

T3 BIBLE PROGRAMME

COURSE 5:
**Coming to Know God:
The Doctrine of Salvation**



Coming to Know God: The Doctrine of Salvation

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Title

Coming to Know God: The Doctrine of Salvation

Objective

The objective of this course is to help students come to know God specifically in the area of our Salvation. Our aim is to understand more of what Christ has accomplished on our behalf and learn what it means to work out our salvation. We want to be disciples of Jesus who know the Father and obey Him.

Synopsis

In this course, we focus on the theme of Salvation. The Doctrine of Salvation is explained and applied by looking at Scripture primarily. We will focus on the atonement and various pictures God gives us to understand the work of the Cross, especially as it relates to His love, and how His love relates to suffering and sickness. We will spend time working through God's "process" or "order of Salvation" as theologians call it, in saving people. This includes coming to know God through initial conviction of sin and calling, to receiving glorified bodies when Christ returns.

Duration

The course content, if running this along with the filmed teachings, will be covered over 8-sessions, with each session split into approximately two 45-minute blocks of teaching time. If this course is being covered by a live presenter, the time frame may differ. Please confirm it with them.

Requirements

Try not to miss a single one! No prior study of Scripture is necessarily needed, however, bear in mind that this is not a foundational course. We will be digging deeper into Theological truths. Should you not have some basic foundational truths in place, we encourage you to first attend a foundation or introductory type of course, to give you a better foundation to build on. *Please note this is not an accredited programme/course.

Tools

You will need your Bible, a pen and should you wish, a notebook for additional note taking.

Assessment

The best way to learn is through application and interaction with the course content. For this reason, we have included a final optional assessment/activity. Depending on how your course is being run, this may be for self-study, a required part of your course or something you can complete at your leisure. Just check with your course coordinator. Don't fear, this is not an exam. It will merely be an opportunity for you to reflect on and apply what you have learnt during the course. *If you do this as part of self-study, you may want to ask a pastor/elder if you can submit it to them for their input. No marking memo has been provided.

T3 Bible Programme

The T3 Bible Programme consists of 8 Courses with each course made up of Modules. The course work can either be covered with live presentations from pastors/teachers, or filmed recordings of teachings are available. The pace at which the course work is covered is based on the organiser's preference. The course work is taught generally in the filmed teachings and does not necessarily unpack the course notes in a systematic manner. It is recommended students read the notes on their own, before or after sessions, and spend time reflecting and interacting with the notes.

Each course is a stand-alone course and it is not necessary to have attended prior courses or to complete the entire T3 Programme in order.

*A reminder that the T3 Bible Programme is NOT an accredited or registered programme. It is for informal study only. Should you wish to work towards a formal certificate/ diploma/ degree you will need to sign up to a registered and accredited programme with a recognised institution.

Programme Outline

- Course 1: Doctrine of Revelation: God Speaks
- Course 2: In the Beginning
- Course 3: The Fall
- Course 4: Understanding the Old Testament
- Course 5: Coming to Know God: The Doctrine of Salvation ... **YOU ARE HERE**
- Course 6: Growing in God
- Course 7: Church and the Kingdom
- Course 8: Eschatology: The Doctrine of Last Things

Interacting with the Notes

Keep an eye out for **REFLECTION** opportunities in the course notes, where you can pause, reflect and have some space to engage with some questions or additional thoughts. There are also **FOCUS POINTS** which provide additional information and summaries or expound on previous information etc. These are always interesting reads and worth going over outside of "class time".

We trust that as you study and pursue God, seeking His face, that you will encounter Him even more and dig foundations that will take you deeper, make you stronger and will impact on the church and the Kingdom of God, for many years to come.

Blessings,

T3 Teaching Team

ASSESSMENT TASK (OPTIONAL)

Coming to Know God: The Doctrine of Salvation

Answer these question by using your T3 notes and your Bible as your guide.

Question 1:

Define what salvation is and use at least 3 Scriptures to explain how salvation involves having a past, present, and future dimension (one for each aspect). (200 words or less)

Question 2:

The salvation purchased for us through the Cross of Jesus is often illustrated in the Bible with terms such as “propitiation”, “redemption”, “justification” and “reconciliation”. These Biblical images describe different facets of the cross.

Question 3:

Choose one of the four terms and explain how it describes the cross, and discuss why you have chosen that specific word and its meaning for you personally. (200 words or less)

Question 4:

Jesus was a man of emotion and feeling. He suffered and experienced the reality of life on earth. Explain how this truth comforts you and helps you to have the courage to walk as Jesus did. (100 words or less)

Question 5:

Sanctification is a very important Bible word in the life of a Christian. Explain what sanctification is and describe an area in your life where God is busy sanctifying you. (100 words or less)

NB Assessment Guidelines

- Use Scripture to back up your point of view, where applicable.
 - Don't just repeat course content but use the course content as a “springboard” for your own ideas and to show that you have a working understanding of the concepts covered.
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INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

The Story of God

This teaching programme is about helping you immerse yourself into the story of God and the main characters that make up the story. The moment we came to Christ, we became part of the story of God, and our personal life stories find meaning within His grand meta-narrative. All the content in this programme is the telling of this story.

God's story has four parts to it as revealed in the Bible. Here is a brief overview of each:

1. **Creation.** The creation account in Genesis describes how God created all things as good. He created humans in His image, with the intent that we would live in fellowship with Him and serve as co-regents with God over the earth, being wise stewards over all He has made.
2. **Fall.** The Scriptures explain that man defies God and is cut off from the fellowship and intimacy he once had. The Holy Creator God simply cannot fellowship with sinful man. While Man is still in God's image, that image has been corrupted and twisted through sin and the desire for self-rule. Because of man's sinful choices, even the earth itself comes under a curse.
3. **Redemption.** God in His mercy promises to rescue and redeem man's sinful condition and restore creation back into right relationship with Him. This great rescue plan is promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament through the ministry of Jesus. God's great plan of renewing all things begins in Jesus.
4. **Consummation.** The climax of the story when God finishes His project of redeeming the world through Jesus. He finally puts every enemy under His feet including death, sickness and Satan.

This is the greatest story ever told. God wins and gets the glory and He graciously allows us to share in His glory. This great overriding story or meta-narrative is what gives our life meaning and purpose. We are a part then of God's great story to renew all things and bring us into true life. We have one truth and one Lord and our individual stories find meaning within the 'big picture.'

What is Theology?

Theology (from the Greek: *Theos* meaning "God", and *logos* meaning "study or discourse") is essentially the study of God – who is the 'main character' in the story we have looked at.

In our passion to "study" God and get to know Him, we will take a closer look at doctrine. Doctrine (from Greek: *Didache* meaning, "teaching or instruction") is simply the teaching on a specific subject or topic in the whole Bible. So to use the analogy of a builder - in order to build a house, you need to construct it section by section and brick by brick. Doctrine is like the bricks we use to build. Theology is like the house.

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MODULE 1: INTRODUCING THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Salvation is the most important theme in the Bible and is weaved throughout God's great story; a story that paints in vivid detail, the creation, our rebellion and fall, and God's ongoing kindness that led to Him giving His Son as the means of saving us.

The aim of this course is that you will come to understand more of what God has accomplished on our behalf, learn how to walk out this great salvation, and ultimately come to know God and obey Him. For those, *"who know their God shall stand firm and take action"* (Daniel 11:32).

Salvation as a Theme in the Bible

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." - Acts 4:12

We are dealing with a word/term that applies exclusively to God, "there is salvation in no one else" ... therefore music, education, marriage and money cannot bring salvation. Neither can it be found in heroic political figures or those who wield great worldly power. The Bible explains that salvation can only be found in One Name: the Name of Jesus. It is through the Son of God alone that we can truly come to know God the Father. Only the Lord Himself has a true claim to this word of "salvation".

FOCUS POINT

Obviously in the English language, we also use the word "save" in other contexts, for example, "I saved you a slice of pizza," or "my friend helped save our marriage". However, in an absolute sense, only God truly saves.

Defining Salvation

The foundations of the term: Salvation - noun: Hebrew, *yēša* and Greek, *sōtēria*.

In the words of Thomas Oden, a theologian, salvation is:

"... one of the most comprehensive terms of Christian teaching, gathering into a single word-picture a broad range of theological loci crucial to the Christian life: redemption, reconciliation, atonement, propitiation, predestination, calling, covenant, grace, conviction, repentance, forgiveness, justification, adoption, faith, conversion, regeneration, sanctification, and perseverance¹"

¹ Oden, Thomas C. *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*.

Salvation as Rescue

Rescue from Sin

God rescues us from our sins (Matthew 1:21; John 3:17; Acts 5:31). Sinning or rebelling against God's commands has separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2) so that even mankind's best moral efforts are displeasing to God (Isaiah 64:6). Hence, our alienation from God has resulted in spiritual death (Romans 6:23) and caused us to be in the kingdom of darkness (Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 1:13, 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19) and under the wrath of God, deserving His judgement (John 3:18, 36; Ephesians 2:3; Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-11). This is the "negative" aspect that is so vital to the gospel message and is God's tool to convict the world of their need for a Saviour.

Rescue for Relationship and to Rule

God rescues us for a relationship with God and to rule with Him. This is the "positive" aspect and the ultimate purpose God has for us (Genesis 1:26; Ephesians 1:3-14; Revelation 1:5-6). He restores us back into the image of God (Genesis 1:27), back to becoming, as NT Wright says, "a fully flourishing human being". He not only saves us to know Him (John 17:3) but we are saved to serve and to do good works.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." - Ephesians 2:10

REFLECTION

The modern church has often watered down the gospel message. We urge people to come to Christ, but without first warning them of real dangers if they don't. Evangelism involves telling the "bad news" first, and then the "good news" will be seen as truly good. When you share with others about your salvation experience, are you giving enough attention to this truth?

"A God without wrath brought men without sin into a Kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross" - Richard Niebuhr (the theologian who was critical of a liberal watered-down theology prevalent in his day)

NOTES:

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Salvation in Three Tenses

We often see salvation as something that has happened purely as a past event. In this section, a more Biblical view of salvation as having the past, present and future dimension will be discussed.

"It is important not to forget that the Scriptures describe salvation in three tenses - the past, present, and future. To ignore any one of these tenses or aspects of salvation will cause us to have a skewed or unhealthy view of salvation as a whole." - Paul Washer

Past Tense

We have been saved. These Scriptures emphasise the event or experience that took place when you received Christ as Lord. It involves looking back to the moment when God saved you (Ephesians 2:5; Romans 5:1; Romans 10:9-10; Titus 3:4-5). We will look at terms such as "Justification" and "Regeneration" that primarily describe our salvation as a past event.

Present Tense

We are being saved. These Scriptures emphasise the process, or outworking, of our salvation (1 Corinthians 15:1-2; Romans 1:16; John 8:31; Hebrews 3:6-14; 2 Peter 1:10-11). We will look at terms such as "Sanctification" and "Perseverance".

Future Tense

We will be saved. These Scriptures emphasise the consummation or completion of our salvation (Matthew 24:13; Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Philippians 1:6; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:12; Hebrews 9:28). We will look at terms such as "Glorification".

FOCUS POINT

It is very easy for us to read Scripture selectively or through a certain "grid" where we can miss the texts that point to a future salvation. Pay careful attention when reading your Bible, you'll find countless Scriptures pointing to our ultimate future hope.

What It Means for us Living Within "The Three Tenses"

Salvation Involves Not Only an Event but Also a Process

David Pawson explains that,

"The gospel is about the 'the Way' of salvation, along which we need to travel to reach our destination".

In some key salvation texts, all three tenses interfuse. For example,

"For the grace of God has appeared (past tense), bringing salvation to all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions ... and to live ... godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed (future) hope" - Titus 2:11-13

“For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” - Romans 8:24

This process is a life-long journey of God transforming us into His image. Therefore, faithful endurance is an important part of our walk with God (Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 10:36-39, 12:1).

Repentance remains a recurring act within the Christian life and faith requires a continuing self-denial, confession and ongoing penitence (Revelation 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). To claim you have genuine salvation and faith, it is not done by only pointing back, but also by pointing to present fruit (2 Peter 1:10). The problem with those who refer to salvation only in the past tense manner is that it is misleading because it gives a false sense that, “you have arrived”. Conversion is the event and the starting point, not the end goal.

Salvation Means Looking Forward

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus will, “*appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*” (Hebrews 9:28). In Romans 8:24, Paul explains that Christians along with all creation, live in hope for a future glory. Our salvation then will only be completed when Jesus comes again, and therefore we are to live in hope and eager expectation for God to finally drive out the presence and power of sin on the earth (1 John 3:2; Hebrews 6:5).

Salvation Has a Cosmic Dimension

We think of salvation and coming to know God as an intensively personal experience. This is often reflected in our worship songs! We think in very personal narrow terms but there is a larger cosmic dimension God has in mind.

The Bible explains that it's not just individuals that will come to know the Lord but all of creation. God isn't just interested in souls but in all aspects of what He has made. All creation came under the curse of sin, and all creation, including our bodies, will be fully redeemed (Romans 8:19-23; Colossians 1:18-20; Habakkuk 2:14; Revelation 11:15).

Salvation Means Engaging Rather Than Escaping

Some of the church hold to an “escape” theology when it comes to salvation. In other words, they think God rescues and saves them in order to escape this world. Jesus' prayer to the Father for the disciples was not aimed to aid their escape from the world but rather their commission into it (John 17:15-18). Some within the Thessalonian church were fixated with the Second Coming of Christ and were looking for an opportunity to escape. The result was that many became idle (1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6) in waiting for Christ's return. Paul had to remind them to keep working hard and to do good (2 Thessalonians 3).

As we anticipate and expect the return of Jesus, God still desires us to be working and engaging with our culture, rather than passively waiting (Matthew 24:46). We are called to have an “engage” theology. God rescues us to bring God's Kingdom onto the earth (Matthew 6:10, 28:19) and to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16) that needs to be distributed and spread out in order to be effective.

REFLECTION

Biblical salvation is much broader than many Christians realise. God has begun this redemptive “salvation project” through the Cross and will ultimately complete it and redeem all He has made when Jesus finally returns in power and glory. Ask God today to be part of His “salvation project” on the earth.

MODULE 2: SALVATION THROUGH THE CROSS

The Doctrine of Salvation is the teaching of how God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, rescues and saves people from their sin.

Scripture teaches us that we are saved through the cross. We have been, "*reconciled to God by the death of His Son*" (Romans 5:10). This module focuses squarely on the work of the cross; where we will be digging deeper into the mystery of the cross, and trust that God will give us greater revelation into His magnificent sacrificial death. We will also be referring to John Stott's landmark book, *The Cross of Christ*; it provides profound insights and revelation into the cross to guide us in our learning.

The Symbol of the Cross

Symbols are signs that tell a story, or convey a message or communicate something with a perceived or actual value. We find that life is full of symbols.

FOCUS POINT

Religious Symbols of the Monotheistic faiths:

Judaism: The Star of David

Islam: The Crescent of the Moon

Christianity: The Cross (originally the cross was avoided as a symbol)

The cross is the symbol of the Christian faith, but it didn't start out that way, certainly not for the first 100 years or so of the growth and expansion of the church as it came under severe persecution. As John Stott says,

*"... the cross... was at first avoided, not only for its direct association with Christ but for its shameful association with the execution of a common criminal also"*²

Over the first 100 years or so of the church, there were found within the catacombs outside of Rome basic drawings of peacocks, a dove, an athlete's victory palm and most often a fish. *Ichtyos* ("Fish") was an acronym for *Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter* ("Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour"). This symbol had no visual significance and therefore did not remain for long.

As Christianity grew and spread the Cross became the chosen symbol. It was part of the story God Himself was weaving into human history. As the expansion continued, early Christians would not only draw, paint or engrave the cross as a symbol of their faith but also made the sign of the cross on their person.

Yet, for most in the Greek world, the cross was not a symbol of salvation, but torture. The cross, like that on which Jesus was killed, was a tortuous killing machine, likely invented by the Barbarians and then adopted by the Greeks and Romans; this is why the cross is so confounding!

² Stott, John R. W. *The Cross of Christ*.

Propitiation

There are four Scriptures in the New Testament that use the word “propitiation” and apply it to the cross - Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17 and 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

For example, Paul writes in Romans 3:25 and explains that Christ was, “*put forward as a propitiation by his blood*”.

Propitiation then, “*introduces us to the image of rituals at a shrine*” (Stott) with the focus on sacrifice for sin. Propitiation refers to, “*a means of appeasing*” (Liddell) or, “*to appease or pacify his anger*” (Stott). Piper defines it as, “*the removal of God’s wrath by providing a substitute*” and so it vividly describes how the Father’s just wrath was satisfied through Jesus the sacrificial lamb bearing the penalty of our sin.

God’s wrath should not be seen as a harsh or demanding payment for sin, but rather needs to be understood in the light of His nature being full of grace, mercy and love. His love and His wrath needn’t be contradictory; it is because God is full of love that He must hate evil.

REFLECTION

When we think of words such as “anger” or “wrath” we associate it with emotional outbursts that often break down relationships. God’s wrath is very different to ours. He is slow to anger while we often react when others hurt us. God’s wrath is really His steady, controlled anger against all types of sin. It is how He feels about all sin and injustice.

Do you think it is right to also express anger at times?

It’s important to note that propitiation as a Biblical doctrine raises a key question with regard to the nature and character of God.

An important question that theologians ask is, “Is Jesus’ death, propitiation, in the strict sense of placating God’s wrath or in the wider sense of ‘expiation’ (as covering human sin)?” In other words, does the translation of the Greek/Hebrew words to read as propitiation cast the character of God as a bad tempered, angry old man and vice versa?

FOCUS POINT

Propitiation = appeasing / pacifying His anger

Expiation = covering or forgiving of human sin

In answer to that question, Dr David Wells gives a very well balanced explanation:

“In Pauline thought, a man is alienated from God by sin and God is alienated from man by wrath. It is in the substitutionary death of Christ that sin is overcome and wrath averted, so that God can look on man without displeasure and man can look on God without fear. Sin is expiated and God is propitiated”

So God Himself, through Christ, was the very object of the Father’s own wrath and therefore appeased His righteous anger by being a substitute for us, allowing Himself to bear the pain and punishment we should have born. This is the wonder of propitiation, revealing to us the grace of God. Thank God for the Cross!

The Ransom Theory

Through early church history, many theologians understood the atonement primarily through the imagery of ransom.

“It dominated the church’s thinking until the time of Anselm and Abelard. It was even the primary way in which Augustine understood the atonement, and thus it enjoyed the immense prestige that the name accorded⁵” - Erickson

Some of the early theologians, such as Origen and later Gregory of Nyssa who further developed Origen’s view, understood ransom to refer to the atonement as a transaction, the paying of a ransom price to Satan because we have been slaves to sin, under his rule and dominion.

However, it must be made clear that there is no Biblical evidence that Satan had to be “paid off” and demanded the life of Jesus in return for lost souls.

“What happened to Satan when Christ died was not payment, but defeat⁶” -John Piper

Scripture makes it clear that there was no deal or negotiation with Satan. Hebrews 2:14, says that Jesus became a man so, *“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil”*. The emphasis here is on defeat and destruction, and not a work of satisfying Satan’s demands.

So if Jesus paid the ransom price for our salvation, to whom did He pay it?

The ransom that was paid was a ransom to God Himself. The New Testament says repeatedly that Jesus offered Himself to God, not the devil. For example, *“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God”* (Ephesians 5:2), and Jesus, *“offered himself without blemish to God”* (Hebrews 9:14). This, however, does not mean that God enslaved us but rather that we have been enslaved by sin, the devil, and our own sinful desires (Titus 3:3; Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 1:13; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19).

REFLECTION

If Jesus has redeemed you from a life of slavery to sin and the kingdom of Satan, are there any areas in your life in which you might still be allowing sin to enslave you? Jesus has bought your freedom but you need to believe it and walk in it.

⁵ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*.

⁶ Piper, John. *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die*.

Conflict and Reconciliation

Ken Sande explains that there are three basic ways people often respond to conflict:

Escape Response

This is when the reaction is to avoid the conflict. It often takes the form of denial or running from the issue, while the extreme reaction is one of suicide.

Attack Response

This is when the reaction is to try to win the conflict. Some see it as an opportunity to assert their rights through force, intimidation, or for example, litigation. Murder is the extreme form of an attack response.

"Good Christians, just as they are slow to anger, should be slow to sue" - Antonin Scalia, US Supreme Court Judge

Biblical Response

- **To overlook sin.** This is only possible if it is not a serious issue or something that is causing a relational split. *"It is to a man's glory to overlook an offence"* (Proverbs 19:11); *"Love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).
- **To reconcile** (Matthew 5:23-24). This can happen when the offence becomes so great that one cannot overlook it. It causes a relational breakdown.

Our sin against God is so great that God cannot overlook it. He has dealt with it through the Cross - thereby reconciling us back to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18; Colossians 1:19-20).

REFLECTION

This reconciliation we have with God means we can now have peace with one another (Ephesians 2:13-16; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:22). The sign to the world of God's reconciliation with us is now proven by our reconciliation, love and peace with one another (Matthew 5:9; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14, 4:20). Handling conflict situations in a Godly way is a testimony to the world as it shows God's peacemaking character to our community and unsaved friends.

We Are Unable to Initiate Reconciliation Towards God

The Bible tells us that we are unable to initiate reconciliation with God because *"we were by nature children of wrath"* (Ephesians 2:3) and were, therefore, unable to truly love God or obey Him. This means our natural default is not towards submitting to God but rather rebelling against Him.

There are some key Scriptures that deal with our "natural" tendency to rebel from God. Our sinful state is described in this text, *"the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot"* (Romans 8:7). Romans 5, describes our natural state when God chose to die on the cross for us. The passage uses words such as, *"weak"* (v6), *"sinners"* (v8) and *"enemies"* (v10). In other words, we see that we did not, meet God half-way or do anything in our ability to earn or achieve salvation. (1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:14; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 1:21).

God saves us not only from our lost state but from our hostility and rebellion against Him. Reconciliation then is truly an initiating action on the part of God.

FOCUS POINT

What is significant is that not only is our sin dealt with in Christ's work of reconciliation and our attitude toward God changed from rebellion to faith, but that God's attitude and barrier towards us is dealt with. He, "has something against" (Matthew 5:23) us. But God took the steps Himself to remove His own judgement against us by sending Jesus in our place (2 Corinthians 5:21). God's demand for righteousness and holiness in Man was met by Jesus, our substitute, who was completely obedient and faithful to the law.

REFLECTION

"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" - Hebrews 12:14

Are there people in your life with whom you need to make right with and reconcile? If they are not prepared to reconcile, would you be prepared to at least forgive and release your anger or unforgiveness towards them, before God?

Knowing God through the Cross

God Reveals Himself Through Jesus' Life

In the Old Testament God revealed His glory through nature and history, however in the New Testament, God has revealed His glory primarily through Jesus,

"And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" - John 1:14

The writer to the Hebrews states,

"He is the radiance of the glory of God" - Hebrews 1:3

God Reveals Himself Through Jesus' Death

The revelation of God is seen through the life of Jesus as He dwelt among men and also through His death. Jesus Himself said, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified" (John 12:23), in referring to His death. Later in John, in referring to His death, Jesus says, "Father, the hour has come, glorify your son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Jesus makes it clear that both the Father and the Son are revealed by the cross.

What does the cross then reveal about God? Specifically, the Bible shows us it reveals **His love** and **His justice**. Both aspects are important to know as we desire to follow and obey Him.

God's Love

"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" - Romans 5:8

The cross provides evidence of God's love towards us. The verb, "shows" (Greek verb *συνίστημι*) indicates, "something to be known by action" and, "to demonstrate" (Louw and Nida). John explains that through the action and obedience of Jesus on the cross, Jesus displayed God's love,

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." – John 3:16

Some, however, cannot reconcile God's love with Christ's death. In other words, how does God demonstrate His loving kindness through the bloody death of His Son?

Some have viewed the atonement as a violent act that encourages others to act violently. Some view the idea of penal substitution as, "divine child abuse" (Brown and Parker) and see the cross as an act that, "legitimizes violence and abuse". How do we answer these accusations?

The Father Sent His Precious Son

Perhaps the love of God shown in the cross is easier to grasp when we realise that, "God was active in and through Christ" (Stott) suffering for our sins. In a very real sense, the Father suffered with the Son in His love for sinners (2 Corinthians 5:19).

It cost the Father by sending His Son. For example, in John 3:16, John explains that God's love for the world was shown in His willingness to give up His "only son". The word "only" in Greek was used of an only child (Luke 7:12, 9:38). It also emphasised something unique, such as Abraham's child of promise, Isaac (Hebrews 11:17). We get this picture from John 3:16, that Jesus was the unique, one-of-a-kind Son who was very precious to the Father (John 1:14, 3:18).

FOCUS POINT

It is undeniable that the cross was a violent act but we can only understand God's love in it when we realise that it cost God the death and suffering of His precious Son in order to save us.

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God's Justice

Having covered the love of God in Christ on the cross we can now turn our attention to God's Justice through Christ on the cross.

The Big Picture

Due to original sin, the Bible is clear that all of humankind (outside of Christ) live under the weight of sin. This weight of sin is a result of the transgressing of the holy standards and commandments of our Creator God. Therefore, at the heart of what God accomplished through Christ on the Cross, is the incredible justice of God in doing away with the guilty verdict which sin pronounced against us.

And so we see as we read Scripture and the New Testament in particular, that God has acted in and through Jesus Christ to abolish the weight of that sin and to declare us guilt free; wholly justified to stand before a holy God.

God's Justice Executed on the Cross

Galatians 4:4 says, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law". How? Through the Cross!

Romans 3:25-26, explains how the cross demonstrates God's justice and in Christ He was able to punish sin, yet forgive sinners.

"God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" - Romans 3:25-26 (NIV)

Romans 3:25-26, fits into the section of Romans in which Paul is explaining the righteousness of God. It is explained that this righteousness, "from God" (v21) is a gift that we receive by faith in the atoning sacrifice (v25) of Jesus for our sins. The righteousness of God is the righteous status that He bestows on sinners. Yet, the Bible is clear that God is a Righteous Judge who feels a holy wrath against sinners; against His creatures' rebellion against His holy law, which is rebellion ultimately against God Himself, because His law expresses His character. But if God is truly righteous and just, He should be punishing us for our sin and not justifying us.

*"If God does not justly punish sin, he would be 'unjust to himself' as Anselm put it?"
- John Stott*

Paul places such an emphasis on the work of the cross as a demonstration of God's justice that he mentions it in verse 25 and again in verse 26. In the first instance Paul looks back to the past and says that the cross demonstrates God's justice, because, "in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished". Clearly, the case is that "although in his forbearance he temporarily left sins unpunished, now in justice he has punished them, by condemning them in Christ".

So God chose to delay His punishment of sinners and restrain Himself in the past, not due to His lack of righteousness but because of His mercy and patience towards us. At the right time, His wrath against sin was publicly demonstrated through condemning sin through the perfect sacrifice of Christ's death and hence was able to demonstrate His justice. Wiersbe comments that "The animal sacrifices in the Old Testament never took away sin; but when Jesus died, He reached all the way back to Adam and took care of those sins".

⁷ Stott, John R. W. *The Cross of Christ*.

God's Authority

We will now look at a third aspect of God – His authority. God's authority was displayed at the cross in the way He conquered evil, endured suffering and bore our sin and sickness. Understanding this will enable you to have the confidence to walk in God's authority and to know that we are called to be, *"more than conquerors through him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37).

Over Evil

Jesus died on the cross to conquer evil and destroy Satan's influence over mankind. We will see that the Lord Jesus is indeed the glorious, conquering Saviour and that the crucifixion dealt a deathblow to the enemies of God. John Stott has described God's conquest over evil in six stages, with the decisive victory taking place at the cross.

God's Conquest in Six Stages

1. **Conquest Predicted.** In Genesis 3, God pronounces judgement over the serpent for his deception to Adam and Eve saying, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (v. 15). Here the conquest of Satan is predicted through the woman's offspring, the Messiah, Jesus. Theologians call this pronouncement the *protoevangelium* or the "first gospel". It is the first declaration of the good news, showing God's intent to save and redeem. We are also the "offspring" of Eve but left to our own, we will never have victory over sin or evil. We need to trust in the ultimate offspring – Jesus.
2. **Conquest Begun in the Ministry of Jesus.** The Lord Jesus burst onto the scene ministering in Palestine around AD 30 preaching, *"repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17) meaning that the Kingdom was not just, *"something which would appear in the immediate future, but as a reality... manifested in his own person and ministry"* (Ridderbos). So we see God's Kingdom advancing while demonic strongholds are destroyed before it. Demons are cast out, sickness is healed and nature itself acknowledges its Lord.
3. **Conquest Achieved at the Cross – Decisive Stage.** Scripture clearly shows that the Cross was the place of God's decisive victory. It was, *"through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil"* (Hebrews 2:14) and in explaining the Cross, Paul wrote, *"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him"* (Colossians 2:15).
4. **Conquest Confirmed and Announced – The Resurrection.** The resurrection confirmed the work of the cross in the sense of validating Christ's divinity, authority and power over the devil, death and sin (John 2:19-21; Mark 9:31; 1 Corinthians 15:13,16).
5. **Conquest Extended.** This refers to the church going out in obedience to the great commission in Matthew 28:18, going in the authority of Christ and by the power of the Spirit to extend the Kingdom of God in the nations.
6. **Conquest Consummated – When Christ Returns.** It is, *"at his coming"* (1 Corinthians 15:23) that, *"he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power"* (v. 24) and finally, *"The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (v. 26).

God as A Being Who Can Suffer

Divine impassibility is ultimately not Scriptural because there are so many texts that refer to God's emotions. Some of them might be figures of speech, but they must refer to some greater reality. We see that while it is true that God does not have sinful passions or emotions, the Bible does describe Him as being a personal and emotive being who responds and interacts with His creation. The whole scope of Biblical revelation describes God as experiencing emotions of love, delight, joy, suffering and agony.

"The biblical evidence, in both testaments, pictures God as a being who can suffer⁸"
– DA Carson

He is described as yearning with a broken heart for His Son who has rebelled against Him (Jeremiah 31:20), and as a Lover who has suffered because His Bride is adulterous and unfaithful (Jeremiah 3; Hosea 11:8-9). He is also one who bears the unjust complaints of His people (Micah 6:3). In the New Testament we see Jesus is shown as angry and distressed, weeping over Jerusalem because of their rebellion and unfaithfulness (Luke 19:41-42), and there are many other examples which show Christ, the full revelation of the Father, as full of emotion (Isaiah 53:3; John 11:35; Luke 19:41; Hebrews 5:7).

God and the Suffering of Christ

God's suffering is seen in its clearest sense in Christ. The profound truth is that God came as a man and suffered on the earth. The Bible says He suffered in His life through temptation. Hebrews 2:18 says Christ, "suffered when tempted" and therefore is able to, "sympathise with our weaknesses" (4:15). His death by crucifixion, however, was the greatest example of His suffering, and the one that offers us as His disciples the greatest comfort as we follow our Lord. The New Testament explains in context of His death, "Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Luke 24:46); "We share abundantly in Christ's sufferings" (2 Corinthians 1:5); "Christ suffered in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:1); "Christ suffered for you" (1 Peter 2:21).

REFLECTION

Does the fact that Jesus was a man of emotion and feeling bring you any comfort? Why, and how so? And do you think that the emotion He experienced makes God somehow seem more approachable as we confess and pray through the reality of the up's and downs of life?

⁸ Carson, D. A. *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*.

REFLECTION

Honestly evaluate how you process suffering and pain in regard to your relationship with Christ. When something happens that brings pain, do you play the God blame game? Or do you factor in that God Himself might well have brought the pain your way in order to test and mature your faith?

We acknowledge that there is much mystery in understanding suffering and in some of the seemingly senseless things that happen to God's people. Be encouraged in knowing that God experienced suffering on the cross in overcoming sin and evil so that one day we would experience full joy and an eternal life, free of suffering (2 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 3:1-11; Revelation 21:4).

Over Sickness

Physical sickness came as a result of the fall of Adam. All disease and illness, which leads to physical death is simply a result of the curse from the fall of our first parents (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 6:33). Although God can use sickness for our greater good, it is an enemy of the Kingdom, an intrusion which was not part of God's original order (Deuteronomy 7:15; Revelation 21:4).

The Cross and Healing

Jesus redeemed us from the curse of sickness when He died on the cross. The Messianic text in Isaiah explains that *"Surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows ... with his wounds we are healed"* (Isaiah 53:5). This Scripture, in referring to the atonement, is applied in the New Testament for spiritual and physical healing. Peter refers to it in context of spiritual healing (1 Peter 2:24) while Matthew refers to it in context of physical healing (Matthew 8:16-17).

The New Testament shows us that Jesus had authority over all sickness and sin. Luke describes Him as one who, *"went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil"* (Acts 10:38). No sickness was too difficult for Jesus to heal. He raised the dead (Matthew 9:18; John 7:11), cleansed the lepers (Mark 1:40), healed the crippled (Mark 2:1), healed the blind and mute (Matthew 9:32; 12:22; Luke 10:46) and countless other miracles. Jesus embodied the rule of God over all sin and disease. He came to demonstrate to us what the Kingdom of God would be like and to inaugurate that Kingdom in our midst.

It is important to note that Jesus commands us to pray for God's Kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10) and to, *"seek first his kingdom"* (v. 33). We are to trust for God's rule to break over sick bodies and souls. Healing and other miraculous signs are intended to point to the truth and reality of the gospel (Mark 16:15-17; Acts 3:16, 30; Hebrews 2:3-4).

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"
- James 5:14-16

REFLECTION

We see that God intends healing to be a normal part of church life. Why else would God command us to pray for the sick with the promise that they can be healed?

The decision of who gets healed, and who does not, is not our concern. The concern of church leaders and saints should be praying for the sick and trusting for God to heal, in obedience to the Scriptures and the pattern of Jesus and the early church's life.

Sometimes God chooses to heal through medicine and doctors. Ultimately, they are also gifts from God and can be accepted as divine healing. Sometimes God heals through supernatural means and we trust for this as well.

Does God Always Heal Today?

In light though of what was taught earlier in reference to the six stages of Jesus' conquest over evil, we must understand that complete possession of all the benefits Christ bought for us will only come when He returns (1 Corinthians 15:23, 52). While we believe in the Kingdom coming "now" and breaking in in supernatural ways, we are not "Kingdom now" believers.

"The fact that we are living between the first and second comings of Christ, what George Ladd calls living between the 'already and the not yet', provides the interpretative key for understanding why the physical healing that Christ secured for us in or through the atonement is not always experienced today ... If in this age it does not come, then we still have assurance from the atonement that it will come in the age to come⁹" - John Wimber

FOCUS POINT

Although God uses affliction and even illness to shape us, it does not mean that we should accept it automatically as God's will. Our default should be to earnestly seek God for healing, as we understand that Jesus bore our sickness and has authority over it. We must remember that often people aren't healed because we don't earnestly ask God (James 4:2). Ultimately, our heart must be to see God glorified in the situation, whether He chooses to heal or not. Choose to act in faith and trust God.

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⁹ Wimber, John; Kevin Springer. *Power Healing*.

MODULE 3: THE ORDER OF SALVATION

The emphasis in Module 2, as we looked at the wonderful cross, was squarely on what God has done in order to save people. He accomplished His work of salvation through Jesus. We see that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). We have looked at various facets of the atonement and how the Cross has revealed God's character and authority over all evil. The emphasis has been on what God has done, regardless of our response.

Ordo Salutis

Here, the focus shifts to our response in this great salvation story. We see that salvation is not a one-way street. It requires our participation for it to become effective in our lives. God has done everything on His side, but we still need to receive His salvation, otherwise we will remain in sin. We'll look at what theologians call "the order of salvation" (*ordo salutis*) which basically reveals the way/stages in which we come to know God.

There are five major doctrines or teachings that show how we come into this full salvation experience:

- Calling,
- Conversion,
- Regeneration,
- Sanctification,
- Glorification

What you must note is that the Bible does not explicitly lay out these five stages clearly. There is no single, clear logical order, but these stages are helpful in understanding how we come to know God. These five doctrines are based on Scripture and are a helpful tool to give a framework to grasp the work of the Spirit in our lives, as He leads us from rebellious sinners into becoming worshipping saints. There is then a linear progression, a sequence of events over time, that God takes each obedient Christian on (Mark 4:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Thomas Oden explains, "*We have been saved from the penalty of sin in justification; we are being saved from the power of sin in sanctification; and we shall be saved finally from the presence of sin in glorification.*"

We see that this involves different stages, each one leading us as we play our part, into the fullness of salvation.

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Calling

The first doctrine in this order of salvation is the Doctrine of Calling.

The word "calling" can be used in a number of ways not directing related to salvation. For example, it can mean to "summon" (Mark 15:16), "to appoint or designate" (Romans 1:1) or to refer to a "vocation" (1 Corinthians 7:20).

With reference to salvation, however, we find the word used many times. As we will see, it involves God summoning individuals to Himself so that they will know Him and serve Him. This then speaks about God's initiative and action. It was not man who first called out to God but God who called and reached out to all humankind.

- **First, Scripture teaches that God calls all people to be saved.** (See Acts 17:30; Proverbs 8:4; Isaiah 45:22; Matthew 9:13, 22:9; John 7:37; Romans 10:18). This is not based on any merit of ours, but purely, "*because of his own purpose and grace*" (2 Timothy 1:9). Astoundingly, the same Scripture goes on to explain that His plan to call all people through Jesus was planned, "*before the beginning of time*". This means that even before The Fall, God had foreseen how lost we are and planned His rescue mission (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20).
- **Second, we find that few actually respond to God's call** (Matthew 22:14; Isaiah 65:12; Jeremiah 7:13; Luke 14:16-24).
- **Third, Scripture shows us that those who respond to God's call find salvation** (Hebrews 9:15; Jude 1; John 5:25; Romans 1:5-6, 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Peter 1:3).

REFLECTION

Because individually we have been called by God, corporately we gather as the church, as those who have been called out from the world. The word "church" comes from the Greek word, *ekklesia* meaning the, "called out ones" (Colossians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 10:32; Ephesians 1:22). The only institution Jesus promises to build (Matthew 16:18) and to display His wisdom through (Ephesians 1:22, 3:10) is His church.

How important is the community of called-out ones in your life?

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God's Choosing is Linked to Our Faith

The Bible makes it very clear that it is God's prerogative whom He chooses. He chose Israel as recipients of His blessing without them having earned it (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He chose men and women for His service as He saw fit, such as Abraham (Genesis 12:1), Moses (Exodus 3), David (1 Samuel 16), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5) and so forth. There is the sovereign action of God in choosing, that cannot be denied.

We see, however, in many passages in the New Testament that God's choosing is linked to our faith in Christ. *"God chose you ... to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth"* (2 Thessalonians 2:13). We see this pattern in Scripture: faith (in Christ) and election go together. In other words, being in Christ is the key to our election (Ephesians 1:4-5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; John 3:16-19; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:2, 5).

Rodman Williams explains it this way: *"It is not because we are elected that we are able to believe ... but we are elected as believers. If one, even for a moment, steps outside of the correlation of election and faith, the situation becomes meaningless. Election is in relation only to those "in Christ"; outside Him there is no election... thus it is the people of faith who are the elect people of God"*¹⁰

If this is the case, then we understand that election is not an arbitrary decision from God. It is God's will co-operating with Man's will, in a sense. For true relationship to happen, love by nature must be free. God's love never extorts or forces. It often persuades very powerfully, but God chooses to work through a person's will and wants us to come freely in response to His call and choice.

FOCUS POINT

A Word of Caution: Christians sometimes get taught that because God has chosen us in grace, how we live has no bearing on our salvation. Peter warns us from this type of thinking, he states, *"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall"* (2 Peter 1:10).

1 Peter is written out of concern because of false teachers teaching the believers that their lifestyle (moral actions such as immorality) would not affect their salvation. Peter makes it clear that we are not to presume on God's grace. If you want to be sure or certain of, *"your calling and election"*, he urges us to, *"practice these qualities"* (see v5-7), so that we would not fall in the end.

So how do you know if you are elect?

The answer: because you have put your trust in Christ for your salvation and continue to trust and live in Him.

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¹⁰ Williams, J. Rodman. *Renewal Theology*.

Examples of Prevenient Grace

We find examples in Scripture of some individuals who were dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1) yet still had the capacity to do good and to call out to God in some sense. In other words, there was grace working in their lives before they were saved.

The narrative in Acts regarding Cornelius, the first Gentile believer, also described the work of prevenient grace. Acts 10 describes God clearly at work with Cornelius before his conversion. Scripture portrays him as, *“a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God”* (v2). We see that his heart and actions to please God, *“ascended as a memorial before God”* (v4). Paton explains, *“There is nothing in the story that tells us that he “willed” himself into being a devout man. What we see within the record is that God considered him devout based upon his reaction to the limited light he had”*. By Cornelius cooperating with the light he had received, God was about to give him more light - the gospel.

Another example is found in Acts 16 where Paul travels to Philippi and meets an unconverted businesswoman named Lydia, *“who was a worshipper of God”* (v14). She responds to the gospel through Paul’s preaching. So even though Cornelius and Lydia were not yet converted and in bondage to sin, the grace of God was at work, causing them to seek God.

The apostle Paul is another example. In writing to the church in Philippi, he describes how he was *“faultless”* in his ability to keep the law (Philippians 3:6 - NIV) as an unsaved Jew. His ability to be faultless in keeping the law does not mean he was sinless obviously. I agree with Ben Witherington who writes concerning Paul, *“a concept of God’s graciousness ... is required to explain how anyone overcomes the bondage to sin, much less keeps God’s law faultlessly for any period of time, never mind always”*.

We must understand that even prior to conversion, God's grace and light is at work in all our lives (Titus 2:11; John 1:9) restraining people from complete lawlessness and causing people to call out to Him. This does not lead us to pride or boasting. It leads us to be thankful and to understand that although we responded in faith, this salvation is, *“not from yourselves, it is a gift from God”* (Ephesians 2:9).

REFLECTION

God loves sinners. There is no one whom God cannot forgive or save. Scripture states clearly that God desires that all come to know Him (1 Timothy 2:4,4:10; Matthew 18:11-14; Ezra 18:23; John 3:16). Jesus’ blood was shed for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2) not just the sins of some.

Ask God today to give you His heart for those who are lost in sin – those whom God is calling and longing to save.

God calls all people to Himself as we stated earlier. His grace is available to all, but few respond to the call. For those who respond to the call and put their trust in Jesus are called the elect. The fact that God chose or elected us is purely by His mercy and kindness. He chose the weak and foolish things of this world, which is us! He has offered us the greatest gift imaginable and has enabled us to respond to, and receive His gift. All glory to God!

Metanoia, A Change of Mind

The words repent or repentance do not convey the full meaning the authors of Scripture intended with the word *metanoia*. For example, the Oxford Dictionary states: “repent - to feel regret about (what one has done or failed to do).”

Biblical repentance, however, is not just feeling sorry for something.

The Greek word used in Scripture is, *metanoia* and its close relative *metanoeo* (often translated repent) means to, “think again afterwards”. In other words, it means to change one’s mind. The full implication is that through a sense of moral regret, you not only change your mind but also your actions.

Regret on its own is not enough. You may simply regret being caught. Remorse is not enough. We may feel remorse or pity for those we have wronged and still do nothing about it. Biblical repentance does something about what is wrong. Repentance is not just a change of mind; it is a change of direction.

For hundreds of years’ theologians have argued that the word repentance inadequately represents what the Bible means by *metanoia*. As early as the second century Tertullian protested the translation of *metanoia* into the Latin *paenitentiam agite*, which simply means to, “do penance”.

“Though it [metanoia] includes sorrow and regret, it is more than that. It is a call to conversion from self-love, self-trust and self-assertion to obedient trust and self-commitment to God” - Frank Stagg

Due to this controversy, Merriam-Webster actually includes *metanoia* as a separate entry in its English Dictionary, with the definition, “a transformative change of heart; especially: a spiritual conversion.” *Conversion is a good word to use because it speaks of radical change.*

When you perform a currency conversion (i.e. Rand to Dollar), you essentially take something of value out of one kingdom and put it into another kingdom. Our conversion experience, our first moment of repentance, should be one where we know God, “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

“If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17); hence we come into Christ, in part, by the change wrought through *metanoia*. We are those who are, “transformed by the renewal of your mind ...” (Romans 12:2b).

To summarise, repentance is not merely a feeling but is a change of mind leading to a change of behaviour.

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How Do We Repent?

The Bible is not a textbook, so nowhere do we find a particular system or “12-step-programme” for repentance. What we do find is different teachings on repentance, exhortations to repent, and the stories of people who did. From these, we see that true repentance involves conviction, confession and transformation.

Conviction

“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” - Romans 2:4

“Repentance begins with a revelation of sin and of righteousness and judgement, which God kindly provides for us through the conviction of the Holy Spirit” - John 16:8-11

God will also use our leaders and fellow saints to teach us the ways of God. Paul describes how his first letter to the Corinthians was used by God to bring them to a place of sorrow regarding their sinful lifestyle.

“As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us” - 2 Corinthians 7:9

Confession

The parable of the prodigal son shows how conviction leads to another aspect of repentance; the son who asked for money, took it, squandered it, and ended up slumming it, without shame or remorse, suddenly had an epiphany,

“...when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”’” - Luke 15:17-18

The young man realises that his sin is not only against his father (whose money he has wasted); he has also sinned against heaven. His sin offended God most of all.

Repentance, where a person feels and says sorry for the wrongs they have done, who even pays back for what they have done, and starts living differently, is still not complete without the realisation that, *“Against you, you only [God], have I sinned”* (Psalm 51).

Ultimately, our judgement will come, not from society, our family, or even the church - we will be judged by God. We must make right with Him.

Confession is an important part of owning and outing sin in our lives. The Bible encourages us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). In the Bible, this isn't a ritualised one-way confession as occurs in some traditional churches. Confession can take place between a pastor and his flock, or between two saints. Confession is good because it brings things into the light, and places people around us who will help keep us accountable so that we can walk in victory.

Confession is not just a general prayer about a whole bunch of sins, most of which we are still quite attached to and have no intention of stopping. That is not repentance.

Repentance involves a heartfelt prayer that acknowledges our need for God and our regret for a life of sin and self-righteousness; a prayer that asks for God's mercy and grace and which promises to live a different life in future. However, prayer is not enough on its own. The Bible teaches us when we make vows to the Lord, that there is a need to fulfil them (Psalm 76:11).

Jesus is the Object of Faith

It is not merely faith that saves but it's important to know that faith always has an object. Our confidence and trust is to be in Christ. Our faith rests upon the work and person of Jesus (see John 3:14-16; Romans 10:9-10; John 8:24; Acts 16:30; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14; Galatians 3:22).

Therefore, for faith to be effective it must have an object or something trustworthy to believe in (Philippians 1:29). We aren't saved by, 'just believing', or by believing in yourself or your potential. That is humanistic deception.

Saving faith can be likened to a drowning man in the water reaching out his hand to the Saviour. He can't save himself but he can reach out and trust that Jesus (the object of his faith) will save him. Therefore, saving faith involves consciously leaving all self-effort behind. It is coming empty-handed and crying out for mercy to the one who is able to save.

Here is a helpful old Sunday school acronym that describes "saving faith" well:

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"Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God" - Hebrews 6:1.

Here the writer of Hebrews describes saving faith to us. It is a confidence towards God. In other words, He is the object and focus of our faith.

REFLECTION

It is so reassuring to know that God in Christ is the object of our faith. Our faith does not rest on our feelings that change like the weather! It does not rest on our circumstances or our finances that are unreliable at best. Our confidence and trust rest in the person of Christ. He is trustworthy, dependable and unchanging. It is truly Jesus who, *"is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:25). What a God!

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Saving Faith Begins in the Heart and Demonstrates Itself in Action

First, Scripture explains that saving faith involves trusting God from the heart. Romans 10:9, teaches that confessing Jesus as Lord is a deep felt attitude, *“If you... believe... in your heart... you will be saved”*. In other words, saving faith is not merely a mental decision but also springs from a deep-felt conviction of sin and realisation of our need for the Saviour (Romans 6:17). This doesn't mean that saving faith is necessarily emotional, but it does involve a wholehearted giving of oneself in surrender to Christ.

Second, saving faith demonstrates itself in action. Genuine trust and confidence in Christ must result in outward fruit. James tells us, *“But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18). James is not making a case for works based salvation here but is teaching us that true faith is never merely an attitude. Martin Luther summed it up brilliantly. He said, *“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.”*

Thomas Oden explains that faith must always involve a confession of faith. He says,

“Faith in your salvation is not something that should remain in your heart; it must also be made public by confessing it. If you know in Whom you believe and are aware of the change it effected in you, then you must also testify to it in front of others and make it perceptible in your actions.”¹¹

He mentions three ways in which we confess, or make public this saving faith in Jesus:

- Confessing faith through words (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10)
- Confessing faith through works (James 2:14-16; 2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Confessing faith through baptism (Matthew 28:19; Colossians 2:12)

“If conversion to Christianity makes no improvement in a man's outward actions – if he continues to be just as snobbish or spiteful or envious or ambitious as he was before – then I think we must suspect that his 'conversion' was largely imaginary; and after one's original conversion, every time one thinks one has made an advance, that is the test to apply. Fine feelings, new insights, greater interest in 'religion' mean nothing unless they make our actual behavior better; just as in an illness 'feeling better' is not much good if the thermometer shows that your temperature is still going up.”¹² CS Lewis

Saving Faith Continues Throughout Your Life as a Christian

“But my righteous one shall live by faith” (Hebrews 10:38). The Christian life does not only start with faith, but we are called to live daily by faith (1 Corinthians 1:17-18). In other words, God desires us to trust in Him daily, to keep relying on His grace and strength for the life ahead. Salvation is not just a once-off prayer, it involves a life fully lived to the glory of God.

Although we are now in God's family and have been given new life in Christ, we are to guard our hearts against sin. For example, Jesus commands the church in Laodicea to repent from their sin and being, *“lukewarm”* (Revelation 3:19). The writer of Hebrews warns Christians, lest they think they have *“arrived”* so to speak. He urges to, *“not be sluggish, but [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Hebrews 6:12).

¹¹ Oden, Thomas C. *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*.

¹² Lewis, C. S., and Walter Cooper. *Mere Christianity*.

The New Birth as a First Instalment

Romans 8:18-25 explains that God's intent is to make all creation new. Verse 21 explains that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage ... and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (NIV) when Jesus returns. Verse 23 then states that we, "who have the first fruits of the Spirit ... wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies".

REFLECTION

What does it mean that we are those who, "have the first fruits"?

It means that we are the first instalment, in a sense, of the work of the Spirit, that will ultimately renew all creation (2 Peter 3:13). God's purpose is to reconcile and renew all creation of which our born again experience is the first sign and first part. This is vital to understand because it is not just humans that need redemption from sin, but creation itself that has been under the curse (Genesis 3:3:17-18; Romans 8:21-22).

The Result of Regeneration

The result of regeneration is that you become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Some have mistaken being a new creation to mean that God has completely renewed us. But this can't be as we still have the same perishable body and struggle with sinful thoughts and desires. Being a new creation means that there are some fundamental changes that have now occurred in you. As was discussed earlier, the new birth is the first instalment that points to the day when God will give us new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:52) and will renew the earth. This final work of redemption over the world has begun in us, resulting in a changed heart and a changed identity.

We Have a Changed Heart

"He saved us ... by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" - Titus 3:5

Jesus said that a person's heart is the source of many evils (Matthew 16:19; James 4:1). The new birth affects the deepest and most fundamental part of us, our hearts. This changed heart is described in two ways:

First, God makes us clean. Titus 3:5, speaks about regeneration as a "washing". This washing or cleansing is the cleansing of sin and an evil disposition. This is often identified with water baptism that signifies a cleansing of the old life. (See Acts 15:9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Psalm 51:6-7).

Second, God makes us new ("the renewal of the Holy Spirit"). Not only does God remove an evil disposition within us (negative aspect) but He also creates a new nature within us (positive aspect). He renews us (Ezekiel 36:26) and puts His law in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10) enabling us to love the Lord with all of our heart (Mark 12:30; Philippians 2:13) and others with the same love (Acts 4:32).

This changed heart then is really a new nature, which is one of righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Sin now becomes unnatural to us (1 John 3:9) and our "default" setting becomes one of desire to obey and worship the Lord.

11 Evidences of the New Birth¹⁴**1. Those who are born of God keep His commandments.**

1 John 2:3–4: *“By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*

1 John 3:24: *“Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.”*

2. Those who are born of God walk as Christ walked.

1 John 2:5–6: *“By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.”*

3. Those who are born of God don’t hate others but love them.

1 John 2:9: *“Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.”*

1 John 3:14: *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”*

1 John 4:7–8: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”*

1 John 4:20: *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar.”*

4. Those who are born of God don’t love the world.

1 John 2:15: *“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”*

5. Those who are born of God confess the Son and receive (have) Him.

1 John 2:23: *“No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.”*

1 John 4:15: *“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”*

1 John 5:12: *“Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

6. Those who are born of God practice righteousness.

1 John 2:29: *“If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”*

7. Those who are born of God don’t make a practice of sinning.

1 John 3:6: *“No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.”*

1 John 3:9–10: *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”*

¹⁴ Piper, John. Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again.

Justification Removes Condemnation

Because of Adam's disobedience as head of the human race, all people stand condemned under God. *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men"* (Romans 5:16).

The idea here is that our condemnation or guilty status under the law has been removed by the obedience of Jesus. Our right standing then is linked to Jesus' obedience. His "act of righteousness" involved being willing to be condemned and die as a criminal, on our behalf.

Here was the perfect Son who had done no wrong. Jesus fully obeyed the law and met its demands (Romans 3:24), living the life we should have lived and dying the death we should have died.

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

FOCUS POINT

The promise for those who have faith in Christ Jesus is that there is now no condemnation. God doesn't treat us as sinners or rebels anymore but as His children. The slate is now wiped clean and our accounts have been cleared from all debt, so to speak.

Justification Credits us with Righteousness

"And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness" - Romans 4:6

Romans 4:6, tells us that through faith, God doesn't just declare us "not guilty" but He also adds or credits righteousness to us. Theologians call this, "imputed righteousness".

Wayne Grudem understands this text to mean that, *"God thinks of Christ's righteousness as belonging to us... He 'reckons' it to our account"*. This same truth is found in Philippians 3, *"I may... be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith"* (v9). Because of our union with Christ we have been brought into such a unity that God sees us with Christ and His spiritual perfection and obedience is seen as ours. This is an incredible truth! To clarify, though, this is not a matter of, *"altering his or her actual spiritual condition"* (Erickson) but of a legal reality before God.

So we see that God not only removes condemnation but also adds righteousness to us. He takes away the debt and credits our account. Another helpful way to see justification is through the imagery of clothing.

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A Robe of Righteousness

The New Testament speaks about us needing to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Psalm 132:9; Ephesians 4:24). Although it does not specifically mention that it is His righteousness we clothe ourselves with, it can be inferred. It says that *"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). By putting our faith in Christ, we become or put on His righteousness in a sense. Jesus' righteousness becomes ours and the Father sees us as perfect in His Son.

*"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head"*
- Zinzendorf

REFLECTION

God's attitude towards us is now changed because we have trusted in what Jesus has done. We have been conferred with a new status! God has pardoned us as guilty sinners and has restored us to be adopted sons and daughters of the king, called to share in the inheritance of the Son. Do you see yourself as that today, clothed with righteousness and pleasing to the Father?

Thank God that today, because of Jesus' obedience, you have been made righteous (Romans 5:18).

Justification is God assuring us that we stand not only forgiven but also now highly favoured. God removes our debt before Him but has also credited our account. He treats us as if we had never sinned and gives sinners a brand new start (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). We realise that our acquittal is totally undeserving. We are thus, *"justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:24). This Righteous Judge is a gracious, merciful Father who caused His only Son to be punished so that we, the guilty, could be acquitted and set free.

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Sanctification

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification ... ” - 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Conversion and regeneration are doctrines that describe being initiated into a relationship with God. They deal with coming into the faith while sanctification deals primarily with walking out the faith. We will see that sanctification describes the process of living a holy life.

The Greek word for sanctification *hagiasmos* is also translated as “holiness” (1 Thessalonians 4:4, 7; Hebrews 12:14). The root word is *hagios* which means holy. Holiness is contrasted with sinfulness (Isaiah 1:4; 17:7) and therefore deals with God’s moral perfection (Isaiah 30:11; Psalm 22:3-5; Habakkuk 1:12) and absolute separation from all that is evil.

Because God is intrinsically holy, He calls His people to be holy (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Creation was made, “very good” (Genesis 1:28) and was without evil and held no corruption. God’s intent was always that we would be a people who would love purity and holiness.

Sanctification in the Past

Sanctification, in one sense, already took place at conversion. This happened through the work of the Holy Spirit and because of our union with the Son.

The Spirit:

“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” - 2 Thessalonians 2:13

The Son:

“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” - 1 Corinthians 1:30

(See also 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:10.)

Therefore, those who at conversion put their trust in Christ are called, saints or holy ones (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:2). This is because we are now in union with Jesus, who is the ultimate Holy One of God (Revelation 3:7; 1 John 2:20; Mark 1:24; Acts 4:27) and because we have been cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

To be clear, Scripture does not say that Christians must lead holy lives to become saints. Rather, because we are saints, we are called to lead holy lives. This leads us to the next point.

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Sanctification in the Present

In other places we find the word *hagiasmos* used, it often is connected with how you are called to live in the present. For example:

*“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.” - 1 Thessalonians 4:7

*“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”
- Hebrews 12:14*

In Romans 6, Paul uses the word sanctification twice (see v19, v22). The context is to do with obedience (v16-17) and choosing to live a life set apart and dedicated to God as His, “*slaves to righteousness*” (v19). Righteousness here is not just about your legal standing but about your moral standing - how you live. So being made right with God (justification) means that we begin to live right with God (sanctification).

In other words, before we were born again, we lived wrongly. We were, “*slaves of sin*” (v17) and lived “*lawless*” lives (v19). But because we have now been set free from the power of sin we are called to live holy lives. Paul says in verse 19, “*so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification*”. Romans 12:1, uses the same language, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*”

REFLECTION

Living a holy life is part of our worship to God. This progressive sanctification is true worship - growing daily into His likeness through resisting sin (Hebrews 12:4) and the devil (James 4:7), while fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).

Our Responsibility

God calls us to co-operate with Him in the work of sanctification. We must do our part to live holy lives. Often we expect God to do it all, but Scripture puts great responsibility on us to, “*cleanse ourselves*” (2 Corinthians 7:1) and to serve Him with, “*clean hands and a pure heart*” (Psalm 24:2-3). (See also 1 Peter 2:11 and 1 John 3:3.)

Sanctification in the Future

Perfect sanctification is not possible in this life! There will always be the presence of sin that lingers around us (1 John 1:8-10; James 3:2; Ecclesiastes 7:20). Even a man such as the Apostle Paul understood he was not yet perfect (1 Timothy 1:15, Philippians 3:12-14). In fact, the choicest saints are those who are very aware of their limitations, understand the mercy of God, and do not pretend to have arrived spiritually. We understand the final sanctification will take place when we see Christ in all His glory and will be fully changed to be like Him in complete holiness (Colossians 3:4; 1 John 3:2).

In the meanwhile, we are called to aim to live holy lives. We are called to strive for holiness (Hebrews 12:14) not as a way to merit grace, but because we have already received grace.

Hardship and trial is a very real part of life, especially the Christian life. The Bible never promises a life free of suffering. In fact, God promises suffering for those who desire to live a Godly life (2 Timothy 3:12).

We live in a world in which we face a real enemy who has schemes to try to destroy and undermine all that we do as children of God (1 Peter 5:8-9; Job 1:7). The world system lies under his influence (1 John 5:19) and is unwittingly part of his kingdom (Ephesians 2:2), which by nature opposes the Kingdom of Light and tries to undermine our faith in Christ.

REFLECTION

The Bible does not gloss over the reality that many will turn away from the Lord. Jesus Himself said, *"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold"* (Matthew 24:12). To the church in Ephesus Jesus warns them to repent, *"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first"* (Revelation 2:4). Because of an increase of wickedness and lawlessness in our age, these Scriptures are a sober reminder for us to persevere. Ask God to kindle a fresh passion within you for Him.

The Basis of Our Perseverance

- God's Power. (Philippians 1:6; Philippians 1:24; 1 Peter 1:5)
- God's Faithfulness. (1 Corinthians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:13)
- God's Son. (John 10:27-28; Hebrews 7:24-25)
- God's Spirit. (John 14:16; Ephesians 1:13-14)

From these four points, we see that it is only possible to remain steadfast in our faith because of the activity of God in our lives. His activity and grace precede everything we do, enabling us to work out our salvation.

The Conditions of our Perseverance

As we have seen above, God provides the most incredible basis for us to persevere in the faith. God has taken divine action through His power, His faithfulness, His Son and His Spirit.

But although God sustains the believer, it does not eliminate certain conditions for us to meet.

- **We must remain in Jesus** (1 John 2:24-25; Hebrews 2:1,3; John 15:3-7). The first condition then deals with abiding or staying close to the Source of our salvation, Jesus Himself.
- **We must endure with Jesus** (2 Timothy 2:10-12; 1 Peter 2:21; Hebrews 10:35-36; Matthew 24:12,13; Colossians 1:21-23). This involves having to stay vigilant and firm in the faith, in spite of hardship. To this, we have been called.
- **We must stay faithful to Jesus** (Revelation 2:10, 4-5; Hebrews 3:12-14, 6:4-8; 1 Peter 1:4-5). If we remain faithful to Him, the Author and Finisher of our faith, He will reward us on that day.

What ties all the conditions together is the need for ongoing faith. It is ultimately our faith in Jesus that must remain, continue, endure and hold firm. If we remain and abide in Him, He promises to preserve us or keep us faithful (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Apostasy

The opposite of perseverance is apostasy, or “falling away” (Mark 4:16-17; Galatians 1:6, 5:4; 1 Timothy 4:1). We must take the warnings of Scripture seriously, here Paul says, “*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

From the days of the nation of Israel who often backslid, God frequently warned against apostasy (Numbers 14:9-12; Deuteronomy 31:16-18; Hosea 5:3-4; 2 Kings 17-7-20; Hebrews 3:15-19).

The New Testament in many places show individuals who have fallen away from the faith or turned against Jesus. For example:

- **Judas:** Matthew 26:14-16,
- **Parable Jesus tells:** Luke 13:26-27,
- **Many disciples:** John 6:66,
- **Ananias & Sapphira:** Acts 5:1-11,
- **Hymenaeus & Alexander:** 1 Timothy 1:19-20,
- **Cretans:** Titus 1:16;
- **Demas:** 2 Timothy 4:10,
- **False teachers & their followers etc.:** 2 Peter 2:1-3, 10-15,
- **Those who have known the truth:** 2 Peter 2: 20-22,
- **Ungodly people:** Jude 4; 8-16,
- **Jezebel:** Revelation 2:20-22

Therefore, God warns against falling away. We have to take seriously our responsibility to remain in Christ and to abide in His love. We must be careful not to be like the Israelites who hardened their hearts in the wilderness causing them to fall away from God (Hebrews 3:12).

REFLECTION

How then can we avoid slipping into unbelief and a hardened heart? Hebrews 3:13 gives us the answer, “*But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” We see that the nature of sin is deceitful and our hearts can easily be led astray from Jesus. This is why being in real accountable relationships are so important. We need, “*one another every day*” to encourage and pray for each other.

Perseverance Builds and Shapes our Character

One of the great purposes of trials is to shape our character and bring us into maturity, “*and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*” (Romans 5:4). Someone once said that God is more interested in your character than your comfort. God sometimes allows in His wisdom and goodness; evil, misfortune and tragedy to befall Christians – for our good (Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20; James 1:2-4). It seems that Christian character is properly shaped in times of trouble and difficulty. Peter compares our faith to precious gold, which needs to be refined in order to become strong and valuable (1 Peter 1:6-7). God uses the “fire” of life to shape us with the result that, if we respond well, we will gain great reward in this life and on that day.

Glorification

“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” – Romans 8:30

Glorification is the teaching in which the final stage of salvation is described. In Romans 8:17 Paul refers to a day when “... we may also be glorified with him.” This day of future glory is described in Romans 8:18-23, in which we, along with all creation, will experience a radical transformation. For each Christian, this means receiving a new glorified body. So when will glorification happen?

“It will happen when Christ returns and raises from the dead the bodies of all believers for all time who have died, and reunites them with their souls, and changes the bodies of all believers who remain alive, thereby giving all believers at the same time perfect resurrection bodies like his own”¹⁵ – Wayne Grudem

Jesus is Our Prototype

The resurrection of our bodies is really a sharing of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus was to be the first of many who was raised from the dead.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” - 1 Corinthians 15:20–23

Jesus is described as the, “first fruits”, or the first of many to come. After His resurrection Jesus was restored to full strength and a youthful appearance, so much so that there were some who did not recognise Him (John 20:15). With His glorified body Jesus was still able to be touched and to eat food (Luke 24:42). We also see continuity with His pre-resurrection body in that the scars from the crucifixion still remained (Luke 24:39; John 20:20,27). This doesn’t mean we will still bear our scars, but that Jesus does, to remind us of His eternal work of redemption.

As Christ returns in power and authority so we will see Him and in an instant be changed to be like Him (1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 John 3:2). To clarify: those who are dead when Jesus returns will be raised up physically, but those who are still alive will be instantaneously changed. 1 Corinthians 15 describes the glorified body in more detail.

Our Glorified Bodies

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul draws up a comparison between our present state and our future state, that will be like Christ’s body.

“So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 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 Corinthians 15: 42–44

¹⁵ Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine.

Here We Find Four Contrasts:

THE EARTHLY BODY	RESURRECTION BODY
Perishable	Imperishable (immortal, not wear out)
Dishonourable	Glorious (attractive, radiant and beautiful)
Weak	Powerful (full strength and power)
Natural	Spiritual (now fully empowered by the Spirit)

(Also refer to Matthew 13:43; Daniel 12:3; Exodus 34:35; Matthew 17:2; Romans 8:29; Philippians 3:21).

The Unbelievers

Scripture also teaches that unbelievers will also be raised from the dead in order to face judgement (John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Matthew 25:31-46). This is covered in more detail in the Eschatology course.

REFLECTION

The expectation of a future bodily resurrection is to be our hope. Paul says in reference to our resurrection that, *"in this hope we were saved"* (Romans 8:24). The apostle John also taught, *"... we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure"* (1 John 3:2-3). Therefore, we are called to look forward in great hope to a wonderful future in which God will make all things new including our bodies! Is this something that you are looking forward to?

In Closing

We have come to the end of this course and have covered a great deal of material. It's important to remember that all you have learnt during this time is really about coming to know God.

John said, *"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent"* (John 17:3).

Our prayer is that your love for Jesus has been deepened and that your zeal for good works has been increased. We have the privilege of being part of a great salvation in which God has done a great work on our behalf. He has called us, enabled us to repent and believe, regenerated us and justified us. One day Jesus will return in great glory to finally remove the presence of sin and evil completely. We look forward, in hope, to that day and in the meantime, we live in faith as God's children seeking for His Kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven.

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