

IDENTITY

in Christ



IDENTITY *in Christ*

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Week 1

EMBRACING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

FOUR SEASONS OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Who am I?

Names
Family
God's Image
Glorious Ruins
Renounce Lie
Justified
Adopted
Sanctified

CALLING TO CHRIST

Where's my place?

God's Summons
Central/Peripheral
Kairoitic Events
3 Longings
Micah 6:8
Prophet/Priest/King
Apostolic Band
Agora (Streets)

INTENTIONALITY FOR CHRIST

What's my best aim?

Gifted & Experienced
Regrets
Busyness
Fear
Resignation
Faith/Hope/Love
Mid-Life Bucket Lists
Greatest Contribution

LEGACY FROM CHRIST

What's my message?

My Treasury
Succession
Influence
Will for Others
The Jordan River
Benediction
Deliver Mail
Letting Go

Embracing Our Identity in Christ

Our **identity**, besides being one of the most precious things to prevent from theft, crisis, or loss, is extremely important to God. The Father has given his children an identity in Christ that will shape us on our journey to heaven. If in the process of identity formation we ignore what God says concerning our identity, then we may expect confusion in other seasons of spiritual formation.

Just after birth, a child is given an identity. Identity formation, however, is a longer process. When Jesus Christ was approximately thirty years of age the Father spoke of his identity at his baptism just before entering fully into his calling. In the same way, *identity in Christ* ought to precede our *calling to Christ*. It is at this important season of identity that Satan challenges each of us, as he did our Lord. The devil's first attacks on our Lord were aimed at his identity: "If you are the Son of God."

The evil trinity—the world, the flesh, and the devil—is seeking to kill and destroy us in each season of spiritual formation. In the spring they confuse our identity, in the summer our calling, in the autumn our intentionality, and in the winter our legacy. The world escorts us to the pit; the flesh entices us to fall in; and the devil pushes us over the edge. "The pit," as it were, represents a dark and slimy collection of lies, condemning thoughts, and foolish strategies designed to confuse and distort our identity formation.

This Identity Group is the first of four spiritual formation groups designed to shape us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. It assumes that you have to begin here before asking the next three major questions of the Christian life: *Where's my place (calling)? How do I steward all my gifts, resources, and efforts with intentionality in the light of eternity (intentionality)? What inheritance, testament, and benediction do I leave behind as I prepare to cross the river of death in order to gain eternity (legacy)?*

Each meeting will begin with prayer, sharing homework from the previous meeting, and discussing the assigned readings. Each meeting will include an instructional time, which assumes healthy dialogue from the Scriptures. Our focus will be to address the peculiar pitfalls that accompany this season of the Christian life.

In all this, we are seeking God's grace—the power of the Word, the Holy Spirit, the mystery of providence, and the pastoral care of our community—to shape us each directly, uniquely, and beautifully according to our God-given identity in Christ.

Identity in Christ

- To whom have you given the authority to tell you your identity?
- The importance for a Christian leader to be shaped by the gospel
- **Key question:** *Who am I in Christ?*
- Jesus: The Importance of Sense of Identity
- **Scriptural Support:** Luke 3–4

Made in the Providence and Image of God According to Gender

In the Providence of God

1. Your Family/Full Name _____
2. Your Ethnicity _____
3. Your Heritage (good, bad, and ugly) _____

In the Image of God

- Genesis 1:26–28
- *“I am the image of God.”*

According to Gender

“Glorious Ruins,” C. S. Lewis

Glorious Manhood

Fallen Manhood

Redeemed Manhood

Glorious Womanhood

Fallen Womanhood

Redeemed Womanhood

Notice: The image of God was not erased by the Fall.

- Genesis 9:5–6
- Psalm 8
- Psalm 139

Why We Need the Gospel—Genesis 3

1. Loss of original righteousness and are guilty—justified
2. Shame and hiding—adopted
3. Withdrawal from God’s holy presence—sanctified
4. Our default mode is *autonomy*

For Next Week

The first stage of understanding our identity is to embrace our original design and family history. God created us to be his image bearers in our family, who named and raised us. This alone is significant for evil, our faith, and how we respect people. Since he also created us either male or female to uniquely reflect God’s glory, we must come to terms with both the glory and the curse of being a man or a woman.

At this point we must come to terms with what was lost in the Fall, and our default, autonomous mode to attempt to justify ourselves, hide our glory, and overcome sin. Only then will we be able to sense how desperate we truly are to hear the gospel—our true identity in Christ moment by moment throughout life.

“You are God’s image.”

“The entire world is a revelation of God, a mirror of his virtues and perfections; every creature is in his own way and according to his own measurement an embodiment of a divine thought. But among all creatures only man is the image of God, the highest and richest revelation of God, and therefore head and crown of the entire creation.” —Herman Bavinck, *Dogmatiek*, 2:566

“Man does not simply *bear* or have the image of God; he *is* the image of God.”

“From the doctrine that man has been created in the image of God flows the clear implication that the image extends to man in his entirety. Nothing in man is excluded from the image of God. All creatures reveal traces of God, but only man is the image of God. And he is that image totally, in soul and body, in all conditions and relationships. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is true man, and he is man, true and real man, because and insofar as he is the image of God.” —Herman Bavinck, *Dogmatiek*, 2:595–96

“No ordinary people.”

In a famous sermon titled “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis concluded his remarks with one of the most important statements ever uttered about the importance of people and the influence our conduct has upon them. As he pointed out, it is a very serious thing to live in society with other people whose eternal destiny hangs in the balance. Everybody one day will be either glorified or damned by God. We are encouraging them to one of these two destinations by the way we treat them. Lewis calls upon us to ponder this sobering spiritual truth in these words:

“It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. . . . Next to the blessed Sacrament itself [communion], your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.” —“The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis, 14–15

Look upon the image of God in others. Although people are “a frightful deformity,” yet . . .

“Whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, ‘He is a stranger’; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you . . . Say, ‘He is contemptible and worthless’; *but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.* Assuredly there is but one way in which to achieve what is not merely difficult but utterly against human nature: to love those who hate us, to repay their evil deeds with benefits, to return blessings for reproaches. It is that we remember not to consider men’s evil intention but to look upon the image of God in them, which cancels and effaces their transgressions, and with its beauty and dignity allures us to love and embrace.” —John Calvin, *Institutes*, I.15.4 and III.7.6

Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference

Larry Crabb, *Men & Women: Enjoying the Difference*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 150–158.

The Nature of Masculinity

When does a man feel most like a man? What makes him glad that he is a man, grateful to be alive because of the unique joys of masculinity?

Because God created us *for* relationship, because we find our reason to exist *in* relationship, and because life's deepest joys come to us *through* relationship, masculinity is most richly expressed in relationships. It is in relationship that a man achieves a satisfying sense of completion. But what is this thing we so easily refer to as “masculinity”?

Two elements are involved: *a quiet confidence* as a man moves purposefully through life, aware that what he has to give makes a good difference and *a tender sensitivity to others* that makes him willing to decisively and sacrificially involve himself with another. Consider them both.

Although God delegated authority over the earth to both the man and woman, it is difficult to escape the impression that God intended the *man* to move into the world in a way that differed from his intention for the woman. After the Fall, God's judgment on Adam introduced difficulties that affected him as he *worked in the world*. The judgment was not that he had to work, but rather that his work would not go smoothly.

Eve's judgment, on the other hand, centered on *her relationship with the man*, both as the one who would bear the couple's children and in her efforts to enjoy companionship with him (see Gen. 3:16–19).

God's judgments on both the man and the woman were neither rude nor uncaring. God's intent was to discourage Adam and Eve (and their descendants) from thinking that their lives could ever work without him and to help them realize that the full realization of joy awaits a new heaven and earth. He wanted to hedge them in, to surface a despair that would drive them back to himself.

We can assume therefore that when he judged the man and the woman, God introduced problems into the very core of their existence. For Adam, that meant struggles as *he moved into his world*. For Eve, that meant pain as *she related to Adam*.

Paul's instruction that older women should teach younger women to be “busy at home” (Titus 2:5) further suggests that the spheres of a man's and woman's responsibilities, though overlapping considerably, are in some measure distinguishable.

This thought is easily abused. No executive or businessman may use this passage to justify working long and hard at his office and letting his wife handle things at home. Nor can a pastor or missionary assume that his call to ministry frees him to do “God's business” while his wife raises the children.

God specifically warns husbands not to be so involved outside the family that they neglect responsibilities at home (1 Tim. 3:4; 1 Peter 3:7). And he makes it clear that a husband's responsibility within his home extends far beyond material provision. God directly commands the husband to love his wife according to the example of one who sacrificed all, including his position, to remove obstacles to relationship that *his bride had created* and to thereby introduce her to an intimacy they could both enjoy (Eph. 5:21–33).

Directions to the husband specifically include nourishing his wife (providing for her needs) and cherishing (tenderly handling) her according to a thought-through understanding of her sensitivities (Eph. 5:29; 1 Peter 3:7), whether it is in the tender, intimate life-generating physical relationship or in the confidence with which he approaches decisions in life. Most men will, of course, go through troublesome times of uncertainty, but as long as there is a confidence beneath the turmoil that things will sort themselves out, the sense of masculinity continues to be felt.

A woman will not, however, enjoy the company, at least not for long, of a supremely confident man who never struggles with self-doubt, whose confidence is a swaggering belief in his ability to reach self-serving goals. The successful, talented, attractive man who doesn't know how to expose his weaknesses and sensitively explore his wife's feelings will not win her appreciation. Neither macho nor wimpy describes a man.

A man is "manly" when he moves through life with a purposeful and confident involvement, when he follows a direction that he values for reasons that are bigger than himself. If that direction reflects the purposes of God, then his style of relating will not be self-consumed, driven, or pushy; it will rather reflect a growing sensitivity to others and an unhurried involvement with them that can be neither manipulated nor stopped. Indications that he is pulling appreciation or applause or confirmation from others to feed either an oversized or a starving ego will lessen the enjoyable impact of his masculinity on both himself and others.

When a man's purposes are godly, that is, when he is ambitious for God's glory and concerned with other-centered relating, he will experience a stability that anchors him through emotional ups and downs (which he will therefore be unafraid to experience) and a noble desire for tender, caring, intimate involvement with people, primarily his wife. In this involvement his wife will feel secure, conscious that she is more enjoyed and valued than his greatest achievements.

Masculinity is not so much a matter of what a man does, but that *he does it* and that he does it *for certain reasons*. Little things, for example, like rubbing your wife's neck when it is sore, will be felt as "masculine" even though another man or a woman could provide the same service for your wife, and perhaps more competently. It is the demonstrated and eager sensitivity to another's need that feels masculine to both partners when a husband rubs his wife's sore neck.

A masculine man knows, with a sense of gratitude rather than pride, that there will be impact for good as he moves into his world and that what he gives is most worthy of respect when it touches the longings of his wife's heart. Masculinity disposes a man to move decisively and compassionately into his world and toward family and friends with a joyful confidence that he can promote good purposes.

When the substance within him that defines his male identity is moving with other-centered energy, a man feels a completion and wholeness that makes selfish achievement and immoral pleasures less appealing. Nothing brings a man quite the same level of masculine pleasure as touching his wife in a way that brings her joy and confidence as a woman and that frees her to enjoy all that she is and can become.

Masculinity, I suggest, might therefore be thought of as *the satisfying awareness of the substance God has placed within a man's being that can make an enduring contribution to God's purposes in this world, and will be deeply valued by others, especially his wife, as a reliable source of wise, sensitive, compassionate, and decisive involvement.*

The Nature of Femininity

Womanhood must never be defined in a frivolous way that makes it necessarily “unfeminine” to be fully competent and highly respected as a physician, corporate executive, or biblical scholar. Nor should femininity be somehow essentially connected to cooking, sensual clothing, or a sweet, subservient demeanor. Womanhood, like manhood, has more to do with a woman’s attitude toward herself and others as she involves herself in relationships.

A godly woman is more interested in giving whatever she has to meet someone’s need than in developing her talents, and she is aware that her uniquely feminine contribution depends more than anything else on matters within her heart that affect her style of relating.

I have suggested that a man experiences himself as masculine when he knows that his very substance is a gift from God moving confidently in the lives of others. A woman feels most uniquely feminine when she enjoys her capacity to strengthen relationships and to encourage others by inviting them to enjoy the blessings of relationship.

A woman is less centrally focused on *achievement* as a means for feeling complete (although a graduating female medical student may be just as happy to finish school as a graduating male). More, she tends to value giving something of herself to nourish relationships and deepen attachments. Her focus is less on *going into the world* and more on *entering a relational network*.

Researcher Carol Gilligan, in arguing her central thesis that women approach life differently than men, reported on a series of interviews with highly successful professional women:

“In response to the request to describe themselves, all of the women describe a relationship, depicting their identity *in* the connection of future mother, present wife, adopted child, or past lover. These highly successful women do not mention their academic and professional distinctions in the context of describing themselves. If anything, they regard their professional activities as jeopardizing their own sense of themselves Identity is defined in the context of relationship.”³

She goes on to say that men see themselves more as separate individuals, achieving something, than as persons whose identity is found in relational attachments. “Instead of attachment, individual achievement rivets the male imagination.”⁴

The ideas of *separateness* and *achievement* and *entering* seem more rooted in the masculine nature while *involvement* and *attachment* and *invitation* belong more clearly to feminine identity.

I recently received a letter from a husband and wife who wrote to tell me about how they were growing and maturing. The different emphasis in each of their comments illustrates my point. In part of her letter, the woman wrote:

“I see two major things now that are being built upon that good foundation [past growth]: The first is that I am able to experience and own my depravity in wonderful, painful ways that are causing true repentance and brokenness. Though the reality of my own wretchedness is excruciating, I’m often somehow aware in the pain of a thrill that I am where I am. The second is a great desire *to stand with my arms outstretched, beckoning others to life* and because I’ve learned and experienced truth and reality I can say with confidence ‘Come on friends, come away from death, choose life!’ What a privilege—what a high calling (emphasis mine).”

Her husband, in the same letter, expressed himself differently, focusing more on his ministry:

“I believe that *we are on the cutting edge and are presenting the gospel* in a profoundly relevant way. I write this with humility and thankfulness as I see a quietly powerful revolution happening in the lives of people as they turn from useless idols to pursue the living God. All of this is precious to me* (emphasis mine).”

The difference is noteworthy. The woman sees herself as *inviting others* to taste the Lord through her. The man sees himself as *moving toward others* with powerful impact. I do not think it stretches things too far to regard *physical* sexuality as a wonderful picture of *personal* sexuality: men feel complete as they strongly enter; women feel enjoyed as they warmly invite.

Femininity, at its core, might therefore be thought of as the secure awareness of the substance God has placed within a woman’s being that enables her to confidently and warmly invite others into relationship with God and with herself, knowing that there is something in each relationship to be wonderfully enjoyed.

These thoughts about masculinity and femininity are neither precise enough to qualify as definitions nor complete enough to bear direct implications for all the questions about male-female relationships. They do, however, say enough to carry the discussion further.

*In this personal communication from friends, it is worthwhile to note that the wife experienced her husband as a man because of his strong involvement with his work and his vulnerable participation in her life. She said, “You would want to worship if you could see him now. It’s as if the wonderful qualities God placed within him are being freed and he’s just blossoming as a human being, as a man. We’re not afraid of each other anymore, so there’s wonderful freedom to be mirrors for each other and therefore to be active participants in the growth of each other’s soul.”

Week 2

THE INTERPRETATION WAR

The Interpretation War

Introduction

- Discussion from readings
- The practice of the spiritual discipline of solitude

A Complex Problem (Why?)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

The Nature and Function of Deceit—Luke 4:1–13

1. The timing
2. Two ways lies function for us in a Christian disguise

Surrender

Prove/Defend

Lie

3. The added danger of projection of our lie on to others

Winning the War with the Truth of the Gospel

1. Make sure performance flows from position (indicatives then imperatives).

Position

Performance

“There is a great gulf between the understanding that God accepts us because of our efforts and the understanding that God accepts us because of what Jesus has done. Religion operates on the principle, ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.’ But the operating principle of the gospel is ‘I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.’ ”

—Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, (New York: Dutton, 2008), 179–180.

2. Repent and believe the gospel.

Renounce your inmost lie or condemning thought and the strategies you have come up with through works; *preach* the gospel to yourself (i.e., muscles), and trust it is true.

- 2 Corinthians 10:4–5
- Psalm 42:5

“You have to take yourself in hand. . . . You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself and say to yourself, ‘Hope thou in God’—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way.” —Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 21.

3. Use questions of clarification to avoid unfair projections on others.

4. Pray for loved ones through an interpretation process in the vacuum of silence and vulnerability of wounds caused by painful events.

For Next Week

For your practice of the spiritual discipline of solitude (Word and prayer):

1. Ask God to show you your central condemning thought (core lie).

Nine Basic Fears of Nine Personality Types (Enneagram)

1. I am corrupt, evil, or defective.
 2. I am unworthy of being loved.
 3. I am worthless.
 4. I am unknown and personally insignificant.
 5. I am useless, helpless, and incapable.
 6. I am without support and guidance.
 7. I am deprived and hurting.
 8. I am a victim and controlled by others.
 9. I am voiceless and anxious.
2. When are you usually attacked with it by evil?
 3. Can you see how it has functioned for you?
 4. What foolish strategies have you come up with to prove you are not what evil says you are?
 5. In what ways have you surrendered to evil's identity along the way?
 6. Why do we need the gospel each moment throughout our days?

Readings

Cherishing Lies About Our Identity

Your identity in Christ is foundational for your calling to Christ. Someone might even challenge your sense of identity as a ministry leader and ask, "Who do you think you are?" The number one cause of all the ills that ministry leaders face may be traced to the leader embracing a lie in the core of his being that is directly opposed to the truth God speaks of his identity; namely, the gospel.

This is why the Father reminded Jesus of his true identity before the ministry-start, and why evil's first attack was against Jesus' sense of identity. Before Jesus began his ministry, the Father clearly reminded his Son of his true identity: "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased." Immediately afterwards Satan attacked Jesus' true identity as the best strategic way to destroy his ministry. "If you are the Son of God," Satan said two times in the temptation of Christ.

Every ministry leader is bombarded with lies about his or her identity. “I am unwanted,” one believes. Another believes, “I am worthless.” Of course, evil strikes when the leader is at her most vulnerable moment. After Satan attacked Jesus in the wilderness when he was tired and hungry, it says, “Satan left for a more *opportune* time.” The “opportune time” is when the leader is most vulnerable.

Christian leaders are vulnerable to evil. Lies annoy a ministry leader. Lies tempt him to believe that others think ill of him, and to believe contemptuous thoughts about himself. Leaders may discover they were most effective at the times when they felt the worst about who they are. All the leader’s efforts to improve his ministry performance often make matters worst because the attack is against the gospel-given identity of the leader, not his performance per se.

I wish the solutions were as simple as telling leaders to stop believing lies about themselves, and to start believing the truth about who they are in Christ. Simply repeat a hundred times: “I am not a failure, I am more than a conqueror.” Say, “I am not unwanted, I am chosen to be adopted.” The problem is that we are not morally neutral in choosing truth over lies. We are already overly bent towards deceit, even deeply committed to deceit. The reason we rarely make it on sheer intellectual and ideological choices and changes is that we cherish lies and the false identities that have been functioning for us as ministry leaders for years in a way that we even attempt to serve God autonomously. We struggle to believe the kindest and sweetest words of affirmation and love from God about our identity in Christ before we go attempt to persuade others that it is true for them.

Ask God’s Spirit of truth to tell you the lie or central condemning thought that you have come to believe about yourself. What is the constant, annoying, and condemning message about you that keeps you from enjoying your calling? Ask God how it has functioned for you over the years? How has it impacted others like your family and friends.

When Leaders Lose Effectiveness and Faith in the Gospel

How sad to lose ourselves in an attempt to prove we are someone we are not through gospel-ministry service! Absurdity riddles spiritual leaders because evil’s interpretations of us go undetected.

In our most vulnerable moments in life, evil whispers the reason why one experiences tragedy and lack of fulfillment in serving God; “It was your fault! You are such a [disappointment].” While we make autonomous commitments to avoid such pain again, we easily redouble our efforts to eliminate the condemning false identity that interpreted us in that moment. If we embrace the lie and the autonomous way to prove one is not a disappointment, then our Christian service and spiritual disciplines often become the means to get what we already have in the gospel. Such an effort, however, may lead to burnout and the loss of the leader’s effectiveness in service.

Efforts, which are *not* motivated by *God’s* gracious interpretation of us, deny of the truth and misuse spiritual disciplines. For God declares his ministry leader a delight, but only for the meritorious efforts of Christ Jesus. Since Christ won the Father’s pleasure in us as a gift, which we receive by faith, all works to overcome evil’s lies, wounds, or accusations in any other way are exercises in absurdity.

People in our lives suffer when a leader embraces a false identity associated with a wound. If he embraces the lie that he is a disappointment, then he is more likely to project unfairly on to others that they believe he is a disappointment. Soon his words are spoken out of wrongly interpreted wounds, causing pain to spread throughout his community.

I've counseled ministry leaders who have tried for years to overcome Satan's lies by their own efforts. Sometimes the pressure on their performance drove them to excessive righteousness (Ecclesiastes 7:16), and other times they simply surrendered to the lie. When we surrender to a false identity, we agree with evil that a lie is true and the gospel is not. Despair is the loss of confidence that the gospel is true. Absurdity! Meaninglessness!

Until we get sick and tired of the lie and our futile efforts to overcome evil's counterfeit identity of us, we'll not welcome what the highest court in heaven declares of us; namely, that we are not only pardoned and righteous in God's sight but chosen as his beloved children.

Solitude is the way to receive good news again, not in more service for God. It is the place of greatest struggle where our souls may come out from hiding and encounter God's voice once more. There, in his presence, one may hear: "You are my son in whom I adore with delight for Christ's sake." Do you believe the truth about you?

"If I am seeking to get identity from you, I will watch you too closely, listen to you too intently, and need you too fundamentally. I will ride the roller coaster of your best and worst moments and everything in between. And because I am watching you too closely, I will become acutely aware of your weaknesses and failures. I will become overly critical, frustrated, disappointed, hopeless, and angry. I will be angry not because you are a sinner but because you have failed to deliver the one thing I seek from you: identity. But none of us will ever get the well-being that comes from knowing who we are from our relationships. Instead we will be left with damaged relationships filled with hurt, frustration, and anger." —Paul David Tripp

"Here is something, which is truly important, and something which is basic and fundamental to the whole Christian position. The order in which these things are put is absolutely vital. The apostle does not ask us to do anything until he has first of all emphasized and repeated what God has done for us in Christ.

"How often have men given the impression that to be Christian means that you display in your life a kind of general belief of faith, and then you add to it virtue and knowledge and charity! To them the Christian message is an exhortation to us to live a certain type of life, and an exhortation to put these things into practice.

"But that is an utter travesty of the gospel. The Christian gospel in the first instance *does not ask us to do anything*. It first of all proclaims and announces to us what *God has done for us*.

"The first statement of the gospel is not an exhortation to action or to conduct and behavior. Before man is called upon *to do* anything, he must have *received* something. Before God calls upon a man to put anything into practice, he has made it possible for man to put it into practice." —D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Expository Sermons on Second Peter*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1983), 23–24.

The Weight of Glory

C. S. Lewis, Preached originally as a sermon in the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, on June 8, 1942: published in *THEOLOGY*, November, 1941, and by the S.P.C.K, 1942.

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation. There is also a third case, which is more complicated. An enjoyment of Greek poetry is certainly a proper, and not a mercenary, reward for learning Greek; but only those who have reached the stage of enjoying Greek poetry can tell from their own experience that this is so. The schoolboy beginning Greek grammar cannot look forward to his adult enjoyment of Sophocles as a lover looks forward to marriage or a general to victory. He has to begin by working for marks, or to escape punishment, or to please his parents, or, at best, in the hope of a future good which he cannot at present imagine or desire. His position, therefore, bears a certain resemblance to that of the mercenary; the reward he is going to get will, in actual fact, be a natural or proper reward, but he will not know that till he has got it. Of course, he gets it gradually; enjoyment creeps in upon the mere drudgery, and nobody could point to a day or an hour when the one ceased and the other began. But it is just in so far as he approaches the reward that he becomes able to desire it for its own sake; indeed, the power of so desiring it is itself a preliminary reward.

The Christian, in relation to heaven, is in much the same position as this schoolboy. Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire the ultimate reward. Just in proportion as the desire grows, our fear lest it should be a mercenary desire will die away and finally be recognized as an absurdity. But probably this will not, for most of us, happen in a day; poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.

But there is one other important similarity between the schoolboy and ourselves. If he is an imaginative boy he will, quite probably, be revelling in the English poets and romancers suitable to his age some time before he begins to suspect that Greek grammar is going to lead him to more and more enjoyments of this same sort. He may even be neglecting his Greek to read Shelley and Swinburne in secret. In other words, the desire which Greek is really going to gratify already exists in him and is attached to objects which seem to him quite unconnected with Xenophon and the verbs in $\mu\iota$. Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object. And this, I think, is just what we find. No doubt there is one point in which my analogy of the schoolboy breaks down. The English poetry which he reads when he ought to be doing Greek exercises may be just as good as the Greek poetry to which the exercises are leading him, so that in fixing on Milton instead of journeying on to Aeschylus his desire is not embracing a false object. But our case is very different. If a transtemporal, transfinite good is our real destiny, then any other good on which our desire fixes must be in some degree fallacious, must bear at best only a symbolical relation to what will truly satisfy.

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking

enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies of Progress or Creative Evolution themselves bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere. When they want to convince you that earth is your home, notice how they set about it. They begin by trying to persuade you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile in earth as it is. Next, they tell you that this fortunate event is still a good way off in the future, thus giving a sop to your knowledge that the fatherland is not here and now. Finally, lest your longing for the transtemporal should awake and spoil the whole affair, they use any rhetoric that comes to hand to keep out of your mind the recollection that even if all the happiness they promised could come to man on earth, yet still each generation would lose it by death, including the last generation of all, and the whole story would be nothing, not even a story, for ever and ever. Hence all the nonsense that Mr. Shaw puts into the final speech of Lilith, and Bergson's remark that the *élan vital* is capable of surmounting all obstacles, perhaps even death—as if we could believe that any social or biological development on this planet will delay the senility of the sun or reverse the second law of thermodynamics.

Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. But is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any satisfaction to it? “Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread.” But I think it may be urged that this misses the point. A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.

Here, then, is the desire, still wandering and uncertain of its object and still largely unable to see that object in the direction where it really lies. Our sacred books give us some account of the object. It is, of course, a symbolical account. Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience. The scriptural picture of heaven is therefore just as symbolical as the picture which our desire, unaided, invents for itself; heaven is not really full of jewelry any more than it is really the beauty of Nature, or a fine piece of music. The difference is that the scriptural imagery has authority. It comes to us from writers who were closer to God than we, and it has stood the test of Christian experience down the centuries. The natural appeal of this authoritative imagery is to me, at first, very small. At first sight it chills, rather than awakes, my desire. And that is just what I ought to expect. If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I must expect it to be less immediately attractive than “my own stuff.” Sophocles at first seems dull and cold to the boy who has only reached Shelley. If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.

The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have “glory”; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally, that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple. The first question I ask about these promises is: “Why any of them except the first?” Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only. I think the answer turns again on the nature of symbols. For though it may escape our notice at first glance, yet it is true that any conception of being with Christ which most of us can now form will be not very much less symbolical than the other promises; for it will smuggle in ideas of proximity in space and loving conversation as we now understand conversation, and it will probably concentrate on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of his deity. And, in fact, we find that those Christians who attend solely to this first promise always do fill it up with very earthly imagery indeed—in fact, with hymeneal or erotic imagery. I am not for a moment condemning such imagery. I heartily wish I could enter into it more deeply than I do, and pray that I yet shall. But my point is that this also is only a symbol, like the reality in some respects, but unlike it in others, and therefore needs correction from the different symbols in the other promises. The variation of the promises does not mean that anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a person, and lest we should imagine the joy of his presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and monotony, a dozen changing images, correcting and relieving each other, are supplied.

I turn next to the idea of glory. There is no getting away from the fact that this idea is very prominent in the New Testament and in early Christian writings. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendour like the sun and stars. All this makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy I am a typical modern. Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation” by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but in a good child—as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise

from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex forever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; "it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign." I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how he thinks of us. It is written that we shall "stand before" him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

And now notice what is happening. If I had rejected the authoritative and scriptural image of glory and stuck obstinately to the vague desire which was, at the outset, my only pointer to heaven, I could have seen no connexion at all between that desire and the Christian promise. But now, having followed up what seemed puzzling and repellent in the sacred books, I find, to my great surprise, looking back, that the connexion is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed. By ceasing for a moment to consider my own wants I have begun to learn better what I really wanted. When I attempted, a few minutes ago, to describe our spiritual longings, I was omitting one of their most curious characteristics. We usually notice it just as the moment of vision dies away, as the music ends or as the landscape loses the celestial light. What we feel then has been well described by Keats as "the journey homeward to habitual self." You know what I mean. For a few minutes we have had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that it is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken into the dance. We may go when we please, we may stay if we can: "Nobody marks us." A scientist may reply that since most of the things we call beautiful are inanimate, it is not very surprising that they take no notice of us. That, of course, is true. It is not the physical objects that I am speaking of, but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment the messengers. And part of the bitterness which mixes with the sweetness of that message is due

to the fact that it so seldom seems to be a message intended for us but rather something we have overheard. By bitterness I mean pain, not resentment. We should hardly dare to ask that any notice be taken of ourselves. But we pine. The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being “noticed” by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St. Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know him, but that they will be known by him (1 Cor. viii. 3). It is a strange promise. Does not God know all things at all times? But it is dreadfully reechoed in another passage of the New Testament. There we are warned that it may happen to any one of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: “I never knew you. Depart from Me.” In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely *outside*—repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored. On the other hand, we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged. We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities. Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.

And this brings me to the other sense of glory—glory as brightness, splendour, luminosity. We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. I think I begin to see what it means. In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty grace, and power of which Nature is the image. That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that “beauty born of murmuring sound” will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on* the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get in. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience

as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.

And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life. At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind, and still more the body, receives life from him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when he made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will "flow over" into the glorified body. In the light of our present specialized and depraved appetites we cannot imagine this *torrens voluptatis*, and I warn everyone seriously not to try. But it must be mentioned, to drive out thoughts even more misleading—thoughts that what is saved is a mere ghost, or that the risen body lives in numb insensibility. The body was made for the Lord, and these dismal fancies are wide of the mark.

Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside. The following him is, of course, the essential point. That being so, it may be asked what practical use there is in the speculations which I have been indulging. I can think of at least one such use. It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory himself, is truly hidden.

Week 3

THE GOSPEL PART I—JUSTIFICATION

The Gospel Part 1—Justification

Introduction

- Discussion of readings
- Applications from previous week

There is nothing more than the gospel, but there is a lot more of it!

Why Christians Never Stop Needing the Gospel: Justification

“I am justified.”

Definition

Justified by grace alone through faith

- Pardoned of all my sins
- Counted as righteous in his sight
- But only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to me
- And received by faith alone

Scriptural Support

- Acts 13:38–39
- Romans 3:22–28, 4:5, 5:1, 8:1
- 2 Corinthians 5:19–21
- Galatians 2:16
- Philippians 3:9

Why This Is so Practical on My Best and Worst Days

“The gospel also reminds me that my righteous standing with God always holds firm regardless of my performance, because my standing is based solely on the work of Jesus and not mine. *On my worst days* of sin and failure the gospel encourages me with God’s unrelenting grace toward me. *On my best days* of victory and usefulness, the gospel keeps me relating to God solely on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness and not mine.

—Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, 20 (italics mine)

“If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious and pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please him through our works, then all [efforts to comply to the Law] is pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false savior.

—Martin Luther on The First Commandment

“The truth of the gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine . . . Most necessary is it that we know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.”

—Martin Luther on Galatians 2:14ff

Memorize

“I am pardoned of all my sins and accepted as righteous in his sight, but only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to me and received by faith alone.”

For Next Week

Justification—The Puritans at Westminster Abbey in 1643

1. Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.
2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.
3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those who are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, in as much as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice, and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.
4. God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.
5. God doth continue to forgive the sins of those who are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God's fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of his countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance.
6. The justification of believers under the Old Testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the New Testament.

Affirmations and Denials on the Gospel and Sanctification

—*Gospel Reformation Network, www.gospelreformation.net*

Article I—Legalism is a Real Problem

- We affirm that legalism is a dangerous problem that the church must always address.
- We deny that legalism is the primary enemy of the gospel to the exclusion of spiritual bondage, moral rebellion, and a love for sin.

Article II—The Gospel and Total Depravity

- We affirm that unregenerate man, being totally depraved, is unable to obey or please God unto salvation.
- We deny that the believer, being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, remains unable to obey and please God, by grace and in Christ.

Article III—The Gospel Includes Sanctification

- We affirm that the gospel provides salvation for the whole man, including man's need for both imputed and imparted righteousness.
- We deny that the gospel provides freedom from the guilt of sin in justification without deliverance from the power of sin in regeneration and liberation from the practice of sin in sanctification.

Article IV—Union with Christ and Sanctification

- We affirm that both justification and sanctification are distinct, necessary, inseparable, and simultaneous graces of union with Christ through faith.
- We deny that sanctification flows directly from justification, or that the transformative elements of salvation are mere consequences of the forensic elements.

Article V—Gratitude and Motivation

- We affirm that gratitude for justification is a powerful motivation for growth in holiness.
- We deny that gratitude for justification is the only valid motivation for holiness, making all other motivations illegitimate or legalistic.

Article VI—Good Works Not Merit

- We affirm that believers are not under the Law as a covenant of works, where the believer is required to merit his or her own righteousness before God.
- We deny that Christ has freed the Christian from the moral Law as the standard of Christian living.

Article VII—Adoption and Sanctification

- We affirm that through the finished work of Christ believers are adopted by God as sons and now relate to God as their loving heavenly Father.
- We deny that our adoption precludes God's fatherly displeasure when his children rebel, or that God's fatherly love prevents him from disciplining Christians who stray from the path of righteousness.

Article VIII—Effort and Sanctification

- We affirm that God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-empowered effort to put off sin and put on righteousness is necessary for Christian growth in grace.
- We deny that all practical effort in sanctification is moralistic, legalistic, or that the only effort required for growth is that Christians remember, revisit, and rediscover their justification.

Article IX—Faith and Sanctification

- We affirm that growth in the Christian life comes through faith, which believes and acts on the promises of God in the Scriptures.
- We deny that faith is wholly passive in sanctification or separated from good works in the same sense that justification is by faith alone.

Article X—Preaching the Imperatives

- We affirm that faithful preaching of the Law for use in the Christian life must always be done in the context of God's provision through the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- We deny that preaching the Scripture's indicatives without the imperatives is a healthy model for Christian ministry because such preaching fails to conform to the pattern seen in Scripture and is dangerous to the life and ministry of the church.

Article XI—Sanctification and Assurance

- We affirm that Christians gain assurance of salvation by cherishing the promise of the gospel and by the fruit of the Spirit's work in the believer's life.
- We deny that assurance gained through growth in godliness amounts to a performance-based religion or necessitates an unwholesome spiritual pride.

Article XII—Sanctification and Victory

- We affirm that Christians can and should experience victories over sin, however limited and partial, and that these victories bring glory to God and bear testimony to the power of his grace.
- We deny that rejoicing in victories over sin amounts to spiritual pride or performance religion, although Christians may and sometimes do sin in this way.

Week 4

THE GOSPEL PART II—ADOPTION

The Gospel Part II—Adoption

Introduction

- Discussion of readings
- Applications from previous week

There is nothing more than the gospel, but there is a lot more of it!

Why Christians Never Stop Needing the Gospel: Adoption

“I am chosen to be adopted by God.”

Definition

Adoption is an act of God’s free grace to choose me in love to be his son; to have his name put on me; to give his Spirit to me; to care for me as a perfect Father; to grant me every privilege of a son; to make me an heir of all that he promises, and a fellow heir with Jesus Christ in glory.

Scriptural Support

- Ephesians 1:3–6
- John 1:12
- 1 John 3:1
- Galatians 4:4–6
- Psalm 103:13
- Hebrews 6:12

Basics

When God considered how to put on display his glory in the plan of salvation of sinners, his central idea and imagery was the rescuing of orphans to the praise of his glorious grace. Therefore he commissions us to not hide this or act any more like orphans.

Discussion: When do we act like an orphan, and not like we are; namely, his sons/daughters? When have you felt most like an orphan?

- **The Father's legal act**
- **The Son's costly share**
- **The Spirit's experiential assurance**

The Patriot: The little girl's first word, "Daddy!"

Why This Is So Practical When It Comes to Obedience

To be motivated by the threats of the Law is sub-Christian.

"Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful Father, however small, rude, and imperfect these may be."
—John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.4

"[In] their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind." —Puritan Divines of Westminster

"If the commandment can be done through fear of penalty and not through love of righteousness, it is done in the temper of slavery Not freedom—and therefore it is not done at all."
—St. Augustine, *The Spirit and The Letter*

"The terrors of the Law and God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view.
—Augustus Toplady, "A Debtor of Mercy Alone"

"Even the infliction of wrath will not create the hatred of sin; it will incite to greater love of sin and enmity against God." —John Murray

"While I regarded God as a tyrant I thought my sin a trifle; but when I knew him to be my Father, then I mourned that I could ever have kicked against him. When I thought God was hard, I found it easy to sin; but when I found God so kind, so good, so overflowing with compassion, I smote upon my breast to think that I could ever have rebelled against one who loved me so, and sought my good." —Charles H. Spurgeon, *Repentance after Conversion*, Sermon, No. 2419, June 12, 1887

Are you acting like an orphan or a child?

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| Do you typically have a feeling God is disappointed with your life? Feel you are unable to meet his demands for your life? Do you find yourself working under an unending sense of obligation? | Do you feel the Father's sense of please and delight for you? |
| Do you find that you live by certain man-made rules, expecting yourself and others to obey? Do you measure maturity by those rules? | Do you measure your obedience by the life of Jesus Christ? Are you able to fully comprehend that the demand has been satisfied? |
| Do you find that you are insecure about your identity, appearance, reputation? | Do you find that you do not strive to find approval with others, but are at peace with both your flaws and your talents and personality? |
| Do you serve out of a personal need for achievement so as to impress God and others, or have no motivation to serve at all? | Do you have a heart that is motivated to serve by a deep gratitude for being unconditionally loved and accepted by the Father? |
| Do you find you are motivated to have daily Bible study and prayer out of duty to earn God's favor or do you have no motivation at all? | Do you find delight in Bible study and find pleasure in prayer as you come to know the Father's love in a personal relationship? |
| Do you believe you "must" be holy to have God's favor, thus have an increasing sense of shame and guilt when you are not perfect? | Do you "desire to" be holy; not wanting anything to hinder an intimate relationship with the Father? |
| Do you have an ongoing sense of self rejection from comparing yourself to others? | Do you have an ongoing sense of seeing yourself from a positive perspective and affirmed because you know you have such value in the Father's eyes? |
| Do you seek comfort, or relief, through addictions, find ways to escape from life, busyness, or intense religious through activities? | Do you seek comfort and find rest in the Father's presence and love? |
| Do you compete with others by boasting or out performing them? Do you have rivalries, or have jealousy towards other's success and position? | Do you find you have humility and unity as you value others and are able to rejoice in their success and position? |
| Do you typically accuse and expose others in order to make yourself look good by making others look bad? | Are you motivated by love to seek and restore others in a spirit of love and gentleness? |
| Do you see authority as a source of pain; distrustful of them, not having an attitude of submission? | Do you find you have a respectful, honoring attitude towards authority, viewing them as ministers of the Father used for good in your life? |
| Do you have difficulty receiving admonition? Do you feel you must be right? Do you easily get your feelings hurt and close your heart to discipline or self awareness? | Do you see the Father's gift in admonition, viewing it as a blessing and needed in your life so that your faults and weaknesses are exposed and put to death? |

Are you acting like a child or an orphan?

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| Do you find that you are always trying to fix yourself or others? | Do you sense the ongoing affirmation of being loved, forgiven, and totally accepted because Christ's merit really clothes you? |
| Do you find yourself to be guarded and distant depending on circumstances, i.e., guarded unless other's performance allows you to seek out and meet your own needs? | Do others find you to be open, patient, and affectionate as you lay your life and agendas down in order to meet the needs of others? |
| Do you believe that God's presence is conditional and distant? | Do you believe that the Father's presence is close and intimate? |
| Do you feel an ongoing sense of being in bondage? | Do you feel an ongoing sense of being free? |
| Do you approach God as a servant or slave? | Do you approach the Father as a son or daughter? |
| Do you battle with spiritual ambition, an earnest desire for some spiritual achievement and distinction and the willingness to strive for it, or a desire to be seen and counted among the mature? | Do you daily experience the Father's unconditional love and acceptance and then be sent as a representative of his love to family and others? |
| Do you typically fight for what you can get? | Do you experience rest knowing that Jesus Christ has released the Father's good gifts and inheritance for you? |

Sonship Ministries

Week 5

THE GOSPEL PART III— DEFINITIVE SANCTIFICATION

The Gospel Part III— Definitive Sanctification

Introduction

- Discussion of readings
- Applications from previous week

There is nothing more than the gospel, but there is a lot more of it! (Part III)

Why Christians Never Stop Needing the Gospel: Sanctified

“I am a saint.”

Definition

Definitively sanctified by the Holy Spirit: a one-time work with ongoing results

- The radical, once-for-all and irreversible breach with one’s sinful nature (Definitive—Progressive—Consummate).
- The Christian is a saint, a holy one. (Sin’s Penalty—Sin’s Power—Sin’s Presence)
- It is not simply positional holiness that is envisioned: it is a real existential breach with the reign and mastery of sin.

Scriptural Support

- Romans 6:2, 6, 18
- Romans 7:4-6
- 1 Peter 2:24
- 1 Peter 4:1-2
- Acts 26:18
- 1 Corinthians 1:2
- 1 Corinthians 6:11

Why This Is So Practical for the Christian Leader

- This is important when temptation occurs, and one's former sinful ways seem reasonable and strong.
- It is vital that the Christian not see himself or herself as a victim of one's old nature. (Explain victim-mentality in contemporary culture.)
- Experiential power is exercised over sin with biblical weaponry and authority.

For Next Week

Definitive Sanctification

Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), pp. 756-759.

Sanctification is generally thought of as a process, and there is certainly a sense in which it is. But the New Testament often represents the Christian as one who *has been sanctified*, and therefore as one who has been definitively constituted in some way and on some basis *holy* (see Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Eph. 5:26; note the perfect tense of **ἀγιάζω**, **hagiazō** in the first three references and the aorist tense in the last two references, as well as the numerous instances where Christians are called “saints” or “holy ones”).

The Biblical Data

Additional evidence for God's definitive sanctification of the believer includes:

- **Romans 6:2, 6:** “We died [**ἀπεθάνομεν**, **apethanomen**] to sin . . . the old man was crucified [**συνεσταυρώθη**, **synestaurōthē**] [with him].”
- **Romans 6:18:** “You have been set free [**ἐλευθερωθέντες**, **eleutherōthentes**] from sin and have become slaves [**ἐδουλώθητε**, **edoulōthete**] to righteousness.”
- **Romans 7:4–6:** “You also were made to die [**ἐθανατώθητε**, **ethanatōthēte**] to the law . . . we were [**ἡμεν**, **ēmen**] in the flesh . . . but now we have been released [**κατηργήθημεν**, **katērgēthēmen**] from the law, having died [**ἀποθανόντες**, **apothanontes**] to that by which we were bound.”
- **1 Peter 2:24:** “That we, having died [**ἀπογενόμενοι**, **apogenomenoi**] to sins, might live to righteousness.”
- **1 Peter 4:1–2:** “Therefore, since Christ suffered [**παθόντος**, **pathontos**] in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, because he who has suffered [**ὁ παθὼν**, **ho pathōn**] in the flesh [a reference to the Christian who “suffered in the flesh” when Christ “suffered in the flesh”] is done with sin, with the result that no longer does he live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God.”

The Meaning of These Affirmations

Through its language of death and of liberation from slavery, this biblical material depicts a radical contrast between the believer's pre-Christian existence and the life he lives as a Christian. It affirms that every Christian is definitively sanctified the moment he trusts in Christ (see Acts 26:18—"those having been sanctified by faith which is in me"). He died *to* sin and he has been liberated *from* sin.⁶⁷ Accordingly, the Scriptures speak of every Christian as a "saint" or "holy one" (ὁ ἅγιος, **ho hagios**; see, e.g., Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).

This sustained contrast can only mean that for the Christian there exists "a cleavage, a breach, a translation as really and decisively true in the sphere of moral and religious relationship as in the ordinary experience of death. There is a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death. . . . In respect of every criterion by which moral and spiritual life is to be assessed, there is absolute differentiation. This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provisions of grace."⁶⁸

The Ground of the Christian's Breach with Sin

Just as the ground of the Christian's justification is Christ's imputed obedience, which saving benefit every Christian receives the moment he becomes a partaker of Christ through faith, so also the ground of the Christian's definitive sanctification is his real spiritual union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–14; 2 Cor. 5:14–15), into which saving union every Christian is *actually* brought the moment he becomes a partaker of Christ through faith. In other words, not only is the Christian accounted by God as righteous vis-à-vis the law, he is also *constituted holy* by God vis-à-vis the power and mastery of sin. It is not simply *positional* holiness that is envisioned by definitive sanctification: it is a real *existential* breach with the reign and mastery of sin, which breach is created by the Christian's actual spiritual union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and which is as decisive and definite as are Christ's death and resurrection. Murray speaks of the significance of the vital spiritual union between Christ and the believer for his definitive sanctification:

So intimate is the union between Christ and his people, that they were partakers with him in [his death and resurrection], and therefore died to sin, rose with Christ in the power of his resurrection, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life . . . the decisive and definitive breach with sin that occurs at the inception of Christian life is one necessitated by the fact that the death of Christ was decisive and definitive. It is just because we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of Christ's death on the tree that we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer has died to sin and no longer lives under its dominion. Sin no longer lords it over him. To equivocate here is to assail the definitiveness of Christ's death. Likewise the decisive and definitive entrance upon newness of life in the case of every believer is required by the fact that the Resurrection of Christ was decisive and definitive. As we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of the Resurrection, so we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed, and that, as a new man in Christ Jesus, he serves God in the newness which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of whom he has become the habitation and his body the temple.⁶⁹

Summary of the Doctrine

The doctrine of definitive sanctification does not mean that the Christian actually achieves, personally and existentially, sinless perfection the moment he trusts Christ; this would leave no room for progressive sanctification. Besides, entire sanctification awaits the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23). And the Christian who says he has no sin is deceiving himself and the truth is not in him (1 John 1:8). But what it does mean is that every Christian, the moment he becomes a Christian, by virtue of his union with Christ, is instantly constituted a “saint” and enters into a new relationship with respect to the former reign of sin in his life and with God himself, in which new relationship he ceases to be a slave to sin and becomes a servant of Christ and of God. And the Christian is to take this breach with sin, constituted by his union with Christ, as seriously as God does and stop “presenting the members of his body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness” and start “presenting himself to God as one alive from the dead, and his members as instruments [or servants] of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:13, 19). He has Paul’s own assurance that “sin will not lord it over him” (Rom. 6:14).

67. See the exodus redemption, by which the people of God were delivered from Egypt once for all and completely. This exodus event is the Old Testament soil in which the New Testament imagery of liberation from sin is rooted.
68. Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” in *Collected Writings*, 2:279–80.
69. *Ibid.*, 2:289, 293.

“A glance at Christ will save, but it is the gazing at Christ that sanctifies.” —R. M. M'Cheyne

Week 6

SHARING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Sharing Our Identity in Christ

Type out your identity in Christ using the following template.

My name is _____ (full name). I am the son of _____, the grandson of _____ and _____ (give brief explanation). I am the husband/wife of _____ and the father/mother of _____.

I am made in the image of God, which means I am _____. I am a fallen image bearer too, and therefore a “glorious ruin.”

I am a man/woman, and not a woman/man, which means my glory as a man/woman is expressed by _____. I am a broken man/woman, which means the curse in Genesis 3 was meant to make me long for another man (Jesus) to save and change me into his likeness. My brokenness is seen in the way I _____.

I renounce my core lie and Satan’s condemning thought that I am _____, and I renounce my foolish and autonomous strategies to overcome this lie—also my surrender to this lie from time to time. These foolish strategies, which did and do not work, are _____.

I am pardoned of all my sins and declared righteous in God’s sight, but only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to me and received by faith alone, which means I am justified.

I am the son of God the Father, who chose me in love to be adopted into his family through Jesus. And I cry out for intimacy with him through the Holy Spirit; saying, “Abba! Father!”

I am a saint, a holy one, a consecrated man/woman for holiness of life and calling. I am anointed with the Holy Spirit and gifted with spiritual gifts of love, power, and effective service in all of life and every relationship. I am a new creature in Christ, and declare war with my old, sinful nature in the irreconcilable war that lasts until heaven (definitively sanctified).

Sample

Name and Genealogy

I am Robert Davis Smart. Robert means “man of renown,” Davis is after Uncle Len, and the Smarts were from Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland. I have a ceaseless generational flow of preachers from my great-grandfather back to the 1600s in Scotland to the 1900s in Vermont where my grandfather was a preacher’s kid. I am a descendant of three members of the Mayflower, yet my recent genealogy includes an uncle and aunt addicted to alcohol. I grew up the youngest of six along Lake Michigan, and came to faith in Christ my last year at Purdue University.

Image, Gender, and Brokenness

I am a glorious ruin. I bear God’s glory as a man designed to penetrate his creation and lead his people as a pastor, my family as a husband, father, and grandfather, and all peoples as a preacher, writer, and missionary with tender strength in order to give the gospel, cultivate a culture of grace, and leave a legacy for his glory. I am a broken man, who is marred by a constant sense of inadequacy, an arrogant commitment to autonomy, and a deceitful heart that believes Satan’s lie that I am unwanted.

Renouncing Lie and Foolish Strategies

I renounce the lie that I am unwanted and mistreated, along with my foolish strategies of self-hatred and pleas for rescue. I preach the gospel to myself each day that:

Justified

I am pardoned for all my sins, accepted as righteous in his sight (but only for the righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone). I am justified and vindicated by my advocate before the Father and Satan as innocent, debt-free, and accepted.

Adopted

I am wanted by my Father, and was chosen to be his son in Christ before time and Creation to enjoy all the privileges of sonship—prayer, inheritance, provision, protection, support, involvement, his name, Christ as my brother, etc. His Spirit within me tells me this is true and assures me of his love.

Definitively Sanctified

I am a saint, a holy person, who is set apart for God’s special purposes. I am baptized with the Holy Spirit, gifted, indwelt by, and sealed with the Holy Spirit, who has made a once-for-all radical breach with my sinful nature. He intercedes with groans within me so that all things work together for my good.

