204

²⁶³⁷Busenitz, p. 205, but thought by him to be insignificant.

²⁶³⁸Ibid., p. 211

²⁶³⁹Ibid., p. 206.

entails a painful conflict for the woman as well.²⁶⁴⁰ Another objection is that the curse for man and woman concern propagation (of plants or people), and that the issue of headship would be intrusive on the context.²⁶⁴¹ Yet there is no reason to assume that the curse must only concern propagation.

The most substantial objection is the observation that each curse is accompanied by a subsequent explanation or elaboration on it: the serpent crawls on his belly (14a) – consequently he will eat dust (14b); enmity between man and serpent (15a) – consequently the serpent will have his head crushed (15b); the ground is cursed (17a) – consequently man will toil for food (17b-19a); man will die (19b), – consequently he will return to dust (19c). Likewise, childbearing will be painful (16a), yet the woman will still sexually desire the man (16b).²⁶⁴² Another weighty objection is the observation that the desire to usurp authority is an expression of human rebellion, the effect of sin itself on human character.²⁶⁴³ The other curses concern changes in nature that complicate life.

In regards to the character of man's rule over the woman several options are offered:

- 1) Man's headship over woman, which existed from the beginning, is intensified – what was once a loving, gentle leadership has the potential to become insensitive and domineering. In support of this proposition, it is noted that other curses complicate an already preexisting relationship: the serpent's means of movement, the woman's ability to bear children, the man's success in raising crops.²⁶⁴⁴ This is not to be understood, however, as justifying a husband's abuse of his wife. It is not a command to abuse the wife, but simply describes the consequence of the Fall.²⁶⁴⁵
- 2) The relationship of headship-subordination between man and woman is introduced for the first time in the passage, and is purely a result of the Fall.²⁶⁴⁶ Groothues notes that, in distinction from other curses, there is nothing in the passage itself about male rulership that describes it as a pre-existing condition – it simply abruptly states, "He will rule over you."²⁶⁴⁷ She thus compares male headship as a whole with divorce, which God permitted in the Old Testament because of hardness of heart (Matt 19:8).²⁶⁴⁸ Cassuto sees in 3:20, the naming of Eve, Adam's first act of dominion over his wife.²⁶⁴⁹ Yet, one must note that Adam had already named "woman" in Genesis 2:23. In addition, the discussion of male leadership before the fall provides weighty arguments in favor of the idea that it was part of God's plan from the start. Knight also notes that the New Testament writers never attribute male leadership to the Fall, but they do appeal to creation order.²⁶⁵⁰

²⁶⁴⁰Mathews, p. 251.

²⁶⁴¹Busenitz, p. 206.

²⁶⁴²Ibid., p. 207-208

²⁶⁴³Busenitz writes, "The contention that 'sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband' is unquestionably true. But it is a natural consequence of sin, not a result of God's judgment on the woman in Gen 3:16! Just as the sin-corrupted headship of the husband is not a part of the divine judgment upon the man but a consequence of sin, so the sin-corrupted submission of the wife is not a part of the judgment; it is the result of sin" (Ibid., p. 212).

²⁶⁴⁴Mathews, p. 249.

²⁶⁴⁵Mathews writes, "It is a distortion of the passage to find in it justification for male tyranny. On the contrary, ancient Israel provided safeguards for protecting women from unscrupulous men (e.g., Deut 24:1–4), and the New Testament takes steps to restrain domination. Paul admonished men and women to practice mutual submission (Eph 5:22–33) and cautioned husbands to exercise love and protection without harshness (Col 3:19). Because of the threat of harsh dominance, Paul commanded Christian charity toward women in the community of the home and the church" (Mathews, p. 251).

²⁶⁴⁶Luther accepted this view: "Hence it follows that if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects" (LW 1.115). From Mathews, p. 248-249, note 217.

²⁶⁴⁷Groothues, p. 140.

²⁶⁴⁸Ibid., p. 140.

²⁶⁴⁹Cassuto U. A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. – Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961. – V. 1. – P. 170.

²⁶⁵⁰Knight G. W. III. The Role Relationship of Men and Women. – Chicago, IL: Moody, 1977. – P. 32.

- 3) As mentioned above, it has been suggested that מַשָּׁל (*mashal*) be translated “be like.”²⁶⁵¹ In that case, male dominance is not in the picture at all in Genesis 3:16. Still, even if the idea of male dominance is absent in this passage, it little effects one’s conclusions, since the primary question at hand is what God’s order was before the Fall, not the conditions that ensue after it.

After examining the arguments advanced above, the second position concerning the nature of woman’s desire, and the first option concerning man’s headship appear most convincing. Woman’s desire for and dependency on her husband are increased after the Fall. Fallen man will at times take advantage of her vulnerability and abuse his power. This is not, however, the first introduction of male leadership into the marriage relationship, but its exacerbation and potential distortion of a preexisting hierarchical relationship. Furthermore, it does not justify abuse by the male. The potential for abuse, in spite of its inevitability, must be opposed and striven against, like all other aspects of the curse on humanity.

The fourth option concerning the nature of woman’s desire, that the woman desires to overthrow male leadership, also has fair support, although it is mostly indirect and little derived from the context itself. Nonetheless, the fact that women struggle with male leadership is a fact of life and likely prompted the apostles to devote considerable attention to this question in the New Testament. Yet, the issue of insubordination, although present in other contexts, is not conclusively demonstrated in this one.

As the Genesis narrative continues, many of the features we have noted above are seen in practice, along with some unfortunate deviations. Men continue to represent their families before God. This is evident in God’s covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning their descendants and His calling of Noah to construct an ark for the salvation of both his and the entire future human family. Isaac becomes intercessor for his wife in regard to her barrenness, and God answers his prayer (Gen 25:21). Jacob demonstrates that the husband must lead not only in good times, but when the family is threatened with danger as well, as he places his wives and children safely in the rear of his company as he goes ahead to meet Esau, his estranged brother (Gen 32:2-3). Women in the Genesis narrative, in general, adopt a helping role. Besides childbearing and child raising, they manage the home (e.g. Gen 18:6).

The results of the Fall predicted in Gen 3:16 are also manifested. Leah’s desperate attempts to win Jacob’s heart (Gen 29:31-34) manifested an exaggerated “desire” for her husband. The husband’s potential abuse of his wife is realized as both Abraham and Isaac subject their spouses to humiliation by giving them to other men (Gen 20:1ff; Gen 26:6-11). Another unfortunate practice also appears. In Genesis 4:19, Lamech becomes the first polygamist. The results of polygamy, as recorded in Scripture, are universally negative – envy, jealousy, and abuse are repeatedly encountered (e.g. Gen 16:3ff; 29:1ff. See also Jud 11:2ff).

In the area of male leadership, a significant qualification can be noted – the woman becomes a channel of divine counsel for her husband and thereby serves in yet another way as his “helper.” In particular, God commands Abraham to heed Sarah’s counsel concerning Hagar, and even employs her (unjustifiable) jealousy of Hagar and her son to separate the true heir, Isaac, from his potential rival, Ishmael (Gen 16:2; 21:9ff). This instance presents an interesting contrast to God’s rebuke of Adam for listening to his wife in that Abraham is commanded to do just that.²⁶⁵² Adam’s problem, then, was not in listening to his wife, but in putting her counsel above the clear command of God. The fact that Eve offered advice was not wrong, but rather the content of her advice was wrong. On the other hand, Sarah did not always give good counsel to Abraham – she gave him Hagar as a wife (Gen 16:2).

In another even more striking example, God reveals his plan for Esau and Jacob not to Isaac, but to Rebekah (Gen 25:23). Unfortunately, Rebekah feels compelled to use deception to secure the blessing for the chosen son (Gen 26:5ff). One might imagine that if Rebekah had shared her revelation with her husband (and if Isaac had been open to receive it), the sad scene of Genesis 26 might have been avoided. Additionally, Rebekah

²⁶⁵¹Schmitt, p. 1–22.

²⁶⁵²Stitzinger, p. 35.

wisely counsels her husband about sending Jacob away to seek a wife.²⁶⁵³ Finally, Jacob shows respect for the counsel of his wives in asking their advice before abandoning Haran for Canaan (Gen 31:1-16).

Later in the Torah, old features are repeated and new elements added. Moses leads his family through the transition from wilderness shepherding to delivering God's people (Ex 4:20), an arrangement that Zipporah does not always appear pleased with (Ex 4:24). For an unspecified reason (either because of her complaining or for her protection) Moses parts with his wife for a time until his return from Egypt (Ex 18:2). Another example of men protecting their wives is seen when the men of Gilead leave their wives and children in Gilead while they cross over with the other tribes to complete the conquest of Canaan (Num 32:26). Male leadership has very negative consequences for the wives of Dathan and Abiram, as they and their entire households perish with their husbands in their rebellion (Num 16:27ff).²⁶⁵⁴

Looking to the Law of Moses, it is significant that the husband had the right to nullify his wife's vows (Num 30:6-8). This appears to demonstrate male priority in decision making in the home. Other stipulations in the Law of Moses protect the individual partners of the marriage relationship or the relationship itself. The couple is guaranteed an extended honeymoon – the husband is exempted from military service for the first year of marriage (Deut 24:5). Although a man is permitted to divorce his wife, he is forbidden to take her back again if she had subsequently remarried (Deut. 24:1-4). On the one hand, a jealous husband could subject his wife to the "test of bitter waters" to determine if she had been unfaithful (Num 5). On the other hand, penalties were enacted for falsely accusing one's wife publicly of sexual misconduct (Deut 22:13ff). A final stipulation of the Law reveals that there are at times higher priorities than support for one's spouse, as the husband is to participate in the execution of his wife if convicted of leading God's people into idolatry (Deut 13:6).

In the pre-monarchical period we again encounter both some commendable and some not so commendable examples of marital relations. On the positive side, Elkanah comforts his wife Hannah because of her barrenness (1 Sam 1:3-8). He also allows her the freedom to determine the future of their son Samuel (1 Sam 1:21-23), thereby delegating authority to her. In another instance, Elimelech leads his wife Naomi to Moab to escape the famine in Israel and thereby provides for his family (Ruth 1:1).

On the other hand, one of the most horrid examples of abuse occurs as a man, in order to save his own life, gives his concubine over to a mob (Jud 19:25), thus failing to take the leadership role when danger was at hand. In a similar way Samson's wife, when faced with danger, fails in her role as helper to her husband – she betrays his secret, the solution to his riddle (Jud 14:15-18).

We also see further development in the wife-as-counselor theme. First of all, Othniel's wife wisely counsels her husband to obtain a field from her father Caleb (Josh 15:18). Samson's mother receives the revelation from an angel concerning her son's future (Jud 13:2ff) and shows more discernment than her husband in interpreting the revelation (Jud 13:22f).

A new element is introduced in the pre-monarchical period – a wife called to ministry. Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, served as judge and prophet in Israel many years (Jud 4:4).²⁶⁵⁵ Thus the Scriptures give precedence for a woman's involvement in ministry independent from her husband.²⁶⁵⁶ In the Deborah narrative, another

²⁶⁵³Bloesch D. G. *Is the Bible Sexist?* – Westchester: Crossway, 1982. – P. 30.

²⁶⁵⁴This is usually understood as an example of "corporate personality," where a family or nation will share in the fate of its representative, for better or for worse. Numerous exceptions to this principle also exist – it is not recorded that Achor's wife perished with him (Josh 7:24-25). Although corporate personality could be appealed to in support of male leadership (since a woman never served in that capacity), several observations weaken that claim. First, corporate personality is purely an Old Testament phenomenon. In the New Testament, each individual is responsible for their own actions, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Groothues, p. 31, 34).

²⁶⁵⁵Before Deborah, Miriam was a prophet and leader in Israel (Ex. 15:20,21; Micah 6:4), but her marital status is not mentioned. She is usually associated with Moses and Aaron in the biblical text.

²⁶⁵⁶At the same time Longenecker insightfully notes that the Scriptures nonetheless underscore here the traditional husband-wife relationship by identifying the husband of Deborah – a phenomenon rarely if ever seen in regard to the wives of notable male leaders (Longenecker R. N. *Authority, Hierarchy and Leadership Patterns in the Bible* // Mickelsen A. *Women, Authority and the Bible*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986. – P. 68).

example of female heroics is encountered, as Jeal, the wife of Heber, plans and executes the slaying of Sisera, the captain of the enemy forces, as he was fleeing from the armies of Israel.

Next, we will examine the monarchical period. In contrast to the cowardice of the concubine's husband mentioned above, David and his men battle to recover their wives, children, and property from raiders (1 Sam 30:3). As for a wife's heroism – Michal protects David from Saul, who planned to kill him (1 Sam 19:11-17). Uriah demonstrates that at times there are higher priorities than marital bliss, as he refuses to sleep with his wife out of sympathy for his fellow soldiers still at war (2 Sam 11:11). In other instances, David shows solidarity with his wives – he recovers Michal, whom Saul had separated from him (2 Sam 3:12-14), and comforts Bathsheba after the death of their first son (1 Kin 11:1ff).

This period of biblical history again showcases instances of womanly advice, some helpful and some not so helpful. On the positive side, Bathsheba reminds David of his promise to make Solomon king after him (1 Kin 1:15ff). In addition, although not in a marriage context, a "wise woman's" counsel saves an entire city (2 Sam 20:16-22), and a wise woman of Tekoa counsels king David (2 Sam 14:1-20). On the negative side, Solomon's marriage to foreign wives results in their leading him into idolatry, causing the ruin of both him and his kingdom (1 Kin 11:1ff). Although the date of this event is unknown, Job's wife's famous exclamation, "Curse God and die," is another example of very bad advice (Job 2:9).

Another significant occurrence in this period is when Abigail, acting in the best interest of her husband, but against his wishes, sends David the supplies Nabal had refused him, thereby saving the latter's life (1 Sam 25:18-35). At the same time, Abigail's respect for her husband's honor is demonstrated in that she waits for an appropriate time to reveal to Nabal the ominous results of his foolish choice (1 Sam 25:36-37).

Most likely written during the monarchical period, the wisdom literature often speaks to the marriage issue. Proverbs describe the virtuous wife in terms of godly character: she fears God (Prov 31:30) and is charitable (Prov 31:20). Other commendable character traits include strength (Prov 31:17, 25), wisdom (Prov 31:26), dignity (Prov 31:25), and optimism (Prov 31:25). She is hard-working (Prov 31:16, 18, 24, 27), especially in domestic affairs (Prov 31: 13, 15, 19, 21, 22), "building up her house" (Prov 14:1). Her industry and character bring benefit and honor to her husband (Prov 31:12, 23; 12:4) and result in her praise (Prov 31:28-31). The husband is to consider a good wife a gift from God (Prov 19:14; 18:12), and to enjoy her in marital faithfulness (Prov. 5:15-19). The Song of Solomon celebrates marital love, but at the same time the Preacher of Ecclesiastics cautions that sexual relations alone are not enough to bring full life satisfaction (Ecc 2:8).

One negative note is sounded in the wisdom literature. Frequently we hear of the scourge of a contentious wife, who is not able to reconcile herself to being under her husband's headship (Prov 21:9; 19:13; 21:19; 25:24; 27:15-16). This is a significant observation for the issue of egalitarianism – the contentious wife is not hailed as a reformer in her male-dominated society, but is presented in a negative light.

The period of the divided kingdom will be examined next, in which we encounter more negative than positive examples. First, Jeroboam shirks his leadership role by sending his wife to Elijah to inquire about their son's health (1 Kin 14:1-4). Several instances can be cited of a wife's leading her husband into idolatry or other sin: Jezebel leading Ahab into Baal worship (1 Kin 16:31ff; 21:25), and arranging the murder of Naboth and seizure of his property (1 Kin 21:11ff); Ahab's daughter leading Jehoram of Judah into idolatry (2 Kin 8:18; 2 Chr 21:6); and the Israelite wives practicing idolatry in Egypt after fleeing the Babylonian conquest. In this last instance their husbands openly defy the prophets warning, which condemned the idolatrous practices of their wives (Jer 44:15).

One positive example of a wise woman can be found in this period – the Shunammite suggests to her husband that they provide housing for the prophet Elisha and is greatly blessed as a result (2 Kin 4:8ff). Additionally, we find a second example of a woman in ministry independent from her husband, as Huldah, wife of Shallum, serves as a prophetess in Israel (2 Kin 22:14ff).²⁶⁵⁷ Of note also is that Isaiah's wife apparently served in prophetic ministry along with her husband (Is 8:3).

²⁶⁵⁷Again, as in the case of Deborah, the husband of a famous woman leader is identified (Ibid., p. 68).

A final observation from this period is that the families of men in prophetic ministry sometime encounter unusual stresses – Isaiah is prophetically directed to give his children unusual names (Isa 8:1ff), and Ezekiel is instructed not to mourn for his recently deceased wife (Eze. 24:15ff).

We complete our survey of marital relationships in the Old Testament with a look at the post-exilic period. A major issue at this time was that of mixed marriages with foreigners. Learning from mistakes of the past, the leaders of Israel insist on marriages within the commonwealth to prevent the influx of unhealthy practices through the influence of foreign wives (Ezra 9-11; Neh 13:23ff).

One happy exception, however, was Esther's marriage to the king of Persia. Demonstrating great tact and perseverance (in contrast to her predecessor Queen Vashti), Esther is able to bring the king to the realization of his mistake in opposing Mordecai and the Jews, and to secure his full support in their defense (Esther 4ff; 8:3; 9:11-13). Esther's wise behavior can be contrasted with that of Haman's wife, who at first advises her husband to hang Mordecai (Est 4:14), then heartlessly predicts his downfall for attempting it (Est 6:13). Another example of a wife's wise counsel in this period is when Belshazzar's wife counsels her husband to call for Daniel to explain a riddle (Dan 5:10).

A pleasant, but unexpected development also occurs at this time – God reveals his attitude about divorce and abusive treatment of the wife. God hates divorce (Mal 3:16f), and will not accept the offerings of those who deal faithlessly with their wives (Mal 3:13ff).

Other miscellaneous observations can be made. The builders of Jerusalem are motivated by love of family to fight their opponents (Neh 4:14). Wives along with their husbands complain about usury in Judah (Neh 5:1). During the eschatological repentance of Israel, wives will mourn separately from their husbands (Zech 12:12-14). Between the testaments, according to Longenecker, the status of women in Israel fell significantly, likely due to the influence of Hellenism.²⁶⁵⁸

In summarizing the Old Testament witness, we can say the following. Although we do not encounter a specific command for the wife to be submissive to her husband, several factors do point to male leadership in the home. Adam gave Eve her name and answered to God for humanity's sin. God characteristically appealed to the husband as the representative of the home (e.g. Noah, Abraham, etc.). In addition, the Bible does not praise women who oppose their husband's leadership (i.e., the "contentious woman"), but denounces them.

We also conclude that the curse of the woman in Genesis 3:16 did not introduce a new leadership structure in the home, i.e., the wife's subordinate position, but rather warned that the husband in his fallen state will sometimes abuse his God-given authority to mistreat his wife.

Throughout the Old Testament narrative, we see a stable picture of male leadership in the home. Yet, we encounter instances where wives do give good counsel from the Lord that their husband should heed. At times, they demonstrate competence in leadership as well – they served as prophetesses and once as a judge. Yet, women leaders are not mentioned without reference to their husbands, which may indicate their subordinate position within their family units.

C. The New Testament Witness

1. Gospels and Acts

Moving on to the New Testament, we encounter a radical change in attitudes toward women in the ministry of Christ. Jesus greatly raised the level of women in his time and treated women equally with men in teaching and discipling them.²⁶⁵⁹ In contrast to rabbinic thought of His day, Jesus preferred that women studied God's word than did housework (Luke 10:38-42).²⁶⁶⁰

²⁶⁵⁸Ibid., p. 69-70

²⁶⁵⁹Groothues, p. 22-23; Longenecker, Authority, Hierarchy and Leadership, p. 71.

²⁶⁶⁰Groothues, p. 23.

In His specific teaching on marriage, Jesus reminds us again that dedication to God and His kingdom take priority over family loyalties (Lk 18:29). Families may actually divide over issues of faith (Matt 10:34-36). This means that at times a wife will disobey her husband if it involves a compromise of Christian faith. At the same time, Jesus did nothing to annul the Old Testament pattern of male leadership. Echoing God's attitude toward divorce expressed in Malachi, Jesus forbids divorce except in cases of adultery (Matt 19:3ff; Mk 10:2ff).

Egalitarians, noting Jesus' more liberal attitude toward women, feel this reflects God's will for woman's total liberation from male leadership in home and society. Jesus, it is felt, did not take His reform farther in His own time out of concern for jeopardizing His overall mission of redemption.²⁶⁶¹ This is speculation, though, since Jesus did not say or do anything to indicate that He secretly held a totally egalitarian position.

The relationship of Joseph and Mary deserves special attention. On the one hand, Joseph respected the special calling given to Mary and the ramifications it will have for his personal life (Matt 1:24f). This reminds us of the special callings Deborah and Huldah received in the Old Testament, which certainly affected their marriage and family lives.²⁶⁶² On the other hand, God respected Joseph's leadership in their family and guided him through dreams (Matt 1:20; 2:13f, 22).

In the Gospels and Acts, wives again can provide both wise and unwise counsel. Pilate's wife warns her husband about condemning Jesus (Matt 27:19), while Herod's wife instigates the execution of John the Baptist (Matt 14:6-11). In an apparently concerted effort, Ananias and Sapphira conspire together to deceive the church (Acts 5:7ff).

The Gospels and Acts also record a number of instances where the wife demonstrates greater spiritual insight than her husband. Elizabeth, for example, quickly understood and embraced God's plan for the birth of Messiah's forerunner, whereas her husband initially doubted (Lk. 1:8ff, 59-63). Luke points out how women, perceiving the significance of Jesus' mission, became His supporters and followers apparently independent of their husbands (Lk 8:3; 23:27; Acts 1:14). All the Gospel writers observe that women were the first witnesses of the resurrection, and that the male disciples all doubted.

Lydia was the first believer, not only in her family, but in all of Europe, and became instrumental in leading her family to the Lord (Acts 16:14ff).²⁶⁶³ It is also notable, that in Acts both Aquila and his wife Priscilla are considered Paul's co-workers in ministry, and Priscilla is usually mentioned first, possibly indicating a leadership role in ministry (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19). It is also likely that Junias (if indeed a female name) served as an apostle in the Roman church along with her husband (Rom 16:7).

2. Galatians 3:28

Moving on to the epistles, we encounter here the most vital texts for understanding our question. Our first passage (proceeding chronologically) is Galatians 3:28. This verse appears to openly declare the removal of all racial, social, and gender distinctions in Christ. A strong emphasis is placed on gender in this verse – Paul uses the words *ἀρσεν* (*arsen*) and *θηλυς* (*thelus*), words specifying male and female gender. Thus Paul does not say there are no men or women in Christ (as persons), but no male and female (as distinctions). Both of these adjectives are in the neuter as well, again avoiding the nuance of personality. Another interesting feature is that the other couplets are joined by the conjunction *οὐδε* (*oude*), i.e., “or,” but male and female by *καί* (*kai*),

²⁶⁶¹Ibid., p. 24, 110.

²⁶⁶²Such examples reveal that at times a husband, in respect for his wife's calling, must make corresponding lifestyle adjustments. At the same time, it appears that the more common situation was for the wife to assist the husband in ministry (1 Cor 9:5).

²⁶⁶³Dunn, however, thinks Lydia was not married at the time: “Women who were single, widowed, or divorced and of independent means could evidently function as heads of their own households, as in the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14–15)” (Dunn J. D. G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996. – P. 246). In support of his opinion, we note that it was “her household” that was saved. This designation would be unusual if her husband was still at home.

i.e., “and.” It is thought that this conjunction, as well as the words ἄρσεν (*arsen*) and θήλυς (*thelus*), allude to the identical construction in Gen 1:27.²⁶⁶⁴

Paul’s context here is salvation by faith alone without the need for circumcision or observance of Jewish law. Now that Christ has come, the tutelage of the Law has ended. Adoption into God’s family depends now not on national origin, but on imitating the faith of Abraham.

The primary interpretive problem here is which gender distinctions are removed in Christ, and which, if any, remain. A common understanding, based on the context, is that salvation (and, correspondingly, baptism) is available for all regardless of race, gender, or social standing. George writes, “What Paul was really saying is this: ‘As far as your being joined to Christ Jesus is concerned, there is no difference between how this takes place for Jews and Gentiles, for slaves and free men, for males and females; you are all just like one person in being joined closely to Christ Jesus.’”²⁶⁶⁵ Yet role distinctions in marriage (and possibly in church) remain intact.

Others object that this passage must be understood as nullifying all gender distinctions (except, of course, physical).²⁶⁶⁶ It is argued that if men and woman are spiritually equal in Christ, then that should be reflected in equal roles, status, and authority.²⁶⁶⁷ It is also noted that the relationship of children to parents is not listed here, since that authority structure must remain in place. Nevertheless, subordination of women to men and slaves to masters ends in Christ.²⁶⁶⁸ Egalitarians are ready to recognize different levels of authority on the basis of spiritual giftings, but not on the basis of gender. The first excludes only individuals, because not all are so gifted, while the latter excludes an entire class, as if inability to rule the family was inherent to all women.²⁶⁶⁹

Later passages, in which Paul appears to reinstate gender distinctions, are to be understood as concessions to the status quo of societal norms out of concern for effective evangelization. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and Acts 21:26 underscore that Paul’s general strategy was to become “all things to all men” in order to save some. Paul discusses circumcision, slavery and marriage again in 1 Corinthians 7:17–31 and obviously makes concessions to the status quo in the first two instances – Jews should not be concerned about their previous circumcision, and slaves are not to worry about their slavery – one can serve God in spite of these circumstances.²⁶⁷⁰ It is assumed that the same applies to gender distinctions – they are simply the status quo that one must put up with until a time of reformation comes. Since societal norms in our day permit female leadership, there is no reason to continue to observe the previous norm of submission in marriage.

In response to the above claims, a few points should be made. First, the context of Galatians 3:28 addresses only salvation and only supports the concept of equality in relation to God. Generalizing the passage to apply to all areas of gender distinction is conjecture and without support from the surrounding context. Galatians 3:28 can be compared with 1 Peter 3:7, where the husband, although having authority over the wife (1 Pet 3:1), is to regard her as his equal in Christ, or, in Peter’s words, as a “fellow heir of the grace of life.”²⁶⁷¹ Second, the claim that later passages about submission in the home are culturally relative cannot be decided until those passages are examined themselves in their own context. One can freely admit that Paul used cultural accommodation in evangelization, but whether or not he considered the wife’s submission a culturally relative issue is a separate question. Third, we note in 1 Corinthians 7:25–31 that Paul’s “concession to culture” in reference to marriage did not consist of counseling wives to submit to husbands for the time being, but he addressed instead issues of divorce and singleness. Paul’s only “concession to culture” in this passage is that it is all right to get married if you are single.

²⁶⁶⁴It would be incorrect to assume, however, that Paul is claiming that every distinction between male and female has been erased in Christ. In Genesis 1:27, although both sexes are human, both bear God’s image, and are both commissioned to rule, they are still distinguished as “male” and “female.” Life in Christ does not obliterate this distinction.

²⁶⁶⁵George T. Galatians // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994. – P. 283.

²⁶⁶⁶Bruce F. F. The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. – P. 190.

²⁶⁶⁷Groothues, p. 27ff.

²⁶⁶⁸Ibid., p. 149.

²⁶⁶⁹Ibid., p. 28.

²⁶⁷⁰Bruce, p. 188.

²⁶⁷¹Knight, Role Relationship, p. 8.

Other important differences exist between the couplets in Galatians 3:28. God's choice of Israel over the Gentiles as heirs of His kingdom was already revealed in the Old Testament to be temporary. Also, slavery was not instituted in Eden as part of God's creation order, and Paul spoke in favor of freedom for slaves (1 Cor 7:21; Philemon),²⁶⁷² although, as egalitarians rightly assert, his agenda was not to change the social order in this respect. In distinction from Gentile exclusion and slavery, however, family relationships were established as part of God's creation order, and no other text suggests that that order has been or will be abolished in this age.

There is likely an eschatological reference in Galatians 3:28 to the fact that in the age to come gender distinctions will completely cease to exist (Matt 22:30). Consistent with Paul's "in Christ" theology, not all that the believer possesses in Christ is attainable in this life. Our "completeness in Christ" (Col 2:10), bodily resurrection in Him (1 Cor 15:22), and full experience of our new creation in Him (2 Cor 5:17) await us in the eschaton, although we can enjoy the foretaste of them now.²⁶⁷³ In a similar way, women enjoy equality in Christ in regard to their relationship with Him, but will not enjoy freedom from all gender distinctions until "Christ, who is our life, is revealed" (Col 3:4).²⁶⁷⁴

3. 1 Corinthians 7 and 11

The next passages written concerning our question are in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. In chapter 7, he gives detailed instruction about divorce and sexual conduct. It is noted in verses 2-5 that a woman has authority over her husband's body, and visa versa, and that periods of abstinence are to be agreed on mutually. Here, it is felt, the ideal pattern for marriage is displayed, where decisions are reached mutually by partners of equal authority. However, it is conjecture to assume that this instruction applies to all areas of decision making in the home and not simply to this one situation. The context does not allow such a generalization. The fact that Paul devotes several verses to describing the husband's and wife's equal authority in this regard creates the impression that this was an exceptional case which required special explanation and substantiation.

Even more central to the question is Paul's discussion of male-female relations in chapter 11. It is generally accepted that the words *γυνή* (*gune*) and *άνήρ* (*aner*) used here, which are also the words for "wife" and "husband," refer to men and women in general. Such features as the lack of the article before *γυνή* (*gune*) or possessive markers with *άνήρ* (*aner*), the attributive "every man" in verse 3, the reference to man coming from woman in verse 12, and the reference to natural order in defense of head coverings all support this conclusion.²⁶⁷⁵

Other features, though, point more specifically to the husband-wife relationship: the woman disgracing "her head" likely refers to her husband, the woman being created "for man" applies primarily if not exclusively to marital relations, and Paul, in other places, uses *άνήρ* (*aner*) only to describe a husband. For the sake of our discussion, though, whether *γυνή* (*gune*) and *άνήρ* (*aner*) refer to woman and man or husband and wife is not

²⁶⁷²George writes, "Paul's instructions to Philemon certainly carried within them the seeds of the dissolution of the very institution of slavery. Nowhere did Paul treat slavery as a divinely ordained institution, and, at least on one occasion, he declared that a slave could properly become free (1 Cor 7:21)" (George, p. 289). Similarly, Melick writes, "While it is true that Paul advocated that slaves accept their position and adjust to it, it is equally true that he sowed the seeds of emancipation here and in the Epistle to Philemon, which no doubt the church at Colossae read. There is no equivalent passage for the husband and wife or parent and child" (Melick R. R. Philippians, Colossians, Philemon // The New American Commentary. – Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991. – P. 309).

²⁶⁷³Significant here is the parallel passage in Colossians 3:11, which is nearly identical in form to Galatians 3:28 except for the omission of the couplet "male and female," although it likely includes them. All in Christ are undergoing renewal, experiencing the first fruits of our full inheritance in Him.

²⁶⁷⁴George again writes, "We still live in the tension between the 'No Longer' and the 'Not Yet'" (George, p. 292).

²⁶⁷⁵Thiselton A. C. The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. – P. 822; Knight, Role Relationship, p. 23.

crucial, since what is being said about men and women in general in this context will certainly apply to wives and husbands in marriage.

A more crucial discussion is Paul's meaning when he says that man is the "head" of the woman (11:3). The Greek word here is κεφαλή (*kephale*). This word, in the great majority of its uses, refers to the literal, physical head. However, it has metaphorical applications as well. Commentators debate the following as possible metaphorical meanings in this passage: head as authority, head as most prominent member, and head as source. A survey of major Greek lexicons produces varying results. The standard Greek lexicon from classical times on, Liddell-Scott-Jones, mentions prominence and source, but not authority.²⁶⁷⁶ The standard biblical Greek lexicons, BAGD and Louw-Nida, mention prominence and authority, but not source.²⁶⁷⁷ Other leading biblical Greek lexicons, EDNT and Grimm-Thayer, also fail to mention "source."²⁶⁷⁸

Wayne Grudem offers further criticism on κεφαλή (*kephale*) as "source" in ancient Greek. He notes that Liddell-Scott-Jones provides only two references for κεφαλή (*kephale*) as "source," and that both are questionable. One reference dates back to 500 B.C., much earlier than the New Testament text, and may be understood as "first" as well as "source."²⁶⁷⁹ The other reference is to the head (source) of a river.²⁶⁸⁰ On the other hand, the Mickelsens object that BAGD's reference to κεφαλή (*kephale*) as "authority" is based on only one reference, which dates back to only 500 A.D.²⁶⁸¹

Grudem's more extensive investigation of 2,336 instances of κεφαλή (*kephale*) in Greek literature revealed that 49 times (16% of the instances of the metaphorical use of the word) the meaning was "authority"; but he found no instances of "source."²⁶⁸² Thiselton agrees with Grudem's critique of κεφαλή (*kephale*) as source, but wonders if his instances of κεφαλή (*kephale*) as "authority" might not better be understood as "prominence."²⁶⁸³ Payne, on the other hand, cites two passages in Philo and another in a second century A.D. work Artemidorus Daldiani where κεφαλή (*kephale*) means "source,"²⁶⁸⁴ and Thiselton cites an early first century A.D. letter from Seneca to Nero describing the "head" (Nero) as a source of health and well being.²⁶⁸⁵

Some appeal also to the understanding of human physiology in ancient Greece – was the brain understood as the source of life or the control center for the body? Thiselton claims that one can find both understandings of the brain's function in ancient Greece.²⁶⁸⁶

Another way to understand the meaning of κεφαλή (*kephale*) is how it is used in the Septuagint, where it translates the Hebrew ראש (*rosh*). In most occurrences, ראש (*rosh*) is physical head, but 180 times it metaphorically indicates "leader." Of note is that in 104 of those instances ראש (*rosh*) as "leader" is translated not by κεφαλή (*kephale*), but by ἄρχοντας (*arhontos*) or a derivative.²⁶⁸⁷ Only between 8-18 times does κεφαλή

²⁶⁷⁶Mickelsen B., Mickelsen A. What does *kephale* mean in the New Testament? // Mickelsen A. Women, Authority and the Bible. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1986. – P. 98; Grudem, p. 52-53.

²⁶⁷⁷Arndt W., Danker F. W., Bauer W. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. – 3rd ed. – Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000; Louw J. P., Nida E. A. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains. – 2nd ed. – New York, NY: United Bible societies, 1996. – V. 1. – P. 738.

²⁶⁷⁸Thiselton, p. 818.

²⁶⁷⁹The reference is as follows: "Zeus was the first, Zeus last, the lightning's lord, Zeus head, Zeus centre, all things are from Zeus... Zeus alone first cause of all (*Orphic Fragments*, 21a).

²⁶⁸⁰Grudem, p. 57

²⁶⁸¹Mickelsen, p. 100.

²⁶⁸²Grudem, p. 67-68. We must note, though, that 30 of these 49 instances were from the Septuagint or the New Testament, an issue we will discuss independently. Only 19 were found in other Greek works. Grudem also claims that the Church Fathers often used κεφαλή (*kephale*) in the sense of "authority" (Grudem, p. 80).

²⁶⁸³Thiselton, p. 813.

²⁶⁸⁴Payne P. B. Response to Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen // Mickelsen A. Women, Authority and the Bible. – Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1986. – P. 124-125.

²⁶⁸⁵Thiselton, p. 817.

²⁶⁸⁶Ibid., p. 816. See also Grudem, 54-55

²⁶⁸⁷Another common choice was ἡγούμενος (*hegoumenos*).

(*kephale*) translate *rosh* (רֹשׁ) in this metaphorical sense.²⁶⁸⁸ The clearest example is likely Judges 11:6-11. Also significant is that *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) is never used as “source” in the Septuagint.

From the evidence presented above, it appears that a first-century reader could have understood *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) in any of the three metaphorical senses listed earlier, authority, prominence, or source, yet evidence for the third variant is the weakest.

When we look at the other metaphorical occurrences of *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) in the New Testament, the following is observed. Prominence in rank or importance is clear in Colossians 1:17-18, where the phrase “that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” is key to understanding how He is “head of the church.” Prominence in rank or importance is also the meaning in a variant reading of Acts 16:12 (mss D). “Head” as physical prominence is seen in 1 Peter 2:7 and its parallels. Ephesians 4:15 appears to hold up the “head” as an example to follow or goal to aspire to. In addition, the Mickelsens rightly note that the notion of spiritual growth follows in the next verse, connected to v. 15 by the relative pronoun “from whom.”²⁶⁸⁹ Thus, *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as “source” could be suggested here. Source is the most likely connotation in Colossians 2:19 as well. Finally, “head” as authority is clear in Colossians 2:10 and Ephesians 1:22. Thus, we see in the New Testament corpus evidence for *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) in all three aspects under debate – authority, prominence, and source.

Other arguments in favor of *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as source, head, or prominence have been advanced based on the context of this passage. A key factor is the relationship of the man’s headship with the headship of Christ and God, which are placed in parallel in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Some feel all three relationships speak of “source.” Christ is the source of man, as creator, man is the source of the wife, God is the source of Christ in incarnation (Jn 8:42).²⁶⁹⁰ The order, then, is chronological. Adherents of egalitarianism claim that if hierarchical relationship were in view, the order would be God-Christ, Christ-man, man-woman.²⁶⁹¹

One difficulty with *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as source here, however, is the claim that Christ is the head of “every” man – Christ does not individually create every man, but He is Lord of each. Another problem is that in each case, “source” must be understood differently: Christ is the source of man’s entire being; man is only the medium God used to create woman, and God is the source of Christ only in the sense of sending. If *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) is understood as “authority,” this difficulty is lessened. Although the authority relationships between these three pairs is not exactly parallel, the essential feature of “authority” as “leadership” is still preserved in all three. Also in support of *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as “authority” is the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:23, which is the only other mention of man’s “headship” over woman (or wife). Here, as will be demonstrated, the issue is clearly leadership.

The following context, however, does support *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as source. Christ’s headship of man and man’s headship of woman (v. 3) is the basis for man’s not covering his head and woman covering hers (vv. 4-5). After the parenthetical verse 6, the discussion continues about the rationale for head coverings, but this time in terms of image and glory (vv. 7-8). Women should cover their heads because they are glory of man and have originated from him. One could easily argue that the rationale in v. 3 and v. 7-8 are the same. Consequently, headship is an issue of glory and origin.²⁶⁹²

Verse 9, as conventionally translated, could potentially support *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as authority since woman being created “for” man can imply leadership. However, it is noted here that “for” translates *διά* (*dia*),

²⁶⁸⁸Mickelsen, p. 102-103. The numbers vary depending on how the occurrences are analyzed.

²⁶⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 106

²⁶⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 107

²⁶⁹¹Groothues, p. 159. Egalitarians also object to the idea of the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father, which the understanding of *κεφαλή* (*kephale*) as “authority” in v. 3 would require. They feel his subordination was only temporary, for the purpose of redemption (Payne, p. 124-127). Yet, Christ’s voluntary submission to the Father extends beyond its application to redemption on into eternity (1 Cor 15:27-28).

²⁶⁹²It is also argued that v. 11 should read, “Neither is woman differentiated (χωρίς - *horis*) from the man, nor is the man differentiated (χωρίς - *horis*) from the woman,” that is, they are equal in all respects, including authority. Yet such a wide application of this passage is unjustified, especially in a context, as we will see, that speaks of the husband’s authority as well. The conventional translation “independent” reflects a recognized meaning for *χωρίς* (*horis*) (BADG), and coincides well with the context (see v. 12).

which, with the genitive, usually, if not always, means “because of,” not “for the benefit of.” Woman being created “because of man” could relate simply to the order of creation and thus parallel v. 8, without connotations of submission.

Another pertinent feature of the context is the phrase in v. 10 that “woman ought to have authority on her head.” Translators usually insert the phrase “a symbol of” to give the sense that she is under her husband’s authority. It must be noted, however, that in all the other 31 New Testament occurrences of the phrase “has authority” (ἔχειν ἐξουσίαν), it is the subject of this predicate construction who has the authority. It is felt, then, that the woman’s authority (to pray and prophecy) is spoken of here.²⁶⁹³

Yet, the verses surrounding verse 10 complicate this understanding. Verses 8-9, which are the basis for v. 10 (connected by δῖα τοῦτο), emphasize the woman’s origin from man. It is hard to imagine how woman’s origin from man could serve as the basis for her having (and displaying on her head) authority. It is easier to understand her needing a sign of her husband’s authority on her head (v. 10) because of her origin from man (vv. 8-9). Thus, “she is to have (a symbol of) authority” is the better contextual reading. In confirmation of this conclusion, we note that verses 11-12 are concessive – they reassure the wife that in spite of male leadership, the marital relationship is far from one-sided.²⁶⁹⁴ In addition, Grudem notes that head coverings symbolized male authority in the culture of the day and would have been so understood by the readers of 1 Corinthians.²⁶⁹⁵

The above paragraph demonstrates an important point – woman’s origin from man implies his authority over her. This is significant both for our understanding of v. 3 and for our understanding of Genesis 2. Although sufficient evidence exists for either claim – that κεφαλή (*kephale*) could mean “source” or “authority” in v. 3, and may imply both – yet in v. 8-10, we see that the idea of source implies authority. Man is woman’s source, and by virtue of that, he is also her authority. Relating this conclusion to Genesis 2 provides support for the proposal that male leadership was part of the original creation order, where woman’s originating from man is first described.

If a sense of κεφαλή (*kephale*) as leader is present in v. 3, it provides great inspiration for the wife in regard to her submission to her husband. God the Son, being equal in nature and dignity with the Father, voluntarily submits to His authority. The Holy Spirit, in fact, submits to both Father and Son. It is misguided to conclude that submission indicates inferiority, since the Scriptures teach the full Deity of Christ and the Spirit and, at the same time, their voluntary subjection to the Father’s will and plan.

4. Ephesians 5:22-33

The next key passage is Ephesians 5:22-33. It is the second passage in which we encounter the phrase that the husband is head of the wife. Paul uses the same terms that he did in 1 Cor 11:3 – γυνή (*gune*) as woman, ἀνὴρ (*aner*) as man, and κεφαλή (*kephale*) as head. Yet, here the issue is clearly the marital relationship, so we appropriately translate ἀνὴρ (*aner*) as husband and γυνή (*gune*) as wife.

In this passage, Paul makes clear that headship is related to authority and submission. The headship clause in v. 23 begins with the conjunction γὰρ (*gar*), that is, “for,” indicating that it serves as the basis for what precedes. Verse 22 instructs the wife to submit to her husband, and verse 23 explains why – because her husband is the head. Consequently, headship in this context must be understood in terms of leadership-submission. Additionally, the husband’s headship of the wife is compared with Christ’s headship of the church (v. 23) and the church’s corresponding submission to Him (v. 24).

²⁶⁹³Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, p. 589–590, in Thiselton, p. 815.

²⁶⁹⁴Knight notes a consistency in Peter and Paul’s instructions on marriage that is apparent in 1 Cor 11:10-12 as well – encouragement for submission followed by concessions for the wife (usually in the form of commands for the husbands) (Knight, *Role Relationship*, p. 22-23).

²⁶⁹⁵Grudem, p. 75.

At the same time, some features in the context may give the idea of headship here a second sense, more resembling the head as “source.” The phrase “He Himself {being} the Savior of the body” runs in apposition to the preceding phrase “as Christ also is head of the church.” Appositions usually explicate what precedes, and following that general rule, Christ’s headship, then, must also be related to His saving work. Although it is rightly noted that the husband is not his wife’s savior, it is also mistaken to understand this as an extraneous addition by Paul, unrelated to the contextual issue of marital relationships. In Paul’s instructions to the husband, in fact, one encounters exhortation to demonstrate the same sacrificial love that Christ showed in His saving work.²⁶⁹⁶

In relation to the above, scholars debate the significance of the contrasting conjunction ἄλλα (*alla*), “but,” in v. 24. Those who feel that the appositional phrase, “He Himself {being} the Savior of the body,” is unrelated to the husband-wife discussion see this contrasting conjunction as a means to return to the main topic.²⁶⁹⁷ It could also serve as transition from the idea of headship as source, introduced by the phrase “He Himself {being} the Savior of the body,” back to the discussion of headship as leadership, as shown in the words following, “as the church is subject...” etc. A paraphrase of the entire section would go something like this:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord, for the husband is the head (leader) of the wife, as Christ also is the head (leader) of the church (He Himself also serving as head in another capacity – as Savior of the body). However, returning to the leadership question, as the church is subject . . .

Some attempt to emphasize head as “source” in the passage to the exclusion of head as “leader.” Evans, for example, points to the proximity of this context to chapter 4, where Christ is head in the sense of “goal” and “source,” in comparison to a more distant context, chapter 1, where Christ’s headship is definitely authoritative.²⁶⁹⁸ Such attempts are, on the basis of the arguments advanced above, unjustified. They are also unnecessary. Leadership and provision are in no way contradictory and do not exclude each other in the marriage relationship. As long as we do not exclude the concept of leadership, we can affirm with Groothues that the man’s headship is a “life-giving headship.”²⁶⁹⁹

Having established the connection between headship and leadership-submission, the next task is to determine what Paul means by submission. The term used here is ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*), which is the ordinary word for submission and used to describe submission of children to parents, slaves to masters, citizens to government, people to God, church members to leaders, and demons to disciples. Even though, as Lincoln points out, submission may take on a different character in each of these examples,²⁷⁰⁰ nonetheless the element of leadership and authority connoted by this term cannot be bypassed.

It is well noted that ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*) is in the middle-passive voice (middle preferred). This indicates that submission by the wife is her initiative and done voluntarily as unto the Lord.²⁷⁰¹ The Scriptures give no mandate to the husband to subdue his wife or demand her obedience.²⁷⁰²

Some writers have noted a distinction in Paul’s instructions to wives in comparison with what he says to children and slaves. The later must obey (ὑπακούω – *hupakouo*) their parents and masters, but this term is not used in respect to the wife (the same phenomenon is noted in the Colossians parallel). The significance of the distinction is not clear, but it is unlikely that ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*) carries no connotation of

²⁶⁹⁶O’Brien writes, “Christ’s headship over the church is expressed by his loving it and giving his life for it, as v. 25–27 so clearly show. This will have profound implications for the husband’s behavior as head of his wife (v. 28)” (O’Brien P. T. *The Letter to the Ephesians* // *The Pillar New Testament commentary*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. – P. 414).

²⁶⁹⁷O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 415; Lincoln A. T. *Ephesians* // *Word Biblical Commentary*. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 370.

²⁶⁹⁸Evans, p. 74.

²⁶⁹⁹Groothues, p. 156.

²⁷⁰⁰Lincoln, p. 367.

²⁷⁰¹O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 411.

²⁷⁰²Commenting on the identical use of the verb in Colossians 3, Melick comments that Scripture “never calls for the husband to make his wife submit. If he could, her heart would not be in it. Besides, Paul addressed wives here, not husbands (Melick, p. 311).

obedience in this context.²⁷⁰³ Obedience is the core element of submission. As Lincoln writes, “This is to drive a wedge between terms that are frequently synonymous.”²⁷⁰⁴ They are used synonymously, for example, in describing the wife’s submission in 1 Peter 3:5-6, where the word ὑπακούω (*hupakouo*) describes Sarah’s obedience to Abraham.²⁷⁰⁵

As in the case of 1 Corinthians 11:3, it is helpful here again to compare the wife’s role in the home with Christ’s role in the Trinity. We have already mentioned that Christ’s submission to the Father, according to 1 Cor 15:28, appears to extend into eternity. It is significant that the same word ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*), describing the Son’s submission to the Father, is also used to describe the wife’s submission to the husband.²⁷⁰⁶ This observation, as in our comparison of the Father’s headship of Christ with the man’s of woman, demonstrates that submission need not imply inferiority – no more that Christ is inferior to the Father.

Verse 21 also contributes to our understanding of the wife’s submission. Verse 22 is elliptical (missing a verb), and so the verbal sense of the verse, translated “be subject,” is derived from the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*) of verse 21. In this verse believers are encouraged to be subject “to one another (ἄλλήλος - *allellos*).” Two views exist on the meaning of verse 21. Some feel the verse simply introduces the following household code, which then spells out how submission of believers is to be worked out unilaterally in relation to wives, children, and slaves only. They note that nowhere in Scripture is the husband told to submit to the wife, masters to slaves, or children to parents. In addition, they claim the term ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*) requires an ordering “under” (ὑπο) something, and therefore does not permit reciprocity. The reciprocal pronoun is understood not in a reciprocal, but in a unilateral sense. Instances are cited where ἄλλήλος (*allellos*) has this more unilateral sense.²⁷⁰⁷ Therefore, the verse can be paraphrased, “Be subject to those among you who are in authority over you.”

On the other hand, others see in this verse a true reciprocity. In support of this option, it is noted that the participle ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hupotassomenoi*) of verse 21 is part of a string of participles, which describe the results of being “filled with the Spirit” in v. 18.²⁷⁰⁸ The other items in this string of participles are all incumbent for all believers (speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks). In fact, a reciprocal pronoun (this time ἑαυτοῖς - *eautois*) appears in v. 19, “Speaking to one another (ἑαυτοῖς) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Also in support of this view is the observation that the pronoun ἄλλήλος (*allellos*) is a virtual Christian code-word for mutual care, concern, and cooperation (Eph. 4:25; John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 1:12 are just a few examples). In addition, other New Testament passages hint at the idea of mutual submission as well (Phil. 2:3-4; Gal 5:13). Especially notable is Peter’s charge in the context of church leadership, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another” (1 Pet 5:5).²⁷⁰⁹

In view of the above, it does appear that Paul is encouraging mutual submission between believers. This is not to be understood, however, as nullifying the clear instruction that follows about submission in the home, or as abolishing leadership roles in the church. Verse 21 alone cannot carry that much doctrinal weight so as to

²⁷⁰³Contra Groothues, p. 164, 168, who feels submission consists only of respect, as in v. 33. Christ’s headship over the church, which is compared with the husband’s over the wife, consists of more than respect. The term itself translated respect, φοβέω (*phobeo*), is the common word “to fear,” and reinforces the idea that the husband’s leadership is a serious matter. Knight’s comment on v. 33 is also worth consideration: “‘Respect’ tells of the positive attitude in which the wife must obey” (Knight, *Role Relationship*, p. 47).

²⁷⁰⁴Lincoln, p. 367.

²⁷⁰⁵Some object that the Old Testament does not give clear examples of Sarah obeying Abraham or calling him lord directly. In spite of this difficulty, we would be unwise in light of Scripture’s inspiration to charge Peter with error here.

²⁷⁰⁶O’Brien P. T. *Colossians-Philemon* // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 222.

²⁷⁰⁷O’Brien states, “But in other contexts a symmetrical relationship cannot be in view. For example, Revelation 6:4, ‘so that men should slay *one another*’, cannot mean that each killed the other at precisely the same time as he or she was killed. Likewise, Galatians 6:2, ‘Bear *one another’s* burdens’, does not signify that ‘*everyone* should exchange burdens with *everyone* else’, but that ‘*some* who are more able should help bear the burdens of *others* who are less able’ (cf. also 1 Cor. 11:33; Luke 2:15; 21:1; 24:32)” (O’Brien, *Ephesians*, p. 403).

²⁷⁰⁸Groothues, p. 166.

²⁷⁰⁹Lincoln, p. 365-366.

overthrow numerous other verses that qualify it. It is better to understand Paul's instruction here in the same sense of Peter's – that those in leadership positions are to “clothe themselves in humility” before their subordinates and be open to hearing from God through them. The numerous Old Testament and New Testament examples of how the wife wisely counseled her husband are examples of the kind of valuable input she can give.

Another possible way to reconcile mutual submission with male leadership is to view the husband's sacrificial love and service of the wife, also described in Ephesians 5, as his expression of submission to her. As Evans explains, the command to love has an aspect of submission – a willingness to give up personal preferences for the sake of others.²⁷¹⁰ Lincoln sums up this view, “In this writer's vision of Christian marriage what is called for from wives is complete subordination to complete love.”²⁷¹¹

We must also determine the meaning of the phrase that a woman should submit to her husband “as to the Lord.” It could possibly refer to her attitude in submission – she does it as unto the Lord. This understanding is supported by the subsequent comparison of how the church submits to Christ. Or, the phrase could indicate the degree of submission – only to that degree that is appropriate in the Lord. Since both ideas are true and supported elsewhere in Scripture, it is not imperative to decide between these two options. They both describe God's will for the believing wife. Thus, submission to the husband is never absolute. At times, it is necessary to “obey God, rather than men.”

Viewing this passage from a historical perspective is also very revealing. In the Hellenistic Jewish and Greco-Roman world, “household codes” also existed, which were in many ways similar to those found in Scripture. In particular, they prescribed submission of wives to husbands, slaves to masters, and children to parents.²⁷¹² It is often felt that such secular parallels indicate that the church was simply accommodating to societal norms in their instructions for order in Christian marriage, and that these are therefore not abiding norms for all time.

Although similarities exist, there are also significant differences between the secular and scriptural household codes. For Greeks, the overriding purpose of household order was to promote the welfare of the State, a concept foreign to the biblical injunctions.²⁷¹³ As mentioned above, the New Testament instructions are based not on secular, but on spiritual, and uniquely Christian principles.²⁷¹⁴ In the New Testament accounts, children, slaves, and wives are addressed directly and considered independent moral agents. In the other lists, they are generally mentioned only as objects to be controlled.²⁷¹⁵ Requiring reciprocal obligations from those in

²⁷¹⁰Evans, p. 76. Also see Groothues, p. 170.

²⁷¹¹Lincoln, p. 373.

²⁷¹²The most famous of the “household codes” dates back to Aristotle: “Now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for every state is composed of households.... The investigation of everything should begin with the smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these three relationships, I mean that of mastership, that of marriage..., and thirdly the progenitive relationship” (*Pol.* 1.1253b). Josephus wrote, “The woman, it [the Law] says, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be obedient, not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for God has given authority to the man” (*c. Ap.* 2.24 § 199). Philo teaches, “Wives must be in servitude to their husbands, a servitude not imposed by violent ill-treatment but promoting obedience in all things” (*Hyp.* 7.3). From Lincoln, p. 357.

²⁷¹³Although Lincoln insightfully notes the emphasis on church unity in Ephesians and on an eventual unification of all things in Christ (*Eph* 1:10). The marriage code could be understood as part of securing that unity (Lincoln, p. 365).

²⁷¹⁴Commenting on the parallel passage in Colossian 3, O'Brien writes, “Particularly significant in the Colossians rule for the household are the references to the ‘Lord’ (κύριος). The commands are furnished with the motivation ‘in the Lord’ (ἐν κυρίῳ). So the readers are admonished ‘as is proper in the Lord’ (ὡς ἀνήκεν ἐν κυρίῳ, v 18), and ‘for this is pleasing in the Lord’ (τοῦτο γὰρ εὐάρεστόν ἐστιν ἐν κυρίῳ v 20). Paul reminds them of the fear of the Lord (φοβούμενοι τὸν κύριον, v 22) and their conduct is regarded as done for the Lord (ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ, v 23). Reference is made to the Lord's judgment (vv 24, 25; 4:1), while they are admonished to ‘serve the Lord Christ’ (τῷ κυρίῳ Χριστῷ δουλεύετε, 3:24)” (O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, p. 219).

²⁷¹⁵O'Brien writes in this regard, “In the (Stoic) texts the stations are not addressed directly, nor is the imperative mood used; the naming of the station was sufficient to indicate the appropriate conduct” (O'Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, p. 216). Philo, though, does show more sympathy toward those in submission: “The Hellenistic Jewish tables, e.g. Philo, influenced by the Old Testament, side with the weak, the minor and the unfree... the central interest of the ethical tables shaped by the Old Testament was the protection

authority was another distinction of New Testament thought.²⁷¹⁶ Furthermore, in antiquity women were expected to assume the religion of their husband.²⁷¹⁷ The New Testament, however, warns that the gospel will divide households (1 Cor 7:15-16). Thus, the Christian attitude toward wives, as described in the New Testament household codes, was in fact considered quite liberal for its time.²⁷¹⁸ The fact that the Paul was advocating radical alterations in attitudes toward women here speaks against the understanding that he was simply accommodating culture.

In addition, in the Ephesian passage there is no contextual clue that Paul's is advocating merely cultural accommodation in his instructions to husbands and wives.²⁷¹⁹ He bases his instruction for couples on the assertion of man's headship over the woman in God's creation order and on the model of Christ and the church. His instructions for children also have a permanent basis in the fifth commandment.²⁷²⁰

In contrast, Paul's instruction to slaves is not based on some external abiding principle – they are simply to serve their masters (as long as they served them) as they would serve Christ. Consequently, one could envision, based on the texts themselves, a time when master-slave relations could be different than they were at Paul's time, even abolished altogether. Melick aptly sums up this discussion, "When servants are servants (and masters are masters), these guidelines pertain. When children are children (and parents are parents), these guidelines remain. Likewise, when a woman is a wife (and a man is a husband), this is the order God expects. Of course, when other situations occur, such as when servants/slaves are freed, a different set of guidelines are appropriate."²⁷²¹

Mounce makes another insightful observation about the issue of cultural accommodation: "While the issue of cultural accommodation is too large to discuss in detail here, it is hard to believe that the apostle Paul, if the picture of him in Acts and through his writings is to any degree accurate, would teach something that he believed was false. While he may voluntarily have altered his behavior, may have had Timothy circumcised but not Titus, may have become weak for the weak (1 Cor 9:22), this is different from teaching error. For example, while he instructs slaves to be obedient to their masters, he never teaches that slavery is right."²⁷²²

Neither was Paul limited in his teaching by his cultural background or rabbinic training. Even Evans, writing from a basically egalitarian position, affirms that Paul "was quite willing and able to go against the normal cultural pattern if necessary."²⁷²³ Those who claim that Paul was simply a product of his age and not able to break out of the patriarchal mindset of his time underestimate the capabilities of a man who likely had deeper insight into the plan of God than any of his day, and possibly of all time. The man who was "caught up to the third heaven" and "heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak," who received a thorn in the flesh because of the "surpassing greatness of the revelations" can hardly be classified as a partially reformed rabbi. As we read the works of the inspired apostle, we, as the Ephesian believers before us, can "understand (his) insight into the mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4).

Judging from the passage in context, then, and the character of Paul himself, it is highly unlikely that cultural accommodation was his agenda in his instruction to married couples in Ephesians 5. Similarities with

of the weak and the helpless. So the partner is always taken seriously and all human beings, not only men but also wives, children and slaves, are treated as ethically responsible subjects" (O'Brien, Colossians-Philemon, p. 217).

²⁷¹⁶Commenting on the parallel passage in Colossians 3, O'Brien writes, "Although this is not totally new, there are no extant examples which are as thoroughgoing as Colossians 3:18–4:1 in this emphasis on reciprocal obligations. Wives, children and slaves are ethically responsible to do 'what is fitting' as well as husbands, fathers and masters." (O'Brien, Colossians-Philemon, p. 218).

²⁷¹⁷Lincoln, p. 358.

²⁷¹⁸O'Brien, Ephesians, p. 407.

²⁷¹⁹Lincoln's suggestion that Paul's concern for proper conduct in the world expressed in Ephesians 5:15-17 might carry over into our context of a wife's submission is unlikely (Lincoln, p. 359). The passage in question is introduced by "therefore," which relates it more to the previous context than to the following.

²⁷²⁰Melick, p. 310.

²⁷²¹Ibid. Also see the previous discussion on slavery in the section on Galatians 3:28.

²⁷²²Mounce W. D. Pastoral Epistles // Word Biblical Commentary. – Dallas, TX: Word, 2002. – P. 418.

²⁷²³Evans, p. 50.

secular household codes, then, are better understood as the result of God's general revelation of order in society being preserved (although imperfectly) in secular society, whereas the Scriptures, by virtue of special revelation, give a more perfect description of God's plan. It is a fallacy to claim that observing similar features both in society and in the church necessarily means the church was accommodating to culture.²⁷²⁴ Melick affirms, "The end result is an authority (the Bible) which is no authority since at any place where the culture differs with express biblical commands the Bible will be perceived as secondary to culture."²⁷²⁵ Helpful also is Melick's comment, "By what standard is the culture to be measured? Is the twentieth-century cultural pattern the norm, or could it be that the Bible intends to correct the modern scene at this point, as it does at many others?"²⁷²⁶

The presence of these household codes, in fact, may indicate not an accommodation to culture, but a warning against unhealthy cultural influences. Evans makes the observation that there are no specific Old Testament commands about submission of the wife as there are in the New Testament. She concludes that this is because the practice was universally accepted and never challenged. The fact that the New Testament specifically prescribes this behavior may indicate that believing wives were beginning to abandon this tradition. Evans speculates that believing wives were influenced in this way not only by their new freedoms in Christ, but also by egalitarian tendencies among elite women in Greco-Roman culture of the 1st century.²⁷²⁷ If her conclusions are correct, then the household codes were written not to accommodate cultural tendencies, but to oppose them.

A passage closely related to the Ephesian text is Colossians 3:18-19. The essential issues are the same, and so our treatment of the Ephesians passage will address most of them. As in Ephesians 5, adherents of egalitarianism propose that in Colossians 3 again Paul was seeking to accommodate secular norms for the sake of evangelistic ministry. Of special note in this passage is Paul's use of the impersonal verbs ἀνῆκεν (*aneken*), "it is fitting," and εὐάρεστον (*euareston*) "it is pleasing," which were used by Stoic philosophers as well.²⁷²⁸ This common vocabulary is thought to indicate Paul's borrowing his content from Stoic texts. However, we can refer back to our discussion on Ephesians 5 to refute the idea that Paul is accommodating to culture in either of these passages. In spite of two instances of common word usage (which is insufficient to prove literary dependence), here, as in Ephesians 4, "nothing in the passage itself suggests even remotely that this was a temporary command for a specific situation."²⁷²⁹

In Colossians we again encounter the issue of Paul's phrase "as is fitting in the Lord." The key word ὡς (*hos*), "as," can serve as comparative particle, meaning "in such a way as is fitting in the Lord," thus limiting the husband's authority by the higher standard of obedience to God. Or, it could be taken as a "marker introducing the perspective from which a pers., thing, or activity is viewed or understood as to character, function, or role," that is "because it is fitting in the Lord."²⁷³⁰ Our discussion of Ephesians 4 applies here as well – both are applicable in the setting of Christian marriage.

5. Pastoral Epistles

We move on now from Paul's prison epistles to the Pastorals. First, we will examine 1 Timothy 2:9-15. In one sense, this text is not as useful for our discussion since the issue at hand in women in church ministry. Yet two elements in this passage are important for our investigation. First is Paul's instruction in v. 12 that woman

²⁷²⁴One could use such an approach, for example, to claim that the scriptural prohibition of murder is culturally relevant, since it was forbidden in society as well.

²⁷²⁵Melick, p. 309.

²⁷²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷²⁷Evans, p. 33-43.

²⁷²⁸O'Brien, Colossians-Philemon, p. 215.

²⁷²⁹Melick, p. 309.

²⁷³⁰Arndt, p. 1103ff.

should not teach or have authority over a man. If this instruction is taken to forbid women from filling leadership roles in the church, then it would likely have ramifications for authority relationships in the home as well. The most problematic feature of this text is the word translated “authority.” The common word, ἐξουσία (*exousia*), is not used, but a rare form, αὐθεντέω (*authenteo*). Because of the rarity of this word’s usage (and its theological importance in this passage), its meaning is much debated. The word appears to be originally based on the idea of aggression. Therefore, it is often thought to refer to an aggressive, domineering use of authority.²⁷³¹

The main question is whether Paul was forbidding women all exercise of authority and teaching ministry over men in the church, or just their teaching men in a domineering way. The first is more probable based on the syntax of the passage. In order for the two verb “teach” and “exercise authority” to function as a hendiadys (equivalent or complimentary in meaning), they would need to approximate each other in the text. Instead, they are separated from each other by five words.²⁷³² Another difficulty is the conjunction οὐδε (*oude*), “or,” stands between them, thus signifying that two distinct activities are involved.

A less commonly encountered suggestion is based on the research of Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger, who claims that the term αὐθεντέω (*authenteo*) was used in mystery religions for a female figure in the myth who murdered, so that the murdered individual could be reborn. It is proposed, then, that αὐθεντέω (*authenteo*) suggests “rebirth” or “origin.” Consequently, Paul’s meaning here is that a woman shouldn’t teach that man “originated” (αὐθεντέω) from woman, which was a Gnostic teaching. Several difficulties, however, preclude this view. First, Gnosticism was a second century phenomenon, and although certain Gnostic tendencies began earlier, one would have to somehow demonstrate that the specific Gnostic teaching about Adam originating from Eve was in circulation as early as A.D. 60. Second, in the mystery religions the word αὐθεντέω (*authenteo*) itself did not mean “originate,” but “murder.” Likely another word was used in the mystery religions to describe the rebirth that took place after the murder. If Paul had meant to refer to this myth, he would have used the term that described the rebirth, not the term that described the murder.

Third, the theory is built on the speculation that Paul was writing to combat a specific false teaching in Ephesus at this time, yet nothing in the context confirms that conclusion. Fourth, commentators have argued that Paul would most likely have not limited his prohibition of false teaching only to women, especially since all the false teachers mentioned in 1-2 Timothy were men.²⁷³³ It is also unlikely that one or several specific woman false teacher(s) were in view due to the lack of the article before the word γυνή (*gune*), “woman.”²⁷³⁴ Finally, one cannot ignore that the conjunction οὐδε (*oude*), “or,” stands between “teach” and “exercise authority,” signifying distinct actions.

Another key section of this passage for our discussion follows in verse 13: “For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.” Groothues feels that the mention of Adam and Eve (especially about Eve being deceived) is merely meant as an analogy in order to teach that what happened in the garden should not happen again.²⁷³⁵ However, the connecting conjunction γὰρ (*gar*), “for,” eliminates that possibility, since it denotes that what follows is the grounds for what precedes. The reason and basis for Paul’s teaching about woman’s leadership in the church is the creation order of Genesis 2. Here, then, we find still another confirmation that the inferences to male leadership in Genesis 2 are not coincidental, but serve as proof that God intended such an order from the beginning. We would hesitate to affirm with Jewel that Paul is simply speaking from his rabbinical background and that his teaching is not always accurate.²⁷³⁶ Such a claim undermines the totality of Scripture as a reliable guide for Christian doctrine and practice.

²⁷³¹Arndt, p. 150. Louw and Nida, v. 1, p. 473.

²⁷³²Mounce, p. 128.

²⁷³³See 1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17–18; 4:14. Ibid.

²⁷³⁴Contra Groothues, p. 214.

²⁷³⁵Ibid., p. 217.

²⁷³⁶Knight, Role Relationship, p. 44.

The final passages in the Pastorals for our consideration are 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:3-5, which we can investigate together. Many features of the Titus passage concern the domestic life of the Christian family.²⁷³⁷ The passage emphasizes the wife's love for husband and children, listing these qualities even before "sensible" and "pure."²⁷³⁸ It also instructs woman to be submissive to their own husbands.²⁷³⁹ We have already discussed the term ὑποτασσόμενοι (*hypotassomenoi*) and its relation to authority in the home, so we will not need to repeat that discussion here.

A new item appears in this list, though, the term οἰκουργός (*oikourgos*), i.e., "workers at home" (BAGD). This term is disputed in the text, since many other manuscripts have οἰκουρός (*oikouros*), i.e., "stayers at home" (BAGD). Metzger and associates prefer the first variant because of much better external support²⁷⁴⁰ and because of the extreme rarity of the term. Copyists would more likely replace it with the more common term than visa versa.²⁷⁴¹ The difference is significant, since the former term emphasizes the wife's activity in the home, whereas the latter – her location in it.

1 Timothy 5:14 also encourages the wife's domestic life, but uses the word οἰκοδεσποτεῖν (*oikodespotein*), "manage the home." This word is derived from οἶκος (*oikos*), "home," and δέσποτης (*despotes*), "master." Thus, her activity in the home is emphasized over her presence. Mounce's comments are helpful here, that this instruction "does not require a woman to work only at home (cf. Prov 31), but it does state that she does have duties at home."²⁷⁴² Mounce's mention of Proverbs 31 is also instructive, since the wife's activity in that chapter includes both domestic activity and tasks outside the home. Helpful also is the observation that Paul's concern in the Timothy passage was that women should be busy in the home so that they would not spend their time gossiping from house to house (1 Tim 5:13).²⁷⁴³ This was a temptation because few other options existed for women outside the home. One could possibly conclude from this discussion that the Scriptures do not forbid the wife's involvement outside the home as long as she is able to manage the home adequately and provided that her outside labors are productive (unlike the women of 1 Timothy 2).

In distinction from our previous New Testament passages, there exists in Titus 2 and 1 Timothy 5 evidence that Paul was concerned about society's perception of the Christian marriage. The stated purpose for his instruction to the wife is so "the word of God will not be dishonored." In 1 Timothy 5, the wife's good behavior will "give the enemy no occasion for reproach." Nevertheless, these features need not necessarily be

²⁷³⁷Four of the seven instructions given to young women here concern domestic life, including "love their husbands." Paul assumes, of course, that the great majority of young women will marry and here he does not discuss the case of the single woman (see 1 Cor 7). Many feel that the first six instructions to young women are to be understood in pairs: love of husband and children are obviously related; "sensible" and "pure" are thought to related to inner character, and "workers at home" and "good", if taken together, could be understood as "working well at home" (Lea, p. 300) or "working at home with a good attitude" (Knight G. W. III. *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* – Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W. B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992. – P. 308). Yet, this is not very convincing. Besides the similarity between love of children and parents, it is hard to see clear similarities within the other pairs. In addition, there is a seventh instruction, which also breaks up this proposed symmetry.

²⁷³⁸Kelley relates how love of husband and children was also prized in the culture of the day: "In antiquity, among pagans and Jews alike, these twin virtues were regarded as the glory of young womanhood, and are frequently mentioned on funerary inscription." Kelly (*ibid.*, 240–41). See Lea, p. 300, footnote 11.

²⁷³⁹Lea and Griffin note the superfluous use of ἰδιοῖς (*idiois*), "one's own," here, since the article alone is sufficient to indicate that the husband was in view, and relate its significance: "Selwyn's comment is pertinent: 'This word delivers the passage from any charge of inculcating the "inferiority" of women to men, and shews that the subordination is one of function, within the intimate circle of the home.'" Lea, p. 301.

²⁷⁴⁰οἰκουρός (*oikouros*) in κ² D² H L P most minuscules, most Fathers, Textus Receptus, οἰκουργός (*oikourgos*) in κ* A C D* F G I 33 177 330 623 Clement of Rome.

²⁷⁴¹Metzger B. M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* – 4th ed. – London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994. – P. 585.

²⁷⁴²Mounce, p. 411.

²⁷⁴³Groothues, p. 171.

understood as a *concession* to culture. Nothing excludes the possibility that such behavior was esteemed both in secular society and by God and therefore normative for women of all times.²⁷⁴⁴

Several features in text, in fact, support this conclusion. The instruction to the wife to be submissive and a worker at home are part of a substantial list of exhortations to believers of different ages and genders (Tit 2:1-10). The other items listed are indisputably normative behavior for all times. It appears somewhat arbitrary to single out submission to husbands and domestic work as concessions to culture while claiming the rest are universal.²⁷⁴⁵ In addition, Titus 2:3 speaks of older women teaching “what is good” to the younger women, and includes in that “good teaching” submission to husbands and domestic work. The term “good” here refers, as elsewhere in Scripture, to what is good before God and pleasing to him.²⁷⁴⁶ Moreover, verses 11-14 provide another basis for the instructions that precede it. Besides a concern for the gospel’s reputation, the behavior encouraged in v. 1-10 is a working out of the believer’s redemption – a lifestyle consistent with the gospel.²⁷⁴⁷

6. 1 Peter 3:1-7

Our final NT passage will be 1 Peter 3:1-7. This passage begins with our fourth encounter with the instruction for wives to be submissive to their husbands. Like the passages in Titus and 1 Timothy 5, a main concern here is how the world perceives the church, in particular how believing wives should relate to unbelieving husbands and influence them for the gospel. The entire context of the book, as Groothues notes, is about Christian living in a hostile environment.²⁷⁴⁸ Evans feels that Peter’s exhortation is, therefore, for the purpose of avoiding offense to the unbelieving husband, who, according to societal expectations, would expect his wife’s submission.²⁷⁴⁹ This situation would have already been exacerbated by the fact that the Christian wife had already demonstrated insubordination to her husband in becoming a Christian. Thus, the egalitarians conclude that Peter’s instruction here is a cultural accommodation to the unbelieving world of Peter’s day. Now that society no longer expects a woman’s submission, this teaching is no longer applicable.

Returning to our text, though, we notice that Peter’s instruction was not only for wives of unbelieving husbands, but for all wives: “You wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that *even if* any of them are disobedient to the word...” (italics mine). Furthermore, Peter appeals to Sarah and her obedience to Abraham as an example of the conduct of “holy women of former times.” Thus, Peter regards the wife’s submission as “holy” behavior.²⁷⁵⁰

A final debated feature in 1 Peter is his reference to honoring and obeying the king (1 Pet 2:13-17). It is argued that this is a cultural concession, and that submission to kings is no longer required in our day. In a similar way, Peter’s instruction to obey one’s husband in the next chapter can be viewed as culturally conditioned as well, and no longer applicable in societies that don’t require it.²⁷⁵¹

In response, we note that we have already discussed the danger of assigning cultural relativity to a biblical principle without substantial support from the context that this is indeed the case. In none of the passages we

²⁷⁴⁴Note Knight’s comments: “Paul appeals to Gentile non-Christian perspectives here and elsewhere (1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Cor. 5:1) because he regards non-Christians as having in these cases a proper ethical sense, since “the work of the law is written in their hearts” (Rom. 2:15) and since they know right from wrong in certain basics even if they themselves do not follow this knowledge (Rom. 1:32).” Knight, Pastoral Epistles, p. 310.

²⁷⁴⁵Mounce, p. 418.

²⁷⁴⁶Knight, Pastoral Epistles, p. 310.

²⁷⁴⁷Mounce, p. 419.

²⁷⁴⁸Groothues, p. 174.

²⁷⁴⁹Evans, p. 118.

²⁷⁵⁰This point is not negated by the objection that Sarah’s obedience was an accommodation to culture as well (Evans, p. 119), since Peter commends her not for her “culturally-sensitive” behavior, but for her “holy” behavior. Nor is it overthrown by the objection that Sarah’s calling Abraham “lord” was just a gesture of respect (Groothues, p. 174). Whatever connotations the term may have, since Peter uses it as an example of Sarah’s obedience it must at least carry the connotation of submission.

²⁷⁵¹Groothues, p. 176.

have examined is it stated that submission to the husband is *only* for the purpose of the believer's reputation with outsiders. The likelihood of this simply being an oversight by the New Testament authors is small, since there are at least 4 separate contexts all dealing with the issue of submission, and none of them regulate it purely to cultural accommodation. Additionally, Knight insightfully notes that the principle of obedience to government authority is universally valid. The reign of kings was simply the mode that authority existed in at that time. Notable in this regard are the more general terms for government leaders used in other texts: "every human institution" (1 Pet 2:13); "governing authorities" (Rom 13:1); and "authority" (Rom 13:2).²⁷⁵²

D. Remaining Arguments

One argument sometimes voiced is that one can perceive a movement in Scripture from a domineering patriarchal society to a more tolerant patriarchal society. If one extrapolates this tendency one can conclude that God's ultimate intention is to abolish male leadership entirely. We may object, though, that the overview of Scripture we just completed showed no substantial change in God's attitude toward leadership in the home. There is no indication of a movement toward abolishing the male leadership in domestic affairs. The same family order established in Eden is affirmed by the apostles. We can agree, especially based on an eschatological application of Galatians 3:28, that male leadership is not an eternal institution. However, the question is when it will end. Jesus revealed that in the resurrection gender distinctions will be abolished (Matt 22:30). It is best to conclude, then, that God's order for the home will remain intact until that time.

Speaking more generally about the approach to Scripture employed above, we must insist that it is imperative to base our teaching on what God has revealed and not on speculative assumptions. Any principle of Scripture can be (and usually eventually is) taken to an extreme and can lead to error. Most false teachings in the history of the church are based on solid biblical principles that are embraced, however, with disregard for other factors in Scripture that balance and qualify them.

Another claim is that subordination relates to God's creation order, but gender equality results from God's work in redemption. Since redemption has priority over creation, we need to acknowledge submission, but emphasize equality. Sometimes submission in the home, it is felt, is not beneficial for advancing the cause of redemption.²⁷⁵³ Returning to our passage in Titus chapter 2, however, we see that God's order for the home does not hinder, but rather enhances His redemptive work. Verses 11-14 of that chapter, which speak of the outworking of God's redemptive plan, are the basis for observing the virtues listed in verses 1-10. Included in that list of virtues is love for husband, love for children, working at home and submission to husbands. These virtues contribute to God accomplishing His goal of "purifying for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds" (Tit 2:14).

One apparently formidable objection is outlined in Rebecca Groothues' "Good News for Women."²⁷⁵⁴ She argues that women cannot be considered "equal in nature, but different in function," which is the favorite cliché among traditionalists. She distinguishes "functional subordination" from "female subordination." Functional subordination is based on ability and is temporary in nature – it ends when the subordinate party gains sufficient ability to fill the higher role. However, in the case of women, her subordinate role is based on her gender and can consequently never be overcome. Only two conclusions, then, can be reached. In one case, women, being equal in nature and ability, are being held back unjustly from filling roles they are capable for. Thus, they are denied the personal satisfaction participating in leadership could bring, and others are denied the positive contribution they could make on a leadership level. Or, if this charge of injustice is to be avoided,

²⁷⁵²Knight, *Role Relationship*, p. 14.

²⁷⁵³Longenecker, *Authority, Hierarchy and Leadership*, p. 82.

²⁷⁵⁴Groothues, p. 41-90.

women must be considered incapable by nature to hold leadership positions, and consequently the “equal in nature, but different in function” theory fails.²⁷⁵⁵

Groothues feels the first of the options is correct. Women are as capable for leadership as men, and are being unjustly held back. She points out that moral standards among men and women are identical. This indicates that they are both equally competent morally and spiritually. Since leadership roles require moral and spiritual qualities such as wisdom, maturity, and responsibility, a woman cannot be considered less capable for leadership than a man.²⁷⁵⁶ She also points out that scientific research does not confirm essential difference between the sexes in leadership qualities.²⁷⁵⁷ Groothues use the same argumentation to refute the traditionalist’s appeal to the Trinity as the model for the Christian home. If Christ is eternally submitted to the Father, then He is either being unjustly held back, or is inferior in quality or essence.²⁷⁵⁸

There are several ways this objection can be answered. First, the goal for the Christian is not to seek personal satisfaction, whether through involvement in leadership or by any other means, but to do God’s will. If it pleases God, as our study of Scripture above has revealed that it does, that husbands should have leadership in the home, then the Christian wife will in fact derive the greatest personal satisfaction by knowing that her submission to her husband pleases God.

If it seems that limiting the wife in this way deprives others from benefiting from the positive contribution she could make on a leadership level, it must be remembered, that both in the Old and New Testaments godly women often gave wise counsel to their husband. The wife’s input and participation is not automatically eliminated by her submissive role. It is also erroneous to think that being qualified for a position guarantees participation in it. God’s plan does not always appear logical in this respect. Paul, for example, was eminently qualified for Jewish evangelism (experience, education, passion, vision, contacts). Yet, God sent him instead to the Gentiles, a commission Paul struggled with his entire career (Acts 22:18-21; Rom 9:1-4; 11:13-14).

In addition, we must consider that if egalitarians deem male headship an injustice (that is, the system itself, not the abuses that have often come because of it), we must note at whose door this charge is being laid. If men are to blame for this institution of this system, then egalitarians have a basis to object. However, as our study above has shown, God has instituted the system, then God is being charged with injustice. As Job learned during his trials, it does not work to accuse God of being unfair.

The comparison with Christ’s submission to the Father does not help the egalitarian position either. There is no “injustice” in this arrangement in that, even if the order is eternal, it is voluntary on the part of the Son. It does not necessitate that Christ be inferior to the Father, but rather He is free to choose a subordinate position if He pleases. This does not demonstrate weakness on His part, but rather great strength of character.

Concerning the claim that male leadership implies inferiority of the women – that she is no longer “equal by nature” – the terms used here must be more closely examined. The concept “inferior” requires the existence of a common standard, according to which one is judged “superior” and another “inferior.” What common standard exists between men and women on the level of “nature”? The standard is expressed in the concept “humanity.” Both men and women share a common “human” nature. Yet, of what does human nature consist? The concept “humanity” can be compared with a genus classification in taxonomy. Humanity, like the genus, is defined by all the characteristics that members of that genus have in common. Thus, since men and women are the only members of humanity, humanity is, by definition, those qualities that men and women share completely in common. Consequently, men and women, by definition, must be equal in nature. The man cannot claim to be more human than the woman, or visa versa. On the level of “genus,” they are (and by definition must be) completely equal.

²⁷⁵⁵Groothues writes that denying leadership to women implies that they are “less wise, less mature, less responsible, less rational than those persons who are males” (Ibid., p. 53).

²⁷⁵⁶Ibid., p. 106.

²⁷⁵⁷Ibid., p. 231ff.

²⁷⁵⁸Ibid., p. 56-57.

At the same time, it is obvious (at least physically, if not emotionally or spiritually) that men and women are different. These difference in no way effect their equality as humans. They exist not of the level of “genus,” but (roughly speaking) on the level of “species.” It is logically valid and theoretically possible to assert, that the unique combination of qualities in their proper proportion inherent to men make them (in general, exceptions, of course, exist) more capable for leadership. This capability for leadership, however, does not make men more “human” than women. On the other hand, the unique combination of qualities in their proper proportion that inherently make women (in general, exceptions, of course, exist), better nurturers then men do not make them more “human” than men. On the “species” level, differences are expected. There is no common standard here by which one can be considered “superior” and another “inferior” by nature. If, for argument’s sake, we claim that men are inherently better leaders than women, the only claim to superiority a man can make is that he is more “male” than the woman is. If, for argument’s sake, we claim that women are inherently better nurturers than men, the only claim to superiority a woman can make is that she is more “female” than the man. Such claims, of course, are meaningless.²⁷⁵⁹

Another objection is as follows. Adherents of egalitarianism often propose that if the topic of male leadership is examined *theologically*, that is taking into consideration the whole biblical picture (especially those elements that are central in God’s plan of redemption), instead of by means of several *proof-texts*, which appear to prescribe male leadership in the home, the conclusion would be clear – equality of authority in the home is considered more consistent with God’s overall plan. This approach to theologizing, however, has inherent dangers since it assumes an inconsistency in biblical teaching that must be overcome by embracing certain principles and rejecting others. Besides violating the evangelical doctrine of plenary inspiration, which guarantees total consistency throughout biblical revelation, it creates the dilemma of needing to establishing criteria for classifying which biblical revelation is important and needs to be preserved, and which is not important and may be ignored. Moreover, one must recognize that “the whole biblical picture” consists of individual parts, and cannot be determined without taking into consideration all these constituent parts. If a theological conclusion requires omission of even several texts (especially if those texts speak directly to the issue at hand), then one can justifiably question the correctness of that theological conclusion.

Discussion has also arisen about the significance of the use of masculine pronouns in respect to God. First, it must be noted that God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and therefore without gender.²⁷⁶⁰ He is depicted in Scripture as filling both masculine and feminine roles.²⁷⁶¹ Therefore, the preference for masculine pronouns in no way attributes gender to God or proves the superiority of males over females. Some feel the use of masculine pronouns is an accommodation to a patriarchal society – people of biblical times could not have accepted a feminine presentation of God.²⁷⁶²

This acknowledged, the consistent use of masculine pronouns throughout the canon along with the fact of a masculine incarnation and the preponderance of the title “Father” likely communicates more than accommodation. If it were simply the latter, one might expect occasional exceptions to the rule so as to indicate that it indeed was only accommodation to cultural norm. A more likely explanation is that in using the masculine pronoun, God is emphasizing those qualities He shares with males in distinction from those He shares with females, in particular, His leadership qualities.

Related to the above discussion, it is proposed that Christ’s maleness had nothing to do with His work of redemption – that He could have been female instead of male and still died for our sins. If this is denied, it is claimed, then his redemption is not for all people, but just for men. In addition, the fact that Christ is the

²⁷⁵⁹Knight comes close to our comment here in writing, “Both facets of creation come to their rightful expression. Spiritual equality may not be negated by sexual differences, because we are both made and renewed in the image of God... Nor does our spiritual equality as joint-heirs of life remove our maleness and femaleness and the role relationship which that created difference brings to the relation of man and woman as it exists in marriage” (Knight, *Role Relationship*, p. 8-9).

²⁷⁶⁰God called Himself “I Am” (Groothues, p. 103).

²⁷⁶¹The man with the lost sheep and the woman with the lost coin both represent God in Luke 15 (Groothues, p. 113)

²⁷⁶²Evans, p. 22; Groothues, p. 101.

perfect image of God has nothing to do with his maleness. He could have come as a female and still displayed the image of God. Christ's maleness has no relation to His being God's image bearer or the redeemer of humans, any more than his Jewishness did.²⁷⁶³

Immediately, we note the misguided claim that Jesus' Jewishness was incidental. In order to fulfill messianic prophecy, Jesus needed to be a physical descendent of Abraham as well as of David and Judah. We also encounter here the issue of representation. As argued above, Adam was humanity's representative before God in the Garden. Adam's representative role in creation is typological of Christ's representative role in redemption (see Rom 5:12ff). Being a male, Jesus could become the "Second Adam" and represent humanity before God.

E. Conclusions

We conclude our study with a brief summary. God's order for male leadership in the home was established in Eden and is preserved through all ages of God's people to the present day. We do not anticipate its nullification until the resurrection. Because of sin, the history of male leadership has been scarred with great abuses and injustices toward women, as was predicted (but not prescribed) in Gen 3:16. Scripture's encouragement to the husband to love his wife sacrificially counteracts this tendency.

At the same time, man does not serve as a mediator for woman in spiritual things, but in Christ she enjoys equal access to God and a relationship with Him in no way inferior to his. She is to be his helper not only in material things, but in spiritual things as well, bringing wise counsel. At times division may arise in the home over disagreements about essential aspects of the gospel. In such cases, the wife's loyalty to Christ precedes her loyalty to her husband. God may entrust to a wife a special spiritual ministry in distinction from her husband's. While it is recognized that this may be the exceptional case, the husband must be ready to make the appropriate lifestyle changes to accommodate her calling.

Finally, to recall the material in our initial paragraphs, a Christian home ruled by love will provide little occasion for conflict, even in the area of authority and decision making. Nevertheless, undergirding this life of mutual respect, consideration, and submission is God's order for the husband as head of the home.

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²⁷⁶³Groothues, p. 109-112.

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## Appendix B: Neoplatonism

### A. Description

Neoplatonism was the most influential worldview in the ancient world. It had a significant effect on the theology of many early Church Fathers and, through them, continues to form the thought of certain branches of Christendom today.

The founder of this system of thought was the Alexandrian native Ammonius Saccas (175-240). Alexandria was a famous meeting point between East and West. One could find there, as the historian Copleston notes, “Hellenistic philosophy, special science and Oriental religion.”<sup>2764</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that we discover in Neoplatonism elements of both Greek philosophy and Hindu faith. The Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky also observes the parallels between Neoplatonism and Hinduism: “‘Neoplatonism’ leads to a ‘mystical plunge’ that in some ways reminds one of the teaching of Hinduism.”<sup>2765</sup>

Neoplatonism is an offshoot of two philosophies that preceded it: Neopythagoreanism and Middle Platonism. Neopythagoreanism arose in Alexandria in the first century B.C. and contains elements of Stoicism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism. According to this view, all reality is contained in a certain “Monad,” which is the basis of all reality. All that exists is a manifestation of the Monad or its emanations. The Monad itself exists beyond all mental perception in complete mystery. Consequently, Neopythagoreanism is an apophatic worldview. One of the emanations, namely the Demiurge, created the world. The “Fall” of humanity occurred when the rational and irrational souls were materialized.<sup>2766</sup> This worldview shares many common features with Gnosticism and the teaching of Marcion.

Middle Platonism (1st c. A.D.) was a mixture of various convictions that were not always clearly interconnected. God’s transcendence was emphasized as well mysticism and the need for mediators between God and the world. Similar to Neopythagoreanism, in Middle Platonism we encounter the idea of emanations from the “One,” namely “Nous” (i.e., “Mind”), and “Soul.” Humanity’s goal is the ascent to God and ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, that is, i.e., attaining likeness to God as much as that is possible.<sup>2767</sup>

One could guess that these worldviews affected the famous Jewish philosopher from Alexandria – Philo. Correspondingly, we notice a tendency to apophatism in his teaching. The historian Sahakian writes, “Philo regarded God as exalted above all human understanding, hence as infinite, incomprehensible, nameless, and transcending human knowledge, and he insisted that the most that can be asserted about God is what he is not.”<sup>2768</sup>

The idea of the soul ascending to God was a fascination for Philo.<sup>2769</sup> Since this ascent requires the aid of mediators, Philo proposed the following: Logos, angels, and Wisdom. Through contemplation of the Logos and personal moral conduct, a person can ascend to God and unify with Him. Commenting on Exodus 24:2, Philo wrote, “But he who is resolved into the nature of unity, is said to come near God in a kind of family relation, for having given up and left behind all moral kinds, he is changed into the divine, so that such men might become kin to God and truly divine.”<sup>2770</sup> Yet, Philo still recognized the distinction between God and the deified human: “There is one true God only.”<sup>2771</sup>

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<sup>2764</sup>Copleston F. A History of Philosophy. – New York, NY: Doubleday, 1993. – P. 446.

<sup>2765</sup>Лосский В. Н. Очерк мистического богословия восточной церкви и Догматическое богословие. – М: Центр СЭИ, 1991. – P. 201. Author’s translation.

<sup>2766</sup>Copleston, p. 446-448.

<sup>2767</sup>Ibid., p. 451-455.

<sup>2768</sup>Sahakian W. S. History of Philosophy. – New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 1968. – P. 80-81.

<sup>2769</sup>Gross J. The Divination of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers / trans. Onica P. A. – Anaheim, CA: A & C Press, 2002. – P. 73-79.

<sup>2770</sup>Philo. Questions and Answers on Exodus, 2.29, в Loeb Classical Library / Ed. T. E. Page / Trans. R. Marcus // Cambridge, MS: Harvard, 1953. – P. 70.

<sup>2771</sup>Philo. On Dreams, 1.229, in Yonge C. D. The works of Philo. – Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995. – P. 385.

Philo's views differ greatly from the conventional Jewish understanding of the human fate. Gross comments that the religious atmosphere in which Palestinian Judaism developed was not favorable to the idea of deification.<sup>2772</sup> This observation confirms our suspicion that the theosis teaching did not arise from Jewish (Old Testament) teaching.

One of Ammonius Saccas' students, Plotinus (205-270), further developed the Neoplatonic worldview and established its basic parameters. Plotinus was raised in Alexandria, but taught in Rome. Two of his followers, Porphyry (233-302) and Proclus (412-485), contributed to the development and propagation of Plotinus' teaching.

Plotinus' teachings consisted of the following.<sup>2773</sup> He centered his cosmology in a certain "Ultimate God," which he called the "One." A series of emanations flow out of the One, namely the Nous (i.e., "Mind") and the World Soul. Matter is another emanation from the One, but it is the lowest and least pure of them. Nonetheless, matter reflects the spiritual realities that gave it existence.

The goal of life is return to the One, that is, to "ascend" to it. The first step in this process is personal purification through an ascetic and ethical lifestyle. The latter consists of observing the four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice (the cardinal virtues in Aristotle's ethics). By this means, a person can progress from the emanation "matter" to the emanation "World Soul."

The second step is to rise above sensory perception to interface with the Nous by means of philosophy and contemplation. The third and culminating step is mystical union with the One. At this stage, the seeker no longer senses any distinctions between things, and does not even think about the One, but rather enjoys an organic union with it. Proclus recommended "mystical silence before the Incomprehensible and Ineffable."<sup>2774</sup> Lossky describes Plotinus' system thusly: "You enter into the sphere of the non-intellectual and non-existent... then silence unavoidably ensues."<sup>2775</sup> The death wish of Plotinus was for that which was divine in him to return and be united with the Divine.<sup>2776</sup>

A person's experience with the emanations is self-authenticating. This means that a person knows internally by intuition when he or she progresses from one emanation to another. The deeper one goes in this progression, the more one understands that all reality is a unity. The appearance of variety in the world is an illusion. The closer one is to the One, this apparent "variety" disappears.

The One is beyond understanding or description. It is impersonal and inactive. There is no distinction in it. It is omnipresent. All existence instinctively strives for reunion with the One and will, in the end, attain unification with it.

Plotinus thought it impossible to ascribe specific attributes to the One.<sup>2777</sup> One may not even speak of its existence. It is beyond existence and serves as the source of existence. Ascribing to the One specific attributes places limitations on it and makes it finite. Proclus taught, "We are not entitled to predicate anything positively of the ultimate Principle; we can only say what it is *not*, realizing that it stands above all discursive thought and positive predication, ineffable and incomprehensible."<sup>2778</sup> Plotinus was willing to speak of the One as "good," yet he made the qualification that this attribute is not "inherent" to it.<sup>2779</sup>

The One does not act or think. It lacks will or self-consciousness. The presence of such features would require some kind of distinction in it. The One must remain "One." Emanations flow out of it not by the act of the One's will, but by necessity. Here, Plotinus operates on the principle that everything must produce

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<sup>2772</sup>Gross, p. 71.

<sup>2773</sup>See Geisler N. L. *Christian Apologetics*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 174-177; Sahakian, p. 81-86; Copleston, p. 463-471; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoplatonism>

<sup>2774</sup>Copleston, p. 481.

<sup>2775</sup>Лосский, p. 201. Author's translation.

<sup>2776</sup>Copleston, p. 464.

<sup>2777</sup>Sahakian claims that Plotinus taught that one may speak of attributes in the One (Sahakian, p. 82).

<sup>2778</sup>Copleston, p. 479.

<sup>2779</sup>Ibid., p. 465.

something else. Therefore, the One must produce emanations. Yet, somehow, the emanations are distinct from the One. So then, Neoplatonism is not a true pantheistic worldview.

The “Nous” is the location of the Platonic world of “ideals.” The Nous’ “thoughts” are aligned in two directions: toward the One and toward itself. This distinguishes the Nous from the One – the Nous has distinctions inherent to it, that is, two orientations.

The World Soul has two components: a higher and lower aspect. The higher aspect communicates with the Nous, and the lower part – with the material world. The Platonic “ideals,” located in the Nous, are expressed in the world by means of the World Soul. In the world, they are known by the term “logos.” Matter is considered evil only when it fails to reflect these “ideal forms,” communicated by the Nous through the World Soul.

The human soul derives from the World Soul. It also consists of two parts: divisible and indivisible. The “divisible soul” is our physical body. The human soul became divisible and materialized due to humanity’s desire to be independent of the One.

## B. Effect on Christianity

Without doubt, Neoplatonism exerted a heavy influence on the worldview of the early Church Fathers. Bray relates, “Most of the leading theologians of the classical period of Christian dogmatic development had received a Neoplatonic education.”<sup>2780</sup> This system had its greatest effect on the Alexandrian Fathers, as Copleston notes, “Neo-Platonism exercised a profound influence on Christian thinkers at Alexandria.”<sup>2781</sup> In fact, not only was Plotinus a student of Ammonius Saccas, but Origen was as well. Sahakian relates, “(Origen) adopted Neo-Platonism as a philosophical foundation for Christian theology.”<sup>2782</sup> It is said of Athanasius, “In his understanding of God, Athanasius was heavily influenced by Plato, Plotinus, Albinus, and Proclus.”<sup>2783</sup>

The Alexandrian Fathers, in turn, exercised their influence on the Church as a whole. Sahakian feels, “In the last analysis, Patristic theology and philosophy were actually based upon fundamental concepts of Hellenistic thought.”<sup>2784</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, in particular, constructed his theology from Neoplatonic premises. According to Sahakian, “(Pseudo-Dionysius) introduced it into the Church so effectively that it remained there nine centuries.”<sup>2785</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius styled himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, mentioned in Acts 17:34. Today, all serious scholars agree that his works were pseudonymic. They note that no one cites his works until the sixth century. In addition, in his work *On Church Hierarchy*, he speaks of initiation into monastic vows and reading the Symbol of Faith during the liturgy. These practices did not exist in the first century. Lossky even admits that the author of these books was not the individual mentioned in Acts who was acquainted with the apostle Paul.<sup>2786</sup>

Meyendorff writes that Pseudo-Dionysius’ goal was to “unite the Christian system with the hierarchical world of Neoplatonism. Dionysius quotes Neoplatonic authors in abundance, especially Proclus.”<sup>2787</sup> Meyendorff, expressing his astonishment, comments on Pseudo-Dionysius, “Adoption of his teaching by the Church can be considered one of the most amazing phenomenon in history.”<sup>2788</sup>

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<sup>2780</sup>Bray G. *The Doctrine of God*. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993. – P. 33.

<sup>2781</sup>Copleston, p. 483.

<sup>2782</sup>Sahakian, p. 82. Sahakian underscores several elements in Origen’s teaching which especially correspond to Neoplatonism: (1) the human mind is unable to “encompass or truly comprehend God’s attributes;” (2) the Godhead is hierarchical – Father above Son above Spirit; (3) God’s “immobility” required that not He, but the Son created the world; (4) all will someday be saved and will participate in God’s essence; (5) salvation includes liberation from matter (Sahakian, p. 87-88).

<sup>2783</sup>Зайцев Е. Учение В. Лосского о Теозисе. – М.: Библейско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2007. – P. 62. Author’s translation.

<sup>2784</sup>Sahakian, p. 86.

<sup>2785</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>2786</sup>Лосский, p. 21.

<sup>2787</sup>Мейендорф И. Введение в святоотеческое богословие. Минск: Лучи Софии, 2007. – P. 299-300. Author’s translation.

<sup>2788</sup>Ibid., p. 308. Author’s translation.

At the same time, Meyendorff reminds us that, although Pseudo-Dionysius had a significant effect on the Early Church, the latter never totally accepted his teachings, especially his understanding of the sacraments.<sup>2789</sup> On the other hand, Burgess considers Dionysius as “perhaps the most influential intellectual father and spiritual master of Christian contemplatives both in East and West for a thousand years after his death. In the Middle Ages, his writings were put almost on the same footing as the inspired writers of Scripture.”<sup>2790</sup>

Other Eastern Orthodox writers also openly acknowledge that the Fathers’ borrowed from the Neoplatonic worldview. Lossky states that between Dionysius and Plotinus exists “a striking resemblance.”<sup>2791</sup> Lossky considers that Plotinus reached the height of ancient (non-biblical) thought and claims that many Church Fathers assimilated his thought and brought it to completion.<sup>2792</sup> Archimandrite Nikon lists Plotinus among early Christian writers and says of him, “Plotinus taught of ‘God-likeness’ even more precisely.”<sup>2793</sup> Furthermore, Nikon quotes him authoritatively, as in the example: “The human mind is only the reflection of the Eternal and First Mind, with which it shares common features. In this case, the human mind, as a symbol and reflection of the Eternal Mind, teaches us through contemplation of it to ascend to the First Image, the Eternal Mind.”<sup>2794</sup>

Aside from Neoplatonism, Greek philosophy in general influenced patristic theology. Andrey Kuraev writes, “Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory Nazianzen were able to complete studies at the University in Athens (a still pagan institution) before it closed and counseled their disciples to include in their Christian walk the great pagan authors.”<sup>2795</sup> In comparing Eastern and Western theology, Kuraev also reveals the former’s dependence on Greek thought: “Rome never knew names like Aristotle and Socrates, Plato and Plotinus,”<sup>2796</sup> and, “The West received Aristotle and philosophers from antiquity (which were never lost to the Orthodox world)...”<sup>2797</sup> Lossky also sees value in borrowing from Greek philosophy:

Theology should be expressed in the language of the world. It was no accident that God placed the Church Fathers in a Greek context. The required philosophical clarity combined with a need for deep insight motivated them to purify and sanctify the language of the philosophers and mystics in order to communicate the Christian good news, giving it... its universal meaning.<sup>2798</sup>

Zaitsev summarizes well the effect of Neoplatonism on early Christianity:

In the mystical Christian tradition, a tendency is observed to speak about God in an obviously Neoplatonic manner, highlighting God’s unapproachable essence. This tendency reached its climax in the Areopagite, where His super-essential nature is constantly emphasized. It is seen in the works of Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas as well.”<sup>2799</sup>

### C. Comparison of Neoplatonism and Patristic Theology

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<sup>2789</sup>Ibid., p. 309-310.

<sup>2790</sup>Burgess S. M. *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*. – Peabody, MS: Hendrickson, 1989. – P. 33-34.

<sup>2791</sup>Лосский, р. 25. Author’s translation.

<sup>2792</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>2793</sup>Слово об обожении // под ред. Архимандрита Никона (Иванова) и Протоиерея Николая Лихоманова. – М.: Сибирская Благовонница, 2004. – P. 14. Author’s translation.

<sup>2794</sup>Ibid., p. 19. Author’s translation.

<sup>2795</sup>Куряев А. *Протестантам о православии*. – 7-е изд. – Ростов-на-Дону: Троицкое Слово, 2003. – P. 51. Author’s translation.

<sup>2796</sup>Ibid., p. 55. Author’s translation.

<sup>2797</sup>Ibid., p. 72. Author’s translation.

<sup>2798</sup>Лосский, р. 203. Author’s translation.

<sup>2799</sup>Зайцев, р. 220-221. Author’s translation.

We will now investigate how the Neoplatonic worldview was expressed in the teaching of many Church Fathers and continues to find expression in the Church today, especially in the East. The teaching of the “ascent to God,” characteristic of Plotinus’ philosophy, is well accepted among Eastern Orthodox thinkers. Lossky, for example, writes that God’s “original plan was a direct and unmediated ascent of people to God.”<sup>2800</sup> This ascent is connected to an “effusion” from God and “descent” by God. Florovsky comments on the presence of this idea among earlier writers: “Following St. Gregory and Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Maximus speaks of a charitable effusion or imparting of Good – a Neoplatonic image.”<sup>2801</sup>

We also note in this regard the patristic doctrine of salvation through the incarnation of God’s Son, as discussed and refuted in chapter 10 of volume 3 in this series. The Son of God must become incarnate (i.e., “descend”) in order to become an ontological “bridge” between the uncreated God and created humanity, thus making possible people’s “ascent” to God. Many Church Fathers echoed the following thought: “The Son became man, so that man might become God.” However, representing Jesus as a “bridge” corresponds, in Meyendorff’s words, to an “Alexandrian worldview,” according to which the world is structured by the principle of a hierarchical ladder.”<sup>2802</sup> It is necessary “to fill up the gap between the absolute God and relative creation.”<sup>2803</sup> Meyendorff acknowledges, “This was, however, a Hellenistic cosmology, dressed in Christian clothing.”<sup>2804</sup>

In the following except from Pseudo-Dionysius, we see a clear connection between his theology and the Neoplatonic conception of emanations from the One:

Since the All-perfect Goodness, in passing through all, not only passes to the All-good beings around Itself, but extends Itself to the most remote, by being present to some thoroughly, to others subordinately, but to the rest, in the most remote degree, as each existing thing is able to participate in It. And some things, indeed, participate in the Good entirely, whilst others are deprived of It, in a more or less degree, but others possess a more obscure participation in the Good; and to the rest, the Good is present as a most distant echo.<sup>2805</sup>

Keck claims that Pseudo-Dionysius’ concept of an angelic hierarchy (see chapter 13 in volume 3 in this series) comes from Neoplatonism. He comments, “Each higher order of angels transmits knowledge and instruction through the next lower angels, and only the lowest rank of angels, the angels, interacts with the mundane world directly.”<sup>2806</sup> Burgess adds that the hierarchy of angels aids people to attain unification with God.<sup>2807</sup> In his work *An Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, John of Damascus approves of Pseudo-Dionysius’ concept of an angelic hierarchy (see 2.3).

Furthermore, Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of God as the “One”: “But One, because He is uniquely all, as befits an excess of unique Oneness, and is Cause of all without departing from the One.”<sup>2808</sup> Like the Neoplatonic understanding of the impersonal One, the God of Pseudo-Dionysius is “in absolute rest and does not manifest Himself externally in way.”<sup>2809</sup> Lossky supports this view: “The one God abides in absolute rest,

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<sup>2800</sup>Лосский, р. 280. Author’s translation.

<sup>2801</sup>Florovsky G. *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eight Centuries* / Trans. Raymond Miller, et al. – Postfach: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987. – P. 221-222.

<sup>2802</sup>Мейендорф, р. 304. Author’s translation.

<sup>2803</sup>Ibid. Author’s translation.

<sup>2804</sup>Ibid. Author’s translation.

<sup>2805</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius. *On the Divine Names*, 3.20. *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* / Trans. John Parker. – London: James Parker and Co., 1897. – P. 55-56.

<sup>2806</sup>Keck D. *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages*. – New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. – P. 54, 58.

<sup>2807</sup>Burgess, р. 34.

<sup>2808</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius. *On the Divine Names*, 13.2. *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite*, p. 123.

<sup>2809</sup>Лосский, р. 57. Author’s translation.

and His perfect ‘immobility’ places Him outside of time and space.”<sup>2810</sup> Nikon notes that God, in His essence, enjoys “eternal rest.”<sup>2811</sup> Bray affirms that such a view derives from a Neoplatonism worldview, where God is found in “uninterrupted tranquility.”<sup>2812</sup> Bloesch makes the following objection to “Christian mysticism” in general:

The Christian mystic sought to maintain the catholic doctrine of the Trinity, but by envisaging God in Neoplatonic terms as a motionless, undifferentiated unity they were not able to preserve the biblical conception of a God who actively works in history and identifies with our pain and sorrow. To find the pure god, they said, we need to rise above words and images, time and materiality, to the realm of pure spirit.<sup>2813</sup>

We also find coherence between the Neoplatonic idea that “all returns to the One and unites with Him” and the following statement by Metropolitan of Moscow Philaret: “(His glory) is bestowed from Him, accepted by the participants, returns to Him, and in this, so to speak, the circulation of the glory of God consists of the blessed life and well-being of creation.”<sup>2814</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius concurs, “There is no single thing which does not participate in some way in the one, which uniformly pre-held in the uniqueness throughout all, all and whole, all, even the things opposed.”<sup>2815</sup>

Archimandrite Nikon proposes that people play a key role in this cycle: “People, abiding in God, must lead all creation to deification, for which purpose all creation received its existence from God.”<sup>2816</sup> Florovsky cites the teaching of Maximus the Confessor in this regard: “Man must unite everything in himself and through himself unite with God,”<sup>2817</sup> and, “The multitude of creatures are united around the single human nature.”<sup>2818</sup> Nikon confirms, “The lives of the holy Fathers testify that people who attain a high level of deification, deeply experience their unity with their entire surrounding world, awaiting the revelation of the children of God (Rom 8:18-22).”<sup>2819</sup> Maximus summarizes, “Everything will manifest God alone. Nothing will remain outside of God.... Everything will be deified – God will be everything, and in everything.”<sup>2820</sup>

So then, the human dilemma and dilemma of all creation is a descent into a condition of “disunity,” which leads to disfellowship with the “One.” Lossky writes, “After the original sin, human nature is divided, fractured, and torn apart into many individuals.”<sup>2821</sup> According to the teaching of Maximus the Confessor, the elimination of disunity in creation must take place gradually. First, the distinctions between the male and female genders must go, then between Paradise and earth, heaven and earth, spiritual and sensual nature, and, in conclusion, between the Creator and the creature.<sup>2822</sup>

The apophatic understanding of God’s incomprehensibility also derives from Neoplatonism. Meyendorff writes in this regard, “Dionysius follows apophatic theology: as among Neoplatonists, God is unknowable, ineffable, and cannot be subject to any affirmative definition.”<sup>2823</sup> Lossky acknowledges this similarity: “This

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<sup>2810</sup>Ibid., p. 75. Author’s translation.

<sup>2811</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 18.

<sup>2812</sup>Bray, p. 56.

<sup>2813</sup>Bloesch D. G. God the Almighty. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1995. – P. 176.

<sup>2814</sup>Noted in Лосский, p. 59. Translation by Google Translator.

<sup>2815</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius. On the Divine Names, 13.2. The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite, p. 123.

<sup>2816</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 69. Author’s translation.

<sup>2817</sup>Florovsky, p. 225.

<sup>2818</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 69. Author’s translation.

<sup>2819</sup>Ibid., p. 70. Author’s translation.

<sup>2820</sup>The position of Maximus the Confessor, as represented by Florovsky, p. 244-245.

<sup>2821</sup>Лосский, p. 94. Author’s translation.

<sup>2822</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 69.

<sup>2823</sup>Мейендорф, p. 301. Author’s translation.



approach (i.e. apophatism) is also employed by Neoplatonists and in Hinduism.”<sup>2824</sup> Zaitsev asserts, “It is necessary to note that apophatic theology, although it has a long history in Christian tradition,... in reality arose in Greek philosophy,”<sup>2825</sup> and, “Apophatic theology traces its roots to the mysticism of Origen and Greek philosophy and receives its classic development in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius.”<sup>2826</sup>

A striking parallel exists between the concept of “emanations” from the One and the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of God’s “uncreated energies.” The God of Pseudo-Dionysius has two aspects: “Unities” and “Distinction.” These two aspects correspond to Plotinus’ system of the “One” and its “emanations.” Lossky describes Pseudo-Dionysius’ teaching: “‘Unities’” are ‘secret abidings that do not reveal themselves’ - a super-essential nature in which God abides, as it were, in absolute peace and does not manifest Himself in anything outside. ‘Distinction,’ on the contrary, is the procession of the Divine outward... Its manifestations.”<sup>2827</sup> Zaitsev proposes that the system of “essence – energies” appeared in the works of Proclus and, through Dionysius, spread to the Church.<sup>2828</sup>

In addition, the system of “emanations” reminds us of the Orthodox understanding of the “sole rule” of God the Father, according to which the Son is eternally begotten from Him and the Spirit eternally proceeds from Him. Although patristic theology recognizes that the Son and Spirit’s “emanation” from the Father occurs on the level of God’s essence and not His energies, nonetheless, this “movement” of the Son and Spirit out from the Father strongly hints at a Neoplatonic origin of this idea.

One may also draw a parallel between the Neoplatonic concept of the “Nous” and the patristic understanding of God’s nature. According to Maximus the Confessor, Christ is the “source and focus of an ideal world.”<sup>2829</sup> Zaitsev comments that Clement of Alexandria “thinks of God, in general, as the ‘Nous.’”<sup>2830</sup> Similarly, Nikon speaks of the “Mind” as an irreplaceable element in the process of a person’s ascent to God: “The human mind is merely the reflection of the Eternal and First Mind, to which it corresponds. In this case, the human mind, as a symbol and reflection of the Eternal Mind, teaches us through contemplation of it to ascend to the First Image, the Eternal Mind.”<sup>2831</sup>

Additionally, patristic theology echoes the idea of the penetration of the “World Soul” into the material world. Lossky equates this with the “eternal energies”: “In the created world... exists infinite and eternal energies.”<sup>2832</sup> Similar to Neoplatonic teaching, the Eastern Orthodox teach that the human soul is one of the elements that unites creation with God: “This harmony and unity appears in the connection between the material world and the human body, between the human body and soul, and between the human soul and God.”<sup>2833</sup>

Maximus the Confessor taught that God “encloses, unites, embraces and providentially connects with an internal connection all things that exist among themselves and with Himself.” This “hidden and unknown presence of the unifying Cause is present in all beings in various ways.”<sup>2834</sup> In addition, Maximus’ teaching of spiritual (mental) and sensual (physical) aspects of the world reminds one of the Neoplatonic concept of the relationship between the World Soul and the material world: “The world comprehended by the mind is found in the perceptible world as the spirit (lit. ‘soul’) is in the body, while the perceptible world is joined with the

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<sup>2824</sup>Лосский, р. 204-205. Yet, Lossky stresses that unlike Orthodox Faith, in Neoplatonism and Hinduism God is impersonal.

<sup>2825</sup>Зайцев, р. 214. Author’s translation.

<sup>2826</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 18. Author’s translation.

<sup>2827</sup>Лосский, р. 57. Translation from Google translator.

<sup>2828</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 221-222. Yet, the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius differs from Neoplatonism in that the former taught that God, in His energies, expresses Himself, while in Neoplatonism, the “Nous” and the “World Soul,” being only emanations, are lower in quality than the One (Мейендорф, р. 302).

<sup>2829</sup>Florovsky, р. 243.

<sup>2830</sup>Зайцев, р. 55. Author’s translation.

<sup>2831</sup>Слово об обожении, р. 19. Author’s translation.

<sup>2832</sup>Лосский, р. 59. Author’s translation.

<sup>2833</sup>Слово об обожении, р. 69. Author’s translation.

<sup>2834</sup>*Ibid.*, р. 12. Translation from Google translator.

world comprehended by the mind like the body is joined with the soul.”<sup>2835</sup> Vishnevskaya claims that Maximus went to the extreme of saying that the created world is part of God, and that the *logoi* in the created world subsist in the Logos that existed in God.<sup>2836</sup>

Similarities exist as well in how Neoplatonism and patristic theology describe the “ascent to God.” Both systems require the practice of virtuous living. Peter of Damascus wrote, “In the end they (i.e., the commandments) make a man god, through the grace of Him who has given the commandments to those who choose to keep them.”<sup>2837</sup> Likewise, Maximus the Confessor taught, “Love makes a man god.”<sup>2838</sup> In both systems, along with virtuous living, one must practice contemplation. Nikon states that through contemplation a person can “ascend to the First Image, the Eternal Mind.”<sup>2839</sup>

After mastering these ethical and meditative practices, the final step in both systems is mystical unification with God (or the One). In Lossky’s words, the worshipper must aim for the goal of “unification with God in His energies, or unification by grace, making us participants in the Divine nature.”<sup>2840</sup> Maximus the Confessor says the same: “He should make man a god through union with Himself.”<sup>2841</sup>

Maximus’ description of the believer’s ascent to God, as described by Florovsky, precisely matches the one proposed in Neoplatonism.<sup>2842</sup> The first step is recognizing the Logos in the created world (i.e., the “World Soul”): “The problem with knowledge is to see and recognize in the world its first-created foundations.”<sup>2843</sup> Thus, one begins with a more elementary contemplative task before attempting unification with God. Next, one moves on to the level of the “Mind” and then beyond: “The mind must leave the mental or intellectual world and ascend even higher to the mysterious darkness of Divinity itself,” and, “The mind rises higher than forms and ideas, and communicates with Divine unity and peace.”<sup>2844</sup> Finally, “Only towards the end does the mind which is hardened in prayerful ‘ordeal’ know God.”<sup>2845</sup>

## D. Conclusion

We note many obvious and striking similarities between Neoplatonism, patristic theology, and Eastern Orthodoxy in their views on God and unification with Him. They are not merely chance occurrences, but arise from a common source – the city of Alexandria. It is not accidental that, in general, the Alexandrian Fathers developed and promoted this teaching in the Church.

Eastern Orthodox theologians often object that the similarities between their faith and Neoplatonism do not concern the contents of their teaching, but simply the form of its expression.<sup>2846</sup> In other words, the Alexandrian Fathers did not borrow a worldview from Neoplatonism, but only structures and terminology in order to express Christian truth in a way more acceptable to their culture.

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<sup>2835</sup>Florovsky, p. 224.

<sup>2836</sup>*Ambiguities*, 7, taken from Vishnevskaya T. *Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor* // Christensen M. J., Wittung J. A. *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. – Madison: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2007. – P. 140.

<sup>2837</sup>*Treasury of Divine Knowledge* (in *Philokalia*, 3.93), noted in Clendenin D. *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994. – P. 137.

<sup>2838</sup>*Various Texts on Theology*, 1:27-32 (in *Philokalia* 2:171), noted in Clendenin, p. 136-137.

<sup>2839</sup>Слово об обожении, p. 19. Author’s translation.

<sup>2840</sup>Лосский, p. 67-68. Author’s translation.

<sup>2841</sup>See Florovsky, p. 216.

<sup>2842</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 259, 284.

<sup>2843</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>2844</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>2845</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>2846</sup>Лосский, p. 25-27; Иларион А. *Таинство Веры*. – М.: Издательство Братства Святителя Тихона, 1996. – P. 222; Мейендорф, p. 303.

We admit that differences do exist between these groups. For example, in Neoplatonism there are no distinctions in the One, while patristic teaching acknowledges the Trinity. In addition, in Neoplatonism the emanations are manifestations of the One, while Orthodoxy teaches creation from nothing. Furthermore, Neoplatonists strive for unification with God, while the Fathers maintain the preservation of a person's individuality. Another distinction is that patristic theology teaches the deification of the human body, which Neoplatonism rejects. Finally, Neoplatonism does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Therefore, we concur that the teachings of Neoplatonism and patristic/Eastern Orthodox theology are not identical. Nonetheless, there are enough common characteristics between these systems and sufficient differences from biblical revelation to confidently conclude that, in many ways, patristic/Eastern Orthodox theology is not Christianity expressed in the form of Neoplatonism, but Neoplatonism adapted to Christian teaching. We will list several foundational concepts common between Neoplatonism and patristic theology which have no biblical support, i.e., they are foreign to true Christianity:

- Apophatic depiction of God's essence;
- Impassibility and immobility of God's essence;
- Distinction between God's essence and His energies;
- The interpenetration of God's energies into creation;
- Creation of an ontological "bridge" between God and people;
- Return of all creation to God and its unification with Him;
- Deification of humans and all creation;
- Salvation through good works and contemplation, leading to unification with God.

It is misguided to think that these commonalities are simply random overlaps with Neoplatonism, or that they play an insignificant role in patristic/Eastern Orthodox theology – they form the heart of patristic thought. These points do not align with Christian faith based on Scripture, but align with the philosophical system of Plotinus and his followers, whether pagan or Christian.

One must also ask that if the main reason the Eastern Fathers used this method was to communicate Christian truth to their culture, then why should the Church continue to employ this system today? These concepts are completely foreign to the modern mind and do not clarify spiritual truths, but rather muddle them.

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