

ABRIDGED

RODERICK A. GRACIANO
WITH
CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ

An in-depth look at the truths
that will define our eternal destiny...

REDEMPTION

By

JESUS

And The Restoration Of All Things



Psalm 119.105

TIMOTHY MINISTRIES

Redemption By Jesus

And The Restoration Of All Things

An In-Depth Look At The Truths
That Will Define Our Eternal Destiny

ABRIDGED VERSION

RODERICK A. GRACIANO
with PASTOR CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ
2022-2026

Dedication

To the friends of Timothy Ministries, a wonderful group comprised of family members, colleagues, personal friends and a few strangers. In manifold ways, you have each contributed to making it possible for me to follow my calling and enjoy my “dream job” for fifty years. My sincere hope is that you will be encouraged and your faith strengthened by the contents of this book.

Roderick A. Graciano, Lakewood, WA, January 2026

To Flor, my beloved wife, and to my three dear children: Esdras, Hadasha, and Esteban. I have walked with you through every paragraph of this book. Your questions refined the way I presented the content to the church, and your enthusiasm for what God will do led me to love more deeply the hope we have in our blessed Redeemer. May God use this book to form in you a robust faith and an ever-increasing love for Him.

Carlos S. Martinez, Cabo San Lucas, BCS, January 2026

**But above all,
to our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s “beloved Son, in whom we have
redemption.”**

Colossians 1.13-14

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Abbreviations: General

AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , [designating a year or period] after Christ's birth
ANE	ancient Near East, ancient Near Eastern
BC	[designating a year or period] before Christ's birth
Ch.	chapter
Eng	English
Esp	Spanish
Ed.	Editor, or edited
Et al.	and others
Fem.	feminine gender
Ff.	following pages
Grk	Greek language
Heb	Hebrew language
Lat	Latin
Lit.	literal, literally
Ms, Mss	manuscript, manuscripts
P.; pp.	page, pages
Perf.	perfect tense
Pl.	plural
Sing.	singular
V.; vv.	verse; verses
Vol., vols.	volume, volumes

Abbreviations: Written Works

DSS	<i>Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , Edited by Orr, 1915
LBD	<i>The Lexham Bible Dictionary</i>
MBIOS	<i>Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin</i> by Graciano
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> , Edited by Schaff
NSHERK	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i>
NT	The New Testament
OT	The Old Testament
PRE	<i>Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary Of The Old Testament</i>

Abbreviations: Bible Versions

NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible passages quoted in this work are from *The New American Standard Bible* (abbreviated in this document as NASB95), © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

ASV	<i>The Holy Bible, American Standard Version 1901</i>
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible, English Standard Version</i> , © 2016 Good News Publishers
GNT	<i>The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition</i> , © 2011–2013 Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature
HCSB	<i>The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version</i> , © 2009 Holman Bible Publishers.
KJV	<i>The Holy Bible: King James Version</i> , Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version, © 2009 Logos Research Systems
LBLA	<i>Santa Biblia: La Biblia de Las Américas Con Referencias Y Notas</i> , © 1998 Casa Editorial para La Fundación Bíblica Lockman
LES	<i>The Lexham English Septuagint</i> , © 2012 Lexham Press
LXX	The Septuagint (<i>Septuaginta</i> , ancient Greek version of the OT), © 1979 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
NASB95	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIrV	<i>New International Reader's Version</i> 1st ed., © 1998 Zondervan
NIVO	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 1984 International Bible Society
NLT	<i>Holy Bible: New Living Translation</i> , © 2015 Tyndale House Publishers
RAG	Translation by the author, © 2025 Roderick Graciano
RV95	<i>Reina Valera Revisada (1995)</i> , © 1998 Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas
TEV	<i>The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation</i> , © 1992 American Bible Society (formerly <i>Today's English Version</i>)
TNK	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures</i> , © 1985 Jewish Publication Society

Abbreviations: Biblical & Apocryphal Books

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Ho	Hosea
1Co	1 Corinthians	Is	Isaiah
1En	1 Enoch	Jas	James
1Jn	1 John	Jdg	Judges
1Ki	1 Kings	Jdt	Judith
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Je	Jeremiah
1Pe	1 Peter	Job	Job
1Sa	1 Samuel	Joe	Joel
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Jn	John
1Ti	1 Timothy	Jon	Jonah
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jos	Joshua
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jub	Jubilees
2Jn	2 John	Jud	Jude
2Ki	2 Kings	La	Lamentations
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Le	Leviticus
2Pe	2 Peter	Lk	Luke
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mal	Malachi
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mk	Mark
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mt	Matthew
3Jn	3 John	Mic	Micah
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Na	Nahum
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Ne	Nehemiah
Ac	Acts	Nu	Numbers
Am	Amos	Ob	Obadiah
Col	Colossians	Php	Philippians
Da	Daniel	Phm	Philemon
Dt	Deuteronomy	Pr	Proverbs
Ec	Ecclesiastes	Ps	Psalms
Eph	Ephesians	Re	Revelation
Es	Esther	Ro	Romans
Ex	Exodus	Ru	Ruth
Eze	Ezekiel	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Ezr	Ezra	So	The Song of Solomon
Ga	Galatians	Tt	Titus
Ge	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Hab	Habakkuk	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hag	Haggai	Zec	Zechariah
Heb	Hebrews	Zep	Zephaniah

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Preface

Every theologian feels the need to emphasize certain aspects of the great doctrines of the Bible, aspects which he feels have been overlooked or misunderstood in his own time. In the best cases, those emphases are eye-opening. In the worst cases the emphases distract from the central truths of the given topic. We hope that the particular emphases appearing here and there in this book may be of the former and not of the latter. In any case, I, Roderick, take full responsibility for the emphases in this work, as well as for errors of any kind that may have snuck their way into the final draft.

To my friend and fellow laborer in Christian ministry, Carlos Samuel Martinez, goes the credit for inspiring this theological study, for providing many of the questions that form the framework of the narrative, and for providing countless insights, theological and practical, in connection with the main topic and its many aspects. His insights frequently generated material that would not have appeared in this work without his prompting.

We have both prayed our way through this project, and unhesitatingly acknowledge that if any part of this book results in benefit to the church of our Lord Jesus, then all the credit for that goes to Him and to His Holy Spirit.

In this treatise, several things may seem peculiar to the reader:

1. We have used the nouns *man* and *men*, and the masculine pronouns *he*, *him* and *his*, more or less as Scripture does, in statements requiring a generic, inclusive term for a human person of either sex (see, for example, the pronouns *he* and *his* in the opening sentence of this preface).
2. In English, we write God's personal name, the Tetragrammaton יהוה, as *Yahveh*. The V in this spelling, in place of the W of *Yahweh*, reflects the modern Hebrew pronunciation, *were the name to be pronounced* by a Hebrew speaker.
3. When giving the pronunciation of Greek words, we do so according to the conventions of Modern Greek.

Introduction: The Ancient Solution To Bondage And Property Loss

If a citizen of ancient Israel became impoverished, he could sell himself into servitude. Depending on the poor man's abilities, he could potentially sell himself for enough money to pay off his debts. The downside of the arrangement was that he would have to work like a hired hand for an Israelite master for up to six years (Dt 15.12) or for a foreign master for up to 49 years (Le 25.47-54).

Similarly, an impoverished Israelite could sell the land divinely allotted to his family in Joshua's time.¹ In this case, he could lose the dominion over his property for up to 49 years, until it reverted to him in the 50th year, the year of jubilee (Le 25.10,13,28). If he happened to sell his property very soon after a jubilee year, he likely would not live long enough to regain it in the next jubilee. Depending on the man's circumstances, his family line might lose that portion of their ancestral lands forever.

The Mosaic law graciously provided a solution to the potential problems of long servitude and permanent property loss by its **rules of redemption**. The biblical word *redemption* refers to the act of redeeming, and to *redeem* simply means "to buy back." In the ancient Israelite world, if the man who had sold himself or his property somehow regained the means to redeem, that is, to *buy back* his own freedom and property, he had the right to do so (Le 25.23-27,49). However, if the man was unable to redeem himself or his property, the law prescribed that a near relative, a kinsman (in Heb a *goel*) who had the means, could redeem both man (Le 25.47-52) and property (Le 25.24-25; cf. Je 32.7-8), thereby restoring his poor relative's freedom and dominion. The kinsman would thus be recognized as a *redeemer*.

A poignant provision in the Israelite laws of redemption had to do with the case of a widow who had no surviving male heir. Such a widow, if impoverished for lack of husband or sons to work her land, could sell her land directly to a kinsman

¹ See Nu 34.13-15; Jos 18.10.

redeemer, and live by the fruit of her land as the redeemer restored it to productivity for his own profit. The added proviso, however, was that the kinsman redeemer had to marry the widow, in the hopes of raising up a male heir, who would resume ownership of the land in the name of the original family line. The Bible describes this kind of redemption in the romantic book of Ruth.

Of course, the words *redeem* and *redemption* are also used figuratively, in various scriptural contexts referring to *rescue* as from enemies, oppressors or even from death.² Most relevantly for the entire human race, the Bible also uses the idea of redemption in connection with sin: *to be redeemed* can mean *to be rescued from the tyranny or consequences of sin*.³ If we follow this theme in the Scriptures, a cosmic drama opens up before us. We realize that Adam and Eve sold our race into bondage to the Serpent (the devil) and surrendered man's dominion over the earth to that evil taskmaster. Like the truly impoverished Israelite of old, the human race has never had its own means to redeem itself. Man's efforts to redeem himself by keeping God's laws has only brought death to anyone attempting to establish his own righteousness in that manner. No, the law has left us all destitute like helpless widows (Ro 7.4-5). By the principles of divine justice, we need a kinsman redeemer who can pay the redemption price that humanity itself could never afford. Such a redeemer must be a human descendant of Adam, else he could not qualify as a kinsman. Yet, he must be something more than human, else he would be as impoverished and impotent as the rest of mankind. Thankfully, God has provided just such a kinsman Redeemer. As Job confessed, millennia ago, **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."**⁴

So, we can all rejoice that a Redeemer has been provided for us. However, we mustn't forget that since the word *redeem* means "to buy back," the idea of cost is inherent in the idea of redemption. Nothing can be redeemed without the

² Ex 6.6; Ps 69.18; 72.14; 103.4; 106.10; Ho 13.14; Mic 4.10.

³ Is 44.22; Ro 3.24; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7; Col 1.14; Tt 2.14.

⁴ Job 19.25.

redeemer incurring a cost, and the Redeemer that God has provided for mankind was not exempted from this reality.

This book has emerged from an in-depth study of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who was willing to incur an incomprehensible price to redeem human beings. We have looked carefully into His role as Redeemer, and into the redemption that He has — *and is* — accomplishing. We have distilled the observations and insights from our study into a narrative that documents the primary benefits to God and man that accrue from the redemption, and also explains how a person can receive Christ’s redemption and begin to experience its benefits. In the course of this treatise, we will touch on many topics familiar to people living in a Christian culture, including the topic of regeneration (new birth), a phenomenon that intersects with our redemption, but that lies within the more general sphere of God’s works of salvation (see “The Salvation Of God” diagram below).

We note that the Bible word *salvation*, in this context, speaks of a benevolent agent intervening for someone or something in a situation of danger, risk or other serious need. In Scripture, *salvation* is a comprehensive term, and can apply to nation, property, body or soul. This book focuses on how **God, through His Son Jesus Christ, our kinsman Redeemer, saves fallen people from sin and death, and brings them into a familial and royal relationship with Himself.** The redemption described in this treatise, then, is *a particular kind of salvation*. As such, it has multiple components, including, substitution, expiation, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, and more, all of which we will examine in due course. **Facets of our redemption to which we will give special attention, however, are the *familial* and *royal*.** We will look closely at these facets of redemption because, along with everything else forfeited in the Garden of Eden, our first parents lost (1) their pristine familial intimacy with God *and* (2) their kingly dominion of the earth.

As to the loss of the former, mankind has always yearned for a restoration of the idyllic, Edenic family of God, and has often attempted to restore it by human effort, *without* a Redeemer. However, only the heavenly Father Himself, through

His redeemer Son, is able to restore what theologians call the *familia dei*. No coterie of human idealists can ever launch a utopian experiment that will fully satisfy the human heart, or long keep itself from decaying into a means of selfish fulfilment for the few. Thankfully, as the following chapters will explain, the Trinity has been progressively restoring the *familia dei* over the course of millennia, through the phenomenon of the *covenants*.

As to the loss of the latter, Christian scholars and theologians have given scant attention to the redemption of mankind's original grant of coregency "over all the earth" (Ge 1.26). It seems that few Christian authors, through the centuries, have remembered that the biblical phenomenon of redemption includes the restoration of one's sovereignty over his land, not just the liberation of his own person. Though some now "see dominion as the defining characteristic" of "what it means to be made in God's image,"⁵ little is ever said about how that dominion — and thereby the divine image — is to be fully restored. Christian theology books say much about an individual's redemption from sin and the oppression of Satan, less about the redemption of an individual's physical body (Ro 8.23), and almost nothing about the redemption of mankind's dominion over all the earth — *and yet biblically speaking, Christ's work of redemption is not complete until those he has purchased for God with His blood once again "reign upon the earth"* (Re 5.9-10). Of those scholars who have addressed this matter, some have reduced the redemption of mankind's dominion to Christian stewardship (tithing),⁶ others to a postmillennial dream of social improvement in the world as people and their institutions finally submit fully to "the inherent power of the gospel."⁷ Then there are the aggressive theories of the Christian Reconstructionists and their dominion theology,⁸ proposing that, "society will be reconstructed by the Law of God as preached in the gospel and the Great Commission." The

⁵ *Lexham Survey of Theology*.

⁶ W. Clyde Tilley, "A Biblical Approach to Stewardship," in *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987).

⁷ Aiken, Charles A. "Christianity and Social Problems," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 3, no. 9–12 (1892).

⁸ Also known as theonomy, also essentially a postmillennial teaching.

already/not yet aspect of God’s redemptive works, that is, the progressive fulfilment of God’s purposes, plans and promises, teaches us that there is indeed a sense in which the redeemed “reign in life” now,⁹ and are indeed responsible to aid the poor and downtrodden,¹⁰ and to positively influence the world’s institutions in every manner that is consistent with our central mandate of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.¹¹ However, theologians and commentators have lost sight of the fact that God’s grant of dominion over “all the earth” was to *sinless humanity*. The Postmillennial and Reconstructionist expectation that the church in this age, by law and gospel, will bring about the redemption of mankind’s dominion of the earth will fail, for the simple reason that not-yet-glorified saints are unfailingly fallible, and — as history has amply shown — they remain vulnerable to the corruption of power. No, the full redemption of mankind’s royal status over all the earth, (and humanity’s full recovery of the divine image) awaits the ***parousia*** of the King, who will first redeem the bodies of His saints in resurrection and transformation, and then bring “all rule and all authority and power” into submission under Himself and His sinless, glorified saints.¹²



So, please come in, Lord Jesus, and dine with us (Re 3.20). As we study these great truths, be present with us in the person of your Holy Spirit, and feed us as the Bread of Life that You are (Jn 6.48), because we ask it in Your name. Amen.

⁹ Ro 5.17; cf. Mt 10.1; 28.18-20; Lk 10.19; 2Co 10.3-5.

¹⁰ Gal 2.10; Jas 1.27.

¹¹ Mt 28.29-10; Lk 24.45-47; Ac 1.8.

¹² Cf. Ro 3.23; 1Co 15.24.

The Salvation Of God

REGENERATION
Jn 3.3,5; Eph 2.5;
SANCTIFICATION
Ro 15.16; 1Pe 1.2

Grain in time of famine

Healing for the sick

Rain in time of drought

Victory in war
2Ki 5.1

REDEMPTION

The Saving Work Of Jesus Christ

SUBSTITUTION

RANSOM - BEARS INIQUITIES - MADE A CURSE
Mt 20.28; 1Ti 2.5-6; Is 53.4-6,8; Ro 3.24; 1Co 1.30; 1Pe 3.18

EXPIATION - PROPITIATION

Le 16.22; Dt 32.43; Da 9.24; Jn 1.29; Ro 3.25; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7;
Heb 2.17; 1Jn 2.2; 4.10; Re 5.9

HEALING of SHALOM - DELIVERANCE FROM SIN, GUILT, TEMPTATION, DOMAIN OF DARKNESS, WRATH TO COME
Ps 51.14; Is 53.5; Ro 5.1; Col 1.13,20; 1Th 1.10; 2Pe 2.9

JUSTIFICATION

Is 53.11; Ro 3.24; Tt 3.5-7

RECONCILIATION

Ro 5.1,10-11; 2Co 5.18-21; Col 1.20-22; 1Pe 2.25

ADOPTION - SANCTIFICATION

Mt 25.34; Jn 1.12; Ac 26.16-18; Ro 6.5; 8.14-16,23; 1Co 1.30; Ga 3.26; 4.5; Eph 1.5,11; 5.26; Tt 3.7; Heb 2.10-11; 10.10,14; 13.12; 1Pe 1.1-4; 1Jn 3.1-2

SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

2Co 1.22; Eph 1.13; 4.30; 1Jn 4.13

DEVIL DEFEATED - SAINTS GLORIFIED

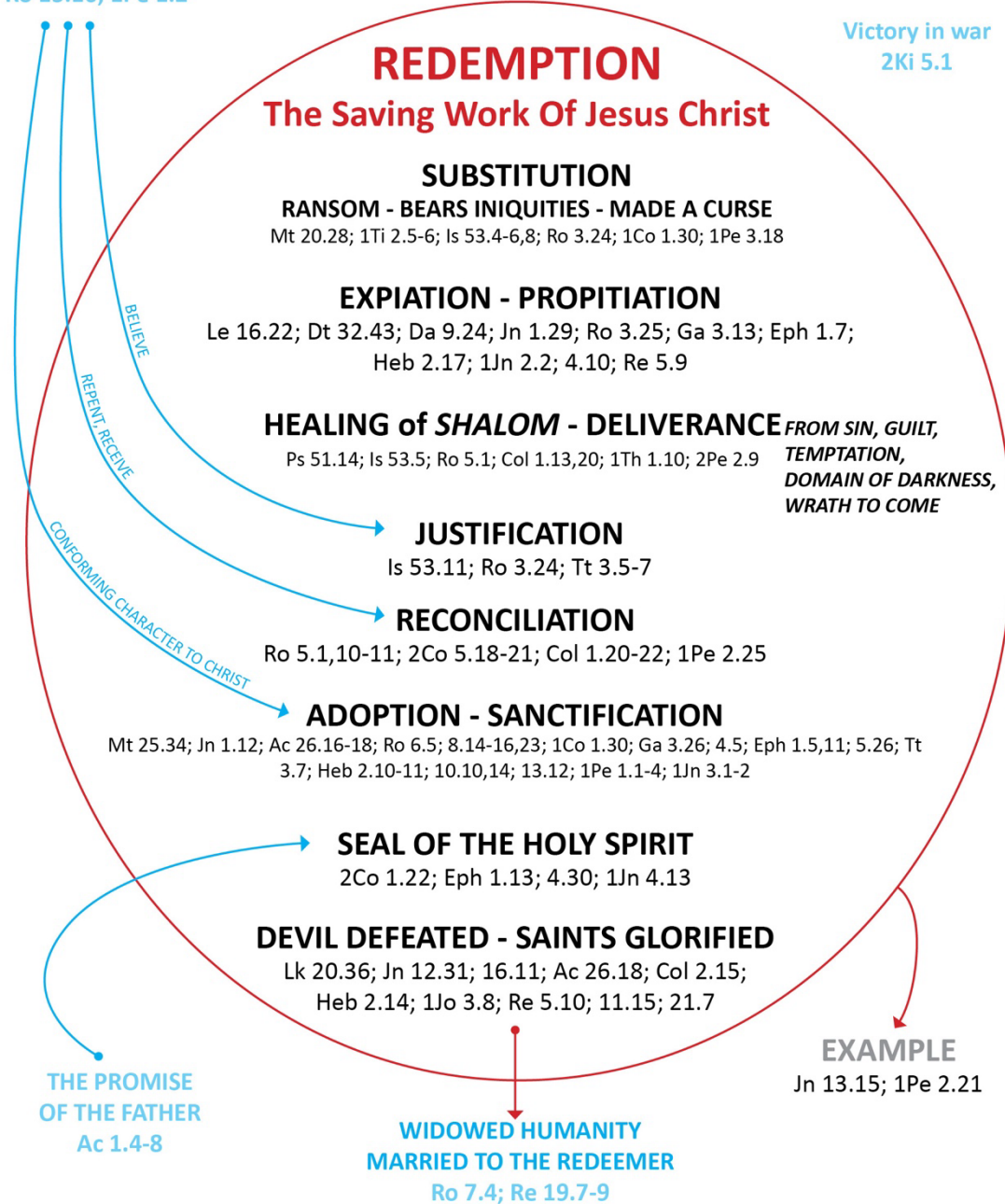
Lk 20.36; Jn 12.31; 16.11; Ac 26.18; Col 2.15;
Heb 2.14; 1Jo 3.8; Re 5.10; 11.15; 21.7

EXAMPLE

Jn 13.15; 1Pe 2.21

THE PROMISE
OF THE FATHER
Ac 1.4-8

WIDOWED HUMANITY
MARRIED TO THE REDEEMER
Ro 7.4; Re 19.7-9



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1. God has our best interests at heart, and no ulterior motives.

Two Things About God's Character

If you were to read the whole Bible from beginning to end, when finished, what would you say were the most important two things to know about God's character?

The apostle John didn't have the 66 books of the Bible all in one convenient volume like we do, and so would never have read it "from cover to cover" like we can. However, he was the longest surviving of the original disciples of Jesus, and was an ardent student of the Scriptures. He knew all or most of the books that our Bible contains today, and himself wrote four of the final ones. He may have never read all 66 books of the Bible in the order that we have them now, but he certainly meditated at length on the overarching themes and messages of the entire scriptural corpus. In the latter part of John's life, God gave him the privilege of writing the final gospel,¹³ and what we might call the "famous last words" of the Bible, that is, his epistles and the book of Revelation.¹⁴ John's words carry profound significance because of the copious antecedent revelation that informs their content.

Therefore, we will find it beneficial to contemplate *all* that John shared as he approached the end of his life and the completion of the Bible. However, in this chapter we single out *only two things* that he said, and these relate to God's eternal character. In his first epistle, John made a point of telling his readers that:

- ◆ God is light (1Jn 1.5)
- ◆ God is love (1Jn 4.8,16)

The succinct simplicity of these statements veils their profundity. What do they really mean?

¹³ Probably between the years AD 70 and 90.

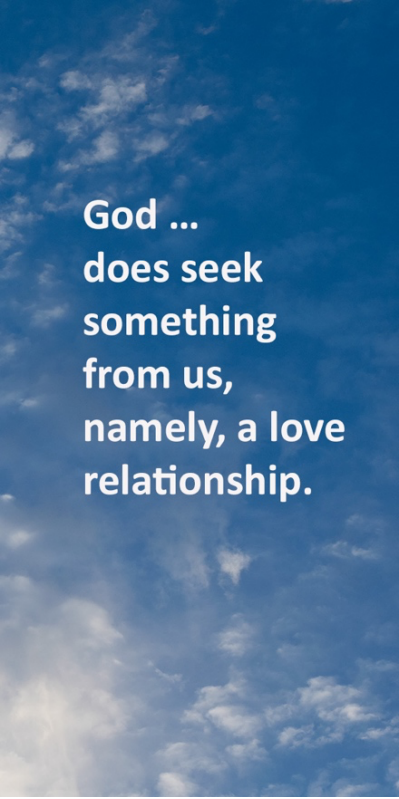
¹⁴ John's last works were probably written between AD 90 and 100.

Consider the statement *God is love*. It implies that love is inherent to God's nature, such that He is love personified. John helps us understand this truth further by characterizing the *love* of which he speaks. He wrote, "We know love by this, that [God's Son] laid down His life for us...." (1Jn 3.16,). In other words, **love is inseparable from who God is, and His love is *self-sacrificing love***. That is, the love that emanates from God's eternal character is the opposite of the so-called "love" that is self-seeking and has ulterior motives for its shows of affection.¹⁵ As we contemplate this, we realize that the consistent proposition of all John's writings, the proposition that God's love is altruistic, rings true because God is eternal and almighty. If God loves, then He loves *without needing anything in return*.

This fact, that God loves without needing anything for Himself, helps us understand John's other point, that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1Jn 1.5). It means that God is truthful in everything He says about Himself and about His plans and purposes for us. When He expresses His loves for us, He does with no hidden motive or agenda tucked away in a secret pocket of darkness. God's character thus contrasts sharply with the character of those who *say* they live in the light, pretending to love, but in reality, hate their brother. John wrote that such a person "is in the darkness until now" (1Jn 2.9-11), pretending to be something they are not. God is not like that, however: He is love, and the love He expresses is absolutely truthful and always desires the very best for those He loves. How wonderful! God's love is the love for which all our hearts yearn. It is the love that brings security, peace and joy, and it is available to us through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, to say that God loves without *needing* anything in return, does not negate the fact that He does *desire* something. **He does seek something from us, namely, a love relationship**. Nevertheless, that He doesn't *need* anything from us lends credence to the Bible's consistent teaching that God loves us prior to

¹⁵ Cf. 1Co 13.4-5, "Love [Grk, ἀγάπη] ... is not self-seeking ...," NIVO.



**God ...
does seek
something
from us,
namely, a love
relationship.**

our loving Him; if we love God it's "because He first loved us."¹⁶ This is why Jesus could teach,

... love your enemies ... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.¹⁷

In other words, if we intend to act like children of God, we will love even our enemies, because He expresses His love even to the unrighteous, by providing their most fundamental needs for physical sustenance. Much more than that, as the apostle Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5.8). God does not wait until people become righteous, or do something that pleases Him, before He loves them; He loves people because He is love.

This wonderful truth should astound us by its contrast to the way pagan religions, from antiquity to the present, have characterized their gods. As Paul Copan and Douglas Jacoby explain,

... the biblical depiction of a God who desires to know his creatures clashes strongly with the pagan concept of divinity. Pagan gods and goddesses, such as the Greek and Roman ones we learned about in grade school, do not love us. The Norse myths present a similar scenario, as do the Celtic, Inuit, Mesoamerican, and gods of other religions — in fact, all pagan religions. One gets the impression that the gods of the ancient Near East don't particularly like humans — let alone desire a relationship with them.¹⁸

¹⁶ 1Jn 4.10, 19; cf. Jn 3.16-17.

¹⁷ Mt 5.44-45.

¹⁸ Copan, Paul; Jacoby, Douglas. *Origins: The Ancient Impact and Modern Implications of Genesis 1-11*, p. 50, (Morgan James Publishing; Kindle Edition).

A Counterintuitive Aspect Of God's Love

Something that may at first cause us consternation, though, is that God's wrath against evil is an expression of His love.¹⁹ This connection between God's love and His wrath may seem counterintuitive, but when the Scriptures speak of God smiting the wicked, the recipients of His wrath are usually those who had harmed or threatened God's people. In other words, **God's wrath frequently has the purpose of protecting those whom he loves.** For example, in the book of Revelation, when God in His wrath sees to the destruction of the wicked entity called "Mystery Babylon," Scripture says,

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."²⁰

The passage goes on to explain,

"... in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."²¹

The apostle Paul put it this way, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians,

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire²²

We see that wrath pours forth from our heavenly Father when He must protect the children He loves. The Israelites were grateful for this protecting wrath, and sang,

Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!²³

¹⁹ As Chris Thurman writes, "I know it's hard to think of God's wrath this way, but God is righteously angry about sin because He loves us." Or as Arthur T. Pierson wrote, in *Many Infallible Proofs*, p. 284, that in the teaching of Christ, "God's anger was seen to be, not a [vindictive and cruel] passion, but a principle — the eternal hatred of wrong, which corresponds with the eternal love of right, and which is only another aspect of love."

²⁰ Re 18.20.

²¹ Re 18.24.

²² 2Th 1.6-7.

²³ Ps 104.35.

It was because God loved Israel that He poured out His wrath upon Egypt in the ten plagues (Dt 7.8), and it's because God loves followers of Jesus today that He will bring fiery judgment upon their unrepentant persecutors (cf. 2Ti 4.14). No wonder Solomon wrote that,

Love *is* strong as death,
Jealousy *is* fierce as Sheol,
Its flashes *are* flashes of fire,
A flame of Yahveh.²⁴

The flame of Yahveh is the fire of His love. When God's love is jealous (= zealous) to protect His children in Zion, His wrath is ready to break out like fire against their enemies (Zec 8.2).

The Consuming Fire

God's children are not the only object of His love, however, and therefore it is not only on their behalf that His wrath blazes forth. God also loves all His own virtues of truth, faithfulness and goodness, and above all He loves His Son.²⁵ Therefore, anything that is contrary to faithfulness and goodness (such as sin and suppressing the truth, Ro 1.18), and anything that is contrary to God's purposes for His Son, is subject to destruction by God's wrath. This is why Scripture describes God as "a consuming fire" (Dt 4.24; Heb 12.29), and why He has manifested Himself on different occasions as a smoking furnace, a flaming torch, or a fiery cloud.²⁶ **From eternity to eternity He is love personified, and so He is forever and always opposed to everything that jeopardizes what He loves.** Thus, when God went before the Israelites into the promised land, the Canaanite nations were consumed before Him because of the Canaanites' wickedness (Deut 9.3-4). At a later time, when wicked king Ahaziah sent a captain with fifty soldiers to arrest

²⁴ So 8.6b, RAG.

²⁵ Ps 91.14; Mt 3.17; 17.5; Jn 3.35; 5.20; Col 1.13; 2Pe 1.17. As Sam Storms writes, "one may speak of *divine wrath* as a function of *divine love*! For God's wrath is His love for holiness and truth and justice." *Attributes of God*, § Wrath, part A.

²⁶ Ge 15.17; Ex 13.21; cf. Eze 1.4; Da 7.9-10.1

God's beloved prophet Elijah, fire descended from heaven and consumed that captain and his soldiers, and a second captain and his fifty after that (2Ki 1.9-12)!

As king David wrote of the Lord in Psalm 21.8-9,

Your hand will find out all your enemies;
Your right hand will find out those who hate you.
You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;
The Lord will swallow them up in His wrath,
And fire will devour them.

Indeed, anyone who acts against what God loves by unrepentantly committing sin will find that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10.31).

This is why the wrath of God should concern every human being who has not yet experienced His redemption. As the apostle Paul wrote, **we have all "sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Ro 3.23). Obviously we all want to be among those who are *protected* and *vindicated* by God's fiery love, and not among those who are *consumed* by His holy wrath. So, we must resolve our sin problem without delay, if we haven't done so already!

Thankfully, since God is light and God is love, that is, since He has our best interests at heart and no ulterior motives, we know that He is predisposed to help us address our problem with sin. But ... we need to back up a bit. We've repeatedly mentioned sin, and quoted Paul's declaration that "all have sinned," but what is sin exactly? And how did it become a universal problem for mankind?

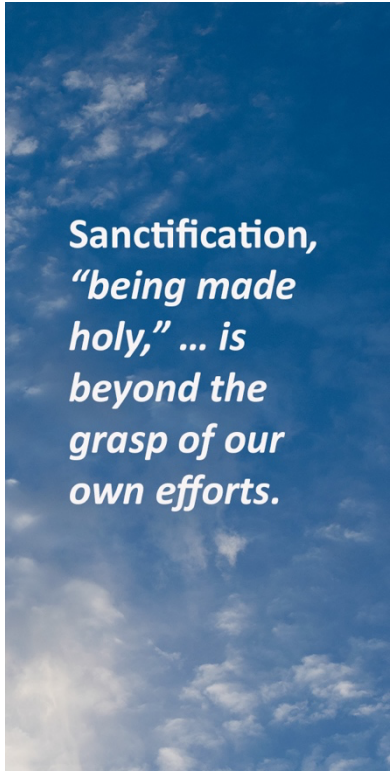
2. Every descendant of Adam except Jesus was born with a sin problem.

What Is Sin?

S*in* refers to humanity's general enmity toward God, and to specific acts expressive of that enmity. The Heb and Grk Bible words translated by our word *sin* have their roots in the ideas of **going wrong** or **missing a mark**. So with regard to specific acts, near synonyms for *sin* in the Bible include *transgression*, *unrighteousness*, *iniquity*, and *doing evil*. The Bible regards as sin any thought or action (or inaction) that is contrary to the laws, will, and character of God. Any act contrary to what God loves is sin. Furthermore, any prioritizing of self above the will of God, and any action that ignores or violates God's right to direct our lives is *sin* (1Jn 3.4).

The Penalty Of Sin

The Bible sums up the penalty of sin with one word: *death* (Ro 6.23). We must understand, however, that the death which results from the commission of sin is multifaceted.²⁷ Sin initiates and exacerbates a progressive physical, moral, psychological, intellectual and relational death in the human being. Our moral deadness makes us "unholy" (cf. 2Ti 3.2), alienates us from our holy God (Le 11.45; cf. Josh 24.19) and leaves us in desperate need of what the Bible calls **sanctification**, "being made holy," the attainment of which is beyond the grasp of our own efforts.²⁸



**Sanctification,
"being made
holy," ... is
beyond the
grasp of our
own efforts.**

²⁷ Roderick describes the different aspects of death that result from sin in his book, *Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin*, Part III: "Understanding Human Fallenness."

²⁸ We will see in ch. 7 that the Christian has some responsibility in the process of his own sanctification, but that sanctification is impossible for anyone apart from the gracious, working of God.

Furthermore, sin robs our lives of meaning and purpose. Finally, if we are not rescued from its grip, sin guarantees our condemnation when we face our Creator, the Consuming Fire!

Sin And Human Falleness

The Origin

The emergence of sin in our universe is shrouded in mystery, but the Bible connects it to the prideful rebellion of one of God’s angels.²⁹ Having lost his citizenship in God’s heaven, that angel, now known as “the devil and Satan” (Re 12.9), but called “the Serpent” early on (Ge 3),³⁰ entered the Garden of Eden, man’s first home, with the intent to destroy the human race while it consisted of only two persons, Adam and his wife Eve. The devil had no right to kill, nor even to touch Adam and Eve,³¹ but he knew that God had given the man a commandment which would result in death if broken. So, the devil approached Eve, who had only heard about God’s commandment second-hand, and attacked her with inuendo and lies. He seduced her into breaking the commandment herself and then induced her to involve Adam in the violation. **We refer to this first sin of humanity and its consequences as “the fall.”**

When our two progenitors chose the devil’s counsel over God’s command, death ensued, as they had been warned. Adam and Eve’s bodies did not suddenly drop dead, but their whole constitution suffered a fatal impairment. The biblical evidence suggests that this impairment involved a detachment of God’s Holy Spirit from their human nature.³² When this occurred, Adam and Eve *began to die* in all

²⁹ Is 14.12-15; Eze 28.13-17. We speculate that envy of humanity’s destiny entered into Lucifer’s rebellion.

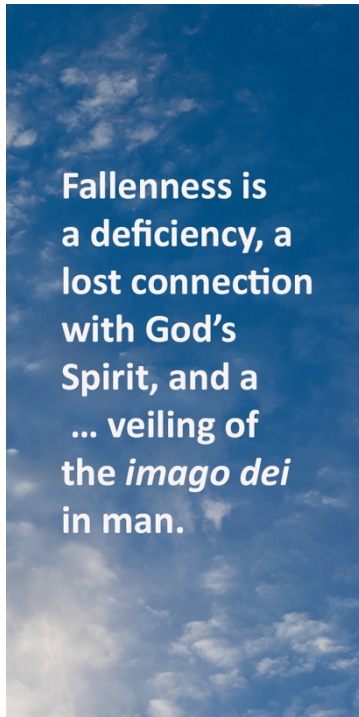
³⁰ The devil was first called the Serpent (Heb *nachash*, pronounced with a guttural *ch*) because of his whispering, hissing speech, not because of his appearance. Whispering speech would soon become associated with divination, cf. Isa 8.19. See Gesenius and Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, pp. 544-545.

³¹ Cf. Job 1.12; 2.6.

³² For a deeper exploration of human nature, and how it was affected by the fall, see the *unabridged* version of this book, **Appendix 1: Human Nature And The Fall**.

the ways listed in the preceding section: physically, morally, psychologically, intellectually and relationally. They found themselves in a pitiable condition we describe as “fallen.” Tragically, this condition has been inherited by all their descendants — except Jesus Christ.

What Fallenness Is



Over the centuries, theologians have speculated much about the essence of human fallenness and how it is passed down through the generations. Biblically speaking, however, fallenness is not a substantive thing like a disease that is conveyed by means of a germ, but is instead the lack of a thing. **Fallenness is a deficiency, a lost connection with God's Spirit, and a consequent veiling of the *imago dei*, the divine image, in man.**³³ Our parents “pass down” this deficiency to us, only in the sense that they are unable to genetically bequeath to us that which is now missing from the human constitution. Man was created “in the likeness of God” (Ge 5.1), but fallen Adam was only able to father children “in his own likeness, according to his [own] image” (Ge 5.3).³⁴ The difference manifests itself in fallen humans as a lack of spiritual vitality, a distortion of their God-given aptitudes, *and* an inability to consistently choose and do what is good and right. **Thus, human fallenness is a spiritual deadness that has left us susceptible to sin, to our own unrestrained drives and impulses, and to the devil's compulsions.**³⁵ Compare the following diagrams:

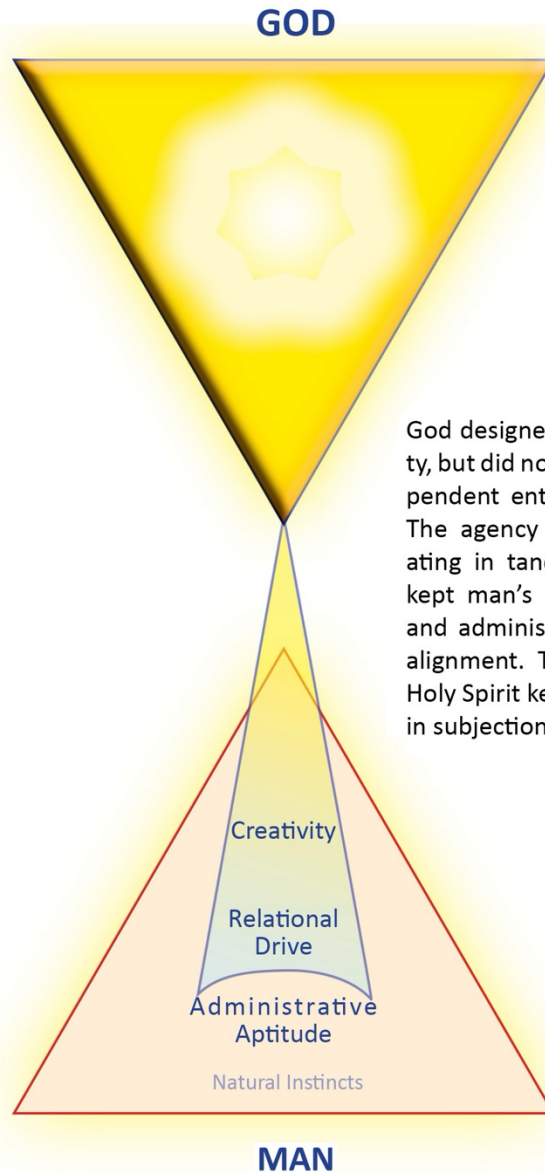
³³ With the veiling of the *imago dei*, fallen man cannot reflect his Creator as he ought. In contrast, the divine image is still perfectly visible in the ideal “son of man,” Jesus Christ (2Co 4.4; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3; 2.7).

³⁴ Ge 5.3 does not imply that the *imago dei* is absent in Adam's posterity (see Ge 9.6; 1Co 11.7; Jas 3.9), but only that Adam, in and of himself, was not capable to reproducing it in his sons.

³⁵ Jn 8.34; Ro 7.5; Eph 2.1-2; cf. Jn 8.44.

ORIGINAL STATE OF CREATED MAN

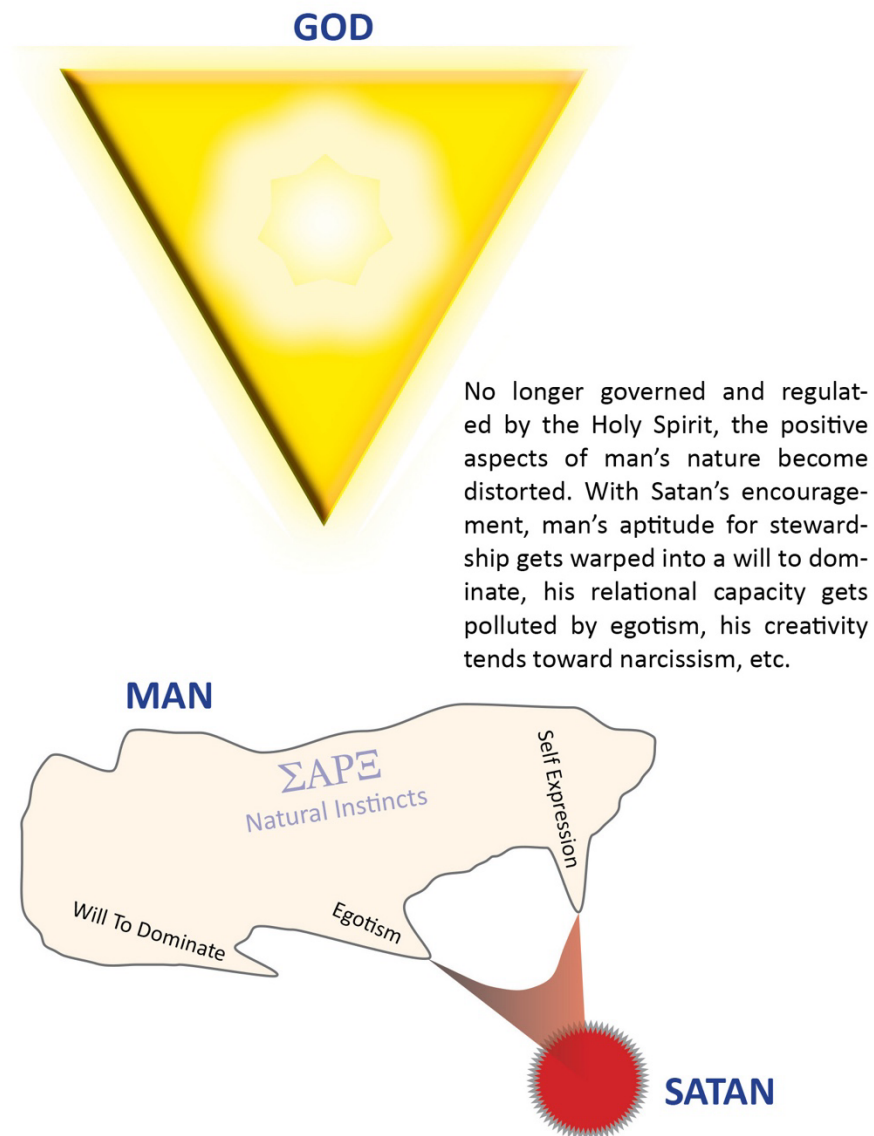
A vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit is an integral component of man as the *imago Dei*. As a creature, man is also endowed with natural instincts that enable him to maintain his physical life on earth. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to man and draws man's faculties toward God, aligning those faculties so that the whole man reflects his Creator, and is clothed in divine light.



God designed man to have individuality, but did not design him to be an independent entity having self-sufficiency. The agency of the Holy Spirit, operating in tandem with human nature, kept man's creativity, relational drive and administrative aptitude in proper alignment. The same working of the Holy Spirit kept man's physical instincts in subjection to his spiritual drives.

CURRENT STATE OF FALLEN MAN

By submitting himself to the Serpent, man broke his vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit. Relative to his original design, man is no longer whole. He is denuded of the divine light and deprived of God's palpable presence. Man's faculties are no longer properly aligned by the Spirit, but are now perverted by the overwhelming pull of his now ascendant natural instincts, "the flesh," and by Satan's blinding deceptions. The *imago dei* in fallen man is veiled such that he cannot reflect God's glory as he ought. Spiritually dead, insofar as his responsiveness to God, man is also dying physically, and is judicially under condemnation.



None of what we have just described should be interpreted to mean that our natural drives are inherently bad; we affirm the opposite! God endowed human beings with *good* physical and emotional drives so that we would have the necessary instincts to thrive together on planet Earth. It's only because we're born lacking the spiritual power to govern those physical and emotional impulses that they become a problem. They get into the driver's seat of our lives when we're born and steer us into all kinds of trouble. From the earliest moments of our lives, we cannot help but feel and think, first and foremost, about what our *self* wants, in order to satisfy our good, *but out of control*, physical and emotional cravings.

In other words, it is due to the lack of an inner “impulse regulator” — not to our physical and emotional drives being inherently evil — that we are born selfish. Tragically, the opportunistic devil and his minions exploit our lack of inner spiritual guidance and control, and add their urgings (usually imperceptibly) to our own selfish cravings. Therefore, without societal deterrence we are apt to live overtly self-centered lives; without divine intervention, we will remain selfish at heart even if we hide it well from the people around us and even from ourselves.

Problems That Stem From Fallenness

We Forget About God

When our physical and emotional impulses control us, and the “god of this world” blinds us (2Co 4.4), we forget about God and ignore His agenda for our lives. This breaks the greatest of God's commandments, which is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk 12.30). This commandment is the reasonable dictate of our Creator, since He brought us into existence for His own purposes. As the apostle Paul reminded the Roman Christians, “from [the Lord] and through Him and to Him are all things” (Ro 11.36). Likewise, to the Corinthian believers he wrote, “there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him ...” (1Co 8.6). People already in heaven cry out this same truth, saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all

things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created” (Re 4.11). **Our obligation to love and honor God is inherent in the simple fact that He created us**, but we so easily forget this. Jesus had to remind even the Pharisees of this obligation, and they were the arbiters of Jewish religious practice! In Jesus’ famous saying, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22.21), the implication was that just as the coin for paying taxes had Caesar’s image on it, and so should be given back to Caesar, in the same way whatever has God’s image stamped on it should be given back to God. The only thing in all creation explicitly said to bear God’s image is mankind. Jesus tells us that we must give ourselves back to God.

However, we must give ourselves to God not *solely* because He created us. We also owe our whole lives to Him because He purchased us “with His own blood,” as the apostle Paul so graphically stated (Ac 20.28). On this basis, Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians, saying, “you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1Co 6.20). To the Romans he put it this way: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Ro 12.1). We realize, therefore, that floating along complacently on the current of our selfish drives and impulses, while withholding from our Creator the sacrifice of ourselves, compounds the debt that we already owe Him (cf. Mt 6.12a). But that’s not the only problem that ensues from the selfish bent of our fallen state.

We Start Wars

While we were still working on this treatise, the news broke that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Evidence points to the selfish ambitions of one man, Vladimir Putin, as the impetus for this war (characterized as the biggest war in Europe since WWII). There are political, economic and military factors that point to pride and fear as part of Putin’s motivation, but they still add up to his selfishness pulling the trigger. Currently, Putin’s selfishness has created a living hell for countless innocent civilians, and apart from our God’s gracious intervention, the number of casualties for both sides in this conflict can only continue to climb.

We might think that a selfish man starting a war is an aberration, and not related to the spiritual fallenness shared by all humanity; after all, not everyone is so bellicose. But Vladimir Putin is no aberration. The selfish impulses that start wars between nations are the same unrestrained urges that start conflicts between neighbors, friends and family members. The Bible puts it this way:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.³⁶

Notice the phrase, *pleasures that wage war in your members*. This phrase refers to those out-of-control hungers and impulses at work in the members of our physical bodies. Notice also the words *lust* and *envious*. These words refer to the selfish physical and psychological drives that come forward and cause harm when our God-given instincts are not brought under spiritual control. Each of us have the potential within ourselves to plunge our world into a war, but even more so when we act under the witting or unwitting compulsion of an external and malignant spiritual power!

We Act Under The Devil's Compulsion

As we've hinted above, fallen human beings are *not* apt to think that they are influenced by evil spirits! Even when a fallen man is confronted about his ignobility by the disapprobation of others, or by more direct consequences of his actions, he takes comfort in the belief that at least he is his own boss, at least he lives autonomously without letting anyone tell him what to do. He imagines that at the end of his life he will say, in the words of the Frank Sinatra song, "I did it my way."

However, autonomy is impossible for fallen man, because the spiritual realm abhors a vacuum. The idea that spiritual interlopers are somehow barred from the steering wheels of our souls is just another deception to which our spiritual deadness leaves us vulnerable. We are mistaken if we think that, while our own spirit lies all but dead in the trunk, some other "higher faculty" of human

³⁶ Jas 4.1-2.

nature comes forward to take the driver's seat; our incapacitated spirit is the "higher faculty"! We imagine maintaining the control over our own life by sheer power of will, but this does not happen. Instead, the "god of this age," the spirit of evil, comes into the spiritual void of our impaired constitution to stimulate and guide the base instincts of our flesh, to blind our minds, and to distract us from the redemptive overtures of God's grace³⁷ (2Co 4.4, NIVO).

The devil with his minions steers the souls of fallen men, *and he has had the right to do so*. Satan's authority over fallen men derives from the fall itself, briefly described above: Adam and Eve despised God's authority and shifted the allegiance of the human race over to the deceiving Serpent. As Augustine put it, man "joined the faction of the fallen angels."³⁸ Thus, Jesus said to the hypocritical seekers of His day, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire" (Jn 8.44 NIVO), and John affirmed the wider principle that all who habitually practice sin demonstrate thereby that they are "of the devil" (1Jn 3.8).

Obviously, not all fallen people are demonized to the extent of the Gerasene man who was driven mad by Legion (Lk 8.26-33). The passages quoted in the preceding paragraph do not imply any such a thing. Rather, as the apostle John wrote, "... the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one*" (1Jn 5.19). That is, Satan assumes the right to afflict all unredeemed persons, and *influences their lives*, whether subtly or overtly. Not everyone abandons themselves to that evil influence, but no fallen person can escape it entirely. Instead, fallen people yield to it unwittingly in what seem like the most human of behaviors, such as jealousy and ambition (Jas 3.14-15). However, when a person *does* embrace the demonic impulse, he soon finds himself in the grip of an overpowering compulsion to evil. The spiritual deadness of fallen humanity is catastrophic; if people yield to Satan's exacerbation of their selfish lusts, it becomes horrific (see Eph 2.2-3).

³⁷ See more about God's grace at the beginning of ch. 4.

³⁸ In *The City Of God* 14.15.

God Intends Something Far Better

But war and oppressive manipulation by the devil are not God's intention for humanity! **We must understand that failing to address our sin and fallenness jeopardizes our participation in a far more wonderful plan.** We will look extensively into the destiny that God has planned for His people in chapter 7, but while we are thinking about human fallenness, let us share a preview, a brief summary of what the Bible tells us about the destiny of those who have been, and will have been, redeemed from their fallen state. We want to whet our readers' appetites for learning about a plan that is so much better than capitulation to the selfish pursuit of personal autonomy.

God's plan for His people far surpasses our countless "happy ever after" fairy tales, *while fulfilling all their best elements!* In God's plan for His people, there is a Prince,³⁹ a royal wedding,⁴⁰ and a golden city.⁴¹ The love and joyous fulfillment that awaits the inhabitants of that city will totally eclipse the shallow infatuation and temporal happiness imagined in worldly romances. After all, the heirs of God's heavenly destiny will not only enjoy everlasting fellowship with one another, but more importantly, the loving company of their Creator and of the human-divine Savior who has forever tied His destiny to theirs. Together, God and His people will embark upon an adventure that will span heaven and earth, *and then a new heaven and earth.* God's planned adventure will so enthrall His people that the sorrows *and pleasures* of this present life won't even come to mind (Is 65.17)!

We reiterate, though, that anyone who chooses to continue living selfishly, insisting upon his own autonomy,⁴² and refusing to face his problem with sin and

³⁹ Is 9.6; Da 9.25; Ac 5.31.

⁴⁰ Ps 45; Re 19.7-9.

⁴¹ Heb 11.16; Re 21.10-21.

⁴² It may seem that we over emphasize fallen man's prioritization of personal autonomy. After all, globally speaking, don't most people submit themselves to the god or gods of one religion or another? Yes, humanity's innate religious impulse dictates that most people adhere, at least nominally, to some form of religious observance. However, if a man's religion does not call upon him to repent (Ac 17.30), and if it does not address the fundamental problem of his

fallenness, is liable to cheat himself out of this glorious destiny. Left unaddressed, a person's fallenness, and the sins that emanate from it, will not only ruin his life in the present (whether precipitously or by attrition), but will ultimately bring him to a state of fathomless regret when he meets his Maker, the Consuming Fire. Thankfully, redemption from ruin and regret has been made possible by the one human being whose nature was never impaired by fallenness and whose character was never twisted by sin.

Why Jesus Wasn't Fallen

Jesus successfully remained in control of His physical and emotional drives and impulses throughout His entire life, even though He was tempted to give in to them, just like we are (Heb 4.15). Though tempted like us, He was not born fallen like us, but was instead born physically and spiritually whole. How so? His mother did not pass down spiritual vitality to Him — she needed a Savior like everybody else (Lk 1.46-47). Jesus' mother, Mary, godly as she was, could not bequeath spiritual wholeness to Jesus, because she herself was born with the same spiritual deficiency as the rest of humanity.⁴³ Her inability, in and of herself, to birth “unfallen” children is apparent from the occasional bad attitudes of her other sons.⁴⁴ However, Jesus did not need the missing component from Mary. He was born spiritually whole, full of spiritual vitality, because His Father is God. It was God Who first created a spiritually vital human nature in Adam, and it was impossible for God to not share His own spiritual vitality with His Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is good news, because it was through this one un-fallen man that God would provide a solution for our pressing problem of sin.

fallen condition (cf. Eze 18.31; 36.26-27), it surreptitiously allows him to remain the captain of his own soul, or at least to maintain the illusion that he remains at the helm of his life.

⁴³ Contrary to the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that Mary was born without any stain of original sin. This idea was invented by some English monks between AD 1121 and 1130, and was made an official doctrine by Pius IX in 1854. See Hastings et al., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

⁴⁴ Mk 3.21; Jn 7.3-5.

Why God Won't Overlook Sins

Because Of His Character

Many have asked, “If nothing is impossible for God, why can't He just overlook our sins?” The answer is: nothing is impossible for God except acting contrary to His own eternal character and nature. For example, because He is the God of truth, God cannot lie. Since God is also love, He cannot allow people to inflict evil upon one another unchecked. Any adult understands that people who are not held accountable for doing wrong will only perpetrate ever worsening atrocities. We have also observed, what God has always known: moral evil brings about increasing degrees of death, both for those who commit it and for those upon whom it is inflicted. Therefore, **God cannot overlook evil in a world He intends to bless with abundant life** (cf. Jn 10.10).

Because Of His Plan For His Son

Of course, instead of overlooking evil, God could simply annihilate all sinners in the first instant of their first transgression. To completely rid His world of all those who sin and cause death would be an act consistent with His loving character, and He very nearly did this with the flood of Noah. However, God has a plan for creation, and that plan has deeper objectives than simply keeping evil out of the world. His plan centers upon His Son, and it involves a great redemption — a redemption that allows Him to *not destroy all sinners*, but a redemption that is nevertheless *incompatible with overlooking sins*. For that redemption to proceed, **the sins of mankind must, at some point, be expiated**, that is, covered and removed (we will look more closely at the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4).

Is An Expiatory Sacrifice Really Necessary?

The expiation of human sin was not absolutely necessary, in the sense that God had *no external obligation to redeem mankind*. As already stated, God could annihilate all sinners in the first moment of their transgression. At the fall or at the flood, He could have righteously allowed the entire human race to perish as a result of their sins, just as He allows the rebellious angels to perish without any hope of

salvation (2Pe 2.4). However, because of God's plan to provide a suitable bride for His Son (more on this in [chapter 7](#)), and in view of His attributes of both love and justice, there is a sense in which there is an inherent necessity *within* the Godhead to justly redeem at least a part of humanity.⁴⁵ **God's plan to justly redeem sinners is what makes an expiatory sacrifice on mankind's behalf truly necessary.**⁴⁶ However, the magnitude of humanity's collective affront against God makes the necessary expiation beyond any mortal person's ability.

⁴⁵ As Leon Morris wrote, "the salvation that was wrought in Christ is something that proceeds from the loving heart of the Father," *The Cross In The New Testament*, p. 369. Our point is that the impetus for redemption, and for the requisite expiatory sacrifice was all internal to the Godhead; neither man nor angels twisted God's arm to get Him to act for man's salvation. Morris' specific point about the Father's love is welcome in opposing the false view that "a loving Son ... [won] salvation for men from a just, but unrelenting, Father."

⁴⁶ As determined from long ago (Lk 22.22; 24.26; Ac 2.23; 4.27-28).

Excursus On The Kingdom Of God

The kingdom of God, also called the kingdom “of Heaven” or “of the heavens,” is a subject that will enter more and more into our study of redemption. While this topic comes to the forefront in the book of Daniel (2.44; 7.13-14) and in the synoptic gospels (Mt 4.17; etc.), it nevertheless constitutes a thematic stream that flows through the whole of Scripture. When we follow that stream to its source, it takes us back to the Garden of Eden (that Paradise we will say more about when we describe the tabernacle in [chapter 7](#)). When we follow the stream to its end, it takes us to the Day of the LORD (a subject we will also delve into in [chapter 7](#)).

Essence And Original Expression

Fundamentally, **the kingdom of God is *the rule of God***. Therefore, biblical references to “the kingdom of God” can refer to God’s sovereign rule over all of creation.⁴⁷ However, passages that speak explicitly about the kingdom of God (or of God ruling as king) usually refer to the sovereignty of God *as it affects the world of humanity* (Da 4.2-3,34-35; Re 11.15-17; 15.3). More specifically, when the OT prophets wrote about the kingdom of God, they often had *a restored Davidic dynasty* in view.⁴⁸ Of course, the hope of a *restored* Davidic reign reflected not only the moral and practical collapse of the Davidic rule in Israel’s history, but also the rejection of God’s divine rule by Israel and the rest of humanity.

However, the kingdom of God existed at the beginning of creation, before anyone had even thought of rejecting God’s rule. The biblical story of God’s kingdom begins with the brief information given in the book of Genesis about God’s perfect rule over the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. In the

⁴⁷ Ps 47.2; 98; Is 6.5; 1Ti1.17; cf. Je 46.18; 48.15; 51.57. Got Questions Ministries summarizes this idea:

Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. Several passages of Scripture show that God is the undeniable Monarch of all creation: “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps 103.19).

⁴⁸ God saw the Davidic kingdom as “My kingdom,” 1Ch 17.11-14. For the prophetic expectations, see Is 9.6-7; 11.1-5; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 17.24-25; 22.2-4; 23.5-6; 30.8-9; 33.14-26; Eze 34.23-30; Ho 3.5; Am 9.11-12. This OT theme is reflected in NT expectations: Mk 11.10; Lk 1.31-33; Ac 15.15-17; cf. Ac 1.6.

garden, before Adam and Eve sinned, not only did God and humanity dwell together in a perfect familial relationship, the *familia dei* mentioned in [the Introduction](#) of this book, but they also lived and worked together in a perfect kingdom. The LORD God was king and lawgiver, both de jure and de facto. At the same time, the man and his wife ruled over the earth and its animals as God's vicegerents (Ge 1.26; 2.19). Under God's authority, they also cared for the garden (Ge 2.15-17).

Current And Historical Distaste For Kings

Now, in many modern countries, like the United States, people don't like the idea of having a king. Some nations still have a beloved king and queen (who often only serve as figureheads alongside a democratic style of government). Other countries, however, have autocratic kings not particularly esteemed by their subjects. So, the question arises, "What's the difference between an autocratic king and a dictator?" Some autocratic kings *are* tantamount to dictators, but to answer the question:

- **A dictator** is generally someone who has seized control of a country by force or intrigue, and has assumed the absolute right to dictate the laws while having no political interests beyond selfish ones.
- **A king**, on the other hand, is in principle someone who assumes the leadership of a nation on the basis of mutual benefit between sovereign and citizens. In a smaller monarchy, the king may have extensive family connections with his subjects, and those relationships instill in him a concern for the people's well-being.

The pre-fall Garden of Eden had the character of a small monarchy. A family connection existed between sovereign and subjects, since Adam was the son of God by virtue of his creation (Lk 3.38). God ruled as king on earth in the person of His Son, the eternal Word and agent of creation, described in John 1.1-3. This was the One whom early Christian theologians called the *Logos Asarkos*, the pre-incarnate Word, who would later "become flesh" and dwell among us as Jesus Christ (Jn 1.14). In Eden, as in all His pre-incarnation manifestations, the *Logos Asarkos* appeared in tangible, human-like form, even though his body did not yet consist of the same material as ours. He was able to do what flesh-and-blood people do, from walking and wearing clothes to performing surgery. As Creator He brought the earth into existence, and then as king, He formed His first human

subject, Adam, “of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Ge 2.7). He also planted the garden and placed Adam in it (Ge 2.8,15). He later built Eve from organic material taken from Adam’s side (Ge 2.21-22). As divine king, the *Logos Asarkos* remained near His subjects, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Ge 3.8). Far from being an autocrat with selfish interests, the divine king of Eden concerned Himself with the well-being of His subjects, even when there was only one (Ge 2.18). Furthermore, while there was not yet any such thing as a constitutional monarchy nor any human assembly to propose laws to which even the king should submit, the LORD God acted, as always, according to the immutable “law” of His own nature. Because the divine king is love and truth personified,⁴⁹ **there has never since been a more benevolent government than the monarchy that was the Edenic kingdom of God.**

Still, after mankind fell into a state of sin, it became natural for human beings to rebel against all rule other than that of their own selfish impulses. Fallen human beings do not wish to submit to any government, no matter how benevolent it may be — they do so, but only because they must.⁵⁰ Fallen people do not desire external government, they desire autonomy; every individual wishes to rule himself without having to submit to anyone else. After the fall, this commitment to autonomy eventually led to ubiquitous wickedness and chaos in the primeval world. This devolution was inevitable because autonomous man cannot help but serve his own depraved inclinations as well as the promptings of Satan, the “god of this world.”⁵¹ The resulting calamitous moral disintegration finally compelled our good and holy God to bring the judgment of the flood upon mankind (Ge 6.12-13).

God Rebuilds His Government By Covenant

When the human race started over with Noah and his sons, God began to rebuild both the *familia dei* and His earthly kingdom through a relational instrument called a *covenant* (we will say more about God’s use of covenants in [chapter 7](#)). In time, Noah’s descendants through a particular family line, the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so increased in number as to constitute a nation, the nation of

⁴⁹ Ex 34.6; Ps 25.10; 31.5; 40.11; 115.1; 117.2; Is 65.16; 1Jn 4.8; 5.20.

⁵⁰ The final proof of this will be demonstrated in the Gog and Magog invasion that will occur *after* a thousand years of God’s ideal rule over mankind (Ps 2; Eze 38-39; Re 20.7-10).

⁵¹ Cf. 2Co 4.4; Pr 17.11.

Israel. As a nation, Israel became willing (thanks in part to the oppression they suffered under the government of Egypt's Pharaoh) to accept life under God's rule. Using Moses as a mediator, **God instituted a government for Israel that we call a covenantal theocracy.** A theocracy is a system of government in which God is recognized as king, while priests and prophets rule in His name.⁵² In a covenantal theocracy, the covenant bond provides assurance that God will do His part to bless the people as His adopted kindred, while they do their part to honor Him as their king, by worshipping Him and keeping His statutes. In this theocracy, God initially reigned through the mediation of Moses as His prophet. After the passing of Moses, the day-to-day governing of the people was done by the priests and prophets who taught and directed the people, sometimes through the elders and leaders of Israel's tribes and clans.⁵³ **As groups and individuals within the nation of Israel embraced God's rule over their lives, and as God dealt directly with those who violated the covenant, this covenantal theocracy served as a powerful expression of God's kingdom on earth.**

Birth Of The Covenantal Theocratic Monarchy (CTM)

Even so, the Moses-mediated covenantal theocracy was not a *flawless* expression of God's kingdom, because many people did not allow God to write His laws on their hearts,⁵⁴ and they all too readily violated the laws that God had written for them on stone tablets. Therefore, after the Israelites had settled in the promised land, they suffered more and more calamities for failing to uphold their part of their covenant with God. In time, the people decided that their lives would be better if, instead of a theocracy, they could have a monarchy like the other nations around them. So, they asked Samuel, the leading prophet-priest of the time, to give them a king (1Sa 8.4-5). This request by the people did not catch God by surprise. God had always intended to reestablish a monarchy for His people, this time under a *human king*, and had made provision for this eventuality in the law (Deut 17.14-20). However, God had also always known that Israel struggled with submitting to Him (1Sa 8.6-8; 10.19), and that the people needed to learn the difference between life under a human king and life under a divine king.

⁵² Cf. Ex 19.5-6.

⁵³ Cf. Ex 18.25-26; Nu 10.1-4; 30.1; Deut 1.9-18; 5.23-28; 27.1; 31.9,28.

⁵⁴ Contrary to the exhortation of Deut 32.46.

So, God directed Samuel to appoint Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, as Israel's first human king, *and* to tell the people what it would cost them to have a man rather than God ruling over them (1Sa 8.10-18). Nevertheless, **Israel's government remained an expression of the kingdom of God**, because it did not transform from a covenantal theocracy into a *secular* monarchy, but into a *covenantal theocratic* monarchy (henceforth CTM) in which king and people remained in covenantal relationship with God and with one another (1Ch 11.3). The offices of the priests and prophets also remained in place, to check and balance the power of the human king.

The Immutable Requisite Of A Divine King

As the biblical story progresses, we discover that, while God *did* intend a man to rule as king over His people, He *did not* intend just any man to serve as that king. No mere man holding the office of king could bring about the reestablishment of a truly Edenic monarchy, not even with the help of priests and prophets. The king that God had in mind would have to combine in his own person the best human qualities of the great kings David⁵⁵ and Solomon,⁵⁶ and at the same time would have to *be God*.⁵⁷ **A full restoration of both the pristine Edenic family and the ideal kingdom of God would require the presence of God Himself, walking and reigning among His people in human form.**

By the time the political sovereignty of the old Davidic dynasty came to its end during the Babylonian exile (c. 586 BC), a few of the Jewish people had come to understand that the just and righteous king who would restore kingdom *might be divine* (cf. Jn 1.15; 11.27; 12.34). After all, some of the prophets had spoken of that coming ruler as though he might be the LORD God Himself (Is 9.6-7; Mic 5.2). Still, such an idea was hard to comprehend. How could the coming king be *both* human and divine? Nevertheless, little by little, with the help of Jesus' own teaching about Himself, and the subsequent teaching of His apostles, we now understand that Jesus Christ, the awaited Messiah and King of God's kingdom, is both truly human and truly divine (Heb 1.1-12).

⁵⁵ Je 23.5; 30.9; 33.15; Eze 34.23-24; 37.24-25; Ho 3.5.

⁵⁶ Is 11.1-5; cf. Mt 12.42.

⁵⁷ Is 9.6-7; 24.23; Mic 4.7; 5.2-4.

The Eschatological Kingdom

Israelites in antiquity may have lacked understanding about *the nature* of the coming king, but they eventually set aside all doubt about his lineage. With help from the prophets, Israel came to know that the messianic king would be a descendant of king David. By the first century, the Jews (and even some Gentiles), had begun to refer to the hoped-for messianic ruler as the “Son of David.”⁵⁸ They generally believed that this messianic Son of David would unveil himself in a royal coming (*parousia*) that would restore political sovereignty to Israel (cf. Ac 1.6). They expected this restoration to bring “this age” to a close and inaugurate “the age to come” (Mt 24.3; cf. Mt 12.32).

In “the age to come” according to the popular understanding, the Davidic Messiah would lead the nation of Israel into a golden era of Edenic peace and prosperity. If anyone gave thought to how the Gentile nations fit into this popular hope, they probably focused upon the expectation of “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (Lk 1.68-74). Only a few, like aged Simeon, thought of the Messiah as “a light of revelation for the Gentiles” (Lk 2.32), that not even the disciples of Jesus understood, at first, that there would ensue a period of Gentile ascendancy in the land (“the times of the Gentiles,” Lk 21.23-24) before Israel’s “golden age.” The Scriptures reveal, however, that the glorious day for Israel will come, when the Davidic king will reign from Zion, not only over Israel, but over all nations, and will restore not only Judah but the entire cosmos to its Edenic state. That still future expression of God’s kingdom in its global fullness is what we refer to in this book as **the eschatological kingdom of God**.⁵⁹

The Kingdom Of God And The New Covenant

Few of Jesus’ contemporaries anticipated that the Messiah would be divine, and almost none imagined that there would be a lengthy interval between Messiah’s coming and the eschatological fullness of His kingdom. The lack of understanding in both of these matters was tied to a third blind spot having to do with the connection between the Messiah and the New Covenant. First-century Jews

⁵⁸ Mt 22.41-46; 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; cf. Psalm of Solomon 17.21, of c. 40 BC, “See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel.”

⁵⁹ The term *eschatological*, comes from the root ἔσχατος, meaning, “extremity, limit, end.” The **eschatological kingdom of God** will be realized after the *end* of our present age.

seemed unaware that the Messiah would arrive as the Messenger and Mediator of God's New Covenant (Mal 3.1-4; Heb 9.15; etc.). Since any post-fall expression of the kingdom of God on earth, including the eschatological kingdom, is of necessity a *covenantal* kingdom,⁶⁰ the disciples of Jesus should have been as excited about the imminent establishment of the New Covenant as they were about the coronation of the messianic king. However, even after Jesus told them explicitly that He was establishing the New Covenant with His outpoured blood (Mt 26.27-28), the focus of the disciples remained on their hoped-for restoration of "the kingdom," i.e., the arrival of the kingdom of God in its eschatological fullness, with Israel in political ascendancy (Ac 1.6).

Israel's subjugation under a succession of pagan empires had undoubtedly kept the hope of the eschatological kingdom simmering in the Jewish mind. The first-century oppression by the Roman government seems to have brought the hope of a restored Davidic dynasty to a full boil, at least among the more zealous Israelites. It appears that Jesus' countrymen were confident in their covenant status, and apparently content with the provisions of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, but they desperately desired to see the fulfilment of the prophecies about the coming Davidic kingdom.⁶¹

So, first John the Baptist and then Jesus made the kingdom of God the focal point of their proclamation. "Repent," they preached, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."⁶² In what sense was the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, at hand? John explained, "I am the voice Isaiah predicted, telling you to prepare the way for Yahveh, the LORD God!"⁶³ In other words, the kingdom of God was near in the sense that the divine king of that kingdom was arriving. Once having arrived, Jesus announced not only that the kingdom of God was near (Mk 1.15), but that it had, in fact, come (Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20).

However, the more we study the canonical Gospels, the more we realize that the Jewish people of the first century had submerged whatever knowledge they had of the New Covenant beneath their hope in the *external aspects* of the

⁶⁰ We will clarify this principle with our in-depth look at covenants in [chapter 7](#). For now, please see Is 55.3; Eze 34.23-25; 37.24-28.

⁶¹ Is 9.6-7; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 23.5-6; 30.7-10; 33.15-22

⁶² Mt 3.2, 4.17.

⁶³ Roderick's paraphrase of Jn 1.23, which quotes Is 40.3.

eschatological kingdom. **For this reason, much of what John the Baptist and Jesus taught about the kingdom of God was *corrective*.** John the Baptist directed the people of Israel back to their covenant calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and away from thoughts of raising an insurrectionist army. Jesus, in His turn, also taught the *spiritual realities* of the kingdom, many of which overlap with elements of the New Covenant. Jesus taught, for example, that the subjects of the kingdom were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, not armed zealots (Mt 26.52).

The Kingdom Of God Is Already And Not Yet

What then is the current state of the kingdom of God? A glance at the current state of our world tells us that the kingdom of God is obviously ***not yet*** here in its eschatological glory. So, we remind ourselves that the realization of the kingdom of God among human subjects, in all its phases, past, present and future, required the eventual establishment of the New Covenant. The establishment of the New Covenant, in turn, required the New-Covenant sacrifice, the final expiation for sin that would propitiate the Father.⁶⁴ Jesus Christ accomplished and fulfilled all these requirements with His first coming. Now, with further teaching from Jesus and the apostles, we understand that **the eschatological culmination of the kingdom of God also awaits *the second coming of Christ* (His *parousia*)**. At that time, King Jesus will transform the redeemed by giving them immortal sinless bodies. He will also completely remove Satan and his minions (the chief opponents of God's rule) from the human domain (more on all this in [chapter 7](#)).

Nevertheless, with all that Jesus accomplished with His first coming, many aspects of the future eschatological kingdom have become a present reality, at least incipiently. As the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles implied, the kingdom of God took a giant step forward and entered a new phase with the first arrival of the "son of David." **It's as if the future fullness of the eschatological kingdom had in some measure overflowed into the present.** Therefore, we can say with Jesus that the kingdom of God is ***already*** here among us (Mt 12.28; Lk 17.21), even if it is ***not yet*** revealed in its full eschatological glory.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See more about the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4.

⁶⁵ See the table following this excursus. For an extensive treatment of viewpoints regarding both the already present and still yet future aspects of the kingdom of God, see George Eldon

In the present time, therefore, wherever people, both Jews and Gentiles, have submitted themselves to the rule of King Jesus, wherever Christian believers love God and neighbor, wherever Holy Spirit's miracles of provision, healing or deliverance occur, there we can see a manifestation of the kingdom of God. We see this manifestation most readily in the organized church, but also in more informal groups that are fully committed to Jesus and His word in the Scriptures (Jn 8.31-32). However, this is not to say that the visible church, nor any Christian organization, provides a perfect picture of God's rule. To the contrary, and much to our grief, Christian organizations throughout history have shown as great a propensity to act contrarily to God and His word as the nation of Israel ever did. Therefore, whether Jew or Gentile, we still long for the ultimate peace and righteousness that will prevail when our King returns and rules in person from Jerusalem. He will rule with both love and grace, but also with a rod of iron, so as to set all things right on our planet (Is 11.4; Ac 3.21; Re 19.15).

Until then, those whom God has graciously drawn to Himself seek out the fellowship of faithful servants of Jesus. They do this so that together they may enjoy the countless benefits of the kingdom of God that King Jesus has already made available to His subjects by His redemptive sacrifice. However, for those who have not yet been born again⁶⁶ and converted⁶⁷ to Jesus in humble dependency, the kingdom of God and its benefits remain out of reach (Mt 18.3; Jn 3.3). For those still unrepentantly pursuing personal autonomy, exclusion from the kingdom's blessings remains one of the grievous consequences of sin.

Ladd's, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. Ladd also provided much helpful insight regarding the kingdom of God in his *A Theology of the New Testament*.

⁶⁶ For an explanation of what it means to be born again, see ch. 6.

⁶⁷ For an explanation of what it means to be converted, see ch. 5, the section entitled, "I've Repented; Must I Also Be Converted?"

The Already/Not Yet Aspects Of God's Kingdom

Already In "This Age" ⁶⁸	Not Yet Until "The Day Of Redemption" ⁶⁹
Davidic king enthroned in heaven (Heb 8.1)	Davidic king enthroned in Zion (Ps 2; 110)
Kingdom of God established, inaugurated (Mt 4.17; 12.28; cf. Eph 2.19-20; Heb 10.19-20)	Kingdom presented whole to the Father (1Co 15.24; cf. Mt 6.10)
Believers bow to Jesus as king (Jn 1.49)	Every knee will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord (Php 2.9-11)
Believers made righteous (Ro 5.1)	Believers receive all the hoped-for blessings of righteousness (Ga 5.5; cf. Col 1.3,27), ⁷⁰ chiefly the presence of Jesus (1Ti 1.1; Tt 2.13)
By grace through Christ, the righteous reign in life (Ro 5.17; Lk 10.19)	The redeemed reign with Christ over the nations (2Ti 2.12; Re 2.26-27)
Jesus and believers cast out demons (Mt 12.28)	Satan bound and removed from humanity's domain (Re 20)
All things subjected judicially to Christ (Eph 1.20-22)	All things fully subjected to Christ in the world to come (Heb 2.8-9)
Many Israelites believe (Jn 2.23; 7.31; 10.42).	All Israel saved (Ro 11.26)
Believers saved (Eph 2.8)	Salvation completed (Ro 5.9; 1Th 5.8)
Believers "have redemption" in Christ, redeemed spiritually (Eph 1.7)	Redemption complete, including redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)
Believers children of God and have received spirit of adoption (Ro 8.15; 1Jn 3.2)	Adoption completed with redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)

⁶⁸ 1Co 2.6.

⁶⁹ Cf. Eph 4.30.

⁷⁰ See Stott, *The Message Of Galatians*, p. 134.

Believers know God (Jn 17.3; 1Jn 5.20)	Believers have full knowledge of God (1Co 13.12)
Believers sealed with Holy Spirit of Promise (Eph 1.13; 4.30)	Believers receive their inheritance (Eph 1.13-14)
Healing available for the sick (Jas 5.14-15)	No more pain or death (Re 21.4)
Material needs provided by God (Mt 6.33; Php 4.19)	“Unfailing treasures in heaven” (Lk 12.33)
Followers of Jesus rewarded (Mk 10.29-30)	Believers receive full reward at Christ’s coming (Re 11.18; 22.12; cf. 2Jn 8)
Believers betrothed to Christ (2Co 11.2)	Believers participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Re 19.7-9)
Believers being glorified (2Co 3.18)	Resurrected in full glory (1Co 15.42)
Believers sanctified (1Co 1.2)	Sanctification entirely accomplished (1Th 5.23)
Believers becoming conformed to Christ (Ro 8.29; 2Co 3.18)	The redeemed fully like Christ (1Jn 3.2)
Believers citizens of heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12.22)	Heavenly Jerusalem visibly present (Re 21.2)
Death judicially abolished by Christ’s death and resurrection (2Ti 1.10; cf. Heb 2.14-15)	Death eliminated from the universe (Re 20.14)

3. We cannot save ourselves from our sin and its consequences.

No man can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for him — The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough — that he should live on forever and not see decay.⁷¹

Our Impaired Nature Cannot Keep Itself From Sinning

When I, Roderick, was a teenager, I knew only enough about Christianity and the Bible to make me feel guilty for my sins. During my final years of high school, I felt increasing guilt in connection with my selfish, self-indulgent habits. The obvious solution was to break those bad habits, so that's what I attempted to do. Try as I might to leave them behind, however, I would always succumb again to those shameful pleasures that so pricked my conscience. I felt caught in a vicious cycle of sin, guilt, and failed attempts at reform. Because of that, I will never forget how I felt the day I first read the words of Jesus in John 8.34:

"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin."⁷²

I was stunned! I wondered how Jesus could possibly know the current circumstances of my life and how enslaved I was to my bad habits.

Only later, when the Lord had suppressed some of my arrogant self-absorption, would I realize that Jesus *had not* spoken those words just for Rod Graciano to read in the Bible 2,000 years later. I came to understand that He had instead articulated a universal truth regarding our fallen race, namely that, ***no sinner can free himself from the tyranny of his own sins***. In other words, no person can lift himself up by his own bootstraps so as to rise above the base tendencies of his inherited fallenness! As long as our human nature remains impaired, *and its cravings unconstrained*, we simply cannot, in any consistent manner, act contrary to our resultant selfish character. Sure, we can cage a tiger, but forcefully keeping it from acting according to its character does not make it less

⁷¹ Ps 48.7-9, NIVO.

⁷² NLT.

of a predator; it will return to its normal behavior as soon as it is released from constraints. Likewise, our family's house rules, along with our community's social *and religious* taboos, can temporarily constrain the impulses of our selfish, self-indulgent character, but they cannot remove the unconstrained impulses and the cravings that shape the character of fallen man from within. Even when externally restrained, we will still act out our selfish desires in our minds. As soon as we distance ourselves from external restraints, by going away to college or joining the service, we're apt to unleash our inner libertine. Apart from a radical repair of our impaired nature, and a new governor for our inner drives and impulses, the best we can be is like the Pharisees whom Jesus described as "like whitewashed tombs — beautiful on the outside, but filled on the inside with ... all sorts of impurity."⁷³

Our Good Works Cannot Outweigh Our Sins

In our unredeemed fallen state, we cannot help but continue sinning. Because of this, we often try to compensate for our misdeeds. We do this by adopting a "scales of justice" mentality. In other words, we attempt to outweigh our sins by good deeds.

History shows that this way of thinking provides the foundational principle of what we might call *the natural religion of fallen man*.⁷⁴ People seem to naturally believe that *if* they need redemption, they can redeem themselves by doing enough good deeds to outweigh their sins on the scales of divine justice. This idea pops up in religions and cults from antiquity to the present. For example, The ancient Egyptian cult of the god Thoth imagined this deity as "present at the weighing of the heart of the deceased," and sometimes represented this god "as the scale of

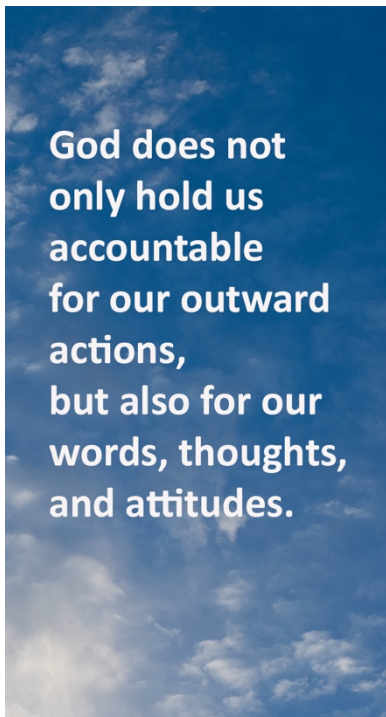
⁷³ Mt 23.27, NLT.

⁷⁴ "... a moralistic religion of self-salvation is our default setting as fallen creatures. If we are not explicitly and regularly taught out of it, we will always turn the message of God's rescue operation into a message of self-help.... So there are really only two religions in the world: a religion of human striving to ascend to God through pious works, feelings, attitudes, and experiences and the Good News of God's merciful descent to us in his Son." Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity*, pp. 42, 128.

justice itself.”⁷⁵ In a much newer religion, some teachers of contemporary Islam say that,

The actions of each person are weighed on a scale of absolute justice by Allah. The good deeds are balanced against the evil deeds. The way the scale tips (to the “good” side or to the “bad” side) determines the person’s eternal destiny. If your good deeds outweigh your bad ones, you go to heaven; if your bad deeds are heavier, then you’ll be spending eternity in a place of unimaginable suffering.⁷⁶

While many faiths teach or imply a “scales of justice” principle, the idea is hardly restricted to the doctrines of recognized religions. Instead, even people of *no religion* naturally gravitate to the idea that they can redeem themselves by doing a sufficient number of good deeds. Fallen man, regardless of race or creed, believes he can save himself by his own merit, so long as he can stack up enough merit to outweigh his sins.



The Bible, however, while teaching that God certainly *does* hold people accountable for their actions, never suggests that a person can redeem himself by doing enough good deeds to outweigh his bad ones. When the apostle Paul wrote about God’s way of salvation for mankind, he insisted that it was “not on the basis of deeds which we have done,”⁷⁷ and certainly not on the basis of attempts at keeping God’s laws (Ro 3.20,28; 9.32; Ga 2.16). That we cannot redeem ourselves by our own good works becomes obvious when we stop to consider that **God does not only hold us accountable for our outward actions, but also for our words (Mt 12.37), thoughts, and attitudes (Mt 5.21-22, 27-28)**. None of us can

⁷⁵ Vos in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. by Karel van der Toorn, et al, p. 862.

⁷⁶ Bickel and Jantz, *World Religions and Cults* 101.

⁷⁷ Tt 3.5. See also Eph 2.9; 2Ti 1.9.

even begin to recall, let alone tabulate, the wrong words we have spoken, or the wrong thoughts and attitudes we have had over the course of our lifetime. To maintain the hope of compensating for our sins by doing good is to live in denial of the fact that, if we were to face a scale of moral justice, *our words, thoughts and attitudes would be piled up against us*, together with our outward actions. We deceive ourselves into thinking that on the imaginary scale of divine justice, all we have to compensate for are those two or three really bad things that we have done. But God looks on the heart. Consequently, those who try to live by a “scale of justice” philosophy or religion are plagued throughout their lives by two haunting questions, “*Have I done enough good deeds?*” and “*How can I know that I’ve done enough?*”

Anyone who really wants the answers to these two bothersome questions, can find them in the Bible: The answers are *No* and *You can’t*. No one can do enough good works to compensate for his sins before God, and therefore no one can ever have assurance that they have succeeded in doing so.

Weren’t Israelites Saved By Animal Sacrifices?

The animal sacrifices offered by the Patriarchs, as well as the sacrifices later prescribed by the Mosaic law, had an important teaching role as typological symbols of the great expiation of sin that would come. They were also the practical means by which people could express their repentance toward God and their devotion to His covenant. Furthermore, in the Levitical system, the sacrifices and monetary gifts offered by the people provided for the sustenance of the priests and other temple workers, as well as for maintenance of the temple facilities, similarly to the way our Sunday offerings provide for the sustenance of our pastors, and maintenance of our church buildings today. However, the animal sacrifices of old did not save offerers from their sins and spiritual jeopardy any more than putting money in the offering plate saves us. As it says in Hebrews 10.4, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The expiation of sin and the salvation of sinners would require a much greater sacrifice, something we will

explore in detail in chapter 4. For now, let it suffice to say that the sacrificial death of any number of *animals* could not possibly save even one *human* sinner.

Even Our Own Death Cannot Expiate Our Sins

As already mentioned in chapter 2 above, the penalty of sin is death (Ro 6.23). But if death is the penalty of sin, why isn't each person's own death sufficient to expiate his sins? Doesn't Romans 6.7 say, "he that hath died is **justified** from sin"?⁷⁸

Some older Bible versions, like the one just quoted, do translate the Greek wording of Romans 6.7 *correctly*, and *consistently* with the rest of the epistle, using the word *justified* rather than the word *freed* (that we find in most Eng editions). Contextually, however, we must understand the phrase, "he who has died," as referring to a person "who has died *in Christ*." As the apostle Paul continues in the following verse, Romans 6.8, "Now if we have died **with Christ**, we believe that we shall also live with Him" It is death with Christ that justifies, not death apart from Christ. (We will say more about what it means to die *with* or *in* Christ in ch. 5 below.)

Nevertheless, the question remains, *Why isn't our own death sufficient to absolve us from the sins committed in our lifetime?* Before answering, let us take the following thoughts into consideration:

- God warned Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit he would die (Ge 2.16-17). God declared to the prophet Ezekiel that the soul that sins will die (Eze 18.4). Paul said that the wages of sin is death (Ro 6.23). As we note these warnings, we should not assume that the death in view is only the death of the physical body, especially since in Romans 6.23 Paul contrasted "death" with "eternal life":

the wages of sin = death
↓ ↓
the free gift of God = eternal life

⁷⁸ Ro 6.7, ASV.

Furthermore, we should not assume that *one death* is sufficient to satisfy divine justice for *multiple* sins.

- Biblical law says that the thief must return double what he stole. For example, if he has stolen one sheep he must return two (Ex 22.4,7). Returning solely the stolen sheep would only address the tangible economics of the situation,⁷⁹ and the law recognizes that additional compensation is required to address the non-tangible losses of the offended party. By extension, we may infer that dying to compensate God for one's own sins would be like trying to make restitution by returning solely the sheep that was stolen, without the mandated second sheep. This is so because a man's physical death only pays a just penalty for his sin, and offers no compensation to God for any fruit He might have had from the man's life had it been holy.
- In other words, biblical justice requires both expiation *and propitiation*, that is, both payment for the offense *and* restoration of the offended party to a positive disposition toward the offender.

With these considerations in mind, we must now recall what we've already affirmed in connection with the greatest commandment, namely, that each person owes his Creator love and honor for as long as he lives. A person who lives his entire life in sin and then dies, never offers up to God the holy life owed to Him. How could this be just?⁸⁰

Additionally, perusing the Scriptures confirms that the warnings about sin bringing death *do not* refer only to physical death, but also to *a second death* of

⁷⁹ And hardly that if the owner had been depending on the sheep for milk at the time.

⁸⁰ In November 1979, I, Roderick, heard Francis A. Schaeffer relate a conversation he had with an abortion nurse who considered herself a Christian. She told Mr. Schaeffer, "the only way I can justify my job of assisting with abortions is by my belief that each of those aborted babies goes straight to heaven." I hope that nurse repented and won't have to stand before God and try to justify why she assisted in robbing Him of the holy lives that each of those aborted infants might have live for His glory.

everlasting suffering in the lake of fire.⁸¹ So, “returning the one sheep” by our physical death only pays part of the just penalty for our sins; it has neither satisfied the just sentence of suffering the “second death” nor has it propitiated God by presenting Him with the fruit of a holy life. Dying a physical death leaves a man no way by which to offer God any further restitution. After “returning the sheep he stole” by dying, he finds himself dead and forever unable to make restitution with “the second sheep” of a holy life! Clearly, any attempt to pay for our own sins by our own physical death would, in the end, leave us facing the second death *without recourse*.⁸²

The Bible presents us with a problem indeed. **Because we have sinned we must die, yet, in order to have a right relationship with our Creator we must live!** Dying for our own sins won’t solve our sin problem, so is there another solution? Thankfully, yes. There is a solution, already alluded to in the citation of Romans 6.8 above, but it’s not a solution of our own devising.

Excursus On The Gospel

One of the most familiar religious words in Western culture is the word *gospel*.

But what does the word *gospel* mean in biblical usage, and what does it refer to in the New Testament? Also, what’s the difference between *the gospel* and *the Gospels*? And what in the world are apocryphal Gospels? For anyone interested in these questions, we offer the following insights.

The Evangel- Word Family

The words *gospel* and *evangelist* in our English New Testaments translate terms from the Greek *evangel-* word family that have to do with “announcing good news.” The good news could be of any kind,⁸³ though historically *evangel-* terms

⁸¹ Ro 1.18; 2.5,8; Eph 2.3; 5.5-6; Re 2.11; 20.6,14-15; 21.8.

⁸² Contra universalist, Hosea Ballou, who “proposed that the event of death severed each human being from all misery or guilt associated with sinful actions.” See Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil’s Redemption*, Vol. 1, p. 572.

⁸³ See for examples, Lk 1.13-19; 2.9-11; 1Th 3.6.

often referred to good news about victory in battle.⁸⁴ Studying words in the *evangel-* word family reveals that people used the Greek words for *gospel*, *evangelist* and *evangelize* in the Hellenistic world, before the time of Jesus. These were not new terms coined by the Christian authors of the NT,⁸⁵ but were known in OT times. Thus, when the Spirit of Messiah spoke through Isaiah the prophet, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me ... to bring good news to the afflicted,”⁸⁶ the Grk verb for “bring good news” is the word *evangelize*. When Jesus, in Luke 4.18, quotes this verse from Isaiah, the NASB95 correctly renders the words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to preach the gospel.”

Defining The Biblical Gospel

With this lexical background in mind, we can define the biblical gospel generally as: ***the good news about God’s victory*** over mankind’s problems with sin, death and satanic oppression.⁸⁷ However, both the essence and the effect of the gospel were clarified over millennia in the progressive revelation of the Scriptures. We can identify four major instances of the gospel’s declaration that all lead up to its fifth and primary formulation:

1. The Proto-Evangel;
2. The Gospel Of Abrahamic Promise;
3. The Gospel Of The Suffering Servant;
4. The Gospel Of The Kingdom;

Followed swiftly by:

5. The Primary Gospel⁸⁸

God first announced the good news of a deliverer for humanity in Genesis 3.15, which verse is therefore traditionally known as the *Proto-Evangelium*, or

⁸⁴ Cf. 2Sa 18.26; Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.25,250; Is 52.7-10.

⁸⁵ Even though the NT would infuse them with new meaning.

⁸⁶ Is 61.1.

⁸⁷ This victory will be complete in the Day of the LORD, as Isaiah prophesied in Is 52.7-10. See also, Is 61.1; Lk 10.17-19; 24.46-47; Jn 6.50-51; 11.26; Ac 13.32-39; 26.15-18; 1Jn 3.5,8.

⁸⁸ Within God’s plan of redemption, **there is only one eternal gospel** (Re 14.6), progressively revealed through the ages, and designated by various titles in the NT. The promises and their fulfillments that produced this gospel have multiple aspects, and the gospel itself has countless implications for the present and the future, **but it is a unified message**. To preach any *other* gospel puts one in danger of Paul’s curse (Ga 1.8, KJV).

Proto-Evangel for short. This rudimentary gospel, echoed much later in Romans 16.20 and 1 John 3.8, succinctly promised that a seed (descendant) of Eve would finally destroy the serpent who had brought about humanity's fall. We fully analyze the Proto-Evangel and its eschatological message in **Appendix 2 of the unabridged version of *Redemption By Jesus***.

In the biblical record, God next "preached" the gospel to Abraham, summarizing it in the promise, "All the nations will be blessed in you" (Ge 12.3; Ga 3.8). God elaborated upon this good news to specify that the Proto-Evangel's promise of blessing for humanity would come through a *particular* seed descended from Eve. This descendant would come through the family lines of Abraham and Isaac: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Ge 22.18; Ga 3.16).

After Abraham, the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant foreshadowed many gospel truths. However, the next highpoint in the revelation of the gospel's content comes to us in the prophecy of Isaiah 52.13 to 53.12. In this prophecy God revealed that His righteous, suffering servant would render Himself a "sin offering" and bear the sin of many. Furthermore, He would die and be assigned a grave, and yet would "prolong *His* days." It's no wonder that the book of Isaiah has been called "the fifth Gospel"! It was to prophecies like Isaiah's that the apostle Paul later alluded, when he referred to,

the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son ... declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead ...⁸⁹

Centuries after Isaiah, John the Baptist and then Jesus Himself, appeared preaching "the gospel of the kingdom" (Mt 3.1-2; 4.23; cf. Lk 16.16). The initial content of this good news of the kingdom, as we can infer from the scriptural record, was that:

- Various realities of the eschatological kingdom of God, including healing and deliverance from demons, have broken into the present age.
- The Lord (king) is coming/has come and will baptize in the Holy Spirit.
- The kingdom is available to the poor in spirit and the persecuted.

⁸⁹ Ro 1.1-4.

- Even many from outside the lineage of Jacob will enter the kingdom.

In short, *the good news* of the kingdom, preached by John the Baptist and Jesus, emphasized the blessings already or imminently available to subjects of God’s kingdom. Proclaiming this good news about kingdom blessings, gave opportunity for both John the Baptist and Jesus to impart much more teaching about the kingdom of God, both in its present and coming aspects. As explained in the “Excursus On The Kingdom Of God,” in ch. 2, much of their teaching about the kingdom was corrective of misconceptions held by their contemporaries.

Finally, with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ at long last accomplished, the apostle Paul was able to crystallize the core of the primary or foremost (ἐν πρώτοις) gospel for us. He set this forth in 1 Corinthians 15.1-8⁹⁰:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

We see from this passage that **the content of the primary gospel is the apostolic report of four historical facts about Jesus:**

1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the [Old Testament] Scriptures.
2. He was buried.
3. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the [Old Testament] Scriptures.
4. He appeared [after His resurrection] to hundreds of witnesses.

Let us understand that, this primary gospel summarized by Paul declares the historical events that **(A)** reveal how the Proto-Evangel is being fulfilled, **(B)** provide the basis for the fulfillment of the Gospel of Abrahamic Promise and the

⁹⁰ ESV.

Gospel of the Kingdom, and **(C)** fulfill Isaiah's Gospel of the Suffering Servant. In other words, the primary gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 sheds light upon, provides the basis for, and crowns all the previous biblical expressions of the gospel. As such, **this four-point proclamation should stand as our default articulation of the gospel**, and as our first answer to the question, "What is the gospel?"

The Gospel In Our Milieu

Understanding the gospel as a message about historical events that fulfilled numerous biblical foreshadowings and prophetic predictions (cf. Ac 13:32-35), dramatically differentiates it from what is often thought of as "the gospel" in our current Evangelical milieu. Sadly, erroneous ideas about the gospel and its content come to light as soon as we begin to query church people on the subject. Greg Gilbert writes that, when asked to define the gospel, "too many Christians would answer" with something like, "The gospel is that God will forgive your sins if you believe in him.' Or they'd say something like, ... 'The gospel is that you are a child of God, and God wants his children to be abundantly successful in every way.'"⁹¹ Gilbert goes on to quote statements of "the gospel" he has found in evangelical preaching and writing, including these two samples:

The good news is, God wants to show you his incredible favor. He wants to fill your life with "new wine," ...

The good news is that God's face will always be turned toward you, regardless of what you have done, where you have been, or how many mistakes you've made. He loves you and is turned in your direction, looking for you.⁹²

In Gilbert's examples of faulty expressions of the gospel, we see a general principle at work, namely that, **unbiblical presentations of the gospel tend to err on the side of highlighting the gospel's potential benefits, and what we can do to receive them, rather than emphasizing the gospel's historical record of what Christ did to accomplish God's victory over sin, death, and oppression.**

We realize that while our world has always had trouble with false "gospels," i.e., *overtly wrong messages* substituted for the biblical gospel (cf. Ga 1:6-9), our current problems of misstating the gospel may have more to do with *wrong*

⁹¹ *What Is The Gospel?*, pp. 15-16. These examples echo "definitions" that we too have heard.

⁹² *What Is The Gospel?*, p. 18.

emphases. Greg Gilbert expresses his concern for the misplaced focus, writing, **“one of the greatest dangers the body of Christ faces today is the temptation to rethink and rearticulate the gospel in a way that makes its center something other than the death of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners.”**⁹³ Indeed, we have seen the central facts of the gospel sometimes take second place to assurances that,

- God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, or
- God wants you to prosper and be in good health,

or obscured by exhortations to,

- Raise a hand to indicate a desire to be saved, or
- Recite “The Sinner’s Prayer,” or
- Come forward to the front of the auditorium to accept Jesus.

However, as we underscore the fact that such assurances and exhortations have sometimes shifted the center of the gospel for the audience to something other than “the death of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners,” ***we do not at all imply*** that we should keep silent about how we should respond to the gospel or about the benefits it offers. On the contrary, when we preach the gospel, we should certainly imitate the Lord and His apostles in sharing the benefits made possible by the gospel (e.g. eternal life; 2Ti 1.10) and in explaining how people should respond to the gospel (i.e., by believing; Mk 1.15).

Nevertheless, we must keep two things in mind: (1) No one can respond appropriately to the gospel if they have not heard the gospel clearly and accurately presented; and (2) only biblical responses to the gospel will bring salvation. In other words, **any “evangelistic” message that says nothing about Christ’s death for sin, burial, and resurrection, has not proclaimed the gospel,** and can hardly be expected to open the Door of salvation to the hearers. Likewise, any end-of-sermon invitation that reduces believing in the gospel to nothing more than raising a hand to register assent to the message, or to the idea of accepting Jesus, probably won’t produce a transformed life. Whether we preach the gospel or share it informally, if we want the message to be effective we will do well to follow the New Testament precedents. To do so means that we will continually

⁹³ Ibid., p. 102.

identify the gospel's core historical facts, and we will share the appropriate biblical responses to those facts.⁹⁴

The Canonical Gospels

We find the gospel's core facts, not only in the apostle Paul's succinct summary of 1 Corinthians 15, but also in the books we call *the Gospels* (and here we use a capital G since we're using the word *Gospel* in the titles of written works). **The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament, titled after their authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.** These Gospels record the primary events of Christ's death for sin, His burial, and witnessed resurrection, all within their ample historical contexts. We often refer to these books as the *canonical* Gospels, which simply means that they are the Gospels included in the canon, i.e., the officially accepted corpus of the Bible.

That the canonical Gospels and the rest of the New Testament enlarge upon the implications, results and applications of the gospel, has great value for us. It help us understand how **everything essential to the Christian life emerges from the gospel's historical core.** None of God's promises to humanity, regarding salvation and restored relationship with Him, could have been fulfilled without the core events of the gospel having occurred. Without the expiating death of Jesus and the corroboration of His resurrection, the kingdom of God would never exist for the human race (cf. Is 52.7).

The corollary of this observation is that to the extent that any of the four central points of the gospel are obscured, to that extent vital aspects of the Christian life are apt do drop out of our experience in the church. For example, if we preach only that "we can be saved by putting our faith in Jesus" (emphasizing an application of the gospel), while deemphasizing the core truth that "Christ died

⁹⁴ In the book of Acts, **the eight major apostolic sermons** and testimonies about or including the gospel are the following: Peter on the day of Pentecost, Ac 2; Peter in Solomon's Portico, Ac 3; Peter before the Sanhedrin, Ac 4; Peter and others before the Sanhedrin, Ac 5; Peter in the house of Cornelius, Ac 10; Paul at the Pisidian Antioch synagogue, Ac 13; Paul on Mars Hill in Athens, Ac 17; Paul before King Agrippa, Ac 26. Every one of these presentations explicitly mentions Christ's resurrection, five explicitly mention His death while three imply it, seven explicitly mention witnesses to the resurrection while one implies witnesses, one explicitly mentions Christ's burial while that fact would be implicit in the others, and six mention the forgiveness of sin (implying a purpose of Christ's death).

for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,” the audience is apt to mentally fasten upon the idea of salvation from hell, and lose sight of the biblical emphases upon repentance, reconciliation with God, and growing in holiness (sanctification). If we preach only that “God can forgive us because Jesus died for our sins,” and do not mention Jesus’ resurrection and its implications regarding His lordship (Ac 2.36), the audience is apt to think that they can receive forgiveness without personal submission to Jesus as king.

Apocryphal Gospels

We must not alter, diminish or obscure the core historical events of the gospel nor its historical and religious context as conveyed in the four canonical Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament. For this reason, the church of antiquity did not include apocryphal Gospels in the New Testament. The apocryphal Gospels, are designated *apocryphal* (from the Latin meaning *hidden*) for two reasons:

(1) These works often revealed their Gnostic origins by purporting to contain *hidden knowledge* to which the church at large was not privy. The prologue of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas provides an example of the claim:

These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas the Twin recorded.⁹⁵

(2) Those who valued these works, considered them sacred and kept them hidden in their religious precincts away from general public contact.

In our time, the designation *apocryphal* conveniently distinguishes these Gospels from the *canonical* Gospels.

As to their dates of origin and content, the apocryphal Gospels are pseudonymous works that originated after the time of the apostles, and that generally convey a sectarian agenda or simply an intent to entertain with legendary material. The apocryphal gospels include (to give some examples),

- the mid-2nd-century *Gospel of Thomas* (quoted above) which mixes canonical sayings of Jesus with Gnostic sayings also attributed to Him,
- the 2nd-century *Infancy Gospel of James*, which emphasizes the sanctity, purity and perpetual virginity of Mary, and

⁹⁵ Marvin Meyer translation. Both Greek and Coptic mss exist for *The Gospel Of Thomas*, hence many variations in the Eng translations.

- the late 2nd-century-or-later *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which relates legendary stories of the five-year-old Jesus who is “repeatedly ... angry, malicious, flippant, and arrogant,”⁹⁶ and curses and smites playmates who offend him.

These apocryphal Gospels have historical value, and to the extent that they borrow from the canonical Gospels they do convey some truth. However, their introduction of fictional events and counterbiblical ideas, obscure the core of the Christian gospel for anyone who reads these works as though they were genuine. Thankfully, since the core of the true gospel consists of historical events that can never be changed, the biblical gospel is in no ultimate danger from these later Gospels, recognized by the world as apocryphal.

Conclusion: Gospels, The Gospel Proper, And Its Demand For A Response

In summary, the **apocryphal Gospels** are fictional and sectarian writings produced after the time of the apostles and are rightly excluded from the official books of the Bible. The **canonical Gospels** are the true, authoritative and officially recognized accounts of the life of Jesus, which are placed at the beginning of the Bible’s New Testament. **The gospel proper** is the good news about the victory of Jesus over sin, death and the devil, and the essential core of that good news is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead on the third day, and was seen alive after His resurrection by many witnesses.

Now, though we have differentiated the biblical gospel from formulas about how to be saved, and from the superficial responses audiences are sometimes invited to make at the conclusion of an evangelistic sermon, we recognize that **the gospel does demand a response**. As we mentioned above, though, only biblical responses to the gospel will lead to a transformed life. Therefore, we will look more closely at appropriate responses to the gospel in chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁶ Markus Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 76.

Quote

On Golgotha, one man died *in* sin; one man died *to* sin; and one Man died *for* sin.

— Author Unknown