



Theological Foundations II  
Essentials of Christian Doctrine



STUDENT'S WORKBOOK



# § Theological Foundations II

## *Essentials of Christian Doctrine*

STUDENT'S WORKBOOK

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# Theological Foundations II

## *Essentials of Christian Doctrine*

### SYLLABUS

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#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *Theological Foundations II* course is an attempt to systematically present what the Apostle Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Students will study biblical topics by examining particular biblical passages, reading through Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, and inspecting Bethlehem’s Affirmation of Faith. The student’s learning will be solidified through class discussion and various homework assignments. This course is the first of two semesters, progressing through roughly the first half of a systematic theology, including the doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity, God’s sovereignty, election, creation, sin, Christology and soteriology.

#### OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to accomplish specific objectives. A student successfully completing this course should be able

- ▷ To magnify the worth of God in a more meaningful and personal way by treasuring him in their heart above all else. We recognize that this, the ultimate objective of the course, is impossible apart from the grace of God in the working of the Holy Spirit, who exalts the risen Lord, Jesus Christ.
- ▷ To understand the Scriptures more fully as a result of searching them diligently throughout the course. Every lesson will compel the student to read and meditate on the Word. Our desire is to encourage students to be Bereans (cf. Acts 17:11).
- ▷ To comprehend and thoughtfully interact with Bethlehem’s Affirmation of Faith and Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*. To this end the student will answer comprehension questions and formulate their own questions.
- ▷ To discuss and apply the biblical truth that is presented in the curriculum.
- ▷ To synthesize and summarize what they have learned through the course. This last objective will be accomplished by the completion of the course’s final project.

## 🔗 REQUIRED BOOKS (TEXTBOOKS)

- ▷ An English version of the Bible, preferably the *English Standard Version* (ESV) or *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)
- ▷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000)

## 🔗 REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to prepare for Lessons 2-12 by completing the lesson pages in a sequential order. Therefore, for each lesson a student should read the Introduction, the Lesson Objectives, and the Preliminary Definitions. Then the student should read the remainder of the lesson, answer the 20 questions contained therein, and complete all the required reading and the integrative assignment. The student may then review the discussion questions and record their own discussion question. Each lesson's workload has been divided into five daily assignments for the convenience of the student. Students will compose a personal affirmation of faith at the end of the course.

Students will pass this course if they attend at least 10 class sessions, complete all the assignments, and complete an adequate final project. Please contact the instructor with any problems or concerns.

## 🔗 PERSONAL AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Students will be required to write a personal affirmation of faith (2-3 pages double-spaced), due one week after the last class session. This paper may be emailed as an attachment to the instructor, or mailed to their address.

The affirmation should consist of the student's own understanding of the various topics covered in the course.<sup>1\*</sup> Students may consult Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith or other creeds and confessions (some of which are listed in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, Appendix 1), but must express their biblical convictions *using their own words*. Students are not allowed to copy any portion of another creed, confession, or affirmation.

Students should include biblical support for the various assertions they make in the form of footnotes, although these footnotes don't need to be extensive. This project may be started after the last class period, but since it is a time-intensive project, students are encouraged to work on it throughout the semester. Students may choose to write smaller portions of their personal affirmation after each lesson. This approach is not required but is recommended.

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<sup>1</sup> \* In reality, this project will only be half of a comprehensive affirmation of faith. Students will have completed the first half of their own personal affirmation of faith (an additional 2-3 pages) if they have completed *Theological Foundations 1*.



 SCHEDULE

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title
1		The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit (1)
2		The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit (2)
3		The Justifying Act of God and Justifying Faith
4		God's Work in Sanctification
5		God's Work in Perseverance
6		Living God's Word by Meditation and Prayer
7		Christ's Church
8		Spiritual Gifts
9		The Church's Ordinances
10		The Church's Leadership
11		Christ's Commission and His Coming
12		Everlasting Joy and Misery

Note: After the 12th lesson you are required to complete a personal affirmation of faith.



# The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit (Pt 1)

# 1

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

The *Theological Foundations I* course ended with Christology. This course, as the continuation of *Theological Foundations I*, will begin with pneumatology. The transition from one course to the next is similar to the transition we observe between the two volumes of Luke’s biblical writings. The Gospel according to Luke primarily described Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. The book of Acts primarily describes the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles. It is significant, however, to notice Luke’s introduction to Acts: “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2).

Luke’s use of the word “began” suggests that we should read Acts as the continuation of Jesus’ ministry in and through the Holy Spirit. In the same way, it is our intention that this course would be seen as a continuation of the first course: what we studied in *Theological Foundations I* is built and developed upon in this course.

The Holy Spirit is God, and as God he is worthy of our praise and adoration. In the church today we often err in one of two ways: either we neglect the Spirit altogether, forgetting that he is at work in our lives, or we emphasize his work in such a way that we lose our focus on Jesus. It is critical, however, to understand the work of the Holy Spirit, in his church and in our lives, so that we may properly give him glory and effectively seek his aid.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the “old era”
- describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the “new era”
- contrast the Spirit’s work in the old and new era

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **Holy Spirit:**
  
- **Manifestation of God's active presence:**



## THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD ERA

It may be tempting to think that the Holy Spirit is not really active until Jesus is anointed or until the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost. It is true that the Spirit, and God's working in the world, becomes more visible in the New Testament; but it is equally true that the Spirit has always been at work, even from the time of creation.

Genesis 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

Psalm 104:30

<sup>30</sup> *When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

Job 34:14-15

<sup>14</sup> *If he should set his heart to it and gather to himself his spirit and his breath,* <sup>15</sup> *all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.*

1. Why is it significant that Genesis mentions the Holy Spirit hovering over the surface of the waters? What work is ascribed to the Spirit in these verses?

Another aspect of the Spirit's work of creation is expressed in John 3.

John 3:3-8

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

2. Compare the work of the Spirit described in John 3:3-8 to the work of the Spirit described in the preceding three passages.

The Spirit had other ministries under the old covenant as well.

Judges 14:6 (see also 14:19)

<sup>6</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon [Samson], and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.

Judges 3:9-10

<sup>9</sup> But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. <sup>10</sup> The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.

1 Samuel 10:6

*<sup>6</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.*

3. According to these passages, what were some of the ways in which the Spirit was involved in Old Testament history?

2 Peter 1:21

*<sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 22:43-44

*<sup>43</sup> He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, <sup>44</sup> 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'?"*

Hebrews 3:7-11

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, <sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, <sup>9</sup> where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works <sup>10</sup> for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' <sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"*

4. What work do these passages attribute to the Holy Spirit?

## THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW ERA

Although the Spirit had a definite role under the old covenant, the New Testament presents the unprecedented mission of the Holy Spirit, a mission that was promised in the Old Testament but not realized until after the death of Jesus.

Numbers 11:29

*<sup>29</sup> But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"*

Joel 2:28-29

*<sup>28</sup> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*

Acts 2:14-18, 33

*<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.' ...<sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."*

5. According to these passages, what is one way in which the work of the Spirit in the new covenant is unprecedented?



Jeremiah 32:38-40

<sup>38</sup> And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. <sup>39</sup> I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. <sup>40</sup> I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

<sup>31</sup> Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

6. According to these passages, what is one way in which the work of the Spirit in the new covenant is unprecedented?

Acts 1:8

*<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

The disciples had lived with Jesus and learned the gospel straight from his mouth. Yet they were not to go out and immediately preach the gospel. Instead they were told to wait in Jerusalem. Why?

Acts 4:29-31

*<sup>29</sup> “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word... <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” <sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God...*

Romans 15:18-19

*<sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ...*

7. What do *these* passages teach us about the work of the Spirit in the new covenant age?

The citation of Acts 4 above omits two key phrases. The text is reproduced again, below, with the key phrases included. In all of these citations from Acts, observe a theme that runs through the book and its connection to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:13

*<sup>13</sup> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.*

Acts 4:29-31

<sup>29</sup> “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, <sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 9:26-28

<sup>26</sup> And when he had come to Jerusalem, [Saul] attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 14:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. <sup>2</sup> But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup> So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

Acts 28:30-31

<sup>30</sup> He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

8. What else can we say about the mission of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost?

*NOTE:* Bethlehem College & Seminary has an Affirmation of Faith which aims to preserve the unity of our institution through sound doctrine. Bethlehem's faculty and employees are united under the teaching of this affirmation, and are accountable to maintain it through their life and doctrine. The affirmation was originally crafted for Bethlehem Baptist Church (Minneapolis) by Dr. John Piper, with the input of the elders of Bethlehem Baptist Church, and was approved for the church in its revised form on November 11, 2003. It has since been adopted by Bethlehem College & Seminary

Bethlehem's Affirmation of Faith provides the structure and topical ordering of this course. In addition, certain sections of the affirmation appear at the end of each lesson as summary statements of the topics studied. It is our desire that you search the Scriptures to see if this affirmation is an accurate statement of the whole counsel of God. We hope that you find our summarizing attempts to be helpful and a starting point for your own Scriptural reflections.

We will now focus on the relevant sections of our Affirmation of Faith.

### An Affirmation of Faith

8.1 We believe that the Holy Spirit has always been at work in the world, sharing in the work of creation, awakening faith in the remnant of God's people, performing signs and wonders, giving triumphs in battle, empowering the preaching of prophets and inspiring the writing of Scripture. Yet, when Christ had made atonement for sin, and ascended to the right hand of the Father, He inaugurated a new era of the Spirit by pouring out the promise of the Father on His Church.

8.2 We believe that the newness of this era is marked by the unprecedented mission of the Spirit to glorify the crucified and risen Christ. This He does by giving the disciples of Jesus greater power to preach the gospel of the glory of Christ, by opening the hearts of hearers that they might see Christ and believe, by revealing the beauty of Christ in His Word and transforming His people from glory to glory, by manifesting Himself in spiritual gifts (being sovereignly free to dispense, as he wills, all the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) for the upbuilding of the body of Christ and the confirmation of His Word, by calling all the nations into the sway of the gospel of Christ, and, in all this, thus fulfilling the New Covenant promise to create and preserve a purified people for the everlasting habitation of God.

9. Should we say that the Holy Spirit indwelt believers in the old covenant era?
  
10. According to this section of the affirmation, how does the Spirit glorify Jesus?

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, “How Believers Experienced the Spirit before Pentecost,” an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)
- ▷ J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1984).
- ▷ James M. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006).

# The Saving Work of the Holy Spirit (Pt 2)

# 2

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## 📖 INTRODUCTION

In this lesson we will continue studying the saving work of the Holy Spirit by learning about effective calling and regeneration. It is fitting to open our consideration of these topics by listening to Charles Spurgeon rejoicing in his conversion:

*I sometimes think I might have been in darkness and despair until now, had it not been for the goodness of God in sending a snowstorm one Sunday morning, while I was going to a certain place of worship. I turned down a side street, and came to a little Primitive Methodist Church.*

*...The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now it is well that preachers be instructed, but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was—"LOOK UNTO ME, AND BE YE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH."*

*...Then lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!"*

*...I listened to the Word of God and that precious text led me to the cross of Christ. I can testify that the joy of that day was utterly indescribable. I could have leaped, I could have danced; there was no expression, however fanatical, which would have been out of keeping with the joy of that hour.*

*...My spirit saw its chains broken to pieces, I felt that I was an emancipated soul, an heir of heaven, a forgiven one, accepted in Jesus Christ, plucked out of the miry clay and out of the horrible pit, with my feet set upon a rock...*

*...Between half-past ten o'clock, when I entered that chapel, and half-past twelve o'clock, when I was back again at home, what a change had taken place in me!<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody, 1984), 18-20.

## 🌀 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ define the doctrine of “irresistible grace,” clarifying what it does and does not mean.
- ▷ describe the doctrine of regeneration and explain whether this act of God happens before or after our response of faith
- ▷ argue for the necessity of hearing the gospel message for salvation

## 🌀 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **born again:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **effective calling:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **external calling:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **internal calling:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **irresistible grace:**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **regeneration:**





## Day 1

### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Our overview of the Spirit's work in the previous lesson was brief. Therefore, we will examine two additional aspects of the Spirit's work in this day. Although these two aspects are not a part of the Spirit's *saving* work, they are unique works of the Spirit within the Trinity.

#### Acts 13:2-3

*<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

#### Acts 15:27-29

*<sup>27</sup> We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. <sup>28</sup> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: <sup>29</sup> that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*

#### Acts 16:6-7

*<sup>6</sup> And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.*

1. What work of the Spirit is described in these verses?

And here is another aspect of the Spirit's work:

Ephesians 4:1-4

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call...

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Galatians 5:15-16, 19-21, 25-26

<sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ...<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident...enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy... <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

2. What aspect of the Spirit's work is described in these passages?

The inductive study of texts for this day is abbreviated so that the student has ample time to read the eleven pages of Grudem, listed below.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 639-649 (Chapter 30, Sections B–E)



## Day 2

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### IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

In order to understand “irresistible grace,” we must put it in the context of two other doctrines of grace that were discussed in *Theological Foundations I: unconditional election* and *total depravity* (or total inability).

Here is a key text teaching unconditional election:

Romans 9:10-12, 16, 18

<sup>10</sup> *And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, <sup>11</sup> though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls — <sup>12</sup> she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”*  
...<sup>16</sup> *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*  
...<sup>18</sup> *So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

And here is a key text teaching total depravity:

Ephesians 2:1-5

<sup>1</sup> *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...*

5. Based on these texts and other things you have studied (and using Grudem’s glossary if necessary), compose your own definitions of “unconditional election” and “total depravity.”

The doctrine of irresistible grace is comprehensible and inevitable when unconditional election and total depravity are understood and affirmed. For if we are totally unable to respond to God in faith, it must be an act of *grace* that brings us to him. And if he has already absolutely determined those whom he will save, this grace must prove *irresistible*.

6. Can you think of a passage of Scripture that teaches irresistible grace?

Now we will examine an articulation of the doctrine of irresistible grace:

### *Irresistible Grace*

*The doctrine of irresistible grace does not mean that every influence of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted. It means that the Holy Spirit can overcome all resistance and make his influence irresistible.*

*In Acts 7:51 Stephen says to the Jewish leaders, “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did.” And Paul speaks of grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). God gives many entreaties and promptings which are resisted. In fact the whole history of Israel in the Old Testament is one protracted story of resistance, as the parable of the wicked tenants shows (Matthew 21:33-43; cf. Romans 10:21).*

*The doctrine of irresistible grace means that God is sovereign and can overcome all resistance when he wills. “He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand!” (Daniel 4:35). “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Psalm 115:3). When God undertakes to fulfill his sovereign purpose, no one can successfully resist him.*

*This is what Paul taught in Romans 9:14-18, which caused his opponent to say, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” To which Paul answers: “Who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me thus?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (Romans 9:20f).*

*More specifically irresistible grace refers to the sovereign work of God to overcome the rebellion of our heart and bring us to faith in Christ so that we can be saved. If our doctrine of total depravity is true, there can be no salvation without the reality of irresistible grace. If we are dead in our sins, totally unable to submit to God, then we will never believe in Christ unless God overcomes our rebellion.*

*Someone may say, “Yes, the Holy Spirit must draw us to God, but we can use our freedom to resist or accept that drawing.” Our answer is: except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always use our freedom to resist God. That is what it means to be “unable to submit to God.” If a person becomes humble enough to submit to God it is because God has given that person a new, humble nature. If a person remains too hard hearted and proud to submit to God, it is because that person has not been given such a willing spirit. But to see this most persuasively we should look at the Scriptures.*

*In John 6:44 Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” This drawing is the sovereign work of grace without which no one can be saved from their rebellion against God. Again some say, “He draws all men, not just some.” But this simply evades the clear implication of the context that the Father’s “drawing” is why some believe and not others.*

*Specifically, John 6:64-65 says, “But there are some of you that do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it was that should betray him. And he said, ‘This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”*

*Notice two things.*

*First, notice that coming to Jesus is called a gift. It is not just an opportunity.*

*Coming to Jesus is “given” to some and not to others.*

*Second, notice that the reason Jesus says this, is to explain why “there are some who do not believe.” We could paraphrase it like this: Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would not believe on him in spite of all the teaching and invitations he received. And because he knew this, he explains it with the words, ‘No one comes to me unless it is given to him by my Father.’ Judas was not given to Jesus. There were many influences on his life for good. But the decisive, irresistible gift of grace was not given.*

*2 Timothy 2:24-25 says, “The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth.”*

*Here, as in John 6:65, repentance is called a gift of God. Notice, he is not saying merely that salvation is a gift of God. He is saying that the prerequisites of salvation*

are also a gift. When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God "irresistible grace."

*NOTE: It should be obvious from this that irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to believe against our will. That would even be a contradiction in terms. On the contrary, irresistible grace is compatible with preaching and witnessing that tries to persuade people to do what is reasonable and what will accord with their best interests.*

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 says, "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jew and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Notice the two kinds of "calls" implied in this text.

First, the preaching of Paul goes out to all, both Jews and Greeks. This is the general call of the gospel. It offers salvation to all who will believe on the crucified Christ. But by and large it falls on unreceptive ears and is called foolishness.

But then, secondly, Paul refers to another kind of call. He says that among those who hear there are some who are "called" in such a way that they no longer regard the cross as foolishness but as the wisdom and power of God. What else can this call be but the irresistible call of God out of darkness into the light of God? If ALL who are called in this sense regard the cross as the power of God, then something in the call must effect the faith. This is irresistible grace.

It is further explained in 2 Corinthians 4:4-6, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God...It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Since men are blinded to the worth of Christ, a miracle is needed in order for them to come to see and believe. Paul compares this miracle with the first day of creation when God said, "Let there be light." It is in fact a new creation, or a new birth. This is what is meant by the effectual call in 1 Corinthians 1:24.

Those who are called have their eyes opened by the sovereign creative power of God so that they no longer see the cross as foolishness but as the power and the wisdom of God. The effectual call is the miracle of having our blindness removed. This is irresistible grace.

*Another example of it is in Acts 16:14, where Lydia is listening to the preaching of Paul. Luke says, “The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.” Unless God opens our hearts, we will not heed the message of the gospel. This heart-opening is what we mean by irresistible grace.*

*Another way to describe it is “new birth” or being born again. We believe that new birth is a miraculous creation of God that enables a formerly “dead” person to receive Christ and so be saved. We do not think that faith precedes and causes new birth. Faith is the evidence that God has begotten us anew. “Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God” (1 John 5:1).*

*When John says that God gives the right to become the children of God to all who receive Christ (John 1:12), he goes on to say that those who do receive Christ “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” In other words, it is necessary to receive Christ in order to become a child of God, but the birth that brings one into the family of God is not possible by the will of man.*

*Man is dead in trespasses and sins. He cannot make himself new, or create new life in himself. He must be born of God. Then, with the new nature of God, he immediately receives Christ. The two acts (regeneration and faith) are so closely connected that in experience we cannot distinguish them. God begets us anew and the first glimmer of life in the new-born child is faith. Thus new birth is the effect of irresistible grace, because it is an act of sovereign creation—“not of the will of man but of God.”<sup>2</sup>*

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2 John Piper, “What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism,” an online article at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org). Throughout this curriculum we will only provide the article or sermon titles (and not the full web addresses) for online articles and sermons found at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).



7. What is the alternative to affirming irresistible grace? Would this alternative undermine God's glorious grace?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 699-702 (Chapter 34, Sections A-B)

8. Why doesn't Grudem think "irresistible grace" is the most helpful term?

## Day 3

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### REGENERATION

At first, the term “regeneration” might sound foreign and confusing: “Some salamanders can *regenerate* limbs that were cut off, so...does ‘regeneration’ have something to do with that?!” Well, not quite. When used in a theological context, regeneration might best be paraphrased as “new, spiritual birth.” The classic text describing this new birth is Jesus’ words in John 3:

John 3:3-8

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

9. Using this passage, write your own description of the new birth.

It is crucial to recognize that regeneration is completely a work of God. We will now examine Ephesians 2 again, this time looking at the broader context:

Ephesians 2:1-9

<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,

*and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

10. How were we made alive? What is the gift of God (verse 8)? Why is salvation accomplished in the way that it is?

A theological question that is often debated is whether regeneration precedes faith or vice versa. It should be clear by now from the passages we've examined, that this curriculum teaches that regeneration precedes faith. God's sovereign act of making us alive is not in response to anything that we do (faith), but is an act of free, divine initiative.

Look at another text which supports this perspective:

Philippians 1:29-30

*<sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

11. What has been granted to the Philippian believers? How might this address the question of whether regeneration or faith comes first?

Notice also these two descriptions of what happens at conversion:

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Acts 16:13-15

<sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

12. How might someone who dogmatically believed that faith preceded regeneration interpret these verses? Would their interpretation be convincing?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 702-706 (Chapter 34, Sections C–D)

13. According to Grudem, what results does genuine regeneration bring?

## Day 4

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### NO OTHER NAME

In our pluralistic and relativistic age, it is trendy to say that there are many ways to God or many ways to express one's spirituality. However popular this kind of sentiment might be in our culture, it finds no echo in the Bible. In fact, Jesus could be accused as one of the most narrow-minded and intolerant people of human history for the kind of exclusive statements he frequently made. Consider the following three texts, which are representative of the teaching of the New Testament as a whole:

John 14:6

*<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Acts 4:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

1 Timothy 2:5

*<sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...*

14. Interact with the following statement: "If God is a mountain, there are many paths that lead us up the mountain. Since they all arrive at the same destination, how can we say that one path is better than another?"

Here is the way that Dr. Timothy Keller responds to another common way of explaining a relativistic view of truth:

*“About every other week, I confront popular pluralist notions that have become a large part of the way Americans think. For example, pluralists contend that no one religion can know the fullness of spiritual truth, therefore all religions are valid. But while it is good to acknowledge our limitations, this statement is itself a strong assertion about the nature of spiritual truth. A common analogy is often cited to get the point across which I am sure you have heard—several blind men trying to describe an elephant. One feels the tail and reports that an elephant is thin like a snake. Another feels a leg and claims it is thick like a tree. Another touches its side and reports the elephant is a wall. This is supposed to represent how the various religions only understand part of God, while no one can truly see the whole picture. To claim full knowledge of God, pluralists contend, is arrogance. When I occasionally describe this parable, and I can almost see the people nodding their heads in agreement.*

*But then I remind the hearers that the only way this parable makes any sense, however, is if the person telling the story has seen the whole elephant. Therefore, the minute one says, ‘All religions only see part of the truth,’ you are claiming the very knowledge you say no one else has. And they are demonstrating the same spiritual arrogance they so often accuse Christians of. In other words, to say all is relative, is itself a truth statement but dangerous because it uses smoke and mirrors to make itself sound more tolerant than the rest. Most folks who hold this view think they are more enlightened than those who hold to absolutes when in fact they are really just as strong in their belief system as everyone else. I do not think most of these folks are purposefully using trickery or bad motives. This is because they seem to have even convinced themselves of the ‘truth’ of their position, even though they claim ‘truth’ does not exist or at least can’t be known. Ironic isn’t it? The position is intellectually inconsistent.<sup>3</sup>*

Again, although religious relativism is rampant in our society, the God of the Bible will have nothing of it. Notice Paul’s reaction to the worship of many gods. We would not expect him to act in the way he does if “all paths lead to the true God.”

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<sup>3</sup> Cited from “The Current Intellectual State of Affairs in America” by Tim Keller, an online article at [www.monergism.com](http://www.monergism.com). Last accessed August 5, 2011.

Acts 17:16-17, 22-23, 30-31

<sup>16</sup> Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup> So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ...<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ...<sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

15. Interact with the following statement: "Being spiritual is what counts. All a person needs is love. It would not be fair for God to judge someone who was ignorant of him."

Although the radical form of relativism expressed in the two preceding questions may be uncommon among those who profess to be evangelicals, there are more professing evangelicals who adhere to what is known as "inclusivism"—the idea that everyone who is saved is saved through Jesus, but that salvation is possible apart from hearing and affirming the gospel.

This view likely arose as an explanation for how God could justly condemn a "good" person who never had exposure to the gospel message. Inclusivism states that the "good" Buddhist, the "good" Aborigine, the "good" man on the island will be saved by Jesus because of their generic faith in God and their ignorance.

Although Acts 17, cited above, addresses this issue, let's examine the clearest rebuttal of such a position:

Romans 10:13-15

<sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> But how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

16. Reconstruct the chain of Paul's argument here by writing out his series of conditions, starting with the condition expressed in verse 15 first and working in reverse order.

*This chain can be collapsed to "Sending gospel-preaching messengers is necessary for belief in Christ and salvation."*

We will also consider an example of someone who "feared God" and yet was not saved. Read the broader context of Acts 10 if needed.

Acts 10:21-23, 30-34, 42-44

*<sup>21</sup> And Peter went down to the men and said, "I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?" <sup>22</sup> And they said, "Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say." <sup>23</sup> So he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ...<sup>30</sup> And Cornelius said, "Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing <sup>31</sup> and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. <sup>32</sup> Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' <sup>33</sup> So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord." <sup>34</sup> So Peter opened his mouth and said... <sup>42</sup> "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." <sup>44</sup> While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.*



17. Cornelius is called “an upright and God-fearing man” (verse 22). Why, then, would Peter still need to preach the gospel to him? Couldn’t Cornelius be saved apart from actually hearing the gospel?

*“My suggestion is that Cornelius represents a kind of unsaved person among an unreached people group who is seeking God in an extraordinary way. Peter is saying that God accepts this search as genuine (hence ‘acceptable’ in verse 35) and works wonders to bring that person the gospel of Jesus Christ the way he did through the visions of both Peter on the housetop and Cornelius in the hour of prayer.*

*...It appears therefore that Luke’s intention in telling the Cornelius story is to show that Gentiles can become part of the chosen people of God through faith in Christ in spite of their ceremonial ‘uncleanness.’ The point is not that Gentiles are already part of God’s chosen people because they fear God and do many good deeds. The key sentence is Acts 11:14: ‘He will declare to you a message by which you will be saved.’”<sup>4</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 692-695 (Chapter 33)

18. Consider the three important elements Grudem thinks must be included in the human preaching of the gospel. Do you think all three elements are necessary? Would you add any additional elements? Explain.

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 160, 161. Used with permission.

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

8.3 *We believe that, apart from the effectual work of the Spirit, no one would come to faith, because all are dead in trespasses and sins; that they are hostile to God, and morally unable to submit to God or please Him, because the pleasures of sin appear greater than the pleasures of God. Thus, for God's elect, the Spirit triumphs over all resistance, wakens the dead, removes blindness, and manifests Christ in such a compellingly beautiful way through the Gospel that He becomes irresistibly attractive to the regenerate heart.*

8.4 *We believe the Holy Spirit does this saving work in connection with the presentation of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. Thus neither the work of the Father in election, nor the work of the Son in atonement, nor the work of the Spirit in regeneration is a hindrance or discouragement to the proclamation of the gospel to all peoples and persons everywhere. On the contrary, this divine saving work of the Trinity is the warrant and the ground of our hope that our evangelization is not in vain in the Lord. The Spirit binds His saving work to the gospel of Christ, because His aim is to glorify the Christ of the Gospel. Therefore we do not believe that there is salvation through any other means than through receiving the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, except that infants and people with severe intellectual disabilities and minds physically incapable of comprehending the gospel may be saved.*

19. Summarize these two sections of the affirmation in your own words.

20. Do you agree with the exception clause added at the end of section 8.4?



## INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Think about your own conversion experience. Answer the following questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the class:

1. Would you describe your conversion as “finding God” or “being found by God”? Why?
2. What prompted you to believe?
3. Did you appear to have a choice in whether or not you believed?
4. Did your desires and affections noticeably change after your conversion?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Are you aware of the daily blessing and presence of the Holy Spirit? Explain.
  
2. Is it logically possible to affirm the doctrines of unconditional election and total depravity and yet deny irresistible grace? Why?
  
3. Is there any hope for the person on the desert island who has never heard the gospel?
  
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, especially 122-154.
- ▷ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).
- ▷ Richard Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953).
- ▷ Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1989).
- ▷ Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1995).
- ▷ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994).
- ▷ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1963).

# The Justifying Act of God and Justifying Faith

# 3

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## 📖 INTRODUCTION

*“The doctrine of justification is not simply one doctrine among others but—as Luther declares—the basic and chief article of faith with which the church stands or falls, and on which its entire doctrine depends. The doctrine of justification is ‘the summary of Christian doctrine,’ ‘the sun which illuminates God’s holy church.’ It is the unique possession of Christianity and ‘distinguishes our religion from all others.’ The doctrine of justification preserves the church. If we lose this doctrine, we also lose Christ and the church; for then no Christian understanding remains. What is at stake in this doctrine is the decisive question as to how man can continue to stand before God. This doctrine ‘consoles our conscience before God.’ Luther repeatedly expresses this in the strongest terms, as though he were under oath. ‘Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed...on this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it.’”<sup>5</sup>*

## 📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ articulate the great exchange that happens in God’s justifying act
- ▷ describe the nature of justifying faith
- ▷ understand the doctrines of union with Christ and adoption

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress, 1966), 224.

 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **adoption:**
- **forensic:**
- **impute:**
- **“in Christ”:**
- **intercession:**
- **justification:**
- **repentance:**
- **union with Christ:**





## Day 1

### COUNTED RIGHTEOUS IN CHRIST

The doctrine of justification is perhaps most clearly stated in Romans. We will trace the doctrine of justification through Romans 3, 4, and 5, observing the great salvation that God has wrought through his son Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:19-26

*<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

1. Using this passage, summarize our greatest need as humans and God's greatest provision for that need.

From this passage we learn that justification is a *gift* made possible by God's *grace*. It is received by faith in Christ. Justification is a declaration that we are in the right with God. It is the opposite of condemnation (cf. Proverbs 17:15).

In Romans 3, Paul introduces the doctrine of justification. He then develops this doctrine in the succeeding chapters.

Romans 4 continues Paul's thought. In Romans 1-3, Paul shows the universality of sin and the condemnation that resulted. Then in 3:21-31 he tells us that the righteousness of God has been manifested, not through the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (3:21-22). He then emphatically states, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (3:28) and that this justification can come to anyone who has faith even if he isn't a Jew.

This is where chapter 4 picks up. In verse 1 Paul asks what was gained by Abraham. He is asking how Abraham was justified. He then gives the answer that is found in Genesis 15:6, "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."

#### Genesis 15:1-6

<sup>1</sup> After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."<sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

It is this text (above) that Paul refers to in Romans 4.

#### Romans 4:1-8

<sup>1</sup> What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.<sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.<sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,<sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;<sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

2. Having read Genesis 15—that Abraham was reckoned<sup>6</sup> righteous not because of something he did, but because he believed—what principle does Paul draw?

If justification is by works, one does something and his payment (or reward) is to be justified; it is something that God *must* give because it has been *earned*. But with justification by faith one has done nothing that earns or deserves the blessings of justification that he receives—it is pure *grace*, a gift undeserved. We are reckoned to be righteous apart from our works since our works, in fact, condemn us. That is why forgiveness of sins is highlighted as the necessary, “negative” aspect of justification. Our sins are counted as Christ’s when he dies as our substitute.

Romans 5 completes Paul’s thought by making the “positive” aspect of justification explicit.

Romans 5:15-19

*<sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup> And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.*

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6 This curriculum will use the terms “count,” “reckon,” and “impute” as synonyms.

3. Describe the parallel between Adam and Christ and between Adam's one transgression and Christ's one act of obedience.

1 Corinthians 1:30

*<sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

As we've seen our justification involves more than just being forgiven of our sins. We are also reckoned as righteous and acceptable in God's presence on the basis of Jesus' obedience.

Philippians 3:7-9

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...*

4. Contrast the two kinds of righteousness Paul speaks of.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

*<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Jesus was not a sinner and thus he knew no sin; he was perfectly righteous. We, on the other hand, are sinners and know sin (quite well!); we are completely unrighteous, so in Christ comes the solution to both our problems: our sin and our lack of righteousness. On the cross Jesus trades places with us. He didn't know any sin, but he became sin for us. That is, our sin was counted as his (imputed to him) so that God the Father treated him as though he had sinned even though he hadn't. The result for us is that we become the righteousness of God in Christ—that is, we, who didn't know righteousness, *become* righteousness. Christ's righteousness is counted as ours (imputed to us) so that God the Father treats us as though we ourselves performed this perfect righteousness. We are forgiven and counted righteous—we are justified.

*“The historic Protestant view of the Bible’s teaching is that the basis of our hope for acceptance with God and eternal life is the provision of Christ for both pardon and perfection. That is, he becomes our substitute in two senses: In his suffering and death he becomes our curse and condemnation (Galatians 3:13; Romans 8:3); in his final suffering and death, and in his whole life of suffering and righteousness, he becomes our perfection (2 Corinthians 5:21). His death is the climax of his atoning sufferings which propitiate the wrath of God against us (Romans 3:24-25); and his death is the climax of a perfect life of righteousness—God’s righteousness—imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:6, 11 with 3:21-22; 5:18-19).*

*...Pastorally the full meaning of justification, as pardon and imputed perfection, has proved to be a mighty antidote to despair for the saints.*

*Alongside the pastoral preciousness of the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ is the great truth that this doctrine bestows on Jesus Christ the fullest honor that he deserves. Not only should he be honored as the one who died to pardon us, and not only should he be honored as the one who sovereignly works faith and obedience in us, but he should also be honored as the one who provided a perfect righteousness for us as the ground of our full acceptance and endorsement by God.”<sup>7</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 722-729 (Chapter 36, Sections A–D)

5. How does Grudem support his assertion that justification includes a *legal declaration* by God?

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<sup>7</sup> Taken from *Counted Righteous in Christ* by John Piper, © 2002 by Desiring God Foundation, pp. 123-125. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

## Day 2

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### JUSTIFYING FAITH

In the previous day's study, we made the crucial assertion that faith is the *instrument* by which we receive the gifts of forgiveness of sins and righteousness through Jesus Christ. In this day we will examine the nature of the faith which justifies. We will seek to demonstrate the truth expressed by two statements of the affirmation of faith we've been studying:

*"The faith which alone justifies, cannot remain alone, but works through love."  
(Section 10.3)*

*"Justifying faith is a persevering, that is, continuing, kind of faith. Even though we are justified at the first instant of saving faith, yet this faith justifies only because it is the kind of faith that will surely persevere." (Section 10.2)*

Love is the fruit of faith, the inevitable expression of the faith that justifies. As Paul says,

Galatians 5:6

*<sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*

In order to demonstrate this truth, we first turn to the great chapter on faith: Hebrews 11. Read this entire chapter, or just the excerpt below:

Hebrews 11:1, 6, 24-26

*<sup>1</sup> Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ...*

*<sup>6</sup> And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ...<sup>24</sup> By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, <sup>25</sup> choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. <sup>26</sup> He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*

6. What can we say about the nature of faith? Does it embrace the fulfillment of all God's promises to us in Christ?

John 6:35

*<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*

From the parallel in John 6:35, we can say that faith (believing) is coming to Jesus Christ such that the hunger and thirst of our soul is satisfied. Furthermore, this faith is a firm conviction of realities that we cannot see (Heb 11:1). The faith that pleases God is a drawing near to him to receive the reward that he offers, namely, himself! Thus faith is more than a mental assent to truths, but involves a hungering, thirsting, and reward-seeking in the heart.

And as the following medley of texts in 1 John indicates, justifying faith perseveres.

1 John 2:3-6, 18-19

*<sup>3</sup> And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.*

*<sup>4</sup> Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. ...<sup>18</sup> Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

John 3:9-10

*<sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

1 John 5:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. <sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has the world—our faith.

7. What shall we say about those who profess faith in Christ and then later fall away? Did they lose their faith? Does justifying faith sometimes not persevere?

Now we must consider the difficult text of James 2.

James 2:14-26

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.



8. James begins by asking about what kind of faith can save a person. He contrasts saving faith with dead faith. Describe the difference between living faith and dead faith.

9. How should we understand James 2:24? Does this contradict what we've studied in Day 1?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 730-732 (Chapter 36, Section E)

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 709-713 (Chapter 35, Section A)

10. According to Grudem, why does God choose faith as the means by which we receive justification?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 713-717 (Chapter 35, Sections B–C)

## Day 3

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The 2014 Desiring God Conference for Pastors was on the topic of union with Christ. All of the messages from this conference can be watched online or downloaded free of charge at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

### UNION WITH CHRIST

We've been arguing that justifying faith is the instrument by which we are united to Christ. We will now explore this particular concept more fully.

*"Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, all of which they become the actual partakers in the application of redemption, and all that by God's grace they will become in the state of consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ...It is out of the measureless fullness of grace and truth, of wisdom and power, of goodness and love, of righteousness and faithfulness which resides in him that God's people draw for all their needs in this life and for the hope of the life to come. There is no truth, therefore, more suited to impart confidence and strength, comfort and joy in the Lord than this one of union with Christ."*<sup>8</sup>

We will start by examining a passage we've already seen before that beautifully describes the blessings that come to us as believers.

Ephesians 1:3-14

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

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<sup>8</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 170-171.

11. Underline every reference to our union with Christ. What are some of the blessings to which Paul is referring? Why might Paul be stressing this theme?

Lest we think that union with Christ is a doctrine that is only taught by Paul, listen to these words of Jesus, recorded in John's Gospel.

John 15:1-8

*<sup>1</sup> I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

12. Is union with Christ a reality restricted to our first moment of belief and salvation?

Does our union with Christ relate to the doctrine of justification?

Romans 4:23-25

<sup>23</sup> *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for [Abraham’s] sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

13. What does it mean that Jesus was “raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25)?

This topic is addressed in Lesson 11 of the companion course, Theological Foundations 1.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 840-845 (Chapter 43, Sections A–B)

14. Is the doctrine of our union with Christ something that you have thought about? What new thoughts did reading this section in Grudem stimulate?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 845-847 (Chapter 43, Sections C–D)

## Day 4

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### ADOPTED AS SONS

In this day, we will consider one more aspect of our salvation: our adoption as sons.

Ephesians 2:1-3

*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

John 8:42-44

*<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. <sup>43</sup> Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. <sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”*

1 John 3:8-10

*<sup>8</sup> Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup> No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup> By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

15. Before we were adopted by God, whose sons were we?

Galatians 3:25-26

<sup>25</sup> *But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

Galatians 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup> *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

16. How do we become children of God?

Romans 8:14-17

<sup>14</sup> *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

17. What are the benefits that come from being a child of God?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 736-739 (Chapter 37, Sections A–C)

18. Do you agree with Grudem that it would be hypothetically possible to receive regeneration and justification without adoption (738-739)? Does this make adoption more precious in your mind?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 739-742 (Chapter 37, Section D)

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

9.1 *We believe that in a free act of righteous grace God justifies the ungodly by faith alone apart from works, pardoning their sins, and reckoning them as righteous and acceptable in His presence. Faith is thus the sole instrument by which we, as sinners, are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God. This acceptance happens fully and permanently at the first instant of justification. Thus the righteousness by which we come into right standing with God is not anything worked in us by God, neither imparted to us at baptism nor over time, but rather is accomplished for us, outside ourselves, and is imputed to us.*

9.2 *We believe, nevertheless, that the faith, which alone receives the gift of justification, does not remain alone in the person so justified, but produces, by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of love and leads necessarily to sanctification. This necessary relation between justifying faith and the fruit of good works gives rise to some Biblical expressions which seem to make works the ground or means of justification, but in fact simply express the crucial truth that faith that does not yield the fruit of good works is dead, being no true faith.*

10.1 *We believe that justification and sanctification are both brought about by God through faith, but not in the same way. Justification is an act of God's imputing and reckoning; sanctification is an act of God's imparting and transforming. Thus the function of faith in regard to each is different. In regard to justification, faith is not the channel through which power or transformation flows to the soul of the believer, but rather faith is the occasion of God's forgiving, acquitting, and reckoning as righteous. But in regard to sanctification, faith is indeed the channel through which divine power and transformation flow to the soul; and the sanctifying work of God through faith does indeed touch the soul and change it into the likeness of Christ.*



10.2 We believe that the reason justifying faith necessarily sanctifies in this way is fourfold:

First, justifying faith is a persevering, that is, continuing, kind of faith. Even though we are justified at the first instant of saving faith, yet this faith justifies only because it is the kind of faith that will surely persevere. The extension of this faith into the future is, as it were, contained in the first seed of faith, as the oak in the acorn. Thus the moral effects of persevering faith may be rightly described as the effects of justifying faith.

Second, we believe that justifying faith trusts in Christ not only for the gift of imputed righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, but also for the fulfillment of all His promises to us based on that reconciliation. Justifying faith magnifies the finished work of Christ's atonement, by resting securely in all the promises of God obtained and guaranteed by that all-sufficient work.

Third, we believe that justifying faith embraces Christ in all His roles: Creator, Sustainer, Savior, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Helper, Friend, Advocate, Protector, and Lord. Justifying faith does not divide Christ, accepting part of Him and rejecting the rest. All of Christ is embraced by justifying faith, even before we are fully aware of, or fully understand, all that He will be for us. As more of Christ is truly revealed to us in His Word, genuine faith recognizes Christ and embraces Him more fully.

Fourth, we believe that this embracing of all of Christ is not a mere intellectual assent, or a mere decision of the will, but is also a heartfelt, Spirit-given (yet imperfect) satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, the change of mind and heart that turns from the moral ugliness and danger of sin, and is sometimes called "repentance," is included in the very nature of saving faith.

19. What is the difference between calling faith the instrument of justification as opposed to the ground of justification?

20. Respond to this statement: “Good works are not necessary to salvation—all that counts is faith.”

 INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT



Revelations 12:10 says that Satan is the accuser who accuses the brethren before God day and night. Write an imaginary account of judgment day with Satan as the prosecutor and Jesus as your lawyer arguing your case before the Father. What will Satan do to show you are guilty (you can write in generalities)? How will Jesus defend you? How will the Father deliver the verdict?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Why do you think Martin Luther said that justification is the doctrine by which the church will stand or fall? Do you agree with him?
2. Why are both forgiveness and the imputation of Christ's righteousness essential for our justification?
3. Analyze the statement: "We must instruct people not only to be believers in Jesus, but also to be disciples. After someone accepts Jesus as Savior, they should then accept him as Lord." What do such statements imply about the nature of faith?
4. Your own question(s):



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- ▷ John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).
- ▷ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1985).
- ▷ Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway), 2006).
- ▷ Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003).
- ▷ J. Ligon Duncan, *Misunderstanding Paul?: Responding to the New Perspectives* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).
- ▷ John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Multnomah: Multnomah, 1995).



# God's Work in Sanctification

# 4

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

Every true believer knows that nominal Christian faith is a deep problem:

*We live in a superficially Christianized society where thousands of lost people think they do believe in Jesus. In most of my witnessing to unbelievers and nominal Christians, the command, "Believe in Jesus and you shall be saved," is virtually meaningless. Drunks on the street say they do. Unmarried couples sleeping together say they do. Elderly people who haven't sought worship or fellowship for forty years say they do. Every stripe of world-loving church attendees say they do.<sup>9</sup>*

What is needed, therefore, is not only a recovery of the true nature of justifying faith, but also a recovery of the doctrine of sanctification. This lesson will examine the doctrine of sanctification.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- define the doctrine of sanctification and distinguish it from justification
- describe how sanctification occurs throughout the life of the believer
- explain what a "filling with the Holy Spirit" means and cite biblical support.

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<sup>9</sup> John Piper, "Conversion to Christ: The Making of a Christian Hedonist," an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **baptism by the Holy Spirit:**
- **baptism in/with the Holy Spirit:**
- **filled with the Holy Spirit:**
- **perfectionism:**
- **sanctification:**
- **sinless perfection:**





## Day 1

### THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

An important task in systematic theology is to be careful not to read systematic categories and language into the Bible in such a way that individual verses are misunderstood. The use of the term “sanctification” in systematic theology is a clear example of this.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

*<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

2 Thessalonians 2:13

*<sup>13</sup> But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*

1. How are the terms “sanctified” and “sanctification” being used in these passages?

Despite texts such as the two cited above, there are other texts that use forms of the word “sanctify” in a different way and from which we derive the doctrine of sanctification.

Hebrews 10:14

*<sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

1 Thessalonians 4:2-7

*<sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

John 17:15-19

*<sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

2. How are forms of the word “sanctify” being used in these passages?

This curriculum will therefore use the term “sanctification” in the sense it is used in this second set of texts—to refer to the ongoing process by which believers grow in maturity and holiness. The term “sanctification” will refer broadly to a Christian’s growth and pursuit of Christ-likeness. Therefore, texts such as Philippians 3 (cited below), though not using the term “sanctify” or “sanctification,” will nevertheless be considered a legitimate source for constructing the doctrine of sanctification.

Philippians 3:12-14

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

At this point we need to make a crucial distinction between justification (which we studied in the previous lesson) and sanctification (in the sense we defined above). Understanding this distinction and relationship between these two doctrines is vital in the Christian life and in our worship of God.

The following chart<sup>10</sup> illustrates the difference between justification and sanctification:

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
External to us	Internal to us
Declared righteous	Made righteous
Removes guilt of sin	Removes pollution of sin
Legal status	Moral condition
Restores God's favor	Restores God's image
Complete and once for all	Progressive but incomplete (until death)
Gives title to heaven	Gives fitness for heaven
Criminal pardoned	Patient healed

3. What is your initial reaction to this chart? Why might it be vital to distinguish between these two doctrines?

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<sup>10</sup> This chart has been adapted from *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), especially from the chapters by John MacArthur and R.C. Sproul.

To put it broadly, our sanctification must be built upon our justification, and not vice versa. Here are some texts that describe this important relationship.

Romans 5:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Titus 3:4-8

*<sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

4. What might happen if justification were built on sanctification, the reverse of what these passages teach?

Romans 12:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*“For the next five chapters Paul will call us to live a certain way as Christians. And with this word ‘therefore’ he is saying: The foundation we build our lives on is the foundation laid in Romans 1-11. Paul is turning now from doctrine to practice. He is turning from theology to ethics. From what is true about God and Christ and salvation to what we should do—what we therefore should do because of Romans 1-11. Because of all the truth about God and sin and Christ and the cross and the Spirit and faith and justification—because of all that we have seen in Romans 1-11, therefore we are to build our practical lives on this. Paul moves from foundation to application with the word ‘therefore.’ Christian acting and feeling and speaking are not rootless. They have foundation. They are built on something. Paul spent 11 chapters...laying the foundation for the building of Romans 12-16. If we miss this connection, we miss everything.”<sup>11</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 746-748 (Chapter 38, Sections A–B1)

5. Based upon your reading in Grudem and your own reflection on the relationship between justification and sanctification, list other similarities and differences between these two realities.

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, “Build Your Life on the Mercies of God,” an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

## Day 2

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### THE PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

We previously suggested that sanctification in the life of a believer is progressive. Today we want to explain this in more depth.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

<sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

<sup>18</sup> And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

6. What evidence is there in this passage that sanctification is progressive? How does transformation happen?

The process of sanctification is something to be pursued. This suggests that not all believers are being sanctified at the same rate and that our rate of sanctification may vary throughout our lifetime.

Hebrews 12:1-3, 12-14

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ...<sup>12</sup> Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup> and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup> Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

7. Underline every imperative (command) in this passage. What does this imply about the process of sanctification?

#### 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

*<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

As John Owen famously wrote, “Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work, be killing sin or it will be killing you.”<sup>12</sup>

We know, however, that the process of sanctification is never completed in this life. We will always need to grow in holiness since we will always need to mortify remaining sin. The believer’s remaining sin was addressed briefly in Lesson 9 of *Theological Foundations I*. We will simply here reproduce some of the texts examined in that lesson.

#### 1 John 1:6-10

*<sup>6</sup> If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. <sup>7</sup> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. <sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

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<sup>12</sup> John Owen, “Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. VI, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 9.

**Philippians 3:12-14**

<sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* <sup>13</sup> *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

**James 5:15-16**

<sup>15</sup> *And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* <sup>16</sup> *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

**Ephesians 4:31-32**

<sup>31</sup> *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* <sup>32</sup> *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

**Matthew 18:15**

<sup>15</sup> *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

**Is, then, the process of sanctification ever finished?**

**Hebrews 12:22-23**

<sup>22</sup> *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,* <sup>23</sup> *and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect...*

**Revelation 21:27**

<sup>27</sup> *But nothing unclean will ever enter [the new Jerusalem], nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

**1 John 3:2**

<sup>2</sup> *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*



8. When is our sanctification complete?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 748-753 (Chapter 38, Sections B2-B4)

9. Choose a verse that has been used to teach “perfectionism” and explain how Grudem responds. If perfectionism is unbiblical, should that mean that we should stop striving for perfection?

## Day 3

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### GOD'S WORK AND OURS IN SANCTIFICATION

In the previous day we learned that sanctification is a process, and is something to be pursued by the believer. But exactly what relationship does God's grace and our effort have?

Philippians 2:12-13

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

10. How are verse 12 and verse 13 related? Underline the word that communicates the logic. Do God and man cooperate in man's sanctification?

1 Corinthians 15:10

*<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

Notice Paul's exhortation of the Roman believers:

Romans 8:12-14

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

11. How might this passage be used to express the divine-human dynamic in sanctification?

Here is how the great American theologian Jonathan Edwards expressed the relationship between God's activity and our activity in salvation.

*"We are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what He produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active."<sup>13</sup>*

Consider also Peter's words about service, which certainly apply to sanctification as well:

1 Peter 4:10-11

<sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>13</sup> As quoted by John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2004), 94.

12. Why does God supply us everything that we need for sanctification?

In concluding our study of sanctification, we must stress the vital importance of sanctification. There is no salvation without it!

2 Peter 1:5-11

*<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, <sup>7</sup> and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. <sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. <sup>11</sup> For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

Galatians 5:19-21

*<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

13. Interact with the following statement: “Our salvation depends upon our sanctification.”

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 753-758 (Chapter 38, Sections C-F)

14. Is there a way to simplify or summarize Grudem's list of motivations for obedience?

## Day 4

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### A FILLING WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are some who teach that Christians will reach a new level of sanctification and power in ministry if they experience “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” An explanation and biblical refutation of this view is set forth by Grudem in today’s further reading.

Grudem does, however, believe that Christians can experience fresh “infillings” of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, seeking to be filled by the Holy Spirit is part of our pursuit of sanctification.

Ephesians 5:15-21

*<sup>15</sup> Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

15. Isn’t the epistle to the Ephesians addressed to believers? Then why would Paul command believers to be “filled with the Spirit” (v. 18)?

Luke 11:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; <sup>12</sup> or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*

16. Using your Bible to search the broader context of Luke 11, discern to whom this teaching is addressed. Why might this be significant?

The study for today has been abbreviated so that the student has more time to devote to the required and further reading.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 775-784 (Chapter 39, Section D)

17. Have you encountered any teaching of a “two-class Christianity”? If so, how was it described?
18. What analogy does Grudem use for a filling with the Holy Spirit of someone who is already full? Did you find this helpful?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 763-775 (Chapter 39, Sections A–C)

This section discusses the Pentecostal belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and offers a biblical counterargument.

## Day 5

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### An Affirmation of Faith

10.3 *We believe that this persevering, future-oriented, Christ-embracing, heart-satisfying faith is life-transforming, and therefore renders intelligible the teaching of the Scripture that final salvation in the age to come depends on the transformation of life, and yet does not contradict justification by faith alone. The faith which alone justifies, cannot remain alone, but works through love.*

10.4 *We believe that this simple, powerful reality of justifying faith is God's gift which He gives unconditionally in accord with God's electing love, so that no one can boast in himself, but only give all glory to God for every part of salvation. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the decisive agent in this life-transformation, but that He is supplied to us and works holiness in us through our daily faith in the Son of God whose trustworthiness He loves to glorify.*

10.5 *We believe that the sanctification, which comes by the Spirit through faith, is imperfect and incomplete in this life. Although slavery to sin is broken, and sinful desires are progressively weakened by the power of a superior satisfaction in the glory of Christ, yet there remain remnants of corruption in every heart that give rise to irreconcilable war, and call for vigilance in the lifelong fight of faith.*



19. How might you use section 10.3 to interpret a passage such as Galatians 6:7-9?

Galatians 6:7-9

*<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

20. Explain what each of the adjectives used to describe biblical faith means:  
a) persevering; b) future-oriented; c) Christ-embracing; d) heart-satisfying.



#### INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Chart your own spiritual journey using a chart similar to the one in Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, page 750. Label different periods of your life of intense or minimal growth. Think about sanctification in terms of your intellect, emotions, will, spirit, and physical bodies (756-757).

 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. What is something that you learned in this lesson which would help you in speaking to a nominal Christian friend?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What periods of your life have been the periods of intense spiritual growth? What was it about those periods that might have been conducive to your growth?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Read Hebrews 3:12-14 and 10:22-25. Is it possible to be sanctified apart from a believing community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995).
- ▷ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006).
- ▷ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006).
- ▷ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991).
- ▷ Donald Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).
- ▷ J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Lafayette, Indiana: Sovereign Grace, 2001).

# God's Work in Perseverance

# 5

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

In this lesson we will consider perseverance and assurance. Regarding assurance of salvation, there are two basic mistakes one can make: having assurance when one shouldn't (that is, having a false assurance) or not having assurance when one should. Whereas the former is probably the more common mistake in the church at large, it is our estimation that the latter will be the more common mistake for those who will use this curriculum. An extreme example of a lack of assurance is William Cowper. John Piper quotes Cowper's own words and then reflects upon what he says:

*Loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a sup-posed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. ... You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. ... My friends, I now expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? ... I forestall the answer—God's ways are mysterious, and He giveth no account of His matters—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.*

*Notice that he affirms the truth of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and does not even quarrel with the reality of his own conversion at St. Albans. What he disputes is that the general truth applies to him. He is the lone exception in the universe. He is reprobate though once he was elect. Ask not why. God gives no account. This is his bleakest way of talking.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> John Piper, "Insanity and Spiritual Songs in the Soul of a Saint," an online biography at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org). Last accessed May 4, 2016

It is our prayer that God would use this lesson to comfort those who are tempted to despair, like Cowper, and mercifully to shake those who are tempted to self-confidence.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ offer biblical support for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints
- ▷ reflect biblically on those who profess Christ but don't persevere
- ▷ describe the sources that contribute to a believer's assurance

### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **assurance of salvation:**
  
- **eternal security:**
  
- **perseverance of the saints:**



## Day 1

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### THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

As with irresistible grace, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is necessitated by the doctrine of unconditional election. If God chooses us—apart from anything we do and solely on the basis of his good pleasure—then those whom he has chosen cannot become “un-chosen” somehow. God will keep those whom he has chosen.

John 6:38-40

*<sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.*

John 10:27-29

*<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

1. Will these assurances (above) remain secure if we do not affirm the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty?

Romans 8:30 has been called an “unbreakable chain” of five links: those whom he (1) *foreknew* he also (2) *predestined*; those whom he (2) *predestined* he also (3) *called*, and those whom he (3) *called* he also (4) *justified*, and those whom he (4) *justified* he also (5) *glorified*. Therefore, the first link in the chain is unbreakably connected to the last link: if you are foreknown by God, then you are glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* <sup>29</sup> *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* <sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

2. How are verses 29 and 30 related to verse 28? Underline the word that shows the logical connection.

Many more verses could be offered in support of this idea; we will present another.

Philippians 1:6

<sup>6</sup> *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

3. Is it possible that Paul is simply mistaken in his confidence in God’s completion of the work he started?



Perhaps the most compelling reason to believe in the perseverance of saints is how this doctrine is linked to God's faithfulness in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 1:4, 7-9

*<sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> ...as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

Our perseverance is as certain as God's faithfulness, and God's faithfulness is at stake in our perseverance.

Here is an articulation of this last doctrine of grace, the perseverance of the saints. At some points, this excerpt anticipates things that we will study in more depth later:

#### *Perseverance of the Saints*

*It follows from what was just said that the people of God WILL persevere to the end and not be lost. The foreknown are predestined, the predestined are called, the called are justified, and the justified are glorified. No one is lost from this group. To belong to this people is to be eternally secure.*

*But we mean more than this by the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. We mean that the saints will and must persevere in the obedience which comes from faith. Election is unconditional, but glorification is not. There are many warnings in Scripture that those who do not hold fast to Christ can be lost in the end.*

*The following seven theses summarize our understanding of this crucial doctrine:*

*1) Our faith must endure to the end if we are to be saved.*

*This means that the ministry of the word is God's instrument in the preservation of faith as well as the begetting of faith. We do not breathe easy after a person has prayed to receive Christ, as though we can be assured from*

*our perspective that they are now beyond the reach of the evil one. There is a fight of faith to be fought. We must endure to the end in faith if we are to be saved.*

*1 Corinthians 15:1, 2, “Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain.*

*Colossians 1:21-23, “And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel...”*

*2 Timothy 2:11, 12, “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him...”*

*Mark 13:13, “But he who endures to the end will be saved.”*

*See also Revelation 2:7, 10, 11, 17, 25, 26; 3:5, 11, 12, 21.*

*2) Obedience, evidencing inner renewal from God, is necessary for final salvation.*

*This is not to say that God demands perfection. It is clear from Philippians 3:12, 13 and 1 John 1:8-10 and Matthew 6:12 that the New Testament does not hold out the demand that we be sinlessly perfect in order to be saved. But the New Testament does demand that we be morally changed and walk in newness of life.*

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

*Romans 8:13, “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

*Notice that this symbolism seems to lose its meaning if applied to an infant.*

*Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not enter the kingdom of God." (See also Ephesians 5:5 and 1 Corinthians 6:10.)*

*1 John 2:3-6, "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (See also 1 John 3:4-10, 14; 4:20.)*

*John 8:31, "Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.'" (See also Luke 10:28; Matthew 6:14, 15; 18:35; Genesis 18:19; 22:16-17; 26:4-5; 2 Timothy 2:19.)*

3) *God's elect cannot be lost.*

*This is why we believe in eternal security—namely, the eternal security of the elect. the implication is that God will so work that those whom he has chosen for eternal salvation will be enabled by him to persevere in faith to the end and fulfill, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the requirements for obedience*

*Romans 8:28-30, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his propose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified." What is evident from this passage is that those who are effectually called into the hope of salvation will indeed persevere to the end and be glorified.*

*John 10:26-30, "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (See also Ephesians 1:4-5.)*

4) *There is a falling away of some believers, but if it persists, it shows that their faith was not genuine and they were not born of God.*

*1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be made plain that they all are not of us." Similarly, the parable of the four soils as interpreted in Luke 8:9-14 pictures people who "hear the word, receive it with joy; but these have no root, they believe for a while and in a time of temptation fall away."*

*The fact that such a thing is possible is precisely why the ministry of the Word in every local church must contain many admonitions to the church members to persevere in faith and not be entangled in those things which could possibly strangle them and result in their condemnation.*

5) *God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained, as it were, like a seed in that first act.*

*What we are trying to do here is own up to the teaching of Romans 5:1, for example, that teaches that we are already justified before God. God does not wait to the end of our lives in order to declare us righteous. In fact, we would not be able to have the assurance and freedom in order to live out the radical demands of Christ unless we could be confident that because of our faith we already stand righteous before him.*

*Nevertheless, we must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith. The way these two truths fit together is that we are justified through our first act of faith because God sees in it (like he can see the tree in an acorn) the embryo of a life of faith. This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable fruit of obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine.*

*The textual support for this is that Romans 4:3 cites Genesis 15:6 as the point where Abraham was justified by God. This is a reference to an act of faith early in Abraham's career. Romans 4:19-22, however, refers to an experience*

*of Abraham many years later (when he was 100 years old, see Genesis 21:5, 12) and says that because of the faith of this experience Abraham was reckoned righteous. In other words, it seems that the faith which justified Abraham is not merely his first act of faith but the faith which gave rise to acts of obedience later in his life. (The same thing could be shown from James 2:21-24 in its reference to a still later act in Abraham's life, namely, the offering of his son, Isaac, in Genesis 22.) The way we put together these crucial threads of biblical truth is by saying that we are indeed justified through our first act of faith but not without reference to all the subsequent acts of faith which give rise to the obedience that God demands. Faith alone is the instrument (not ground or basis) of our justification because God makes it his sole means of uniting us to Christ in whom we "become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).*

6) *God works to cause his elect to persevere.*

*We are not left to ourselves and our assurance is very largely rooted in the sovereign love of God to perform that which he has called us to do. 1 Peter 1:5, "By God's power we are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Jude 24, 25, "Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."*

*Philippians 1:6, "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."*

*1 Corinthians 1:8-9, "Jesus Christ will sustain you to the end; guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."*

7) *Therefore we should be zealous to make our calling and election sure.*

*2 Peter 1:10, "Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>*

4. How is the seventh thesis an inference from the other six?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 788-792 (Chapter 40, Section A)

5. When Jesus says that "no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28) does that leave room for the possibility that we might remove ourselves from his hand?

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<sup>15</sup> John Piper, "What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism," an online article at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

## Day 2

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### THE NECESSITY OF OBEDIENT FAITH<sup>16</sup>

Although it has been stated and implied before this day's study, let us say again: it is *necessary* for the elect to persevere in the obedience of faith; there is no salvation without perseverance!

Colossians 1:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

6. What must happen in order for us to be presented holy and blameless and above reproach?

This emphasis is found not only in Paul, but also in Matthew:

Matthew 24:9-13

*<sup>9</sup> Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

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<sup>16</sup> The title for this day and the next are taken from Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2001).

Notice the recurring theme in John too:

Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26

<sup>7</sup> *To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

<sup>11</sup> *The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.*

<sup>17</sup> *To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.*

<sup>26</sup> *The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations...*

Revelation 3:5, 12, 21

<sup>5</sup> *The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.*

<sup>12</sup> *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

<sup>21</sup> *The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

7. Using your Bible to search the broader context of Revelation if necessary, what does it mean to conquer?



Hebrews 3:5-6, 12-14

<sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, <sup>6</sup> but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. ...<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

8. Underline the two "if" clauses. How do these clauses contribute to this day's study?

Despite the numerous clear statements to the contrary, some still maintain that it is possible for someone to confess Christ, be saved, and then lose every evidence of faith (perhaps even denying Christ at some point in their life). Proponents of such a view will often cite 1 Corinthians 3 in support of their view.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

<sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

9. Do these verses (and especially verse 15) contradict what we've been studying?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 792-794 (Chapter 40, Section B)

1 Peter 1:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

10. According to Grudem, of what significance is 1 Peter 1:5?

## Day 3

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### REFLECTING ON FALLEN RUNNERS

Sadly, most of us have known those who had what seemed to be such a promising start in the race of faith only to fall out of the race altogether later in life. What are we to make of this? One response would be to say that these runners were genuinely saved, but lost their salvation through unbelief. This, how-ever, would contradict what we've learned in the two previous days of study. So what then are we to say?

<sup>1</sup> John 2:18-19

*<sup>18</sup> Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

11. How does John reflect on those who have fallen out of the race of faith?

Likewise, Jesus' words in Matthew 7 shoot a dagger into the heart of nominal Christian "faith."

Matthew 7:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."*

12. What can we say of these prophesying, demon-expelling, wonder-working confessors of the name of Jesus?

We will now consider another text that some would raise in objection to what we've been attempting to establish. Hebrews 6, on anyone's reading, is a difficult text. But does it really teach that a genuine believer can lose their salvation?

Hebrews 6:4-9

*<sup>4</sup> For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. <sup>7</sup> For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. <sup>8</sup> But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. <sup>9</sup> Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.*

13. How might the illustration in verses 7 and 8 prove that verses 4-6 are not describing a genuine believer?

*“I’ll be very personal, to give it its sharpest point. If in the coming years I commit apostasy and fall away from Christ, it will not be because I have not tasted of the word of God and the Spirit of God and the miracles of God. I have drunk of his word. The Spirit has touched me. I have seen his miracles and I have been his instrument for a few.*

*But if, over the next ten or twenty years, John Piper begins to cool off spiritually and lose interest in spiritual things and become more fascinated with making money and writing Christless books; and I buy the lie that a new wife would be exhilarating and that the children can fend for themselves and that the church of Christ is a drag and that the incarnation is a myth and that there is one life to live so let us eat drink and be merry—if that happens, then know that the truth is this: John Piper was mightily deceived in the first fifty years of his life. His faith was an alien vestige of his father’s joy. His fidelity to his wife was a temporary passion and compliance with social pressure; his fatherhood the outworking of natural instincts. His preaching was driven by the love of words and crowds. His writing was a love affair with fame. And his praying was the deepest delusion of all—an attempt to get God to supply the resources of his vanity.*

*If this possibility does not make me serious and vigilant in the pursuit of everlasting joy, what will?<sup>17</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 794-803 (Chapter 40, Section C)

14. Are you convinced by Grudem’s treatment of Hebrews 6? Why or why not?

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<sup>17</sup> John Piper, “When is Saving Repentance Impossible?” an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

## Day 4

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### ASSURANCE

*“Our assurance in faith depends on a three-legged stool: (1) God’s promises (2) the fruit of the Spirit in our lives and (3) the witness of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>*

The first leg of this three-legged stool is by far the most important. We have already looked at a number of texts promising that God will bring all his chosen ones to glory. Here is another:

John 5:24

*<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

And now look at a very similar text:

1 John 5:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

*<sup>12</sup> Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. <sup>13</sup> I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.*

15. Does John believe that assurance is possible? If so, on what basis?

It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that the promises of God and the objective reality that stands behind them are the only means by which we can have assurance.

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<sup>18</sup> Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 276.

2 Corinthians 13:5

<sup>5</sup> *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about your-selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

1 John 2:4-5

<sup>4</sup> *Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, <sup>5</sup> but who-ever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*

16. According to these texts, what is another source of assurance? What might be dangerous about relying too heavily on this source of assurance?

Here is how Jonathan Edwards connected our assurance of salvation to our obedience:

*“It is not God’s design that men should obtain assurance in any other way than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercise of it. And although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected, yet it is not the principal means by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by action.”<sup>19</sup>*

Romans 8:16

<sup>16</sup> *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*

17. To what third source of assurance does this text attest?

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<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 2001), 123.

*“We have not really identified the nature of the witness of the Spirit. We have simply maintained that it is received at conversion and continues during our earthly sojourn. The text itself does not elaborate on what the Spirit’s witness is. What we do see in the text, however, is the function of the Spirit’s witness. It assures us that we are God’s children. Thus, we understand the witness of the Spirit to be the work of the Spirit by which he gives us the subjective assurance that we are God’s children. The promises of God and the fruit of the Spirit are extrinsic legs of the stool supporting our assurance. But the witness of the Spirit is an intrinsic leg, in the sense that it is subjectively experienced. As believers we need both the objective and the subjective dimensions of assurance.”<sup>20</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 803-806 (Chapter 40, Section D)

18. What is something new that you have learned about assurance by reading this section?

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20 Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 302-303.



## Day 5

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### An Affirmation of Faith

*10.6 We believe that all who are justified will win this fight. They will persevere in faith and never surrender to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the New Covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God Himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage, our vigilance; so that we may say in the end, I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

19. Rewrite this section of the affirmation in your own words:

20. What effect should this section have on those who have false assurance?



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Have a conversation with someone you know about whether Christians can lose their salvation. Try to speak with someone whose view on this topic is unknown to you. Find out why they believe what they do and then share with them what you have learned from this lesson. Write a brief summary of your conversation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. How might the phrase, “Once saved, always saved,” be misunderstood and unhelpful?
2. How do you think we should counsel those who are struggling with assurance of salvation? What hope can we give them? What exhortations should we give them?
3. Why is assurance of salvation important for our Christian lives?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).
- ▷ John Piper, “The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Earnest Pursuit of Assurance” an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)
- ▷ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001).
- ▷ John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
- ▷ John Piper, *When the Darkness Does Not Lift* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006).

# Living God's Word by Meditation and Prayer

# 6

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## § INTRODUCTION

There are many incentives to pray and meditate on God's word:

*J.I. Packer wrote about his own pilgrimage in prayer and commented, "I believe that prayer is the measure of the man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face."<sup>21</sup>*

*The great reformer Martin Luther said, "I generally pray two hours every day, except on very busy days. On those days, I pray three." Luther was a pretty busy man—defending his theology, translating the Bible into German, writing books, and leading a Reformation—so I imagine he spent several days in 3-hour prayer.<sup>22</sup>*

*Dallas Willard, professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, wrote, "Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization."<sup>23</sup>*

*Chuck Swindoll wrote, "I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. . . . No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your*

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21 Cited from John Piper, "If My Words Abide in You..." an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

22 Cited from [http://northstarprayernet.typepad.com/northstar\\_prayernet/2008/09/the-prayer-life.html](http://northstarprayernet.typepad.com/northstar_prayernet/2008/09/the-prayer-life.html). Last accessed August 5, 2011.

23 Cited from John Piper, "Why Memorize Scripture?" an online article at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

*witnessing will be sharper and much more effective. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.”<sup>24</sup>*

These encouragements, however, will have little impact if not accompanied by a proper and biblical understanding of these two great spiritual disciplines. So our task in this lesson is to provide the biblical foundations for a life saturated with the Word of God and prayer.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ describe the role that the Word of God has in awakening and sustaining faith
- ▷ explain why the sovereignty of God does not hinder but rather empowers prayer
- ▷ describe the role that prayer has in awakening and sustaining faith

### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **“in Jesus’ name”:**
- **means of grace:**
- **prayer:**
- **sufficiency of Scripture:**
- **waiting on the Lord:**

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<sup>24</sup> Cited from John Piper, “Why Memorize Scripture?” an online article at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).



## Day 1

### FAITH AWAKENED THROUGH HIS WORD

In *Theological Foundations I*, two entire lessons were devoted to the doctrine of Scripture. Why, then, would we return to the doctrine of Scripture again in this lesson?

When we studied the doctrine of Scripture earlier we were considering, primarily, the nature of Scripture and our interpretation of it. In this lesson, we will consider Scripture from another angle. What role does the Bible have in our conversion and Christian life? It is our prayer that this lesson would not only increase your understanding of God’s work through his written Word, but also that you would “long for the pure spiritual milk” of the Word (1 Peter 2:2).

We have already examined the following text (Romans 10) in Lesson 2 of this course to substantiate the claim that salvation is only possible through the preaching of the gospel and explicit belief in Christ. Let’s look at it again, adding two verses, by way of review:

Romans 10:13-17

*<sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” <sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

1. Using this passage, compose a definition of “faith.”

*“Hearing, the kind of hearing that can lead to faith, can only happen if there is a definite salvific word from God that is proclaimed. That word through which God is now proclaiming the availability of eschatological salvation and which can awaken faith in those who hear it is ‘the word of Christ’: the message whose content is the lordship and resurrection of Christ.”<sup>25</sup>*

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.*

1 Thessalonians 2:13

*<sup>13</sup> And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

2. How does Paul describe the awakening of faith in the Thessalonian believers?

1 Peter 1:22-25

*<sup>22</sup> Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, <sup>23</sup> since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; <sup>24</sup> for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, <sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you.*

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 666.



3. What implications does this text have for evangelism?

Notice this final text.

Galatians 3:2-5

*<sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? <sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith...*

The reception of the Spirit at conversion and the continuing supply of the Spirit during the Christian life come through hearing—in this case, the hearing of Paul's gospel. In the next day we will turn to the role of the Bible during the Christian life.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 127-130 (Chapter 8, Sections A–C)

4. Does Scripture address every issue in life directly?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 950-955 (Chapter 48, Sections A–B3)

## Day 2

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### FAITH SUSTAINED THROUGH HIS WORD

Having investigated the role of Scripture at the beginning of a Christian's life, we now will explore the role of Scripture in the daily life of the Christian. The classic text in this regard is Psalm 1.

#### Psalm 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;* <sup>2</sup> *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* <sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* <sup>4</sup> *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.* <sup>5</sup> *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;* <sup>6</sup> *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

5. How does the righteous man prosper and yield regular fruit?

#### Ephesians 6:13-18

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.* <sup>14</sup> *Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,* <sup>15</sup> *and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* <sup>16</sup> *In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;* <sup>17</sup> *and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,* <sup>18</sup> *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.*

6. Most of what Paul mentions in Ephesians 6 is *defensive* armor; what is our one *offensive* weapon? Why might this be so?

Here is another passage which likens the Word of God to a sword:

Hebrews 4:12

*<sup>12</sup> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Although 2 Timothy 3 is often cited in support of the inspiration and inerrancy of Bible (and rightly so), it also speaks to what we're studying today.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

*<sup>14</sup> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup> and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

7. Do you view Scripture as “profitable”? How so? Does your life confirm your testimony?

In particular, it is the promises of God that sustain our faith.

2 Peter 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

8. Why should we focus specifically on the *promises* of God in the fight of faith?

Romans 4:20-21

<sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

2 Corinthians 7:1

<sup>1</sup> Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Hebrews 6:11-12

<sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

2 Peter 3:13-14

<sup>13</sup> But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

And, of course, our supreme model of living by the power of promises is Jesus.

Matthew 4:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 130-135 (Chapter 8, Section D)

9. Of all the practical applications Grudem lists, which one was the most novel to you?

## Day 3

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See Teaching Notes for resources related to this topic.

### THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND PRAYER

For many, the sovereignty of God seems to be a hindrance to prayer, for if God controls all things, what could prayer possibly change? Usually this kind of argument is used to disprove God's sovereignty rather than to argue that we shouldn't pray. And yet, without a clear understanding of how prayer and God's sovereignty relate, it is likely that many believers aren't motivated to pray as they should.

One obvious response to this apparent problem is that the Bible teaches God's sovereignty (covered in Lesson 5 of *Theological Foundations I*) and also *commands* us to pray. We could list hundreds of verses to this effect. Here is only one:

Colossians 4:2

<sup>2</sup> *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*

To this we might add the example of many saints within Scripture, and centuries of believers after Scripture. But can we say more than this? Can we provide a reason for why we should pray if God is sovereign over all things?

We will look first at an interesting episode in the book of Job.

Job 42:7-10

<sup>7</sup> *After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." <sup>8</sup> Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has."* <sup>9</sup> *So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.*

10. Why does God say that Job shall pray for Eliphaz and his friends if it already is his intention to not deal with them according to their folly?

Now consider a similar episode with Abraham and Abimelech.

Genesis 20:6-7, 17

*<sup>6</sup> Then God said to [Abimelech] in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you, and all who are yours." ...<sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.*

11. If Abraham had not prayed, would Abimelech have been healed?

From these two episodes we must conclude: The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working! (James 5:16)

Matthew 9:36-38

<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup> therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

So we have seen that God ordains prayer as the means through which he will accomplish other things that he ordains. But why prayer?

Psalm 50:14-15

<sup>14</sup> Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, <sup>15</sup> and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.

12. According to these verses, why might God choose to work through our prayers?

And here is the testimony of Paul in this regard:

2 Corinthians 1:10-11

<sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. <sup>11</sup> You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.



13. If Paul already hopes that God will deliver him, why does he ask the Corinthians to pray?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 376-382 (Chapter 18, Sections A–B)

14. Interact with this statement: “If we don’t pray, God might not do things he would have done if we had prayed.”

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 955-963 (Chapter 48, Sections B4–C)

## Day 4

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### FAITH AWAKENED AND SUSTAINED THROUGH PRAYER

Just as faith is awakened and sustained through the Word of God, faith is also awakened and sustained in response to prayer.

Romans 10:1

<sup>1</sup> *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*

Luke 18:13-14

<sup>13</sup> *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* <sup>14</sup> *I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.*

2 Thessalonians 3:1

<sup>1</sup> *Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you...*

15. How does this last text in particular connect what we've been studying in this lesson? (Hint: Refer to Question 2 of this lesson.)

But again, prayer not only awakens faith, but also sustains it.

Luke 22:31-32

<sup>31</sup> *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,* <sup>32</sup> *but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*

16. Is there any indication that Peter's faith will, in fact, be sustained by Jesus' prayer? And why would the Son of God need to pray for Peter's faith? Couldn't Jesus, as God, simply sustain Peter's faith apart from prayer?

The many and beautiful prayers of Paul at the beginning of most of his letters is evidence that he conceived of prayer as a means by which faith was sustained. Here is one such prayer:

Ephesians 1:16-19

*<sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...*

17. How do we know that this prayer is made on behalf of believers?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 382-387 (Chapter 18, Section C1-C7)

18. In what way could your prayers be more effective?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 387-393 (Chapter 18, Sections C8-D)

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

11.1 *We believe that faith is awakened and sustained by God's Spirit through His Word and prayer. The good fight of faith is fought mainly by meditating on the Scriptures and praying that God would apply them to our souls.*

11.2 *We believe that the promises of God recorded in the Scriptures are suited to save us from the deception of sin by displaying for us, and holding out to us, superior pleasures in the protection, provision, and presence of God. Therefore, reading, understanding, pondering, memorizing, and savoring the promises of all that God will be for us in Jesus are primary means of the Holy Spirit to break the power of sin's deceitful promises in our lives. Therefore it is needful that we give ourselves to such meditation day and night.*

11.3 *We believe that God has ordained to bless and use His people for His glory through the means of prayer, offered in Jesus' name by faith. All prayer should seek ultimately that God's name be hallowed, and that His kingdom come, and that His will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. God's sovereignty over all things is not a hindrance to prayer, but a reason for hope that our prayers will succeed.*

11.4 *We believe that prayer is the indispensable handmaid of meditation, as we cry out to God for the inclination to turn from the world to the Word, and for the spiritual ability to see the glory of God in His testimonies, and for a soul-satisfying sight of the love of God, and for strength in the inner man to do the will of God. By prayer God sanctifies His people, sends gospel laborers into the world, and causes the Word of God to spread and triumph over Satan and unbelief.*

19. According to section 11.2, how should we counsel someone who is struggling with, for example, sexual purity?

20. According to section 11.3, should someone pray for the healing of an illness? If so, how?



..... § INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Search for five personally-relevant promises in the Bible, write them down, pray for faith to believe them, and then write about how these promises will keep you from sin.



 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 1995).
- ▷ Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1993).
- ▷ D. A. Carson, ed., *Teach Us to Pray* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2002).
- ▷ D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992).
- ▷ Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1998).
- ▷ John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997).
- ▷ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2003).



# Christ's Church

# 7

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

As you read the following quote, make a guess as to who the author might be:

*But as it is now our purpose to discourse of the visible Church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government, until, divested of mortal flesh, we become like the angels...Moreover, beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for...*

Might the author be a Catholic theologian? A pope? An early church father? No. John Calvin.<sup>26</sup>

This lesson begins our study of the doctrine of the church—a doctrine as important as it is practical.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- describe the universal and local dimensions of the church
- list the marks and purposes of the church
- describe the worship and discipline of the church

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<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 4, reprinted. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans) 283.

PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **body of Christ:**
- **church:**
- **excommunication:**
- **invisible church:**
- **visible church:**
- **worship:**



## Day 1

### THE CHURCH, UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL

The first task of this lesson is to define exactly what the church is. The definition that Grudem proposes (above) is, “The community of all true believers for all time.” It is interesting to note, however, that when the Bible describes the church, it tends to use a variety of metaphors. This observation should alert us to the varied and rich dimensions of the church and should guard us against being too reductionistic or simplistic in describing the church.

#### Ephesians 2:19-22

*<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

#### 1 Timothy 3:14-15

*<sup>14</sup> I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, <sup>15</sup> if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.*

#### 1 Timothy 5:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, treat younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup> older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

#### 2 Corinthians 11:2

*<sup>2</sup> I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.*

Revelation 21:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,<sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.<sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ...<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Matthew 5:14-15

<sup>14</sup> You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.<sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

1. Underline all the metaphors used to describe the church. Then choose one metaphor and meditate on its significance. What does this particular metaphor suggest to you about the reality of the church? Record your reflections below.

It is clear that Christ stands as the head of the church, its bridegroom, its king.

Ephesians 1:22-23

<sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,<sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 4:15-16

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 5:23-24

<sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

2. What is intended in the metaphor of Christ as the “head” of the church?

When most people in our culture hear the word “church” they generally think of a building; we can see it on the corner and point to it—it’s a church. But when the New Testament writers were speaking about the church they were thinking not about a physical building, but a people. The church is the people of God, the body of Christ. It is not made up of bricks and mortar, but men and women, Jews and Gentiles.

Ephesians 5:25-27

<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

1 Corinthians 12:27-28

<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Acts 9:31

<sup>31</sup> So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Acts 8:1

<sup>1</sup> And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, <sup>2</sup> To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours...

1 Corinthians 16:19

<sup>19</sup> The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.

Romans 16:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house.

3. When the New Testament uses the word “church” does it refer to the body of Christ worldwide or to a single assembly of believers in one geographical location?

In a similar way, the church can also be thought of as the full number of the elect (the church “invisible”) or the number of professing believers that participate in the activity of the church in some way (the “visible” church).

2 Timothy 2:16-21

<sup>16</sup> But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup> and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup> who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. <sup>19</sup> But

God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

<sup>20</sup> Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

Acts 20:28-30

<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

4. Based upon these passages, is there a distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" church?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 853-859 (Chapter 44, Section A1–A4)

5. Is it appropriate to speak of "the church of God" within the Old Testament?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 859-864 (Chapter 44, Section A5–A6)

## Day 2

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### THE MARKS AND PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

The New Testament only provides glimpses of the congregational activity of first-century churches. John Piper agrees:

*“Let’s begin with a startling fact, namely, that the epistles of the New Testament contain very little instruction that deals explicitly with corporate worship—what we call worship services. Not that there were no corporate gatherings for worship. First Corinthians 14:23 speaks of ‘the whole church’ assembling together, Acts 2:46 speaks of the early church ‘attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes,’ and Hebrews 10:25 speaks of ‘not neglecting to meet together.’ But this is not much...”<sup>27</sup>*

One of the few passages that does describe the early Christian church is Acts 2.

Acts 2:41-42

*<sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

6. According to this passage, what characterized or distinguished the early church?

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 240.



Here are other glimpses into the life of the early church:

Ephesians 5:18-21

*<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

Colossians 3:14-17

*<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In this lesson and in following lessons we will examine different aspects of the church's purpose, structure, and spiritual life. Here is one attempt to summarize the different activities that ought to characterize any healthy church:

*We believe the local church is the focal point of God's plan for displaying his glory to the nations. Our vision is simple: Churches that reflect the character of God. Our mission is to cultivate and encourage churches characterized by these nine marks:*

### **1. Expository Preaching**

*This is preaching which expounds what Scripture says in a particular passage, carefully explaining its meaning and applying it to the congregation. It is a commitment to hearing God's Word and to recovering the centrality of it in our worship.*

### **2. Biblical Theology**

*Paul charges Titus to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Our concern should be not only with how we are taught, but with what we are taught. Biblical theology is a commitment to know the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself in Scripture.*

### **3. Biblical Understanding of the Good News**

*The gospel is the heart of Christianity. But the good news is not that God wants to meet people's felt needs or help them develop a healthier self-image. We have sinfully rebelled against our Creator and Judge. Yet He has graciously sent His Son to die the death we deserved for our sin, and He has credited Christ's acquittal to those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. That is the good news.*

### **4. Biblical Understanding of Conversion**

*The spiritual change each person needs is so radical, so near the root of us, that only God can do it. We need God to convert us. Conversion need not be an emotionally heated experience, but it must evidence itself in godly fruit if it is to be what the Bible regards as a true conversion.*

### **5. Biblical Understanding of Evangelism**

*How someone shares the gospel is closely related to how he understands the gospel. To present it as an additive that gives non-Christians something they naturally want (i.e. joy or peace) is to present a half-truth, which elicits false conversions. The whole truth is that our deepest need is spiritual life, and that new life only comes by repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus. We present the gospel openly, and leave the converting to God.*

### **6. Biblical Understanding of Membership**

*Membership should reflect a living commitment to a local church in attendance, giving, prayer and service; otherwise it is meaningless, worthless, and even dangerous. We should not allow people to keep their membership in our churches for sentimental reasons or lack of attention. To be a member is knowingly to be traveling together as aliens and strangers in this world as we head to our heavenly home.*

### **7. Biblical Church Discipline**

*Church discipline gives parameters to church membership. The idea seems negative to people today – “didn't our Lord forbid judging?” But if we cannot say how a Christian should not live, how can we say how he or she should live? Each local church actually has a biblical responsibility to judge the life and teaching of its leaders, and even of its members, particularly insofar as either could compromise the church's witness to the gospel.*

## 8. Promotion of Christian Discipleship and Growth

*A pervasive concern with church growth exists today – not simply with growing numbers, but with growing members. Though many Christians measure other things, the only certain observable sign of growth is a life of increasing holiness, rooted in Christian self-denial. These concepts are nearly extinct in the modern church. Recovering true discipleship for today would build the church and promote a clearer witness to the world.*

## 9. Biblical Understanding of Leadership

*What eighteenth-century Baptists and Presbyterians often agreed upon was that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church. This plurality of elders is not only biblical, but practical — it has the immense benefit of rounding out the pastor's gifts to ensure the proper shepherding of God's church.*

*In identifying and promoting these nine marks, we are not intending to lay down an exhaustive or authoritative list. There are other significant marks of healthy churches, like prayer and fellowship. We want to pursue those ourselves as well, and we want you to pursue them with us. But these nine are the ones we think are most neglected in most local churches today, with the most damaging ramifications. Join us in cultivating churches that reflect the character of God.<sup>28</sup>*

7. This list above doesn't claim to be exhaustive. What additional marks identify a healthy church in your mind, if any? Do you think that any of the marks listed are unnecessary?

In this course and in *Theological Foundations I*, one of our key contentions is that we were created to glorify God. This is undoubtedly the purpose of the church as well:

Ephesians 3:4-12, 20-21

<sup>4</sup> *When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,*  
<sup>5</sup> *which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers*

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<sup>28</sup> These are the marks of a healthy church as identified by the ministry of 9Marks (9marks.org). The excerpt was taken from [http://www.9marks.org/CC\\_Content\\_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID616736|CIID,00.html](http://www.9marks.org/CC_Content_Page/0,,PTID314526|CHID616736|CIID,00.html). Last accessed May 7, 2007.

*of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.<sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,<sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.<sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,<sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ...<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

8. According to this passage, what is the cosmic dimension of the church's purpose?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 864-869 (Chapter 44, Sections B–C)

9. According to Grudem, what are the two major features of any true church? Do you agree with him?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 873-883 (Chapter 45)

## Day 3

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### THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Certainly one purpose of the church, pervading everything else a church does, is worship.

Revelation 5:9-14

*<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." <sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" <sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

10. What do we learn about worship from this passage?

We also learn about true worship from Jesus' ministry.

Matthew 15:7-9

*<sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: <sup>8</sup> "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; <sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

11. What makes worship vain? What might this imply about the nature of true worship?

*“...What is the essence of this radical, authentic, inward, unifying experience called worship, and how is it that this experience comes to expression in gathered congregations and in everyday life? My answer in advance is that the essential, vital, indispensable, defining heart of worship is the experience of being satisfied with God. And the reason this worship pervades all of life is that all Christian behavior is properly motivated by a thirst for more and more satisfaction in God.”<sup>29</sup>*

John 4:21-24

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

12. What does it mean to worship “in spirit and truth”?

*“The fuel of worship is the grand truth of a gracious and sovereign God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is worship, pushing its way out in tears, confessions, prayers, praises, acclamations, lifting of hands, bowing low, and obedient lives.”<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 247.

<sup>30</sup> John Piper, “God Seeks People to Worship Him in Spirit and Truth.” A sermon found on [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

In the life of a local church, worship is often expressed through singing.

Revelation 5:9

<sup>9</sup> *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation...”*

Ephesians 5:18-19

<sup>18</sup> *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,* <sup>19</sup> *addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart...*

Colossians 3:16

<sup>16</sup> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Psalm 147:1, 7

<sup>1</sup> *Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. ...* <sup>7</sup> *Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre!*

13. Why might singing be a particularly fitting expression of worship?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1003-1009 (Chapter 51, Sections A–B)

14. Compare the following two definitions of worship. What helpful aspects of worship does each definition highlight?

*“Worship is the activity of glorifying God in his presence with our voices and hearts.”*<sup>31</sup>

*“[Worshipping] God means recognizing his honor, feeling the worth of it, and ascribing it to him in all the ways appropriate to his character.”*<sup>32</sup>

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1009-1013 (Chapter 51, Sections C–D)

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<sup>31</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1003.

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, “Worship Is an End in Itself.” A sermon found on [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

## Day 4

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### THE DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

In this last day of study, we will examine a particular function of the church that doesn't neatly fit into any of the subsequent lessons, but is an important work of the church: church discipline. The classic text on church discipline is Matthew 18:

Matthew 18:15-20

*15 If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

15. What kind of authority does the church have?

Matthew 18, and especially verse 18, is difficult to understand. Here are some helpful comments made by D. A. Carson on the parallel passage in Matthew 16.



Matthew 16:15-19

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

*“Peter accomplishes this binding and loosing by proclaiming a gospel that has already been given and by making personal application on that basis. Whatever he binds or looses will have been bound or loosed, so long as he adheres to that divinely disclosed gospel. He has no direct pipeline to heaven, still less do his decisions force heaven to comply; but he may be authoritative in binding and loosing because heaven has acted first (cf. Acts 18:9-10). Those he ushers in or excludes have already been bound or loosed by God according to the gospel already revealed and which Peter, by confessing Jesus as the Messiah, has most clearly grasped.”<sup>33</sup>*

Another helpful cross-reference is Luke 11, which describes the misused authority of the religious leaders of Israel.

Luke 11:52

<sup>52</sup> Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

By failing to recognize Jesus, the lawyers fail to enter the kingdom of God and fail to judge and lead the people of Israel rightly. Peter and the disciples, however, as those who have been given a revelation of Jesus, are able to pronounce just judgments because the gospel they preach is the key that opens the kingdom of heaven to man.

Galatians 6:1

<sup>1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

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33 D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995), 373.

James 5:19-20

<sup>19</sup> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

1 Corinthians 5:4-5

<sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

16. What is the aim of church discipline?

If discipline is not embraced and there is no repentance, the following texts make the church's responsibility clear:

1 Corinthians 5:7-8, 11-13

<sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ...<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

<sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Revelation 2:20-25

<sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup> and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. <sup>24</sup> But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. <sup>25</sup> Only hold fast what you have until I come.

17. What is it that motivates church discipline? Or what is lost if church discipline is not practiced?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 894-900 (Chapter 46, Section D)

18. How important is church discipline? Does your church's practice of church discipline accord with the principles outlined in this section?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 887-893 (Chapter 46, Sections A–C)

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

12.1 *We believe in the one universal Church, composed of all those, in every time and place, who are chosen in Christ and united to Him through faith by the Spirit in one Body, with Christ Himself as the all-supplying, all-sustaining, all-supreme, and all-authoritative Head. We believe that the ultimate purpose of the Church is to glorify God in the everlasting and ever-increasing gladness of worship.*

12.2 *We believe it is God's will that the universal Church find expression in local churches in which believers agree together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the manifold ministries of love, to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline, and to engage in local and world evangelization. The Church is a body in which each member should find a suitable ministry for His gifts; it is the household of God in which the Spirit dwells; it is the pillar and bulwark of God's truth in a truth-denying world; and it is a city set on a hill so that men may see the light of its good deeds – especially to the poor – and give glory to the Father in heaven.*

19. According to section 12.1, what characterizes those who belong to the universal church?

20. According to section 12.2, list the six purposes of the local church. Then list the four metaphors for the church that this section employs.



## INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Reflect on your participation in the local church. You may choose to answer the following questions: “Am I a member of the church I attend? If not, why not? If so, how am I fulfilling my commitment to Christ’s body? How does my commitment to the church need to be strengthened?” Record your reflections below.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. How should we think about para-church ministries—that is, ministries which are not connected to any particular local church?
2. Is worship possible apart from the local church? If so, then why should we be motivated to worship with other believers?
3. What is the biblical basis for church membership?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).
- ▷ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
- ▷ John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 1996).
- ▷ Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).
- ▷ R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1983).



# Spiritual Gifts

# 8

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## 📖 INTRODUCTION

Among those who use this curriculum, there may be no more controversial topic than that of spiritual gifts (with the possible exception of baptism). We recognize that this is a difficult issue. Here is an expression of John Piper's wrestling in 1990:

*I confess that as far as I can remember there has been no question in all my preaching ministry that has caused me more heart-wrenching uncertainty. I sit at my desk with my head in my hands and plead with the Lord, on the one hand, "Oh, Lord, if there is a wind of true, Biblical, spiritual power blowing in our day with signs and wonders and healing and prophecy, forbid that I should stand in the way! Don't pass Bethlehem by. Make me the leader you want me to be for the greatest blessing of this church, and the greatest missionary effectiveness." But then, on the other hand I pray, "Oh, Lord, forbid that we should lose our Biblical bearings; forbid that we become trendy or faddish and begin to substitute the sand of experience for the rock of revealed truth. Show us the fullness of the power of the gospel, Lord, and keep us from preoccupation with secondary things, no matter how spectacular."*

*Here are two stacks of books by evangelical pastors and teachers. One stack argues that signs and wonders (like healings) were designed by God to help people recognize and believe in the Son of God and then to vindicate the authority of his apostles as they laid the foundation for the church with their inspired teachings and writings. After the apostles died and their writings were gathered in the New Testament the place of signs and wonders was past, and we should not seek them today. The other stack of books argues that signs and wonders should be sought and performed today in Jesus' name. The reason we don't see so many is because of how little expectancy there is in the church. But God is at work doing a new thing in our day awakening the church to the reality of these things.*

...So what shall we say to these two views? Virtually all the great pastors and teachers of history that I admire and that have fed me over the years belong to the first group who believe that signs and wonders were only for the apostolic age (John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Benjamin Warfield, my own father). But I am not fully persuaded by their case.<sup>34</sup>

When wrestling with controversial topics like spiritual gifts, we need to stick all the more closely to Scripture, letting the Word of God and not our experience (or lack thereof) shape our understanding. Above all, we ought to seek to persuade others from the Bible with love, patience, and humility.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ define what a spiritual gift is and name the gifts mentioned in the New Testament
- ▷ defend the assertion that all of the spiritual gifts have continuing validity for today
- ▷ describe biblically the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues

### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **apostle:**
  
- **cessationist:**

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34 John Piper, "Are Signs and Wonders for Today?" an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

- **gifts of the Holy Spirit:**
  
- **healing:**
  
- **miraculous gifts:**
  
- **nonmiraculous gifts:**
  
- **prophecy:**
  
- **speaking in tongues:**



## Day 1

### WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

We could have covered spiritual gifts when we studied the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (Lesson 1). So why did we wait? We waited to cover spiritual gifts because it is important for us to see that the gifts are to function within the church for the edification of the body of Christ. Yes, they are also used by God to confirm the preaching of the gospel to unbelievers, but most of the focused teaching on the gifts in the New Testament is on how they function within the church for its edification.

The two biggest questions before us are: 1) “Which spiritual gifts are still functioning today?” and 2) “How do these spiritual gifts function?” But before we can adequately answer either of those questions we need to step back and ask, “What is a spiritual gift?”

1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 14-18

*<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ...<sup>14</sup> For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.*

1 Corinthians 14:26

*<sup>26</sup> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.*

1. According to these passages, what is a spiritual gift? For what purpose are spiritual gifts given?

In *Theological Foundations I* we examined the following passage in a different context. We will now look at it again by way of reminder.

1 Peter 4:10-11

*<sup>10</sup> As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: <sup>11</sup> whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

2. What is the ultimate purpose of spiritual gifts?

Romans 12:6-8

*<sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.*

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

*<sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

1 Corinthians 12:28

<sup>28</sup> *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.*

3. Underline all the spiritual gifts listed in these passages. Why aren't these lists identical?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1016-1022 (Chapter 52, Section A1–A3)

4. According to Grudem, what is the purpose of spiritual gifts in the New Testament age?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1022-1031 (Chapter 52, Section A4–A8)

Section A8 makes the important point that spiritual giftedness is not a sure indication of spiritual maturity.

## Day 2

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### ARE ALL THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS FOR TODAY?

Before we consider the biblical arguments for the *continuation* of all the spiritual gifts, rather than the *cessation* of some of them, consider this provocative thesis:

*“There is one basic reason why Bible-believing Christians do not believe in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit today. It is simply this: they have not seen them. Their tradition, of course, supports their lack of belief, but their tradition would have no chance of success if it were not coupled with their lack of experience of the miraculous.”<sup>35</sup>*

Or this similar idea:

*“Sixth, and finally, there is another reason why I remained for years committed to the doctrine of cessationism. It isn’t based on any particular text or theological principle and yet it probably exercised more of an influence on my life and mind than all of the other arguments combined.*

*I’m talking about [fear: the fear of emotionalism, the fear of fanaticism, the fear of the unfamiliar, the fear of rejection by those whose respect I cherished and whose friendship I did not want to forfeit, the fear of what might occur were I fully to relinquish control of my life and mind and emotions to the Holy Spirit, the fear of losing what little status in the evangelical community that I had worked so hard to attain.]<sup>36</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1993), 55.

<sup>36</sup> Sam Storms, “Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Part 2”, an online article at <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/are-miraculous-gifts-for-today---part-ii>. Last accessed May 5, 2016.

Acts 2:14-18, 32-33

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. <sup>15</sup> For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. <sup>16</sup> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup> ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; <sup>18</sup> even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’ ...<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.”

5. Based upon these verses alone, how long would you assume that the spiritual gifts, including the gift of prophecy, would last?

Our default position, then, would be to assume that all the spiritual gifts would characterize the new age of the Spirit. The burden of proof would be with those who argued that certain gifts (and *only* certain gifts) were discontinued after the ministry of the apostles or the completion of the New Testament canon.

Romans 12:6

<sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith...

1 Corinthians 14:1

<sup>1</sup> Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Galatians 3:5

<sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith...

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Do not despise prophecies, <sup>21</sup> but test everything; hold fast what is good.



6. What do these passages, and especially the geographical diversity and lack of apostolic presence, suggest?

We will offer one more passage in support of our assumption that spiritual gifts characterize the age of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 13:8-12

*<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

7. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will continue until “the perfect comes.” What is Paul referring to by using this phrase “the perfect”?

Having established a positive case for the continuation of all the spiritual gifts, much of our remaining discussion will be spent in refuting objections. In Days 3 and 4 we will examine two of the more controversial gifts, clarifying how these gifts function and hopefully sweeping away misunderstandings and objections. The further reading in Grudem will likewise treat some of the objections made to our position.

A common text used in support of the cessationist position is an isolated verse in 2 Corinthians 12.

2 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*

2 Corinthians 12:12 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> *The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance.*

The NIV translation here is unfortunate since “signs, wonders and miracles” are in the dative case in Greek and therefore must be part of a prepositional phrase. The ESV more accurately reflects the original language.

8. Describe the difference between these two translations. Why might the NIV translation more readily support the cessationist view?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1031-1035 (Chapter 52, Section B1a–B1b)

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1042-1046 (Chapter 52, Section B3–B8)

9. Which objections to the non-cessationist position have you heard? Does Grudem address them all?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1035-1042 (Chapter 52, Section B1c–B2)

## Day 3

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### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

When most people object to the continuing validity of all the spiritual gifts, it's the gift of prophecy in particular that concerns them. Doesn't the exercise of this gift jeopardize the authority and uniqueness of Scripture?

The key chapter on New Testament prophecy is 1 Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:3-4, 24-25

*<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. ...<sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, <sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*

10. According to these verses, what seems to be the content of New Testament prophecy?

Now read the following description of how prophecy was to function within the church. Should prophecy be equated with the word of God?

1 Corinthians 14:29-32, 36-38

*<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ...<sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.*

11. What do these verses imply about the nature of the gift of prophecy?

1 Thessalonians 2:13

<sup>13</sup> *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

<sup>19</sup> *Do not quench the Spirit.* <sup>20</sup> *Do not despise prophecies,* <sup>21</sup> *but test everything; hold fast what is good.* <sup>22</sup> *Abstain from every form of evil.*

12. The Thessalonians were commended for their reception of and esteem for the apostolic preaching, the word of God. What, then, is so striking about Paul's commands in chapter 5?

Though our study of the gift of prophecy must necessarily be brief, we will examine one example of an actual first-century prophecy.

Acts 21:10-11

<sup>10</sup> *While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* <sup>11</sup> *And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"*

Acts 21:30-33

<sup>30</sup> Then all the city [of Jerusalem] was stirred up, and the people ran together. [The Jews] seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. <sup>31</sup> And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. <sup>32</sup> He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. <sup>33</sup> Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done.

13. Was Agabus's prophecy fulfilled in its particulars? What does this imply about the nature of New Testament prophecies?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1049-1057 (Chapter 53, Sections A1–A5)

14. According to Grudem's definition of prophecy, have you ever heard (or spoken!) a word of prophecy, perhaps unknowingly?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1058-1061 (Chapter 53, Section A6–A11)

## Day 4

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### THE GIFT OF TONGUES

The gift of tongues has fallen into disrepute, at least in some circles. But those who have experienced this gift from God testify to its usefulness. We first encounter the gift of tongues at Pentecost.

Acts 2:4-11

*4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."*

15. How does the gift of tongues manifest itself in this passage?

The key passage for understanding this gift, however, is 1 Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:1-19

*1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. 3 On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement*

and consolation. <sup>4</sup> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. <sup>5</sup> Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. <sup>6</sup> Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, <sup>11</sup> but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. <sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

16. Does the one speaking in tongues understand what he is saying? If not, how can he be edified?

17. Is speaking in tongues only restricted to speaking in known human languages?

Finally, it may be helpful at this point to add a few words of personal testimony from Dr. Sam Storms. This testimony would be confirmed by Pastor Tom Steller (Academic Dean of Bethlehem Seminary, Minneapolis, Minnesota) and many other believers who have the highest esteem for the Word of God:

*“I want to conclude this discussion of tongues on a personal note by simply saying that I have found this gift to be profoundly helpful in my prayer life. It has served only to deepen my intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ and to enhance my zeal and joy in worship. Caricatures notwithstanding, praying in the Spirit does not diminish one’s capacity for relational thought or comments to the written Word of God.”<sup>37</sup>*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1069-1077 (Chapter 53, Section E1–E2g)

18. Should we understand the gift of tongues as “ecstatic speech”? Why or why not?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1061-1069 (Chapter 53, Sections B–D)

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37 Sam Storms, *Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 222. This book is an excellent resource for understanding the different views that are possible on this issue and seeing the biblical arguments made for each.



**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1077-1083 (Chapter 53, Sections E2h–G)

The first section of further reading includes a very important discussion of the gift of healing—or, to be more precise, gifts of healings. We assumed that the gift of tongues might be more controversial and misunderstood than the gifts of healings. That is why this last day’s study focuses on the gift of tongues. We would strongly encourage you, however, to read section D of Chapter 53 in *Systematic Theology* on healing.

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

8.2 *We believe that the newness of this era is marked by the unprecedented mission of the Spirit to glorify the crucified and risen Christ. This He does by giving the disciples of Jesus greater power to preach the gospel of the glory of Christ, by opening the hearts of hearers that they might see Christ and believe, by revealing the beauty of Christ in His Word and transforming His people from glory to glory, by manifesting Himself in spiritual gifts (being sovereignly free to dispense, as he wills, all the gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-10) for the upbuilding of the body of Christ and the confirmation of His Word, by calling all the nations into the sway of the gospel of Christ, and, in all this, thus fulfilling the New Covenant promise to create and preserve a purified people for the everlasting habitation of God.*

12.2 *We believe it is God's will that the universal Church find expression in local churches in which believers agree together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the manifold ministries of love, to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline, and to engage in local and world evangelization. The Church is a body in which each member should find a suitable ministry for His gifts; it is the household of God in which the Spirit dwells; it is the pillar and bulwark of God's truth in a truth-denying world; and it is a city set on a hill so that men may see the light of its good deeds – especially to the poor – and give glory to the Father in heaven.*

19. Rewrite the underlined sections of the affirmation on spiritual gifts into one paragraph of your own words.

20. Why might the topic of spiritual gifts be addressed in these two separate sections of the affirmation?



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

What is your spiritual gift(s)? How do you know? How are you practicing this gift? What are you doing to strengthen it? How has God been using this gift to build up his people? If you don't know what your gift is, what will you do to find out?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1, 12-13, 39. What should our attitude be toward spiritual gifts?
2. What role does experience play when talking about spiritual gifts? How can both sides (those who believe all gifts are for today and those who believe some have ceased) fall prey to relying on their experience?
3. What can both sides of the debate on spiritual gifts hold in common?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Sam Storms, *Beginners Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Vine Books, 2002).
- ▷ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000).
- ▷ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).
- ▷ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996).

# The Church's Ordinances

# 9

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

Historically, baptism has been a “fiery” issue. To our day it still bitterly divides Christians who otherwise might be united. So why include a lesson in this course that potentially is just more fuel to the fire of this controversy?

This curricula reflects the belief that the cause of unity is best served by “elevating the value of truth... and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries” rather than by “removing boundaries.”<sup>38</sup> So it is our aim both to declare our biblical convictions about baptism *and* to maintain our differences with other believers in a spirit of humility and charity. To that end, this lesson will contend that baptism should be applied only to those who have made a credible profession of faith. It will also argue, in passing, that immersion in water is the proper mode of baptism.

This lesson will also investigate the second great ordinance of the Lord, the Lord's Supper.

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ argue, from the Bible, for the meaning of baptism and its mode, “immersion”
- ▷ argue for the baptism of believers only, those who make a credible profession of faith
- ▷ describe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper and Christ's presence in it

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<sup>38</sup> These phrases are taken from the Bethlehem College & Seminary Affirmation of Faith, section 15.3.

## PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **believers' baptism:**
- **Communion:**
- **consubstantiation<sup>39</sup>:**
- **covenant community:**
- **Eucharist:**
- ***ex opera operato*:**
- **immersion:**
- **ordinance:**

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<sup>39</sup> This definition is not listed in Grudem's glossary, but is derived from chapter 50.



- **paedobaptism:**
- **sacrament:**
- **spiritual presence:**
- **symbolic presence:**
- **transubstantiation:**



## Day 1

### BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS

The foundational text for baptism is the command of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether one affirms believers' baptism (credobaptism) or infant baptism (paedobaptism), baptism is clearly an ordinance of the Lord.

Matthew 28:18-20

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

1. Is baptism optional? Is a believer living in disobedience if they have not been baptized?

But what is the meaning of baptism? It is clearly an outward, ritual act. But what does it symbolize?

Romans 6:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup> By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were*

*buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* <sup>5</sup> *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

2. What does baptism symbolize? How is baptism's meaning a response to the question raised in verse 1?

Though identification with Christ in his death and resurrection is the primary meaning of baptism, baptism also secondarily represents the washing away of sin:

Acts 22:14-16

*<sup>14</sup> And [Ananias] said, "The God of our fathers appointed you [Paul] to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name."*

And here is another crucial text in understanding baptism's meaning.

1 Peter 3:17-22

*<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. <sup>21</sup> Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

3. Based on this passage, compose your own definition of baptism.

How does baptism correspond to Noah's salvation through water?

*"Baptism corresponds to escaping through water in that the water of baptism is in some ways a counter-part to the waters of the flood. For if, as is nearly certain, baptism when Peter wrote was by immersion... then going down into the waters of baptism was a vivid symbol of going down into the grave in death..."*

*The water of baptism is like waters of judgment – similar to the waters of the flood, and showing clearly what we deserve for our sins. Coming up out of the waters of baptism corresponds to being kept safe through the waters of the flood, the waters of God's judgment on sin, and emerging to live in 'newness of life...' Baptism thus shows us clearly that in one sense we have 'died' and 'been raised' again, but in another sense we emerge from the waters knowing that we are still alive and have passed through the waters of God's judgment unharmed. As Noah fled into the ark, so we flee to Christ, and in him we escape judgment."<sup>40</sup>*

See Teaching Notes for more content that may be helpful in the discussion of immersion versus sprinkling.

We have already hinted at the proper mode of baptism. Baptism is by immersion in water, because immersion most clearly symbolizes union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Also notice 1 Peter 3:21. "Removal of dirt from the body" would not be accomplished by sprinkling (the other mode sometimes proposed), but fits much better with immersion.

The controversy about the mode of baptism also is addressed by looking at the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō*, which is simply transliterated into English as "baptize." If one looks up this word in the standard lexicons (dictionaries) for ancient Greek, *baptizō* never has the meaning "sprinkle" or "pour." Instead, you find definitions like wash, "purify, plunge, and dip. Therefore, from the start, the case for baptism by sprinkling or pouring seems to plead the improbable.

See common Greek Lexicons such as BDAG, Lidell & Scott, or Kittel.

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40 Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 162-163.

Here are descriptions of baptism from Gospel texts:

Mark 1:4-5

*<sup>4</sup> John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

John 3:22-24

*<sup>22</sup> After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. <sup>23</sup> John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized <sup>24</sup> (for John had not yet been put in prison).*

Matthew 3:5-8, 11

*<sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. . . .” <sup>11</sup> I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*

4. Using these texts, what appears to be the meaning and mode of John's baptism (upon which Christian baptism is built)?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 966-971 (Chapter 49, Sections A–B2)

5. Restate one of Grudem's additional arguments for the meaning and mode of baptism.

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 971-975 (Chapter 49, Section B3)

The further reading for this day argues against the Roman Catholic position on baptism and, more broadly, against any who would advocate for baptismal regeneration.

## Day 2

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### A RESPONSE TO PAEDOBAPTISM

Who should be baptized? This is where the debate on baptism gets controversial. The Bethlehem College & Seminary Affirmation of Faith states that only believers should be baptized—that is, those who have repented from sin and shown evidences of genuine faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

We can already see that this is implied based on the nature of baptism. Baptism is an outward symbol of an inward reality. In baptism, we express the truths that we have died and been raised with Christ, that we have been cleansed from sins, and that we are now a part of the new people of God. All of these spiritual realities happen because of faith. Therefore, the one being baptized must have faith. This of course excludes infants.

Would the meaning of baptism described in either Romans 6 or 1 Peter 3 apply to the baptism of infants? Would the connection of baptism and repentance as presented in the Gospels hold true in the baptism of infants?

The argument for paedobaptism is founded on the connection between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament. “If infants were circumcised under the old covenant,” they will argue, “shouldn’t we presume the infants would be baptized under the new covenant?”

As we will see, however, this misunderstands the crucial difference between the old covenant and the new covenant, the old covenant community and the new covenant community.

#### Hebrews 8:6-12

<sup>6</sup> *But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.*

<sup>7</sup> *For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.* <sup>8</sup> *For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. <sup>10</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and*

*write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*<sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.*

*<sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*

6. What is the fundamental difference between the old covenant community and the new covenant community? What implication does this have for whom we should baptize?

The difference between the old covenant community and new covenant community is also described in John 1.

John 1:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*

The covenant community is therefore no longer defined by family descent, but by faith.

A text to which paedobaptists will often appeal is Colossians 2. They will argue that this text demonstrates the correspondence between circumcision and baptism.

Colossians 2:11-12

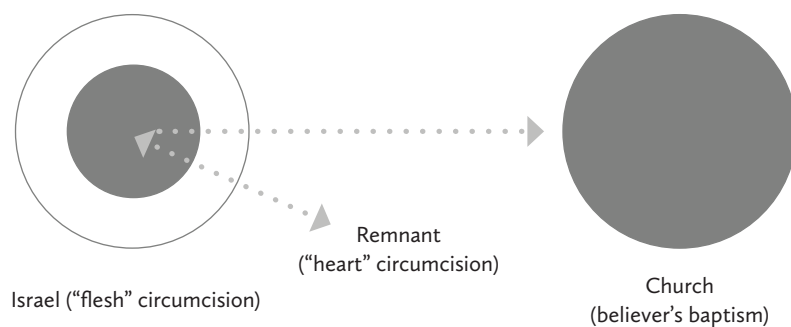
*<sup>11</sup> In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*



7. Is there a correspondence between circumcision and baptism? If so, describe the correspondence precisely.

The relationship between circumcision and baptism is related to the correspondence between the old covenant community and the new covenant community. Rather than the new covenant community being a continuation of the old covenant community, the new covenant community stands in continuity with the faithful remnant of the old covenant.

Therefore, the relationship between old and new covenants could be diagrammed like so:



Notice also the assumption behind this verse in Galatians:

Galatians 3:26-27

*<sup>26</sup> ...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

8. Would Paul's assumption hold true for the baptism of infants?

Another common argument for paedobaptism is the so-called “household baptisms” described in Acts. We will examine these texts and the important text in Acts 2.

Acts 2:38-41

<sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” <sup>40</sup> And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” <sup>41</sup> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Acts 16:14-15

<sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.

Acts 16:31-34

<sup>31</sup> And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” <sup>32</sup> And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. <sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. <sup>34</sup> Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

Acts 18:8

<sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

9. Underline all the statements that describe those who are baptized. It is true that these texts do not mention whether infants were baptized as a part of the household. The silence has been interpreted by each position as support. But in view of the qualifying phrases you underlined, what should we say about these household baptisms?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 975-980 (Chapter 49, Section B4)

10. Restate one of Grudem's additional arguments for the proper subjects of baptism.

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 980-984 (Chapter 49, Sections C-F)

## Day 3

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### DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

The other ordinance established by Jesus is the Lord's Supper, also called communion or "the Eucharist." Each of the Gospels records this supper on the night before Jesus' death. Here is Matthew's account:

Matthew 26:26-30

*<sup>26</sup> Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."<sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,<sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."<sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Also taught in *Theological Foundations 1, Lesson 12.*

The Lord's Supper, celebrated on Passover, was in continuity with that festival day. Jesus' blood, like the blood of the Passover Lamb, will avert the wrath of God from the people of God.

Here is another Old Testament text that informs our understanding of the Lord's Supper:

Isaiah 25:6-9

*<sup>6</sup> On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.<sup>7</sup> And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.<sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.<sup>9</sup> It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."*

And here is a New Testament text:

Revelation 19:6-9

*<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; <sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."*

11. Look at Matthew 26 again and interact with the following statement: "At the Lord's Supper, we look backward in time *and* forward in time."

The most extensive teaching on the Lord's Supper, though, is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:20-34

*<sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then,*

*and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup> if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.*

12. Is it important for the Lord's Supper to be a public, and not secretive, act? If so, why?

13. According to this passage, who should participate in the Lord's Supper?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 988-991 (Chapter 50, Sections A–B)

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 996-999 (Chapter 50, Sections D–E)

14. List the things that are symbolized or affirmed, according to Grudem, in the Lord's Supper:

## Day 4

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### HOW IS CHRIST PRESENT IN THE LORD'S SUPPER?

From the days of the Reformation there has been a debate over the very question that entitles this day's lesson. The Roman Catholic position has been that bread of communion actually becomes Christ's body. The Lutheran position is the Christ is present "in, with, and under" the elements. Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer, argued that the elements were only symbolic of Christ. And Calvin argued that Christ was spiritually present in the Lord's Supper.

Much of the debate has focused on the Jesus' words, "This is my body." What does this mean?

Luke 22:19-20

*<sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This [bread] is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."*

15. How might the parallel underlined above help us interpret Jesus' statement, "This is my body."

Another important text in this debate is John 6.

John 6:47-58

*<sup>47</sup> "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. <sup>50</sup> This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." <sup>52</sup> The*

*Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"<sup>53</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.<sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.<sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.<sup>56</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.<sup>57</sup> As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.<sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."*

#### 16. Is Jesus advocating cannibalism?!

The Roman Catholic view, in which the bread *becomes* Jesus' body when the priest speaks the words over it, has the most disastrous implications of the four views. For in that view, Jesus' actual, physical body is being sacrificed at every Mass.

Hebrews 9:24-26

*<sup>24</sup> For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. <sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, <sup>26</sup> for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

John 19:28-30

*<sup>28</sup> After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst."<sup>29</sup> A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. <sup>30</sup> When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*



17. Using these passages, why is the Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper certainly wrong?

Finally, one of the main problems with any notion that Christ is physically present at the Lord's Supper is the biblical teaching that we will have a resurrection body like Christ's one day and that the Bible repeatedly affirms that Christ is currently seated in heaven at the right hand of God. Note the texts below.

Philippians 3:20-21

*<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Colossians 3:1-4

*<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

In light of these texts, it is difficult to understand how Christ, with a glorified resurrection body, can be seated at God's right hand and yet constantly and continually appearing at the vast number of communion services in the world. To affirm such a doctrine is to deny that our bodies will one day be like the glorified body of Jesus Christ.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 991-996 (Chapter 50, Section C)

18. In your mind, is there a substantial difference between a symbolic view of the Lord's Supper and the view that understands Christ as spiritually present? Explain.

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

12.3 *We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord by which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel, and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying death to the old life of unbelief, and purification from the pollution of sin.*

12.4 *We believe that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the Lord in which gathered believers eat bread, signifying Christ's body given for His people, and drink the cup of the Lord, signifying the New Covenant in Christ's blood. We do this in remembrance of the Lord, and thus proclaim His death until He comes. Those who eat and drink in a worthy manner partake of Christ's body and blood, not physically, but spiritually, in that, by faith, they are nourished with the benefits He obtained through His death, and thus grow in grace.*

19. Why might it be significant that baptism is a “sign of belonging to the new people of God, the true Israel,” as the affirmation states?

20. According to section 12.4, could an unbeliever participate in the Lord’s Supper if they ate the bread and thought of Jesus’ death?



§ INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Write a brief note to a friend (real or fictitious) who is a believer but has not been baptized. Urge them to be baptized and give biblical support to your exhortation.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. Should only pastors and elders baptize? Why or why not? Should only pastors and elders serve communion? Why or why not?
2. Should a church require everyone to be baptized as believers in order to become members? Why or why not?
3. How should we prepare ourselves to receive communion? What are steps that you take (or should be taking) in order to take communion in a worthy manner?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism* (Nashville: B&H, 2007).
- ▷ Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone* (Cape Coral, Florida: Founders Press, 2003).
- ▷ Paul Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978).
- ▷ Leonard Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Note: This book advocates for paedobaptism, a view that differs from the view presented here. The material on the Lord's Supper, however, is very good.

# *The Church's Leadership*

# 10

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## 📖 INTRODUCTION

The church is Christ's body and it must be protected from the ravenous wolves that would seek to destroy it (Acts 20:28-30). How has God designed his church to be guarded and nurtured? What kind of leadership structure has he put in place? And who may be put into these leadership positions?

These are important questions to answer if we want to have healthy churches, accomplishing the many purposes God has given the church to fulfill. Many churches today choose elders or deacons based on their standing in the community or the amount they contribute to the church. It is rare when the main criterion for serving as church leaders are the qualifications Paul gave in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Our hope is that churches all across the land would begin to reaffirm the high calling and high standard for those who serve the church in leadership.

## 📖 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- describe the roles of pastor-elder and deacon in biblical terms
- argue for a biblically-informed methodology for appointing church leaders
- defend the contentious claim that only men should be considered for the role of pastor-elder in accordance with God's design and the Bible's teaching



 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **apostle:**
- **bishop:**
- **congregational government:**
- **deacon:**
- **elder:**
- **episcopalian government:**
- **overseer:**
- **pastor:**
- **presbyterian government:**
- **priest:**





## Day 1

### PASTOR-ELDERS

If you were to ask the average, American Christian who the leader of a church was, you'd probably get the response, "the pastor." "Pastor" has become a very common title in some circles of the church, but curiously, the word occurs only three times outside of the gospels. Here are those three occurrences:

#### Ephesians 4:11-14

<sup>11</sup> *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (Gk. Poimēn, i.e. pastor) and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

#### Hebrews 13:20-21

<sup>20</sup> *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd (poimēn) of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

#### 1 Peter 2:25

<sup>25</sup> *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd (poimēn) and Overseer of your souls.*

In addition, here are two verses that use the verbal form of the word "pastor."

#### Acts 20:28

<sup>28</sup> *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care (Gk. poimainō) for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

1 Peter 5:2

...<sup>2</sup> *shepherd* (poimainō) *the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...*

1. Though an infrequent title for a church leader, “pastor” does communicate something profound. What is that?

The New Testament uses titles other than “pastor” much more frequently when referring to those who lead the church.

Acts 20:17, 28

<sup>17</sup> *Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders (Gk. presbyteros) of the church to come to him. ...<sup>28</sup> “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (Gk. episkopos), to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”*

1 Timothy 3:1-2, 4-5

<sup>1</sup> *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer (episkopos), he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> There-fore an overseer (episkopos) must be above reproach... <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?*

1 Timothy 5:17

<sup>17</sup> *Let the elders (presbyteros) who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

Titus 1:5-7

<sup>5</sup> *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders (presbyteros) in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer (episkopos), as God’s steward, must be above reproach...*

2. Do the titles “pastor,” “elder,” and “overseer” (also translated “bishop”) refer to three distinct offices of church leadership? Why or why not?

After examining the different titles given to the primary office of church leadership in the New Testament, let’s look at this office’s job description. We will be revisiting a number of the same texts in this lesson, examining them from different angles.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

*<sup>1</sup> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

1 Timothy 5:17

*<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

Acts 20:28-32

*<sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

#### I Peter 5:1-4

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

#### Titus 1:7-11

<sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

<sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

<sup>10</sup> For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

3. Underline all the descriptions of the pastor-elders' responsibilities and tasks. Then summarize your findings below:

Finally, let's look at the qualifications for becoming and remaining a pastor-elder.

#### 1 Timothy 3:1-7

<sup>1</sup> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Titus 1:7-9

<sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,<sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.<sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

4. Underline all the descriptions of the pastor-elder's qualifications. Then summarize your findings below:

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 904-905 (Chapter 47, Section A)<sup>42</sup>

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 912-918 (Chapter 47, Section A2)

5. What does the qualification "husband of one wife" mean, according to Grudem?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 905-911 (Chapter 47, Section A1)

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<sup>42</sup> For this reading, read to the bottom of page 905, but do not start section A1 on the topic of apostles. Section A1 is included in the further reading.

## Day 2

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### DEACONS AND SELECTING CHURCH OFFICERS

Aside from the office of pastor-elder, the New Testament mentions another office of the church:

1 Timothy 3:8-13

*<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 1:1-2

*<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. a*

6. What significant differences do you notice between the office of pastor-elder and the office of deacon?

Having examined the two church offices prescribed in the New Testament, we must ask an additional question: “How are men chosen for these positions?” First, it must be said that a potential elder or deacon must meet the necessary qualifications and have a desire to serve in this way: “if anyone *aspires* to the office of overseer, he *desires* a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1).

1 Timothy 3:6-7, 10

<sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. ...<sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

7. What might these verses imply about the way in which an elder or deacon is chosen?

Although there are no explicit prescriptions in the New Testament for choosing church officers, there are a couple of descriptions in the book of Acts that might inform our methodology.

Acts 6:1-6

<sup>1</sup> Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” <sup>5</sup> And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 15:22-27

<sup>22</sup> Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers,

<sup>23</sup> with the following letter: "The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.

<sup>24</sup> Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions, <sup>25</sup> it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth."

8. Based on these passages, what might be a good way in which to choose and appoint church officers?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 918-923 (Chapter 47, Sections A3-B)

9. Summarize the five reasons Grudem offers for church officers being affirmed or recognized by the whole congregation:



## Day 3

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### CHURCH GOVERNMENT

In the previous two days of study we have looked at the biblical descriptions of the church offices of pastor-elder and deacon. We have also considered how men ought to be chosen for these positions. We will now focus on how the local church should be governed and what the relationship between local churches should be.

Acts 14:21-23

<sup>21</sup> When [Paul and Barnabus] had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. <sup>23</sup> And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1 Peter 1:1

<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...

1 Peter 5:1-2

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you...

Titus 1:5

<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...

James 5:14

<sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

10. How many pastor-elders ought there to be in a single congregation of believers?

When we ask the New Testament, “How should the pastor-elders and the congregation as a whole relate?” we observe two distinct strands of teaching that must be held simultaneously. First, look at these texts:

Hebrews 13:17

*<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

*<sup>12</sup> We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.*

And now, consider these texts and what can be inferred from them:

Matthew 18:15-17

*<sup>15</sup> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. <sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

11. What balance must be struck in the relationship between pastor-elders and the congregation? What might this balance look like in practice?

We have already asserted that there is no warrant in the New Testament for a distinct church office of “bishop.” Nor do we see that any “overseer” would be responsible for oversight of multiple local congregations. What would this imply about the hierarchical structure within many denominations?

Sometimes, Acts 15 is offered as evidence of this kind of hierarchical structure of oversight over many churches. Let's examine this passage.

Acts 15:1-6, 22, 30-33

<sup>1</sup> But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. <sup>3</sup> So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. <sup>5</sup> But some believers

who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”<sup>6</sup> The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ...<sup>22</sup> Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers...<sup>30</sup> So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter.<sup>31</sup> And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.<sup>32</sup> And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words.<sup>33</sup> And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.

12. Do you think that this passage warrants an authoritative structure beyond the local church? Why or why not?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 928-935 (Chapter 47, Section C3a-C3b)

13. Which form of church government, as described by Grudem, most nearly corresponds to the form of church government in your church? (Note: You may need to look through the further reading, listed below, to answer this question.)

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 923-927 (Chapter 47, Section C1-C2)

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 935-936 (Chapter 47, Section C3c-C4)

## Day 4

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### SHOULD WOMEN BE PASTOR-ELDERS?

In this last day's study, we will examine the controversial subject of whether women should be allowed to be pastor-elders.

This issue is intimately related to what the Bible teaches about gender roles on the whole, which was covered in Lesson 8 of *Theological Foundations I*. Much of the material in this day's study will assume that the student is familiar with that lesson.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

14. Many have argued that verse 12 is not a universally-binding principle, but was Paul's particular directive for the church in Ephesus to whom he was writing. How might verses 13 and 14 address this objection?

Another controversial, but fundamental, text to this debate is 1 Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:29-38

<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission,

as the Law also says.<sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.<sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?<sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.<sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

15. This text clearly prohibits women from being pastor-elders. How can they preach if Paul here commands them to be silent? But should we interpret Paul's command to mean that women should literally say nothing during corporate worship?

*"In verse 29, Paul turns to prophecy and writes, 'Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.' The two parts of this verse are then separately expanded upon: the first part ('Two or three prophets should speak') is treated in verses 30-33a, where constraints are imposed on the uttering of prophecies; the second part ('and the others should weigh carefully what is said') is treated in verses 33b-36, where constraints are imposed on the evaluation of prophecies."<sup>43</sup>*

The vision of biblical complementarity was described and supported in Lesson 8 of *Theological Foundations I*. In that lesson we affirmed that men and women "were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the church." In this lesson we are simply asserting that men and women are appointed "differing and complementary roles" in the church.

This does not mean that women are less capable, less intelligent, less trustworthy, or less valuable. Our value and worth is not based upon our roles!

If men are to be the leaders of their homes, exercising headship and authority within the home, what do these qualifications of pastor-elders imply?

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43 D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2006), 152.

1 Timothy 3:2, 4-5

<sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...

<sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

Titus 1:5-6

<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination.

16. Can any woman meet these qualifications for the office of pastor-elder?

Does the view of this curriculum deny women all ministry in the church?

Certainly not. Paul describes the ministry of older women as follows:

Titus 2:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

More broadly speaking, a woman should whole-heartedly participate in any ministry of the church that doesn't involve authoritative proclamation of God's Word, which is reserved for the pastor-elders.

Can women occupy the office of "deacon," being deaconesses? There is an interpretive issue in 1 Timothy 3:11 that must be resolved.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

The word “their” in verse 11 is not explicit in the Greek. The verse could therefore be legitimately translated as “The women likewise...” thus indicating that women could be deacons (or deaconesses). Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, argues that this refers to the wives of the deacons. Bethlehem, however, interprets this verse the other way and has had women serve as deaconesses. It is important to note that this difference of opinion doesn't necessarily need to influence your understanding on the role of pastor-elder. Though complementarians have a difference of opinion on deaconesses, they are united in their understanding that men only should be affirmed as elders.

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 937-945 (Chapter 47, Section D)

17. Do you find the example of the apostles or the history of leadership in the Bible to be compelling arguments for the leadership of women in the church? Why or why not?
  
18. How ought we to respond to a woman who claims that God has “called” her to be a preaching pastor?



## Day 5

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### An Affirmation of Faith

*12.5 We believe that each local church should recognize and affirm the divine calling of spiritually qualified men to give leadership to the church through the role of pastor-elder in the ministry of the Word and prayer. Women are not to fill the role of pastor-elder in the local church, but are encouraged to use their gifts in appropriate roles that edify the body of Christ and spread the gospel.*

19. Rewrite this section of the affirmation in your own words.

20. How are pastor-elders to give leadership to the church? What biblical support could you offer to defend the affirmation's answer?



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

If God were to call you to lead or partner in the planting of a new church, what form of leadership would you labor to establish? Why? What would be the process be in selecting and affirming the church's leadership? How would the leadership and congregation relate?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. How is your church governed? How well does it fit with the biblical model of church government?
2. Why is it important for there to be a plurality of elders, rather than just one?
3. Is there a way of presenting male-only eldership that is demeaning to women? What would that look like? Is there a way of presenting male-only eldership that is affirming of women? What would that look like?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ *Shepherds Under God* curricula, available from Bethlehem College & Seminary.
- ▷ John Piper, *Biblical Eldership* seminar, available online at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org)
- ▷ John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals* (Nashville: B&H, 2002).
- ▷ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991).
- ▷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis & Roth, 1995).
- ▷ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
- ▷ Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006).

# *Christ's Commission and His Coming*

# 11

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## 🔗 INTRODUCTION

In some ways, the entire course up to this point has been leading to this lesson. As we see more and more of who God is and all that he has done for us in Jesus Christ, our response should be an ever increasing eagerness to see Jesus Christ praised by all peoples.

When David worshipped God his cry was, “Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” (Psalm 34:3)! This ought to be the cry of every Christian. Have we not also tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord? Shall we not also long for others to drink with us from the water of life?

This is what missions is all about—seeing and savoring the greatness of our God and then seeking to spread his praise to the ends of the earth. This was the joy set before Christ that enabled him to endure the cross (Hebrews 12:2). It is this joy that has been the testimony of countless missionaries throughout the ages. It is this joy that will enable us to leave house, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, and farms that we may have a hundred fold of each, and even more precious—eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

And as we watch the gospel spread among all nations, the cry of our heart is “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelations 22:20).

## 🔗 LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- provide the biblical basis for global missions
- give the biblical account of what happens when we die
- speak about the resurrection of our bodies and the return of Christ

 PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **death:**
- **eschatology:**
- **glorification:**
- **imminent:**
- **parousia:**
- **purgatory:**
- **second coming of Christ:**
- **spiritual body:**



## Day 1

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### CHRIST'S COMMISSION

The following passage is often called the Great Commission. It is the foundation of the mission of the church.

Matthew 28:18-20

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

1. Is this commission still binding on the modern church? What textual support can you offer for your answer?

It would be wrong to view this commission as something that is "tacked on" to Matthew's Gospel. The command to make disciples of all nations is not optional or periphery. Notice Luke 24.

Luke 24:44-48

<sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,<sup>46</sup> and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things.”

*“For Christians, the whole Bible revolves around the person of Christ. Jesus went on, however, beyond his messianic centring of the Old Testament Scriptures to their missional thrust as well.*

*Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’ (Luke 24:45-47)*

*The whole sentence comes under the rubric ‘this is what is written’. Luke does not present Jesus as quoting any specific verse from the Old Testament, but he claims that the mission of preaching repentance and forgiveness to the nations in his name is ‘what is written’. He seems to be saying that the whole of the Scriptures (which we now know as the Old Testament), finds its focus and fulfillment both in the life and death and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah and in the mission to all nations, which flows out from that event. Luke tells us that with these words Jesus ‘opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures’, or, as we might put it, he was setting their hermeneutical orientation and agenda. The proper way for disciples of the crucified and risen Jesus to read their Scriptures is from a perspective that is both messianic and missional.”<sup>44</sup>*

We must ask, then, what it means to make disciples of “all nations” (Gk. *panta ta ethnē*). Does this simply mean that we must preach the gospel in all the countries of the world?

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44 Christopher Wright, “Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology,” *Out of Egypt* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 107.



Acts 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

Revelation 7:9-10

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, <sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Revelation 14:6

<sup>6</sup> Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.

2. Based upon these passages, how should we understand the word “nation” or “nations”?

Here is one attempt to define what Matthew means by making disciples of “all nations.”

*“My conclusion from what we have seen in this chapter is that one would have to go against the flow of the evidence to interpret the phrase *panta ta ethnē* as ‘all Gentile individuals’ (or ‘all countries’). Rather the focus of the command is the discipling of all the people groups of the world. This conclusion comes from the following summary of our Biblical investigation:*

- 1. In the New Testament the singular use of *ethnos* never means Gentile individuals but always means people group or nation.*
- 2. The plural *ethnē* can mean either Gentile individuals or people groups. Sometimes context demands that it mean one or the other, but in most instances it could carry either meaning.*
- 3. The phrase *panta ta ethnē* occurs eighteen times in the New Testament. Only once must it mean Gentile individuals. Nine times it must mean people groups. The other eight times are ambiguous.*
- 4. Virtually all of the nearly one hundred uses of *panta ta ethnē* in the Greek Old Testament refer to nations in distinction from the nation of Israel.*
- 5. The promise made to Abraham that in him ‘all the families of the earth’ would be blessed and that he would be ‘the father of many nations’ is taken up in the New Testament and gives the mission of the church a people-group focus because of this Old Testament emphasis.*
- 6. The Old Testament missionary hope is expressed repeatedly as exhortations, promises, prayers, and plans for God’s glory to be declared among the peoples and his salvation to be known by all the nations.*
- 7. Paul understood his specifically missionary task in terms of this Old Testament hope and made the promises concerning peoples the foundation of his mission. He was devoted to reaching more and more people groups, not simply more and more individuals. He interpreted Christ’s commission to him in these terms.*
- 8. The apostle John envisioned the task of missions as the ingathering of ‘the children of God’ or the ‘other sheep’ out of ‘every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.’*

9. *The Old Testament context of Jesus' missionary commission in Luke 24:46-47 shows that panta ta ethnē would most naturally mean all the peoples or nations.*
10. *Mark 11:17 shows that Jesus probably thinks in terms of people groups when he envisions the worldwide purpose of God.*

*Therefore, in all likelihood, Jesus did not send his apostles out with a general mission merely to win as many individuals as they could but rather to reach all the peoples of the world and thus to gather the 'sons of God' which are scattered (John 11:52) and to call all the 'ransomed from every tongue and tribe and people and nation' (Revelation 5:9), until redeemed persons from 'all the peoples praise him' (Romans 15:11).*

*Thus, when Jesus says in Mark 13:10 that 'the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations [panta ta ethnē], there is no good reason for construing this to mean anything other than that the gospel must reach all the peoples of the world before the end comes. And when Jesus says, 'Go and make disciples of all the nations [panta ta ethnē], there is no good reason for construing this to mean anything other than that the missionary task of the church is to press on to all the unreached peoples until the Lord comes.'<sup>45</sup>*

This understanding should sharpen our focus and strategy in missions. God means to be praised among all the peoples of the world.

Romans 15:18-24

*<sup>18</sup> For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; <sup>20</sup> and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, <sup>21</sup> but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."<sup>22</sup> This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. <sup>23</sup> But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, <sup>24</sup> I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*

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<sup>45</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 210-211.

3. How can Paul say that from “Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum [modern-day Albania] I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ” (15:19) and “I no longer have any room for work in these regions” (15:23)? Weren’t there thousands of unbelievers remaining in these areas?

So we have seen that it is God’s desire—and it must be *ours* also—for the gospel to be proclaimed and for churches to be established among all people groups. And we will certainly succeed in this task, for Christ has promised to build his church (Matthew 16:18).

Revelation 5:9-10

*<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”*

Matthew 24:14

*<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

But is missions the ultimate goal of God? Or of the church?

John 4:21-24

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

John 9:4

*<sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.*

Romans 11:25

*<sup>25</sup> Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*

Revelation 6:9-11

*<sup>9</sup> When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

4. What do these passages imply about the duration of missions?

*"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.*

*Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!" (Ps. 97:1). Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy!" (Ps. 67:3-4).*

*But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, 'Let the nations be glad!' If they cannot say from the heart, 'I rejoice in the Lord. . . I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High' (Psalm. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship."*<sup>46</sup>

**No Required Reading:** There is no required (or further) reading for this day.

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46 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 35-36.

## Day 2

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### DEATH

A passion for God's glory is what drives missions; the reality of death and judgment gives missions its urgency.

As we have seen, sin and death were introduced into the world through the fall of Adam and Eve.

Genesis 3:19

*<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*

Romans 5:12

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...*

And death is now the inevitable outcome for all believers and unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 15:22-26

*<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

*<sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ...*

*<sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

*<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. <sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

5. Why do Christians still die?

If death is a reality for all the living until Christ returns, what happens to us when we die?

Luke 16:19-31

<sup>19</sup> There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. <sup>20</sup> And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, <sup>21</sup> who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. <sup>22</sup> The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, <sup>23</sup> and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. <sup>24</sup> And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." <sup>25</sup> But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. <sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us." <sup>27</sup> And he said, "Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— <sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment." <sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." <sup>30</sup> And he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." <sup>31</sup> He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

6. Based upon this parable, what can we say about those who die?



The teaching of the parable is also confirmed in the following Gospel and in the letters of Paul.

Luke 23:40-43

*<sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."*

Philippians 1:21-23

*<sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.*

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

*<sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

7. What happens to believers when they die?

Unbelievers, however, do not enter God's presence when they die. Neither is there a "second chance" for them to repent of their sins after they have died.

Hebrews 9:27-28

*<sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 816-824 (Chapter 41, Section C)

8. Where does the Catholic doctrine of purgatory come from?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. According to Grudem, did Old Testament believers enter immediately into God's presence? What support does Grudem offer for his position?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 810-816 (Chapter 41, Sections A–B)

## Day 3

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### RESURRECTION

The great Christian hope is not disembodied bliss. Paul clearly stated that his preference was “not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed” (2 Corinthians 5:4)—that is, that we would have resurrected bodies rather than no bodies at all.

In Lesson 11 of *Theological Foundations I*, we already demonstrated the reality of the resurrection of the dead by considering the resurrection of Christ. We will now briefly consider resurrection more generally.

John 5:28-29

*<sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.*

Acts 24:14-15, 20-21

*<sup>14</sup> But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup> having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ...<sup>20</sup> Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, <sup>21</sup> other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: “It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.”*

10. Will only believers in Jesus be resurrected?

Here is another text that describes the resurrection of believers.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

And here is a text describing our physical, resurrected bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:35-44

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup> You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. <sup>39</sup> For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. <sup>40</sup> There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. <sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. <sup>42</sup> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

And it is not only our bodies that will be renewed.

Romans 8:19-23

<sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

11. Why might the renewal of all of creation be an important aspect of the Christian hope?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 828-836 (Chapter 42)

12. According to Grudem, did Old Testament believers understand the resurrection?

13. After reading this chapter, what popular misconceptions did you formerly have or have you heard about this doctrine of glorification?

## Day 4

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### THE COMING OF THE LORD

This course will not fully enter into the subject of eschatology—the study of “the last things.” As you are probably aware, there is much controversy and speculation about things yet to come. Rather than taking a position in that debate, we will simply set forth a number of things on which all evangelicals can agree concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:9-11

*<sup>9</sup> And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, <sup>11</sup> and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

14. What is the clear teaching of this passage?

Here are descriptions of Jesus’ birth, his first “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem, and his return.

Luke 2:4-7

*<sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

Matthew 21:1-11

*<sup>1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, “The*

*Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."* <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup> "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

#### Revelation 19:11-16

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

15. How will Christ's second coming be different from his first coming?

After briefly considering the manner of his return, now let's look at the timing of that return.

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:2-6

<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman,



and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Luke 12:40

<sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matthew 24:42-44

<sup>42</sup> Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

<sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

16. Can we predict the exact timing of the second coming of Christ?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1091-1095 (Chapter 54, Sections A–E)

17. What have you heard about Christ's return? Is what you heard in line with what Grudem says that the Bible teaches?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1095-1105 (Chapter 54, Section F)

18. As you scan the texts and arguments, what possible solution seems best to you?

## Day 5

### An Affirmation of Faith

13. *We believe that the commission given by the Lord Jesus to make disciples of all nations is binding on His Church to the end of the age. This task is to proclaim the Gospel to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, baptizing them, teaching them the words and ways of the Lord, and gathering them into churches able to fulfill their Christian calling among their own people. The ultimate aim of world missions is that God would create, by His Word, worshippers who glorify His name through glad-hearted faith and obedience. Missions exists because worship doesn't. When the time of ingathering is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and the goal of missions.*

14.1 *We believe that when Christians die they are made perfect in holiness, are received into paradise, and are taken consciously into the presence of Christ, which is more glorious and more satisfying than any experience on earth.*

14.2 *We believe in the blessed hope that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will gather His elect, raise the dead, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery.*





#### INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. How does Paul's teaching about Christ's coming comfort (4:18), encourage, and build up (5:11)? How should you seek to use this truth to comfort and encourage others?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. How are you participating in the Great Commission? Can someone participate in this commission without actually going as a missionary?
2. Read Matthew 24:42-51. What was the slave who was ready for his master's coming doing? What, then, does it mean for us to be ready for our Master's coming? What does this readiness look like today?
3. How often do you think about Christ's return and the resurrection? Is it helpful or distracting to think about these things a lot? What do you think about books that speculate about the "end times", such as the *Left Behind* series?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).
- ▷ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).

# Everlasting Joy and Misery

# 12

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## 📖 INTRODUCTION

*Today belongs to the soundbite; tomorrow belongs to marketing; eternity belongs to the Truth. If you live only for this world, you will care little for truth. “Let us eat, drink and be merry”—and call the ideas that protect our appetites “truths.” But if you live for eternity, you will forego a few fads in order to be everlastingly relevant.*

*We prize truth at Bethlehem above temporary successes. Where truth is minimized and people are not rooted and grounded in it, successes are superficial and the growing tree is hollow, even while it blooms in the sunshine of prosperity. O may God give us a humble, submissive love for the truth of God’s word in the depth and fullness of it.*

*Listen to Paul’s warning about our day: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires (2 Timothy 4:3) . . . who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).*

*Take, for example, one truth that is not popular and is being abandoned by many who fly the banner of “evangelical” over their tent—the truth of hell. O what a difference it makes when one believes in hell—with trembling and with tears. There is a seriousness over all of life, and an urgency in all our endeavors, and a flavor of blood-earnestness that seasons everything and makes sin feel more sinful, and righteousness feel more righteous, and life feel more precious, and relationships feel more profound, and God appear more weighty.”<sup>47</sup>*

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47 John Piper, “Dorothy Sayers on Why Hell Is a Non-Negotiable,” an online article at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

And O what a difference it makes when one believes in heaven! This lesson will consider the reality of heaven and hell, two doctrines of the Christian faith that rest very lightly on the church. Both realities are so weighty that they would crush us if we fully embraced them.

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, the student should be able to:

- ▷ outline the major interpretive options for Revelation 20 and the “millennium”
- ▷ defend the biblical doctrine of hell
- ▷ describe the final judgment and the glorious, future hope of the believer

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### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

Look up and record each of the following terms in the Glossary in Grudem’s *Systematic Theology* (page 1235).

- **amillennialism:**
  
- **annihilationism:**
  
- **eternal conscious punishment:**
  
- **final judgment:**



- **great tribulation:**
- **heaven:**
- **hell:**
- **millennium:**
- **new heavens and new earth:**
- **postmillennialism:**
- **premillennialism:**
- **rapture:**
- **universalism:**



## Day 1

### THE MILLENNIUM

One of the most disputed, yet important, texts for forming an eschatological view is Revelation 20, the only explicit reference to the so-called millennium.

#### Revelation 20:1-10

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw an from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. <sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. <sup>4</sup> Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. <sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup> and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

1. Underline every reference to a thousand years. Are we currently within this period of time (1,000 being interpreted as a symbolic number) or is this period of time yet to come?

Revelation 20 refers to the binding of Satan. Did this binding occur during the earthly ministry of Jesus or will it happen in the future?

Matthew 12:22-29

*<sup>22</sup> Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. <sup>23</sup> And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" <sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." <sup>25</sup> Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house."*

2. Does this passage correspond to Revelation 20?

A person's view of the millennium affects the way in which they read Old Testament prophecies. Are there promises made in the Old Testament that are awaiting fulfillment in a future millennial period?

Isaiah 65:17-25

<sup>17</sup> For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. <sup>20</sup> No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. <sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. <sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. <sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup> Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

3. When will this passage be fulfilled?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1109-1114 (Chapter 55, Section A)

4. Which millennial view do you hold? If you don't have a millennial view, which view is most commonly held at your church? Why?

**Further Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1114-1135 (Chapter 55, Sections B-E)

## Day 2

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### JUDGING THE NATIONS

After the millennium, Revelation describes the final judgment.

Revelation 20:11-15

*<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were open-ed. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

5. According to this passage, who is judged?

Jesus also describes this final judgment in the book of Matthew. It is our perspective that Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 describe the same event of final judgment.

Matthew 25:31-46

*<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father,*

*inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* <sup>35</sup> *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,* <sup>36</sup> *I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.* <sup>37</sup> *Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?"* <sup>38</sup> *And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?"* <sup>39</sup> *And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?"* <sup>40</sup> *And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."* <sup>41</sup> *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.* <sup>42</sup> *For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,* <sup>43</sup> *I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."* <sup>44</sup> *Then they also will answer, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?"* <sup>45</sup> *Then he will answer them, saying, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."* <sup>46</sup> *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

#### 6. What is the criterion for the final judgment?

It is important to stress that believers will not be exempt from the final judgment. The following passages make it clear that believers will face the final judgment—and pass.

1 Corinthians 4:3-5

<sup>3</sup> *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.* <sup>4</sup> *For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.*

<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

<sup>9</sup> So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

#### Romans 14:10-12

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” <sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Now notice the following texts that also relate to the final judgment.

#### 1 Corinthians 3:11-13

<sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

#### Matthew 5:11-12

<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

#### Matthew 6:1-4

<sup>1</sup> Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup> Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Luke 14:13-14

<sup>13</sup> *But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,*

<sup>14</sup> *and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*

7. What do these verses teach us about rewards at the final judgment?

Apparently the apostle Paul and the other writers of the New Testament, thought a lot about the final judgment and their future hope of glory. Here are two of the many texts that reflect on the final judgment for believers.

1 Corinthians 9:22-27

<sup>22</sup> *To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. <sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

2 Timothy 4:6-8

<sup>6</sup> *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*



8. What role should the final judgment play in the life of a believer?

Matthew 25:20-21

<sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1140-1148 (Chapter 56, Sections A-F)

9. Should the prospect of coming before Christ's judgment seat cause us terror?

## Day 3

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See Teaching Notes for additional information which might help you navigate this section of the curricula.

### EVERLASTING CONSCIOUS TORMENT

This day's study brings us to an unpleasant topic. But it is a topic that we dare not neglect. For Jesus did not neglect to mention hell, but frequently discussed it in the most graphic terms.

Mark 9:43-48

*<sup>43</sup> And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*

Matthew 24:48-51

*<sup>48</sup> But if that wicked servant says to himself, "My master is delayed," <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, <sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know <sup>51</sup> and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matthew 8:11-12

*<sup>11</sup> I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, <sup>12</sup> while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

10. Underline the phrases and metaphors that are used to describe hell. What do these things teach us about hell? Are the metaphors used to describe reality that is more or less horrific than the metaphors themselves?

There is some debate as to the duration of hell. Will it be everlasting, conscious torment, or will unbelievers simply be destroyed or annihilated (go out of existence) at some point? The teaching of the Bible is clear; harder to admit than it is to understand.

Revelation 14:9-11

<sup>9</sup> *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, <sup>10</sup> he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."*

Notice also the following parallels in these texts:

Daniel 12:2

<sup>2</sup> *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Matthew 25:46

<sup>46</sup> *And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

11. What might be the disastrous implication of arguing that the punishment of unbelievers is not eternal?

Once we firmly grasp the reality and horror of hell, we must be sure that we adopt the appropriate, biblical attitude toward it.

Romans 9:1-3

<sup>1</sup> *I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— <sup>2</sup> that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.*

Matthew 23:37

<sup>37</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!

Revelation 16:5-7

<sup>5</sup> And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. <sup>6</sup> For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!” <sup>7</sup> And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

Revelation 19:1-3

<sup>1</sup> After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, <sup>2</sup> for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” <sup>3</sup> Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

12. How should believers feel about the reality of hell?

*“But today I want to stress the insufficiency of hell. Hell is insufficient to save anybody. I mean hell cannot scare anyone into heaven, because heaven is a place for those who love God, not for those who just fear hell.*

*...Fear of hell is no proof of love for God. Desiring to be rescued by the life boats before you drown, does not prove that you love the captain of the ship. James 2:5 says that God promised the crown of life to those who love him—not fear hell, but love God. James 2:12 says that God promised the kingdom of God to those who love him. The pathway to heaven is the path of love to God. Fear may show you that you are on the wrong path. It may point you to the right one. But fear is not the path or the gate that leads to life. It is what you should feel when you wander off the path.”<sup>48</sup>*

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48 John Piper, “The Echo and Insufficiency of Hell, Part 2,” an online sermon at [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org).

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1148-1153 (Chapter 56, Section G)

13. List the four “positive moral influences” that Grudem lists for the final judgment (1147-1148). Do these also apply to the doctrine of hell?

## Day 4

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### NEVER-ENDING, EVER-INCREASING HAPPINESS

Most of us do far too little daydreaming about heaven. That's probably because very few of us suffer much in this life and because we haven't meditated on how tremendously *real* heaven will be. Most of us may think of heaven as dream-like existence in which we will sing constantly and play musical instruments while lounging around on clouds. Unfortunately, this drab and vague concept doesn't motivate us to give everything we have—even our lives—in order to obtain it. Therefore, in this day's study we will consider the bright, bright future that awaits us.

#### Revelation 21:1-6

*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." <sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

#### Revelation 22:1-5

*<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.*

14. What is emphasized in these descriptions of the new earth?

In Day 2 of this lesson, we saw that there will be differing rewards in the new earth that correspond to our degree of faithfulness in this life. Here is one of the texts used to support this idea:

Luke 19:16-19

<sup>16</sup> *The first came before him, saying, "Lord, your mina has made ten minas more."*

<sup>17</sup> *And he said to him, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities."<sup>18</sup> And the second came, saying, "Lord, your mina has made five minas."<sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "And you are to be over five cities."*

This may prompt the question, "Won't differing degrees of blessedness be the cause of envy, boasting, discord, or discontent?" Here is a stunning answer:

*"Here Edwards deals, in a breathtaking way, with the issue of how there can be degrees of happiness in a world of perfect joy.*

*...It will be no damp to the happiness of those who have lower degrees of happiness and glory, that there are others advanced in glory above them: for all shall be perfectly happy, every one shall be perfectly satisfied. Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others; and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign through the whole society. Those who are not so high in glory as others, will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them, that they will rejoice in their superior happiness; their love to them will be such that they will rejoice that they are happier than themselves; so that instead of having a damp to their own happiness, it will add to it.*

*And so, on the other hand, those that are highest in glory, as they will be the most lovely, so they will proportionally excel in divine benevolence and love to others, and will have more love to God and to the saints than those that are lower*

*in holiness and happiness. And besides, those that will excel in glory will also excel in humility. Here in this world, those that are above others are the objects of envy, because...others conceive of them as being lifted up with it; but in heaven it will not be so, but those saints in heaven who excel in happiness will also [excel] in holiness, and consequently in humility. ...The exaltation of some in heaven above the rest will be so far from diminishing the perfect happiness and joy of the rest who are inferior, that they will be the happier for it; such will be the union in their society that they will be partakers of each other's happiness. Then will be fulfilled in its perfections that which is declared in 1 Corinthians 12:22: 'If one of the members be honored all the member rejoice with it.'*"<sup>49</sup>

15. Summarize Edwards's argument in your own words.

Our experience of God will be one of pure, unending, and ever-increasing joy.

Psalm 16:11

*"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Ephesians 2:4-7

*<sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

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49 Jonathan Edwards as cited by John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 111-112.



16. How does this last text in particular support the idea that our joy in the new earth will be ever-increasing?

In contemplating the joy of the new earth, however, we must be careful not to commit idolatry. We do well to ponder this question—and warning:

*“The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, and all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?”<sup>50</sup>*

Revelation 21:3, 22-23

<sup>3</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” ...<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

Revelation 22:3-4

<sup>3</sup> *No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>12</sup> *For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

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<sup>50</sup> John Piper, *God Is the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 15.

1 Peter 3:18

<sup>18</sup> *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...*

17. What is the final, fundamental, and ultimate joy of heaven and the new earth?

**Required Reading:** *Systematic Theology*, 1158-1164 (Chapter 57, Sections A–C)

18. What common conceptions of heaven have you heard in the church or in popular culture? Record one thing you've learned from Grudem that dispels a misconception that you've heard.

## Day 5

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### An Affirmation of Faith

*14.2 We believe in the blessed hope that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to this earth personally, visibly, physically, and suddenly in power and great glory; and that He will gather His elect, raise the dead, judge the nations, and establish His kingdom. We believe that the righteous will enter into the everlasting joy of their Master, and those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery.*

*14.3 We believe that the end of all things in this age will be the beginning of a never-ending, ever-increasing happiness in the hearts of the redeemed, as God displays more and more of His infinite and inexhaustible greatness and glory for the enjoyment of His people.*

19. How important is it to affirm that “those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness will be consigned to everlasting conscious misery”?

20. Compose a prayer that rejoices over the truth expressed in these sections of the affirmation. Record it below.



•••••  INTEGRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Invest some thought as to how you will continue your study of theology after you have completed this course. Record some of your ideas and goals below and be prepared to share them with the class.

 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Review the following questions in preparation for discussion. As you have worked through this lesson, record any lingering questions that you may have.

1. How is it that believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10) and yet will not come into judgment? In what sense, then, are believers judged?
2. How can an eternity in hell be a just punishment for a finite lifetime of sin? Will unbelievers still be sinning in hell?
3. What can you do to cultivate your desire to see God face to face?
4. Your own question(s):

 **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- ▷ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
- ▷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004).
- ▷ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).
- ▷ John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1999).
- ▷ George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).
- ▷ Kim Riddlebarger, *The Case for Amillennialism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

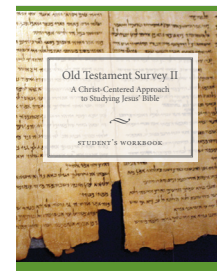
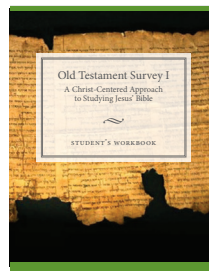
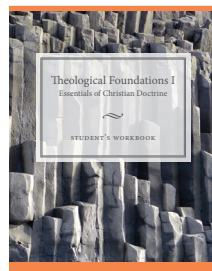
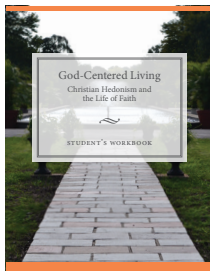


# Theological Foundations II

## Essentials of Christian Doctrine

*Theological Foundations II: Essentials of Christian Doctrine* is a 12-week course designed to introduce students to a systematic treatment of theology, leading to both Christ-centered worship and the living-out of doctrinal truths. This course is an attempt to systematically present what the Apostle Paul called “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Students will study biblical topics by closely examining key biblical passages, answering provocative questions, reading select passages from Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, considering sermons and writings from the ministry of John Piper, and inspecting Bethlehem Baptist Church’s Elder Affirmation of Faith. The student’s learning will be solidified through class discussion and various homework assignments. This course is the second of two semesters, progressing through roughly the second half of a systematic theology, including the doctrines of justification, sanctification, the ordinances, last things, pneumatology and ecclesiology.

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