

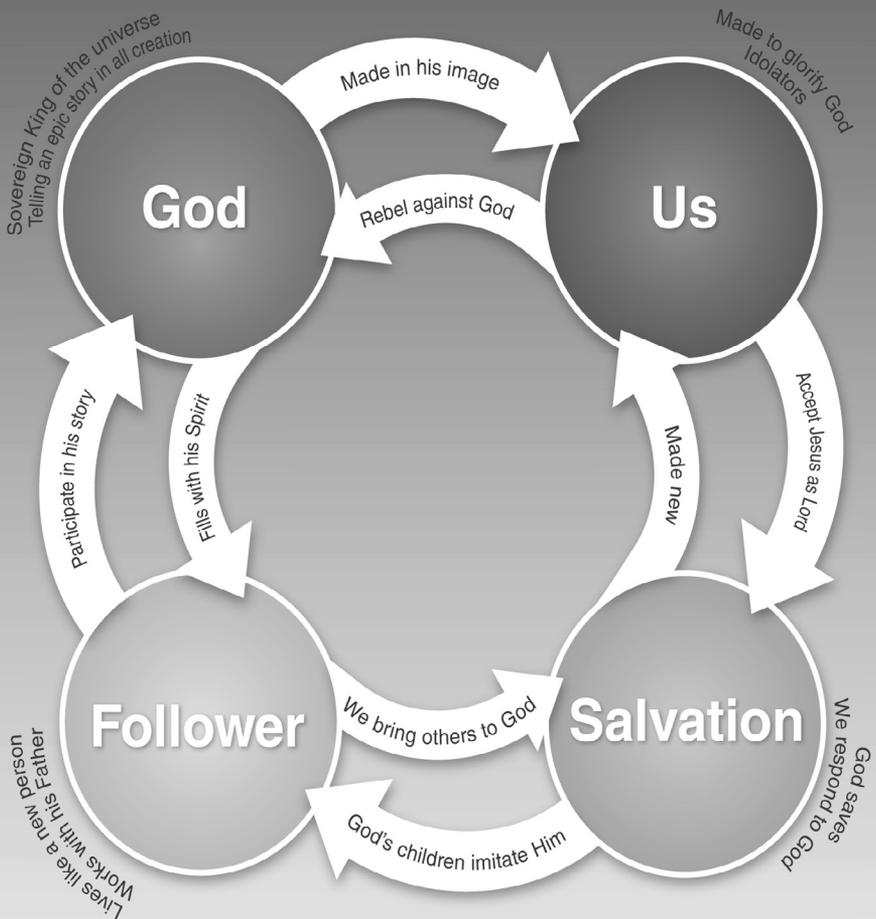
# **Foundations**

*A baseline of Christian belief*



# FOUNDATIONS

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### **1 Peter 2.2-3**

*2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

### **Hebrews 5.11-6:3**

*11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

*1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.*



## **The Nicene Creed**

*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*

*Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.*

*And I believe in one holy universal and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*



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# Preface

I wrote this book because I observed that in the Bible, there are several predominant themes — themes that run through the entire sacred text —; they are fundamental ideas, which form the foundation of the divine narrative.

What's more, when one knows what these themes are, all of his study of the Bible and of God make more sense; he is able to better understand and draw near to God. These themes come to form the foundation of his relationship with God.

Personally, I spent much of my life without having learned these themes in a structured and formal way. As I started seeing them in the Bible, I realized that studying them could be very advantageous for others. So, in this text, I have brought together an explanation of these themes which form the foundation of Christian belief.

I would like to thank my wife and children, because they sacrificed a great deal so that this book could come into existence. Every book is the product of the effort of an entire team, and they are the foundation of my team.

May God use this book to lead you to the Bible — to his Word —, and most of all, to know Him better.

Philip Canarsky

March 2014

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# Introduction

## Theology

This word brings to mind boring academic studies of doctrines and religions; it isn't a topic that normally grabs our attention. However, theology is extremely important for a person who wants to know God, for the simple reason that theology is the study of God and his relationship to the universe. Moreover, I have come to believe that some theological knowledge must form the basis of an intimate relationship with God. To come to know God, we must know something about God.

Today, we need theology precisely because in our Christian culture there is great emphasis placed on what we do for God — our actions and lifestyle, and little emphasis on what we know of God. Our teaching has a tendency to focus on practical application, making wise decisions, and giving good advice. Practical application is essential,<sup>(1)</sup> but when it does not have a theological foundation, we lose the perspective that joins everything we believe together, and that gives meaning to our actions. Rapidly, the Christian life

(1) *James 1:22-25*

becomes a list of tasks and works to be performed, instead of a personal relationship with God.

Theology is very important because, in its absence, no one can maintain a Christian lifestyle — we either fall into legalism and pride, or we justify more and more sin in our lives. Both errors arise because the way in which we live comes from what we know and what we truly believe about God — in other words, from our theology.

So, what we believe about God is the basis of our relationship with God. The purpose of this book is to give an explanation of the basic doctrines of the Christian faith; and thereby put a solid foundation beneath our faith. What you will find in the pages ahead are the core teachings of the Bible that should form a Christian's perspective, or worldview.

### **Practical Theology**

My goal in writing this book — despite its focus on theology, doctrines, and the principal philosophies of the Bible — is to teach the great theological ideas in a very practical way. If we are not careful, our study of theology can become too academic: concerned only with ideas and beliefs, without any connection to our daily lives.<sup>(2)</sup> Knowledge is only worth something if it makes us live differently. So, as we look at the doctrines that make up the foundation of our faith, we will also see how these same doctrines should affect our lives; in other words, this study is a practical theology.

(2) *1 Corinthians 8:1*

## Accessible Theology

Another risk we take when we talk about theology is that of loosing ourselves in lengthy discussions in which we attempt to find the answer to detailed theological questions and debate the different interpretations of obscure biblical texts. If the goal is to learn the big ideas of our faith and incorporate them into our lives, we must be very brief, concise, and precise. So here we will try to talk about the deepest truths in a manner that is accessible to all. We won't look at everything the Bible says about each subject, nor will we discuss all the different points of view, nor will we get lost in detailed discussions of all the minutia of every doctrine. Rather, we will talk about the great truths of the Christian faith in a biblical, concise, and practical manner.

## Two Huge Themes

There are two huge themes that run throughout this book. They are the big themes of the entire Bible, and in every doctrine that we will look at, we will find these themes. The themes are Jesus<sup>(3)</sup> and the Gospel (or God's plan of redemption).<sup>(4)</sup> Rather than just talking about ideas and disconnected individual doctrines, we will see how each big doctrine of the Bible is connected to these two larger themes of the Bible.

## Joy and Love

My hope is that, by seeing the great truths of God, the world, and redemption, our hearts would be filled with more joy<sup>(5)</sup>

(3) *John 12:32*

(4) *Romans 1:15-17*

(5) *1 Peter 1:6*

## Foundations

and love for God and for Jesus,<sup>(6)</sup> and that our faith would have a stronger foundation.

### **Catechism:**

#### ***What is theology?***

- Theology is the study of God.

#### ***Why is it important to study theology?***

- Theology teaches us to know God, to see the world and life in the way that God sees them, to live how God wants us to live, and it fills us with joy from and love for God.

(6) 1 Peter 1:8

# Part 1

## God

The formal definition of theology is “the study of God and of his relationship with the universe”. So, we’ll start our discussion of practical theology by looking at God. Now, this might seem like just a formality that we have to get through before getting to the practical, interesting part of theology, but it’s so much more than that; studying God is actually the most important thing we can do.

### **We’re Self-Centered**

Our perspective on life and the world is very self-centered: everything begins and ends with us. Our evaluation of every circumstance is based on how it affects us. In making decisions, we opt for what’s best for us. We’re focused on our lives — the good and bad things that happen to us and what we want the future to be like.

To us, it feels like we’re the center of everything — if the universe were a tire, we’d be in the middle of it. We think

everything revolves around us, and we even apply this attitude to our idea of God, who then becomes nothing more than another being revolving around our world. Our concern with God mainly has to do with escaping his punishment and getting good things out of Him. Besides that, what we want most from God is for his laws, orders, and commandments to not interfere in our lives.

Our self-centered perspective on life leaves God to one side — except when we need Him. This is our perspective on life, and it's based on a huge misconception: everything doesn't revolve around us.

### **God Is the Center of Everything**

The great reality of the universe is that God is the center of everything — we are not. He reigns over all and is over all. God is the most important Being in the whole universe.<sup>(1)</sup> This truth is the Bible and theology's big idea. It's seen in creation, and we feel it in our hearts. We know deep inside that there's something much greater and more powerful than we are, that we're not as big and important as we sometimes think and act like we are.

So, understanding ourselves and our world shouldn't start by looking at ourselves, but rather by looking at God. And that's why we're going to begin our study of practical theology by studying God. The big idea of the first part of this book is that God is the Supreme Being of the universe. We'll see that the world doesn't revolve around us, that everything doesn't begin with us, and that we're not the center of the

(1) *Romans 11:36*

## God

universe. We'll see an all-powerful God, great in love and goodness, incredibly just, and totally perfect.

### **Catechism:**

#### ***Who is the center of the universe?***

- God is at the center of the whole universe — we are not.



# Chapter 1

## God the Sovereign King

**T**he Bible presents an incredibly great and magnificent description of God: It describes Him as the most powerful Being in the universe, reigning as completely sovereign over all. Curiously, it's possible to read the Bible without seeing nor being captivated by this vision of God. Furthermore, we often miss the Bible's main theme: that God is sovereign and all-powerful — God is the center of the universe.

### Starting with Ourselves

The reason we can miss this theme among all the other details in the Bible's stories and teachings, is because in our minds we see everything as having to do with us — we're the center of our world. Everyone acts as if he's the supreme being in his universe. We try to reign over our own lives, and no one can tell us what to do. In fact, we commit Satan's

original sin,<sup>(1)</sup> as well as Adam and Eve's:<sup>(2)</sup> we want to be the god of our world.

## **Without a Proper Concept of God**

When we see ourselves as the center of our universe, it's hard to know and understand God. We have a distorted perception of what He's like. We think we know Him and know what He's like, when really, we're just trying to fit Him into the way we look at the world.

And if we don't know God well, we also won't be able to have a healthy relationship with Him. It's impossible to be close to someone we don't know. Since we don't really know what God is like, it's hard to have a relationship with Him. We try to do the least we can get by with — just what's required of us — for things to be good between us and God, performing religious activities out of obligation or for legalistic reasons, but we live our lives basically ignoring what God really wants from us.

## **Life Doesn't Make Sense**

Since we don't know God well, our lives don't make much sense to us. In fact, the less we know and understand God, the less meaning life has. This is because we obviously aren't the center of the universe — or even of our small world —, but when we live as though we were the center of our universe, we end up fighting against the reality of who God is and who we are.

*(1) Isaiah 14:12-14*

*(2) Genesis 3:5-6*

## Two Clarifying Questions

In order to truly know God, we have to figure out the answers to two questions: “Who is God?” and “What does God do?” In this chapter, we’ll answer the first question, and in the next chapter we’ll answer the second.

## Who Is God?

Who is God? What is He like? How can we describe Him?

We could write multiple books devoted solely to describing God, and still not be able to completely explain what He’s like. Totally understanding God is beyond our ability, so in this chapter, we’ll limit ourselves to looking at three of God’s most prominent attributes:

- His immensity
- His total authority
- His method of communication with us

## God Is the Supreme Being of the Universe

God is the greatest, strongest, and most powerful Being in the whole universe. He's immense. He's extraordinary. We think we're very important, but compared to God, we are nothing.

In Isaiah 40:12-25, the prophet compares man with God, and it's quite comical to read his comparisons of us with God. He says that we're like tiny insects<sup>(3)</sup>; that God could blow on us and we would be carried off like leaves in a

(3) *Isaiah 40:22*

storm,<sup>(4)</sup> and that all the nations are nothing compared to Him.<sup>(5)</sup>

God is so different from us and so far beyond our world, that no human words can describe Him. In John's vision recorded in the book of Revelation, he attempts to describe how the Resurrected Christ looked. In John's detailed description, he seems to be stumbling over words, due to limitations in the vocabulary and the images he's able to use to illustrate what he has seen.<sup>(6)</sup> In the Bible, each time someone sees something of God, his reaction is the same: great fear and profound reverence at how great and powerful and magnificent God is.<sup>(7)</sup>

### ***Three-in-One***

One reason God is the Supreme Being of the universe is the uniqueness of his identity: He's one Being, consisting of three Beings. God is one, but there are three distinct Beings that — together — form God. This is the idea of the Trinity — that God is three-in-one. God is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

The concept of the Trinity is difficult — if not impossible — to understand completely. It doesn't seem possible that God could be one — and at the same time three — Beings. Yet the Bible talks about each of these three Beings individually<sup>(8)</sup>

(4) *Isaiah 40:24*

(5) *Isaiah 40:17*

(6) *Revelation 1:10-18*

(7) *Isaiah 6:1-5*

(8) *Matthew 18:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14*

## God the Sovereign King

— they are three distinct Beings —, and at the same time, the Bible says they compose one united Being.<sup>(9)</sup>

### ***Eternal***

Another reason God is the Supreme Being of the universe is that He has always existed — He's eternal. But this is another difficult idea for us to grasp: In our minds, everything comes into existence at some point in time, and at some point ceases to exist. That's just how it is with everything and everyone — except God. He's the only Being that has always existed and will always exist.<sup>(10)</sup>

### ***All-Powerful***

The main reason God is in the highest place, is his power: He's all-powerful.<sup>(11)</sup> God does what He wants because He is able to do just that.<sup>(12)</sup> Being all-powerful means that He doesn't have any limits; there are three words that start with “omni” which describe God's unlimited power: omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

- God is omnipresent: He's in every place at every time. Only God can be in multiple places at once; every other being in the universe can only be in one place at a time. But God is different, He's everywhere at every moment.<sup>(13)</sup>

(9) *John 10:30, 14:11*

(10) *Revelation 4:8*

(11) *Psalms 135:6*

(12) *Luke 1:37*

(13) *Psalms 139:7-10*

## Foundations

- God is omniscient: He knows everything.<sup>(14)</sup> Nothing happens, has happened, or will happen that God doesn't know about.<sup>(15), (16)</sup> There's a saying: "Knowledge is power" — and God knows everything, which is another reason He is all-powerful.
- Finally, God is omnipotent: There is nothing He cannot do. At the end of the book of Job, God talks to Job, and asks him a series of rhetorical questions, in which we are able to see something of God's immense power.<sup>(17)</sup> What this text shows us is that God is all-powerful.

God is the Supreme Being of the universe; is limited by nothing; is greater than everything and everyone; and is unique in his beauty, splendor, power, and majesty.

### **God Is the King of the Universe**

Since God is the Supreme Being of the universe, then it makes sense that He's also the sovereign Lord, governing everything. This is exactly what the Bible affirms: He rules sovereignly over all; nothing happens that He hasn't ordained; everything He desires happens; evil operates in

*(14) Job 42:2*

*(15) Isaiah 46:10*

*(16) Job 42:2*

*(17) Job 37-40*

## God the Sovereign King

the world only with his permission and under the limits He sets.<sup>(18)</sup>

In Acts 17, the apostle Paul arrives in the city of Athens, and starts to explain to the people there whom God is. He says that God made everything and governs it all, ordaining even the specific places each person lives, as well as when they are born and when they will die.<sup>(19)</sup> Here we see the two parts of God's reign: He is both Creator and Ruler. That which makes God sovereign is this combination, He creates everything and governs it all — He's sovereign over everything.

### ***The Creator of Everything***

The story of our world begins with God creating it. God the Father,<sup>(20)</sup> God the Son,<sup>(21)</sup> and God the Spirit<sup>(22)</sup> were together in the beginning and created everything.<sup>(23)</sup> God is the source of life — everything comes from Him; in Him we live and move and breathe.<sup>(24)</sup> It's easier to understand God's sovereignty, if we recognize that He made everything — the entire world is his creation. Nothing and no one else can be sovereign, because then the creation would be sovereign

(18) *Job 1:12, Job 2:6*

(19) *Acts 17:24-26*

(20) *Genesis 1:1*

(21) *Colosians 1:16*

(22) *Genesis 1:2*

(23) *Acts 4:24*

(24) *Acts 17:28*

over its Creator. So, God is sovereign over all because He made it all.

### ***Governor of All***

God governs all his creation. This attribute of God is both logical and repugnant to us. On one hand, the idea that the God who made everything would also govern everything, makes complete sense; on the other hand, our tendency to put ourselves in the center of our world makes us reject the idea that God could have complete sovereignty over our lives. Regardless, the reality is that God does govern everything. He determines everything that happens;<sup>(25)</sup> He rules over big concerns (like kingdoms, governments, nature, etc), personal matters (that is to say each person's decisions), and small things that might seem insignificant (for example, which side of the dice faces up when it's rolled<sup>(26)</sup>). The Bible teaches that nothing in the world happens outside of his sight or control, not even the death of a small bird.<sup>(27)</sup>

God reigns so sovereignly that even pagan kings, who spent their entire lives worshipping other gods, have come to recognize his absolute power.<sup>(28)</sup>

### **God Is a Personal Being**

The first two of God's attributes we've seen (his sovereign rule and absolute power), emphasize how incredibly great and glorious God is. But there's another side to God that's

*(25) Ephesians 1:11*

*(26) Proverbs 16:9, 33*

*(27) Matthew 10:29*

*(28) Daniel 4:34-35*

## God the Sovereign King

much more personal: From the beginning, God has wanted to communicate with his creation. God wants to talk with us. God seeks a personal relationship with every single person. The Supreme Being of the universe wants to be the personal Father of the people He's created.

We see the desire God has to be close to us — or better stated: his desire that we would dwell close to Him —, in his persistent attempts to communicate with mankind. In ancient times, God spoke directly with specific men and women, sending prophets to take his message to his people, and instituting the office of priest, so that his people would always have the ability to commune with Him.

Later, God the Son became a man, lived on earth — among his creation, opening up even greater access to God the Father.<sup>(29)</sup>

### ***The Bible***

The Bible gives us the inspired word of God for every person in every time period. The Bible is his message to us. Through his Word, He tells us how to come to know Him, and how to have a personal relationship with Him.

As time progressed, God's people came to recognize the Word of God to be the writings that now compose our Bible. Jesus viewed the books of the Old Testament as inspired by God and applicable to everyone. We know this because during his life, He repeatedly attributed the highest authority to these writings. Later, the apostle Peter gave the apostle Paul's writings the same authority as the

(29) *Hebrews 1:1-3*

Scriptures of the Old Testament.<sup>(30)</sup> Shortly afterward, the church formally recognized all of the New Testament books as being inspired by God; the books that now form our New Testament were recognized and used by the churches of the first century as the Word of God.

Paul explained that what we now call the Bible was written by men, but that its content was directly inspired by God.<sup>(31)</sup> The Bible truly is God's Word — written by men who were directed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>(32)</sup>

### ***Supreme Authority***

We can and should assign the highest authority to God's Word, for the simple reason that it comes from the universe's Supreme Being. God made us and governs sovereignly, therefore He can tell us what to do and how to live.

### ***The Best Path***

We should obey God simply because He's God; but we also should obey because it's in our best interest. God reminded his people, after bringing them out of slavery, that their lives would be better if they listened to Him and obeyed Him.<sup>(33)</sup> Over and over, God has promised that if we just listen when He speaks, we'll find true life.<sup>(34)</sup>

*(30) 2 Peter 3:15-16*

*(31) 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

*(32) 2 Peter 1:21*

*(33) Deuteronomy 8:1-3*

*(34) Psalms 119:97-104*

## Changed by Knowing God

Something happens the more we come to know God: we change. In fact, the more we come to know Him, the more we change. This is what Job experienced after going through a time of great adversity. At the end of what was a horrible experience, he speaks directly with God, and as a result, Job came to know Him better.<sup>(35)</sup> What used to be theory about God, became reality to Job, and he was changed in the process.<sup>(36)</sup> He realized how great, powerful, loving, and strong God is. At the same time, he realized he wasn't the center of his universe.

This is the change that occurs in us as we come to know God better. We see God for who He really is, and ourselves for who we really are.

### Life Makes Sense

By seeing God as the great King of the universe that He really is, and ourselves as how small we really are, our lives begin to make more sense: Understanding God in this way makes our lives come into alignment with reality. When we think we're the center of our universe, our world doesn't make sense because such a life is based on a false reality. However, when we put God at the center of our universe, we live in agreement with the way the universe really is, and everything falls into place in our lives.

*(35) Job 42:5*

*(36) Job 42:6*

## **Application Questions:**

How, or in what ways, in your life do you live as if you were God?

In what areas of your life do you ignore the instructions God has revealed in his Word?

How do you think your life would change if you read God's Word more frequently?

## **Catechism:**

### ***Who is God?***

- God is the all-powerful King of the universe.
- God is three Beings in one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

### ***What does God do?***

- He creates everything and rules sovereignly over all.

### ***How do we know God's will? — How does God communicate with us?***

- God communicates with us through his Word, the Bible.

# Chapter 2

## The Story of God

**I**n order to really understand life and ourselves, we have to come to know God. The better we know God, the more sense the world makes. However, in order to really understand Him, we have to learn who He is and what He does.

In the previous chapter, we saw what the Bible teaches about who God is: we saw the image of the enormous God the Bible presents. It describes Him as the Supreme Being of the universe, the only and all-powerful God, the One who sovereignly governs everything that happens in our world.

In this chapter, we'll be looking at the answer to life's biggest question: What is God doing in the world? Related to this question, there are other another questions we'll look at as well: What's the purpose behind what He does? What does He desire to accomplish? What does He want to do? We understand that God is totally sovereign and all-powerful.

So now the question is: What does God do and why does He do it?

### **We Think Life Is All About Us...**

These are questions we rarely ask. We don't think about life in terms of what God is doing, or what He wants to accomplish in the world. No, we're much more concerned with our own lives: with what we want to do and what we want to accomplish.

We take the idea that we're at the center of our world for granted; we want to be the hero of our own story; we want to receive the glory for what we do in life. We're either complaining that life hasn't turned out the way we want it to, or boasting that we're accomplishing everything just the way we planned. Both complaints and boasting are symptoms that we think life is primarily about us.

So, given that we're self-centered by nature, the first things we think when we look at life are:

- What do I want to achieve with my life?
- What do I need?
- What do I want to do?
- What should be happening in my life?

### ***Frustrations***

Since we try to force life to revolve around us, we live without really understanding what life is truly like. And since we don't understand life well, we don't live it very well either. We get ourselves into trouble and drown ourselves in a sea of frustration. That's why we never feel totally at peace,

## The Story of God

why we always feel like there's something else to get and something more to accomplish, why we constantly feel that we could be happier, and why life often doesn't make sense.

### ***We Aren't the Center***

Not everything revolves around us. We're not the center of our own little universe and we aren't sovereign over our own existence. The Bible makes this very clear when it tells the story of a king who forgot this truth: He thought he was the all-powerful one in his world — that he was sovereign. In the end, God actually killed him, because he made himself the center of his life and didn't recognize that God is the Supreme Being of the universe.<sup>(1)</sup> This demonstrates how important it is for us to recognize that God is all-powerful, and that everything actually revolves around his purpose and his plan in this world.

### **...But It Is Actually About God**

God has a plan and a purpose; He has desires of what He wants to do in the world and through the world. What's most important in the universe is what God wants to accomplish, because He's the Supreme Being of the universe. This is much more important than our most intense desire. Also, since He's the Sovereign King, He makes everything work together to fulfill his purposes and desires.<sup>(2)</sup>

### ***New Questions***

When we realize God is the center of everything, our questions change. We ask what is God doing, instead of

(1) *Acts 12:21-23*

(2) *Ephesians 1:11*

what am I doing; and what does God want to accomplish, instead of what do I want to happen? At this point, we start to understand that the entire universe has to do with Him and with his desires. The only thing that matters in everything and everyone's existence is what God wants. The true goal and the purpose for everything is whatever He desires.<sup>(3)</sup>

### ***God Defines Reality***

If I'm not the king of my world, nor the center of my universe, and if God is the true King of the entire universe, then the logical conclusion is that my desires must be submitted to that which God desires, and my perception of reality should be conformed to the way God perceives reality. In other words, He defines what's important; what's real; what the rules are; and what the definitions of love, hate, justice, and mercy are.<sup>(4)</sup>

### ***Bigger Than Our Lives***

We think that we're very important, but really we're just a speck of existence in the vast expanse of eternity; we're a vapor that quickly disappears.<sup>(5)</sup> The things that God wants to work through his creation are much bigger than our lives and purposes.

(3) *Proverbs 19:21*

(4) *Romans 9:20*

(5) *James 4:14*

## The Story of God

What does God want to do in the world? Through all of creation, God is telling an elaborate story. You could say that the universe is like a stage, and God is directing his masterpiece on this stage — as if it were a play in a theater.

### ***All History Is God's Story***<sup>(6)</sup>

God is telling a great story through the whole world, with everything that happens in it, and through every single person who has or will exist. This is the answer to the question of what is God doing: He's telling the biggest, most exciting, and most incredible story that could ever be told!

### ***Our Lives Are Part of His Story***

We aren't the heroes of our own story. We tend to think everything's about us, but that just isn't true. Everything doesn't revolve around us. Actually, everything has to do with God's story — of course, "everything" includes us, but we're only part of the masterpiece that is God's great story — a very small part —. Even though we'd like to be the star of our own story, deep down we know we're actually part of something much bigger than ourselves.<sup>(7)</sup>

### ***Our Stories Reflect God's Story***

However, we aren't just part of God's story: The story of each of our lives is also a minuscule reflection of God's story. Since we're made in his image, we'll always live a life

(6) *This phrase appears in the song Run by Hillsong United*

(7) *Ecclesiastes 3:11*

that — in some way — imitates God’s grand story. (We’ll look specifically at how this happens, but for the moment let’s just say that we unintentionally imitate God’s story in our own lives.) So, as we learn God’s story, we’ll actually be learning about our own story, as well.

### **The Hero, the Theme, and His Purpose**

The story God is telling through all creation — throughout the entire universe, has one single hero, one main theme, and is being told for one specific purpose.

#### ***Jesus Is the Hero***

There is a central figure in God’s story: Jesus, the second member of the Holy Trinity — God the Son. From beginning to end, God’s grand story is centered around Jesus. Through Him, God created the universe, He sustains everything, He’s first in all God does on this earth, and through Him God is reconciling everything to Himself.<sup>(8)</sup>

Jesus is the hero, the star actor, the dominant force; if this life were a movie, He would appear in every scene. That’s why, at the very end of his time on Earth, Jesus told his followers that all the ancient stories and prophecies in their Scriptures were about Him.<sup>(9)</sup>

#### ***Redemption Is the Theme***

God’s story is a story about love, about justice, and most of all about redemption. In this story, God reveals his love for

(8) *Colossians 1:15-20*

(9) *Luke 24:27*

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his creation,<sup>(10)</sup> and at the same time reveals his justice by judging all rebellion against Himself.<sup>(11)</sup> In his story, God's love and justice are joined at the cross of Christ, where God brought about redemption for his sons and daughters,<sup>(12)</sup> and the reconciliation of all things to Himself.<sup>(13)</sup>

### ***Receiving Glory Is His Purpose***

So, what is God's purpose in the things He does? If all creation is God's stage, and everything that has happened and will happen is part of the elaborate masterpiece that God is directing on that stage, then we have to ask: What's his goal in creating this drama, in telling this story?

God's overriding goal in everything is to receive glory; the Bible teaches from beginning to end that the greatest reason God does everything He does is to receive glory.<sup>(14)</sup> This is the reason He made all of the physical creation,<sup>(15)</sup> the reason He made people,<sup>(16)</sup> the reason He chose the nation of Israel to be his special people,<sup>(17)</sup> the reason Christ saves wicked people like us,<sup>(18)</sup> and the reason He's going to return to live with his children.<sup>(19)</sup> God desires to be glorified through

(10) *John 3:16*

(11) *Romans 3:23-26*

(12) *Romans 5:1*

(13) *Colossians 1:20*

(14) *Romans 11:36*

(15) *Psalms 19:1-4*

(16) *Isaiah 43:7*

(17) *Deuteronomy 26.18-19*

(18) *Ephesians 1:13-14*

(19) *2 Thessalonians 1:10*

everything He does. Receiving glory is the reason God does all that He does.

So if “receiving glory” is the underlying reason for everything God does, then it would seem to be a good idea to think through how He receives glory through his story. He receives glory when the following two things happen: first, when others (people and angels) see Him for who He is, for the great, powerful, loving, just, and intelligent God that He is; and second, when seeing Him produces worship — admiration, awe, respect, reverence — in those who see Him. Throughout his story, God reveals what He’s like, and as we see Him in his story, we have the opportunity to worship Him for who He is.<sup>(20)</sup> In fact, the story ends with God receiving the glory He deserves from every person who has ever lived.<sup>(21)</sup>

### **The Story in 5 Acts**

Most plays or movies are divided into different parts, or acts, and every act has its own purpose in the story’s whole. God’s story is no different: it has 5 acts that together tell the great story of God’s redemption.

#### ***Act 1: Creation — A Perfect World***

At the beginning of the story, only God existed.<sup>(22)</sup> Then, God created everything;<sup>(23)</sup> He made everything that exists in the universe: He spoke and created all things — both

*(20) John 4:23-24*

*(21) Philippians 2:10-11*

*(22) Genesis 1:2*

*(23) Genesis 1:1*

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living and non-living. The only being God didn't create was Himself.

At the beginning of this story, everything God made was perfect, and after making each portion of creation, He said that it was good.<sup>(24)</sup> In the beginning, his creation was perfect and flawless: There was no death, malice, guilt, or evil deed; and neither was there any sickness nor pain. What made everything even more perfect, was that God was physically present with the children He had created.<sup>(25)</sup>

There is a connection between each of our personal stories and this first act of God's story, in that we were all created by God and we all live in the world that was created by God — that is to say, we're the products of his creation, and we live surrounded by his creation.

Furthermore, each of our personal stories is a reflection of God's story in the sense that each of us was “created” — or shaped — by many factors: our family, our friends, the environment we grew up in, the sins committed against us, the things people say about us, among many other factors. All these elements have helped shape who we are. What's more, we ourselves aren't just created and shaped, we also create. Since we're made in the image of God who creates,<sup>(26)</sup> we also create: we invent, we make new things, we produce beautiful and intricate works of art and of science.

(24) *Genesis 1:31*

(25) *Genesis 3:8*

(26) *Genesis 1:27*

***Act 2: Rebellion — A Broken World***

Unfortunately, the first act quickly comes to an end, and the perfection of God's creation doesn't last long. Instead, the second act of this story opens when this same creation rebels against its Creator. The beings God made decided they wanted to be the gods of their own world and, in doing so, they rebelled against the true God.

The first to rebel was the most beautiful being God had created, the archangel Lucifer.<sup>(27)</sup> <sup>(28)</sup> From these verses, we can understand that he was the guardian in the Garden of Eden<sup>(29)</sup> and was filled with pride because of the beauty and the power he had, and wanted to take God's place. When he rebelled against God, there was a battle in the Heavens and he was thrown down to earth. He lost his position, his beauty, and his name — instead of being the most beautiful and powerful archangel, he was transformed into pure evil and he became Satan — God's enemy.

Later, this same being tempted Adam and Eve — God's image-bearers —,<sup>(30)</sup> with the same temptation that had made him fall — the opportunity to be like God.<sup>(31)</sup> They also fell to this temptation, and rebelled against the true God by breaking the only commandment He had given them.<sup>(32)</sup>

*(27) Isaiah 14:12-15*

*(28) Ezekiel 28:12-17*

*(29) Probably of Adam and Eve, since they were the only people there.*

*(30) Genesis 3:1-4*

*(31) Genesis 3:5*

*(32) Genesis 3:6*

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When those whom God created rebelled against Him by trying to replace Him and become sovereign over their world, the perfection of God's creation was shattered. God's perfect creation was ruined because they acted on the desire to try to take God's place — a desire which every person since has also shared and acted upon. In rebelling against Him, they disobeyed Him and brought his punishment upon themselves. This punishment is death because that's the only punishment appropriate for the offense of rebelling against the Supreme Being of the universe.

So then, the death that entered the world as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion was the death of their innocence,<sup>(33)</sup> it was also physical death (since that was when God killed the first animal to make them clothing, which they now needed, as a result of having lost their innocence),<sup>(34)</sup> it was the death of an easy life without pain and suffering,<sup>(35)</sup> and the death of all the perfection of a creation without natural disasters or sickness.<sup>(36)</sup> In other words, mankind's rebellion against God ruined the perfection of God's creation.

Our personal life story also reflects this second act of God's story, because every person who has lived has followed Adam and Eve's rebellious example and has rebelled against God.<sup>(37)</sup> We all want to be the gods of our own world; we all want to make all of our own decisions; and we all want to live the way we think is best. Furthermore, when we rebel against God, we inevitably ruin the good things in our

(33) *Genesis 3:10–11*

(34) *Genesis 3:21*

(35) *Genesis 3:16–19*

(36) *Romans 8:20–23*

(37) *Romans 3:23*

world. Just as the whole world is broken as a consequence of the first rebellion, each person's individual rebellion introduces pain, brokenness, and separation from God into our personal lives.

### ***Act 3: Redemption Promised — a Savior Will Come***

As soon as mankind rebelled, God began to promise salvation from the consequences of this rebellion. He promised He'd send a Savior, a Messiah. He promised that this Savior would pay the price for the punishment of mankind's rebellion, and that the Messiah would restore the Kingdom of God on earth once again.

The first time God promised this Savior was in the middle of pronouncing his punishment for that first rebellion.<sup>(38)</sup> Time after time, He repeated the same promise during the following years, and throughout all the centuries until Jesus came. God made this promise to Abraham,<sup>(39)</sup> and continued making it through the prophets that followed.<sup>(40) (41)</sup>

Later, God chose one nation, Israel, to be his special people; and the religion that He gave them also served to point to the coming of the Savior.<sup>(42)</sup> God commanded his people to sacrifice animals in order to pay the price of their rebellion with blood, and also to teach the people that to really placate God's wrath against their rebellion — to truly cleanse the contamination caused by their sin, and to change their hearts

(38) *Genesis 3:15*

(39) *Genesis 12:2-3*

(40) *Acts 3:18*

(41) *Acts 26:22-23*

(42) *Colossians 2:17*

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so they would sincerely love Him — a better sacrifice was needed than the bulls, goats, sheep, and other animals they repeatedly killed.<sup>(43)</sup> All the customs, traditions, prophecies, and sacrifices pointed to the Savior God would send.

Our own life's story reflects this part of God's story as well, because we spend our lives seeking redemption, too. We spend our lives looking for something — anything — to set us free, to complete us, to make everything in our lives be as we know deep down it should be, to find peace and purpose. We seek our personal redemption through money, friendships, food, health, sex, material possessions, hobbies, and sports, but nothing except God can make us completely and permanently happy. So when we see that the object we hope will redeem us won't make us totally happy or fulfilled, we look for redemption elsewhere. This reveals our connection to the story of God because there's something within us that makes us know life should be different — better, renewed.

### ***Act 4: Redemption Accomplished — The Savior Has Come***

The fourth act of God's story is the great arrival of the Messiah: The second member of the Trinity, God the Son, put aside much of his power and privilege as God,<sup>(44)</sup> though without for a moment ceasing to be divine, and took on the form of a man.<sup>(45)</sup> He did this to initiate the restoration of everything mankind's rebellion had destroyed and to redeem his creation.<sup>(46)</sup>

(43) *Hebrews 9:13-14*

(44) *Philippians 2:6-7*

(45) *Philippians 2:7-8*

(46) *Philippians 2:7-8*

## Foundations

Jesus initiated this restoration during his lifetime, through his death, and by his resurrection:<sup>(47)</sup> He started this during his lifetime by announcing the beginning of the coming of the Kingdom of God, both in words and by undoing some of the physical effects of the rebellion by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and raising the dead. He continued the process through his death by dying a completely innocent death — He had never sinned and thus did not have to be punished like everyone else — and satisfying God’s wrath, while at the same time giving his followers his righteousness.<sup>(48)</sup> His death made it possible for his followers to be both forgiven and clothed with complete perfection before God.<sup>(49)</sup> He also worked restoration through his resurrection by overcoming Satan, sin, and death when He rose from the dead,<sup>(50)</sup> and by giving his followers the certain hope that they would also eventually rise from their own graves.<sup>(51)</sup>

The most incredible part of this story is that we can be part of Christ’s redemptive work: We can enter into this redemption and be reconciled with God in Christ when we decide to follow Jesus by abandoning the story of our lives and entering into God’s story.<sup>(52)</sup>

(47) *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*

(48) *John 1:29*

(49) *John 3:16-17*

(50) *1 Corinthians 15:55-57*

(51) *1 Corinthians 15:22*

(52) *Acts 2:38-39*

**Act 5: Completed Restoration — Back to a Perfect World**

God's story starts with its creation and ends with the return of the King.<sup>(53)</sup> At a time on a day that God has already decided,<sup>(54)</sup> Jesus will return to the earth.<sup>(55)</sup> When He came the first time, it was to announce that the Kingdom of God was coming, to start the beginning of his Kingdom in the world; when He comes the second time, it will be to finish establishing this Kingdom: And at that time, He'll restore all creation.

God's great story will end with the King of the universe establishing his reign over all his creation.<sup>(56)</sup> The Supreme Being of the universe will restore everything his rebellious creation broke: God will restore the earth to a state of perfection, like it was before Lucifer and mankind rebelled against Him.<sup>(57)</sup> As part of this restoration, God's children will be given physical bodies that will be perfected and glorified.<sup>(58) (59)</sup>

Every one of us will participate in this last act of God's story in one of two ways: Some will literally live with God.<sup>(60)</sup> Everyone who decides to leave their rebellion against God and accepts the lordship of Jesus and follows Him as Lord in this life, will be part of this new creation, where God

(53) *1 Thessalonians 4:16-17*

(54) *Matthew 24:36*

(55) *Acts 1:11*

(56) *Revelation 21:1-2, 4-5*

(57) *Romans 8:20-21*

(58) *Philippians 3:20-21*

(59) *Romans 8:17-19*

(60) *Revelation 21:3-4, 6-7*

will live with his sons and daughters. Others that continue in their rebellion against God and never decide to follow Jesus,<sup>(61)</sup> will also participate in the story's last act, but their experience will be hugely different because instead of participating in God's new creation as his children, they'll spend eternity in torment completely separated from Him.<sup>(62)</sup> This second, eternal death is the only just payment they can receive for their rebellion against God.

### **The Hero, the Theme, and His Purpose...Revisited**

This is what God's story is all about: creation, rebellion, promised redemption, the arrival of the Savior, and the restoration of creation's original perfection.

The hero of this story is Jesus: People make bad decisions, rebel against God, and ruin what He creates, but Jesus is the promised Redeemer, anticipated by God's people throughout the ages, the Messiah who came to pay the price for mankind's rebellion, and the Savior who will return in the end to establish God's Kingdom. Because of his sacrifice, we can be reconciled again to God, and live with Him in his new creation.

The theme that runs throughout the entire story is redemption: God loves his creation so much that, in spite of their continual rebellion, He has always sought to reconcile these rebels to Himself. We see his desire to reconcile us in many ways: such as in the clothing He made for Adam and Eve to cover their shame, in his choosing a special

(61) *Acts 2:38*

(62) *Revelation 21:8*

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people to bring the light of his salvation to everyone,<sup>(63)</sup> in the sacrifices He instituted for his people to pay the price of their rebellion with blood, in his sending his Son to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world, and in the restoration that he has promised. God redeems the consequences of his creation's rebellion.

In this story God receives infinite amounts of glory, because through this story, He reveals his character and power to his creation.

- We wouldn't know God's justice, if we hadn't rebelled against Him.
- We wouldn't be able to understand God's love and mercy, if He hadn't rescued us.
- We wouldn't be able to experience God's compassion, if He hadn't revealed it in the midst of our collective suffering and intolerable pain.
- We wouldn't be able to comprehend God's power, if He didn't transform the hardest thing to transform — human hearts that are opposed to Him.
- We wouldn't be able to appreciate God's intelligence, if we hadn't gotten ourselves into a situation that is so hopeless that only a premeditated, divine plan could resolve it.

The story reveals who God is, and by seeing Him better, we along with all the other created beings, are brought to worship and glorify Him.

(63) *Isaiah 49:6*

The story we've been talking about is the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News, the good news that God is reconciling all things to Himself.<sup>(64)</sup>

## Life Makes More Sense

As we see God's story, and as we see our lives in their place as part of this story, life begins to make more sense. Our question shifts from "What do I want to do?" to "How can I use my life to be part of God's story and, by doing so, give glory to the Supreme Being of the universe?" When we live to fulfill this desire, we find satisfaction in life because we're living as part of the true story that we're all part of.

We can say that by starting with God, by seeing him in the center of everything, and by knowing what his desire is in all things, we have a foundation that helps us to understand life better.

### Application Questions:

Are you living as a child of God in his story?

- Have you entered into it?
- Have you entered into it, but still live your own story — just now with salvation?

Your life will make sense when you find your place in this story, when you decide to enter it and dedicate your life to your relationship with God and to helping others come to develop a relationship with God.

*(64) 2 Corinthians 5:19*

## Catechism:

***What is God doing in the world and through all creation?***

- He's telling an epic story of redemption, of his goodness, and of his power.

***What is the purpose of the story (and of everything), and what does God want more than anything else?***

- To receive glory.

***Who is the hero of God's story?***

- Jesus is.



## Part 2

### Us

**W**e started this study of theology by looking at God, which was very appropriate since theology is the study of God. At the same time though, we said that our theological study would be practical, in other words something with direct application to our lives.

So then, we need to turn our attention to ourselves — to people — in order to be able to see how the story of this God who is the Supreme Being of the universe connects with the story of our lives. In this way our theology begins to be practical.

#### **With God in Mind**

As we continue our study, we need to keep God in mind. Our tendency, now that we've spent a little bit of time studying God, is to once again put ourselves in the center of our world. It's in our nature to think of ourselves as most

important, to live to make our own lives great, and to forget that God is at the center of our universe.

## Who Are We?

To really understand who we are, we need to start by acknowledging two fundamental truths that God says form the core of who we are: we are made in his image, and we are totally corrupt. That is why, in spite of the fact that every person is unique — different from everyone else, we share both of these realities in common; we are essentially the same at the core of who we really are.

## Made in His Image

The amazing connection between God and mankind is that God made man in his image.<sup>(1)</sup> That is to say, we reflect who God is. Therefore, only after looking at God, can we truly understand ourselves and our purpose in the world. Of course, we're merely made in his image, we aren't actually God — there's only one God and we're his creation. We bear his image, but are not replicas of God: He's enormous, and we're miniscule; he's perfect, we're incredibly flawed.

However, by being made in his image, we have many of God's characteristics: we reason, we feel profound emotions, we are creative, and we have the capacity to rule over creation. Of all created creatures, only humans have received these qualities, because only we have been created in the image of God.

(1) *Genesis 1:27*

## Totally Corrupted

In spite of having been made in the image of the Divine Being — God, we are very wicked. You could say, every person reflects an immensely corrupted image of who God is. At the root of our being, we're extremely depraved.<sup>(2)</sup> We're evil. Our problem is our rebellion against God, and that rebellion surfaces as sin — that is, disobeying God.<sup>(3)</sup> But our problem goes much deeper than simply evil actions and attitudes; our problem is our heart.<sup>(4)</sup> Who we are in the most intimate part of our being is corrupt and wicked<sup>(5)</sup>; that's why we rebel against God.<sup>(6)</sup>

### *We Want to Be God*

Our rebellion against God is based on the fact that we want to be the god of our world; we want to be the sovereign of our existence. This sinful desire was Satan's initial sin against God<sup>(7)</sup> and the source of Adam and Eve's rebellion;<sup>(8)</sup> and we in this, we are no different than they were.

That's why we all want to be in charge: we resist authority and it's hard for us to follow others — we want to be the boss. Only God is sovereign, but because of our desire to be the god of our own world, we act as though we were the supreme beings of our universe.

(2) *Genesis 8:21*

(3) *Romans 3:23*

(4) *Jeremiah 17:9*

(5) *Isaiah 64:6*

(6) *Isaiah 53:6*

(7) *Isaiah 14:13*

(8) *Genesis 3:4-6*

Since we want to be God, we belittle the true God. No one sees Him as He truly is; in fact, we attempt to make Him in our image. When tragedies or other situations in our lives bring us face to face with God, we many times end up saying things that reveal that we've tried to make made God in our own image — things like: “God shouldn't do that” or “I can't believe that God would be like that.”

When we treat others poorly, it's because we see ourselves as being the center of everything, as though we were God. We set ourselves up as the judges who decide what kind of treatment the other person deserves. We even treat God badly. Because we want to take his place in our lives, we start to treat Him as if we were equals, or even as if He were beneath us: When we do what He asks, we think we're doing Him a favor; and when we do something good, we think that God owes us for what we did.

## Two Questions

In this section we'll be looking at two questions, questions that explain why life is the way it is and that explain why we do much of what we do.

The first question is: What do we want in life? Or: What is the one thing everyone seeks throughout their whole life? By looking at what we want, we'll better understand why we do what we do.

The reason for studying the human condition isn't just to understand ourselves better, but to figure out how we should relate to God. So the second question is: Why did God make us? Or: What is the purpose of our existence?

We'll start by looking at what we want in life, then look at what God wants from our lives; then we'll finish by connecting these two ideas. What we'll see at the end of this section is that by fulfilling God's purpose for our lives, we also find what we're seeking in life.<sup>(9)</sup>

## **Catechism:**

### ***What are people?***

- People are the beings that God created in his own image.

### ***What's everyone's natural condition?***

- Totally corrupted and rebellious against God.

### ***Why do we rebel against God?***

- We want to be the god of our own lives.

(9) *Ecclesiastes 12:13*



# Chapter 3

## Our Search

If we really want to understand ourselves, all we need to do is to ask: What do we want in life? What is it that we seek with everything we are? Or What motivation propels us in life? What we quickly discover is that there is something we all want, something that's at the root of every one of our actions: we want to be happy.

### We Seek Total Satisfaction

Everyone's fundamental desire, at all times, is to be happy and content: We want to be satisfied. Everyone is in search of their own satisfaction. You could define this search as a search for happiness, but our need to be satisfied is much more than just a desire for superficial happiness. Being satisfied is being both happy and safe; it's being approved of, and being loved and accepted; it's having joy and peace. We live to find this kind of satisfaction.

## **Basic Needs**

Our desire to find satisfaction has its roots in the basic, but colossal, needs of our hearts: Every human being has a few basic needs that generate profound desires and are part of who we are as people. We can't escape them; instead, satisfying these needs is the motive behind our actions: behind everything we do and everything we avoid.

So, what are these basic needs?

### ***Security***

The first of these needs is security — feeling that our lives are secure. Sometimes attempts to fulfill this need are expressed in a search for power, control, or influence; other times, the longing for security can be seen in accumulating possessions or money, in an effort to never be in want.

### ***Love***

The second need is love. This need produces the desire in us to have others' respect, admiration, and approval — like parents, friends, or acquaintances; it's what makes us want to have friendships and be part of a family.

### ***Purpose***

The third is purpose in life, a reason for living. We all want to have a purpose that makes our lives worthwhile; we want to do something important in the years we have to live.

## ***Happiness***

The last big need is happiness. Happiness is the human need that encapsulates the other three. It just might be the most profound need we experience. Behind each of our actions lies the thought that this action or decision will produce more happiness than the opposite action. For example: Some people break the law because they think that the results of doing so will make them happy; others obey the law because they think this will make them happier. Everything we choose to do is in order to be happy.

## **Only God Can Satisfy Us**

God can satisfy us better than any other person, activity, or thing.<sup>(1)</sup> The God who made us in his image is the One who gave us these profound needs; therefore, only He can completely satisfy our hearts' needs.<sup>(2)</sup> This means that only God can make us truly happy.<sup>(3)</sup> God made us to find our satisfaction in Him.<sup>(4)</sup> And this is directly connected to what God wants from us.

## **Loving God**

What God wants from us is for us to love Him.<sup>(5)</sup> That's why Jesus said loving God is the first and greatest commandment. God wants our love. When we love God, we put Him in the center of our hearts. And when we love God with all of our

(1) *Psalms 17.15, 43:4, 51.11-12*

(2) *Psalms 4:7*

(3) *Galatians 5.22*

(4) *Psalms 16.11*

(5) *Matthew 22.36-38*

being, we find our complete satisfaction in Him — we love that which is able to satisfy us, and in turn, we are satisfied by that which we love. God made us with the great desire to find satisfaction in life, but at the same time, as we've seen, only He is capable of satisfying that need. His plan is for us to put Him at the center of our hearts, for us to love Him above everything or anyone else, and for us to find our deepest satisfaction in Him.

## **We Look for Satisfaction Outside of God**

In spite of the fact that God can truly satisfy us, we instinctively look for our happiness everywhere but Him. So then, we seek our satisfaction — or our security, love, happiness, and purpose in life — in people, activities, and material things. In fact, we normally don't even think of seeking happiness in God; instead, we assume being with God means giving up the things that really make us happy — in other words, we think that in order to be with God, we have to have less satisfaction and joy in life.

## **Replacing God**

When we look for happiness outside of God, we are essentially replacing God in our hearts. Rather than seeking our satisfaction in God, we seek satisfaction through other people, such as family, friends, or other relationships; activities, such as work, career, shopping, sports, entertainment, or other hobbies; and material things, such as money, clothing, possessions, houses, cars, or jewelry.

## Replacing Him with Idols

The Bible uses the word ‘idolatry’ to describe the act of looking for satisfaction, joy, and security in any place but God — that is, seeking the satisfaction that we should find in God, in an idol. An “idol” is the person, thing, or activity we hope will make us happy, give us purpose, or make us feel secure. An ‘idolater’ is a person who seeks satisfaction in an idol — and we are all idolaters.<sup>(6)</sup>

One of the Bible’s main themes is this tendency we all have to be idolaters. The Bible is full of warnings against idolatry,<sup>(7)</sup> stories of the idolatry of God’s people,<sup>(8)</sup> and accounts of God’s punishment for idolatry.<sup>(9)</sup>

## We Are All Idolaters

Every person who has ever lived is guilty of committing idolatry. Because of how corrupt we as people are, by nature we always search for satisfaction in something apart other than God. Unfortunately, we have a hard time identifying our own idols — it’s hard to recognize what we depend on for our happiness, security, purpose, and love. Here’s a list of questions that are very useful in diagnosing idols of our hearts<sup>(10)</sup>:

- What brings you joy?
- What do you look to for security?

(6) *Romans 1:21-23, 25*

(7) *1 John 5:21*

(8) *1 Corinthians 10:6-7*

(9) *Ezekiel 5:9*

(10) *This list was inspired by a similar list of questions that Timothy Keller posed in a sermon.*

## Foundations

- What gives you purpose?
- What makes you feel accepted and loved?
- What do you think about a lot?
- What do you most fear losing?
- What do you dedicate most of your time and money to?
- What do you anticipate and desire most?
- What is there in your life, that should you lose it, would make you miserable?
- What causes you to treat others badly?
- What causes you to disobey God (that is to say, commit sin)?
- What makes you happy or unhappy?

Can you figure out what you look to for satisfaction in your life? Do you know what your idols are?

## Rebellion and Disobedience

Our search for satisfaction leads us to rebel against, and to disobey, God. When we search for our satisfaction in something or in someone other than God, we live in rebellion against God. Attempting to be happy apart from God leads us to disobey Him — this is an inevitable chain reaction. When we depend on an idol for our happiness, love, security, and purpose, we always end up sinning in our attempts to find satisfaction in that idol.

### The Definition of Rebellion Against God

Since God gave us the desire to be satisfied and happy, and only He can satisfy that desire, when we seek our happiness

in God, He occupies the center of our hearts and all our needs are fulfilled. But our tendency is to replace God by seeking satisfaction outside of Him. Replacing God in our hearts — or in other words, idolatry — is the Biblical definition of rebellion against God. In his Word, God explains that this act of replacing Him is a great offense and is the root of all sin.<sup>(11)</sup> God says that rebellion is actually something that is much larger than the individual sins we commit, because it involves seeking our satisfaction in something, or someone, other than God. Each of us has rebelled against God by removing Him from the center of our lives and pursuing idols instead.

### **The Root of All Sin**

In this way, our idols are the source of all our sin: Our problem is that we think sin is merely doing, saying, or thinking something God forbids, but in reality, sin has its root in removing God from the center of our lives and replacing Him with something else. Removing God from the center of our hearts leads us to commit the specific actions we recognize as being sins. For example, by looking for happiness and peace in his vice instead of in God, the alcoholic commits the specific sin of getting drunk. You could say, his only sin is getting drunk, however the sin behind the sin (or the root of his sin) is not seeking his satisfaction in God. And we could substitute any sin for drunkenness in this example, because the source of all sin is idolatry — seeking satisfaction outside of God.

*(11) Jeremiah 2:11-13*

## We Don't Find Satisfaction

The great irony, or perhaps tragedy, of our lives is that we never find what we most desire. We never find true and total satisfaction. We live life in search of happiness and purpose and love and security, but we are never totally happy nor fulfilled nor loved nor secure. Even when we get the things and live the experiences that we think will make us happy, we always are left feeling that there is something more. We never are totally content. All of the sources where we seek satisfaction cannot completely satisfy us; we are never completely satisfied.<sup>(12)</sup>

### Idols Can't Satisfy

If our experience teaches us anything, it's that nothing in this life can satisfy us completely. The explanation God gives for this is that our idols will never satisfy us because they aren't capable of satisfying us.<sup>(13)</sup> Nothing in our lives can make us totally happy and content: Family is good, but it can't fulfill us completely; work is necessary, but it can't give us our identity or eternal purpose; money and things are enjoyable, but we can never have enough; and we can have good experiences, but they'll always leave us with the desire to do and have more. Nothing in this world can satisfy us. This was what Solomon, the world's wisest and richest man, came to understand at the end of his life.<sup>(14)</sup>

(12) *Jonah 2:8*

(13) *Psalms 135:15-18*

(14) *Ecclesiastes 1:2*

## Idols Destroy

Idols don't just promise satisfaction that they cannot deliver, they also actively destroy our lives. Satan constantly seeks to destroy us,<sup>(15)</sup> and he uses idols to do so.

Our idols bring destruction to our lives: They make us unbalanced, addicted, and obsessed; they destroy our finances and goals and relationships and families. Our idols rob God's purpose from our lives by making us invest our lives in something that isn't worthwhile. They lead us to ruin good things, because we ruin anything we convert into an idol.

Ultimately, our idols lead us to destruction because they cause us to rebel against God in two different ways.<sup>(16)</sup> One way is by disobeying God in order to obey our idols. We obey whatever we love; and since we love our idols, we obey them; and since we obey them, we end up disobeying God. The other way our idols lead us into rebellion against God is when we try to use God to obtain our idols. Since God is all-powerful, we know that He could give us whatever we might possibly want; and since what we most want is what we most love (our idols), then we try to manipulate God so that He gives us our idols.

Our idols are the root of all our problems because anything we put in the center of our hearts makes us disobey God; and it deceives us, it disappoints us, it ruins us, it destroys us, and ironically, we end up destroying it as well.

(15) *John 10:10*

(16) *Psalms 106:36*

## **We Deserve Death for Rejecting God**

By seeking happiness outside of God, we commit the deepest sin: we replace God in the center of our hearts with the things that He created. Because we seek to be fulfilled through creation and not in the Creator, we gravely offend God.<sup>(17)</sup> <sup>(18)</sup> And we end up under God's terrible wrath and judgement as the only just punishment for our rebellion. Instead of being happy and satisfied, we're judged and condemned by God.<sup>(19)</sup>

### **Application Questions:**

What are your idols: where do you look for happiness, purpose, love, and security?

In which areas of your life do you search outside of God to satisfy the needs of your soul?

What would you have to change to put God in the center of your heart?

How could you seek to have your needs be fulfilled in God? (By doing so, you'll be removing the idols from your heart.)

### **Catechism:**

#### ***What do we desire most in life?***

- Satisfaction: happiness, purpose, love, and security.

*(17) Isaiah 42:8*

*(18) Exodus 20:4-5*

*(19) Romans 2:5*

***Who can completely satisfy us?***

- Only God can.

***What is an idol?***

- Any thing, person, or activity that we put in God's place by depending on it for our joy, satisfaction, security, and approval.

***What is idolatry?***

- Seeking our happiness or satisfaction in something created, instead of in the Creator, and thus replacing God in our hearts.

***What lies at the root of all sin?***

- Seeking our happiness in an idol instead of in God Himself.



# Chapter 4

## The Reason We Exist

**W**e all want to be happy; we live our lives searching for satisfaction. Our desire to be happy is at the root of everything we do. This approach to life that starts with ourselves, is very man-centered.

As we saw at the beginning of this book, everything does not revolve around us. Rather, everything revolves around God. God, who is the Supreme Being of the universe, is at the center of everything. So, if we want to truly understand ourselves, asking what do we want in life, is actually starting with the wrong question. Of course, it helps us understand why we do the things we do, but it doesn't explain our true purpose, or better put, the purpose our Creator has for us.

So then, in order to truly understand ourselves, we have to follow a different line of questioning: We have to ask "why did God make us?" or "what is the purpose of our existence?"

## Created to Give Glory

There's something at the core of our nature that drives us to glorify something — anything. This instinct is an integral part of who we are; the desire to give glory to something propels all of our actions.

### Giving Glory Defined

If you doubt whether this idea is true — that we're all made to give glory to something —, then I would imagine your doubt is because of my use of the word 'glory'. This isn't a word we normally use in everyday speech. So, when I say we live to give glory to something, the first logical reaction could be "I don't know about you, but I don't live to give glory to anything!"

What does it mean to "give glory" to something? Giving glory means causing someone or something to be viewed — by others as well as oneself — as great, important, impressive, beautiful, and incredible. Giving glory is singing something's praises and being unable to stop talking about how incredible or important it is. Giving glory is always thinking about and dreaming about something, and being focused on or even practically obsessed with it. It's devoting time and energy to something and sacrificing other things to be able to do more of it. It's feeling deep emotion and passion for something: If others feel indifferent when thinking of it, giving glory is feeling the opposite — it's being made to feel alive by this amazing thing. Giving glory is insisting on sharing something with others, and desiring that others share this with you and experience the emotion and passion that you feel. The truth is that everyone lives

to make something be seen as great, important, impressive, and beautiful. We all live to give glory to something.

### **We All Give Glory to Something**

We all give glory to a wide variety of things in life. Even though what we glorify may differ from person to person, we all glorify something. Sometimes we glorify ourselves: We glorify and worship our own intelligence, abilities, or bodies. Sometimes we glorify material things like houses, cars, food, or money. Other times we glorify the experiences of life, like being inebriated, going to parties, spending time with friends, playing a sport, or going on a trip. We even glorify other people, such as celebrities, athletes, parents, romantic partners, or friends. In the end, the point isn't who or what we worship, but that we're constantly worshipping something.

### **From Seeking Satisfaction to Giving Glory**

Our search for satisfaction in life is related to our worship because seeking satisfaction — joy, peace, love, security, and purpose — through someone or something, leads us to glorify that person or object. We worship the thing, person, or experience in which we put our hope for being happy and content. We make idols of the things to which we turn for satisfaction, because we glorify whatever we think makes us happy, or could make us happy. We make them look great, beautiful, and important, and put them in the center of our hearts.

## God Made Us to Glorify Him

We have been created to give glory; more specifically, God's purpose is for us to give glory to Him. He didn't make us to give glory to just anything — He made us especially to give glory to Him.<sup>(1)</sup> As we've seen, by glorifying anything or anyone but God, we're committing idolatry. God's purpose throughout all of his creation, including our lives, is to receive glory.<sup>(2) (3)</sup>

## What Does It Mean to Glorify God?

Instinctively, we glorify great athletes, a new car, a romantic relationship, or anything else we value in life. Without thinking, we sing the praises of the things that capture our attention. We lift up and bow down to the things that us happy. However, talking about glorifying God sounds like what you do when you go to church and sing worship songs. We really don't know what it means nor how to truly glorify God with all of our lives. Since our purpose (his reason for making us) is to glorify Him, it's very important for us to be able to answer the question: "what does it mean to glorify God?". Simply put, glorifying God is making Him known to others.

### ***Glorifying God Means Making Him Visible***

Since God is a spirit,<sup>(4)</sup> He often doesn't feel very real to us: We think of God as an idea or a concept. So, glorifying Him means making Him visible, making it so others perceive

(1) *Isaiah 43:6-7*

(2) *Psalms 19:1-4*

(3) *Romans 11.36*

(4) *John 4:24*

Him more, and making Him more real to them (and to ourselves as well). Jesus said that when his followers do good works, they draw attention to his Father, and He is glorified.<sup>(5)</sup> So, we give glory to God when we make Him more real to others through our lives.

### ***Glorifying God Means Reflecting His Essence***

The way we glorify God is intimately related with the fact that we're made in his image. God made us in his image,<sup>(6)</sup> and an image should always reflect its original, so we give glory to God when we reflect what He is like to others; when we reflect his goodness, justice, mercy, creativity, and love. We aren't God, but since we're made in his image, He commands his children to be like Him.<sup>(7)</sup> Our purpose and function in the universe is to reflect God's image by imitating Him in all that we are and all that we do.

### ***Glorifying God Means Showing His Greatness***

Everyone tends to minimize God: We don't take Him or what He says all that seriously. We all want to be the sovereign king over our own life, so we receive his Word as if it was a collection of good suggestions, rather than as the "Word of God". But in reality, God is immense,<sup>(8)</sup> all-powerful, and the Supreme King of the universe. Only his opinion matters, and his Word is Law.

(5) *Matthew 5:16*

(6) *Genesis 1:27*

(7) *Ephesians 5:1*

(8) *Colossians 1:17*

So we glorify God when we help others see Him as the great, powerful, and important God He is — that’s why another word we use to mean ‘glorifying’ God is ‘magnifying’ Him. That’s not to say “magnifying Him” as in making Him appear bigger than He is, like microscopes are used to magnify small objects — this would be impossible because God isn’t small! He’s so big we could never make Him appear bigger than He is. Rather, we magnify Him by making his greatness visible, in the way telescopes are used to magnify enormous objects that appear very small to the naked eye.<sup>(9)</sup>

We magnify God, we make others see how great He is, by obeying and reverencing Him, by loving and listening to Him, and by taking Him seriously. When we treat God as the great Supreme King He is, we make his greatness and power more visible to others.

## How to Live for His Glory

How do we live so that giving Him glory is the main goal of our lives? So far, we’ve examined why we should give glory to God and what it means to glorify Him; now, we’ll move on to look at how — in practical terms — we can glorify Him in our daily lives.

## In Everything We Do and We Are

The most surprising idea we find in the Bible is that God says we should glorify Him in everything.<sup>(10)</sup> In this verse, the apostle Paul mentions two of life’s most common

*(9) My thanks to John Piper for this example of the microscope and the telescope*

*(10) 1 Corinthians 10:31*

## The Reason We Exist

activities by way of example: eating and drinking. He says there's a way to do everything we do in life — even the most commonplace things —, so that God receives glory through what we do. But it's also possible to go about every activity in life in such a way as to take glory from God. On the one hand, in our every activity we can help others to see how great and powerful, how good and just, and how important God is; but on the other hand, through the same actions, it is possible for us to minimize God and take glory from Him.

So, if we are going to live our lives for God's glory, then our task is to learn to do everything in such a way that God receives glory — that is to say, we should eat for the glory of God, play football for the glory of God, clean house for the glory of God, go out to have fun for the glory of God; spend time with friends for the glory of God, be with our families for the glory of God, go shopping for the glory of God, go to work for the glory of God, etc. We must learn to do each activity in our lives in such a way so as to glorify God.

We can and should give God glory in everything. That's why He made us and that's our purpose. So, our question should be: How do we live so that in everything we do, God receives the most glory possible? This question is answered in four parts below:

### **1: Through the Attitude We Have**

Our daily activities become sources of glory for God through our attitude toward them: When we work happily and with all our hearts, we glorify God; on the other hand, when we work listlessly and lazily, only doing the minimum

required, we take glory from God.<sup>(11)</sup> Similarly, when we enjoy the good things we've received, we give glory to God, but by not enjoying them, we take glory from Him.<sup>(12)</sup> When we're content with what we have, we glorify God, but complaining and constantly thinking about what we don't have takes glory from Him.<sup>(13)</sup> When we're happy, we give glory to God, but if we go through life (or even through our day) with a depressed, negative attitude, we take glory from God.<sup>(14)</sup>

Through our attitude, we either give glory to or take glory from God; our attitude can transform common acts into acts that greatly glorify God.

## 2: Through Loving God More

If we are to glorify God through our lives, and simultaneously enjoy life,<sup>(15)</sup> then we have to love Him and not the things He's given us in this life.<sup>(16)</sup> This means enjoying our work without loving it; loving our family without placing it in the center of our hearts; enjoying good experiences, such as education, parties, trips, and meals without loving them; appreciating material possessions without valuing them more than we value God.

(11) *Colossians 3:23*

(12) *1 Timothy 6:17b*

(13) *Hebrews 13:5-6*

(14) *Psalms 100:2, Philippians 4:4*

(15) *1 Timothy 6:17*

(16) *Matthew 22:36-38*

## The Reason We Exist

A practical test by which we can see how much we love something is by looking at how much we value it. This is seen in:

- how much time we devote to it
- the amount of our thoughts we dedicate to it
- how happy or miserable it makes us
- how much of our money we spend on it

If we love God more than everything else, this love is evidenced in the way we spend our time, energy, money, and passion; it is made visible by seeking our happiness in God; it's shown by spending a lot of time with Him — praying and reading the Bible.

Once we start to love something else more than we love God, we begin to take glory from Him and make Him be seen as less important and less great than He truly is.<sup>(17)</sup> Everything else in life must take second place to God in our hearts, or else we divert glory away from God. We give glory to God by enjoying life without worshipping it and by putting nothing and no one but God at the center of our lives.

### 3: Through Not Sinning

Another way we glorify God in everything is in obeying his instructions in everything we do — we give glory to God by not disobeying Him. Disobedience can convert even the most common action into an act that diverts glory from God. When we disobey Him, we are assigning very little value to what He says, and we are saying that He's not important. Our attitude is that what we believe and what

*(17) 1 John 2:15*

we want is more important than what God says and what God wants, and that we're more important than God.

However, by obeying God in all things, we convert each action into praise to God because we're doing what He tells us to do, and this reflects our opinion of God: that He's the sovereign King of the universe who rules over all. Glorifying Him in all things by obeying Him has a lot of practical implications for our lives, such as: enjoying food without gluttony; drinking without getting drunk; enjoying sex, but only within marriage; playing sports without flying into a rage or cheating; talking with friends without gossiping; doing business without being dishonest — it's doing everything without sinning. When we obey God in everything we do, we give Him massive amounts of glory by demonstrating how important He is to us.

### **4: Through Advancing the Kingdom**

Finally, we can give glory to God by living our lives focused on advancing his Kingdom in all we do. Jesus instructed his followers that throughout their lives, they were to help others come to know Him.<sup>(18)</sup> He also said that when we do this, God receives much glory.<sup>(19)</sup> So, by always living with the purpose of helping others come to know Christ, God receives glory in everything we do.

How do we help others come to know Jesus through everything we do? By embracing the reality that we are always Jesus's missionaries:<sup>(20)</sup> As we shop at a stores, we

*(18) Matthew 28:19-20*

*(19) John 15:8*

*(20) 2 Corinthians 5:20*

are Jesus's missionaries at those stores; as we work, we're Jesus's representatives at our jobs; as we spend time with our families, we reflect the presence of Jesus to them; and as we play sports, we are Jesus's ambassadors to that team and in that environment. Everywhere we are, we should represent Jesus and attempt to guide those around us toward Him.

When we think this way, it expresses itself in the midst of every activity: we pray for the people around us, enter into friendships with them, help them in their lives,<sup>(21)</sup> look for and take advantage of opportunities to talk with them about Jesus, and guide them to making their next step closer to Him. When we live this way, our Father receives a lot of glory because, in everything, we are helping others come to know Him better.

## **We Find What We Want Most: Total Satisfaction**

In the previous chapter, we examined the need and the desire every person has to be happy; we also saw that we seek to find our happiness in things, people, and places that ultimately can't satisfy us completely.<sup>(22)</sup> In contrast, God can satisfy us completely. We enjoy a life of total satisfaction and complete happiness when we live out God's purpose for our lives, which is giving Him glory.<sup>(23)</sup>

(21) *Matthew 5:16*

(22) *Psalms 16:4*

(23) *Psalms 16:8-9*

So, in this way — with God at the center of our hearts — we are able to find true satisfaction. We live to give Him glory, and He makes us totally happy — happy in Him.<sup>(24)</sup>

### **Application Questions:**

Have you made the decision to glorify God with your life?

Deciding to live life for God's glory is what God asks of each of us, because that's what He made us for.<sup>(25)</sup> During this week, in everything you do, think about this question: Am I making others see God as great or as small right now?

### **Catechism:**

#### ***What is every person's purpose?***

- To give glory to God

#### ***How do we glorify God?***

- We glorify Him by putting Him in the center of our hearts.

*(24) Psalms 16:11*

*(25) Isaiah 26.8*

## Part 3

# Salvation

**W**hat is salvation? We tend to think it's not going to Hell, receiving forgiveness, or starting over. Salvation includes all of these things, and much, much more; it's much bigger than just being forgiven.

So far we've looked at God, the Supreme Being and Sovereign King of the universe, and at ourselves, human who are made in the image of God and who rebel against God. Now we'll look at how there can be peace between the Creator and his rebellious creation; this peace comes through salvation. So, while this introduction gives an overview of the concept of salvation, the next two chapters describe in detail how salvation works.

### **The Solution to Our Problem**

We've established what our problem is, namely that we don't love God, we love everything but God; that we don't glorify God, we give glory to the things we love; and that

we don't live for God's glory, but rather we live for our own satisfaction. Living like this makes us rebel against our Creator, and ironically, it doesn't satisfy us. In other words, our problem is that we're separated from God because we don't love Him and don't glorify Him.<sup>(1)</sup> But it goes beyond simply not loving Him, actually our real problem is that by nature we can't love Him. Finding our happiness in God and living for his glory goes against our fallen nature.<sup>(2)</sup>

More than simply receiving forgiveness and not going to Hell, salvation is God's solution to our problem. Apart from salvation, we're destined to living in rebellion — being unhappy and dissatisfied, and worshipping that which neither fulfills nor satisfies.<sup>(3)</sup> Such a lifestyle separates us from God, makes us children of his wrath, and destines us to be far from God in torment for all eternity.<sup>(4)</sup>

Salvation is the solution to this problem; it's the way God changes us so that we can love Him, glorify Him, and be truly happy and satisfied.

### **Total Transformation**

At its core, salvation is nothing less than a complete transformation of a person. Jesus said it's being born again.<sup>(5)</sup> When God saves someone, He makes that person completely new.<sup>(6)</sup> Being saved is receiving a new heart from

(1) *Romans 3:23*

(2) *Romans 1:21-25, 28, 32*

(3) *Ephesians 2:1-3*

(4) *Romans 2:5*

(5) *John 3:3, 5-6*

(6) *John 3:5-6*

## Salvation

God.<sup>(7)</sup> And from this new heart, flows a new way of living and acting:

- Rather than loving everything but God, we begin to love God more than anything else.<sup>(8)</sup>
- Rather than wanting to disobey God, we begin to want to obey Him.<sup>(9)</sup>
- Rather than rebelling against God, we begin to willingly and happily accept his lordship.<sup>(10)</sup>
- Rather than being children of wrath, we are adopted as children of God.<sup>(11)</sup>
- Rather than being a slave to sin, we become free from sin and renewed.<sup>(12)</sup>

As you can see, the Bible describes salvation as a transformation of our heart. When God saves people, He changes them so they submit to Him, love Him, treasure Him, and seek their satisfaction in Him.

Through being transformed like this, we can find what we most need and most want in life: We can be in a relationship with God because we have placed Him in the center of our hearts, and we can obey God because we value Him more than our idols. We can be completely satisfied because we've entered into a relationship of Father and child with the God who can truly satisfy us.

(7) *Ezekiel 36:26*

(8) *Romans 5:5*

(9) *Ezekiel 36:27-28*

(10) *Ephesians 1:5-6*

(11) *Jeremiah 21:33*

(12) *Ezekiel 36:25*

## Catechism:

### ***What is humanity's biggest problem?***

- We can't please God, we can't love God, and we can't glorify God.

### ***What is God's salvation?***

- Salvation is being born again, being transformed by desiring and being made able to love and value God above all things, and to glorify God with our whole lives.

# Chapter 5

## God Saves

Salvation is the complete transformation of a person's heart — from someone who loves everything but God to someone who loves, follows and obeys God. But how does salvation work? How does this transformation occur?

### **"Our" Salvation**

We think, mistakenly, that salvation primarily has to do with us, that being saved is our decision, that entering into salvation depends on us, that salvation is our agreement with God, and that his greatest goal in salvation is securing our eternal destiny. This is largely true, but our mistake is in looking at salvation from the human point of view, rather than first trying to understand it from God's viewpoint.

### ***We Have to Earn It***

By starting from the point of view that salvation primarily is about us, we take for granted that we have to work to be

closer to God and to deserve to be saved. If salvation centers around us, then it would make sense that we would have to earn it. So accordingly, we try to better our lives, quit our “big” sins, go to church, treat others better, and be good people. We end up relating salvation to the goodness of our behavior, as if salvation were something we could earn.

### ***That Won't Work***

Trying to earn our salvation never works. To start with, we can't do enough to save ourselves.<sup>(1)</sup> We know that even when we are good, we aren't perfect. Furthermore, working to try to deserve our salvation turns us into religious, legalistic hypocrites; and we end up farther away from God, rather than closer to Him.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **God Is the One Who Saves**

The truth is, salvation primarily has to do with God. Salvation starts with his desire to save us; it's his work in us; and He does it for his own reasons. God is completely sovereign in salvation,<sup>(3)</sup> just as in all of creation.<sup>(4)</sup> Of course salvation has to do with us, but it has even more to do with God than with us; salvation starts and ends with God.<sup>(5)</sup>

(1) *Luke 18.20-22*

(2) *Matthew 15.8-9*

(3) *Romans 9:18*

(4) *Psalms 115:3*

(5) *Jonah 2:9*

## God Decides to Save

Salvation begins with God because God decides whom He is going to save, and when God saves us, it's because of his desire to do so, not our own.

### This Can't Depend on Us

We assume salvation starts with us; we say “we get closer to God”, that “we seek God,” and that “we make a decision for God.” And as we'll see in the next chapter, if we are going to be saved, we must do all of these things: we have to seek, decide, and accept. Despite this, however, salvation doesn't begin when we start to become interested in God.

The problem is that if salvation depended on us and was centered around our search for God, no one could ever be saved!<sup>(6)</sup> We're rebellious; we don't seek God. In our natural state, we don't want to follow Him; we run from Him and try to be our own gods. We aren't able to choose God because we are very wicked; left to ourselves, we always choose our idols.

If our salvation depended on us, we wouldn't have hope. The only way that we can be saved is if God decides to save us.<sup>(7)</sup> So then, when God saves someone, it's because He decides to do so.<sup>(8)</sup>

(6) *Romans 3:11*

(7) *Romans 8:29*

(8) *John 6:65*

## He Decided Beforehand

The Bible says that God doesn't make the decision to save a person in the moment He saves them. Rather, it's a decision that He made beforehand.<sup>(9)</sup> When God saves someone, it's because He decided before creating the world that He was going to save them.<sup>(10)</sup> So, God decides whom He will save, and He decided that before the beginning.<sup>(11)</sup>

## Salvation Is the Work of God

Salvation starts with God because He decides whom He will save; it also ends with God because He performs the actual work of salvation. God saves. God does the work of converting corrupt hearts; of transforming a rebellious person into a new person.

## He Did this Work in Jesus

Jesus's life, the cross, and his resurrection from the dead are significant because through these three things God worked salvation.<sup>(12)</sup> It's through Christ that we can enter into a relationship with God and have peace with Him.<sup>(13)</sup> The result of the error in thinking that salvation depends on us, is that we then depend on someone or something outside of Jesus for our salvation.<sup>(14)</sup> God doesn't save us because we become better; rather He saves us in Christ.

(9) *Ephesians 1:3-5*

(10) *2 Timothy 1:9*

(11) *Revelation 13:8*

(12) *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*

(13) *Romans 5:1, 8-11*

(14) *John 14:6*

### ***He Paid the Price***

There is only one punishment for rebellion against God: death.<sup>(15)</sup> In times past, God accepted the death of animals — sacrifices — as payment for rebellion's punishment.<sup>(16)</sup> In other words, when a person rebelled against God — that is, sinned — God used to accept an animal's death in place of the death of that person.<sup>(17)</sup>

However, when Christ came, He lived a perfect life by never rebelling against God in any way. Through his death on the cross, He became the perfect sacrifice; the Son of God died innocently.<sup>(18)</sup> By his death, He paid the price for the punishment we all deserve.<sup>(19)</sup> So, it's through Christ that God saves, because Jesus absorbed God's wrath in the place of all those who enter into a relationship with Him.

### ***He Gives Us His Righteousness***

Part of the work God does in salvation is that He pays the price of our rebellion through the death of his Son, Jesus. Through this forgiveness, we escape the Father's wrath, because Jesus absorbed it in our place; we are saved and forgiven. But just being pardoned leaves us saved and imperfect — imperfect because we carry the stain and contamination of all of our past sins, and also because in the future there will be moments in which we disobey God. Because of this, the other part of God's saving work is

(15) *Romans 6:23a*

(16) *Hebrews 9:22*

(17) *Hebrews 9:13*

(18) *Hebrews 9:14*

(19) *Hebrews 9:26b*

giving us the righteousness — or perfection — of Christ.<sup>(20)</sup> He lived a perfect life; and every person whom God saves receives the benefit of this life. Being saved means being “in Christ,”<sup>(21)</sup> and when God looks at us He doesn’t see how evil and rebellious we are, rather He sees how perfect Jesus is. It is as if the Christian had lived the perfect life that Christ lived. Jesus covers his followers with his perfect life, so that they are also perfect in his Father’s eyes.<sup>(22)</sup>

### ***He Conquered Satan, Sin, and Death***

The work Jesus did at the cross was even greater than just achieving our individual salvation: He defeated the spiritual forces that enslaved and dominated humans and the entire world since Adam and Eve rebelled.<sup>(23)</sup> What are these forces? They are Satan, demons, sin, and death. Satan is the lord of evil forces; demons work to keep people far from God; sin keeps human beings enslaved; and death is everyone’s final destination. However, Jesus destroyed the power that these evil forces had over every person at the cross. Today, these forces are still active and bring about destruction, but their power has been shattered;<sup>(24)</sup> now every person who follows Jesus can have freedom from the enslaving power of sin,<sup>(25)</sup> and death won’t be their final destination, because Jesus was raised from the dead.<sup>(26)</sup>

(20) *2 Corinthians 5:21*

(21) *2 Corinthians 5:17*

(22) *Colossians 1:21-22*

(23) *Colossians 2:13-15*

(24) *1 Corinthians 15:55-57*

(25) *Romans 6:17-18*

(26) *1 Corinthians 15:20-22*

## **He Does the Work When He Saves Us**

When God saves us, He is the one who does the work of salvation.<sup>(27)</sup> In the moment He saves, God display his greatness and power because He is saving someone who is rebellious and lost.<sup>(28)</sup>

### ***He Draws Us to Himself***

God's work in salvation starts at the beginning, because He starts the process of saving us by drawing us to Himself.<sup>(29)</sup> We can only be saved if God initiates the process in our hearts — if He causes us to seek Him. Every time someone decides to follow Jesus, it's because God has irresistibly drawn them to Himself.<sup>(30)</sup>

### ***He Gives Us Faith***

We enter into God's grace by our faith, by believing in Jesus so much we decide to follow Him.<sup>(31)</sup> However, God is the One who gives us the faith we need in order to be saved. And by doing so, we again can see that salvation doesn't come from us, but from God.

### ***Complete Forgiveness***

God also does the work in our salvation because in the moment He saves us, God forgives our sins.<sup>(32)</sup> We don't

*(27)P salms 3:8*

*(28) Jonah 2:9*

*(29) John 6:44-45*

*(30) John 6:37, 39-40*

*(31) John 3:16*

*(32) Acts 2:38*

earn our salvation — we can't work to get it or deserve it; rather, God pardons us because of his grace.<sup>(33)</sup> It is God who erases our sins; and He is also the One who continues to forgive us afterwards.<sup>(34)</sup>

### ***He Makes Us New***

The work that God does in saving us is that He regenerates us; the person we are dies, and in his place God creates a new being.<sup>(35)</sup> In order to be his children, we have to become new.<sup>(36)</sup> And God makes us new — not merely better or changed, but totally new.<sup>(37)</sup> Jesus clearly said that God (the Spirit) is the One who works this transformation in us.<sup>(38)</sup>

### ***Adoption into God's Family***

God does the work in saving us because when we enter into salvation, God adopts us into his family<sup>(39)</sup>, making us his children: Christ's brothers and sisters.<sup>(40)</sup> This is completely God's work; no one can become his child by his own strength; only God can adopt someone into his family.

## **God Saves for His Own Reasons**

Have you ever wondered why God saves?

*(33) Ephesians 2:9*

*(34) 1 John 2:1-2*

*(35) Colossians 3:3*

*(36) John 3:3*

*(37) Romans 6:4*

*(38) John 3:5-6*

*(39) Ephesians 1:5*

*(40) Romans 8:28-30*

## God Saves

We think that it's about us, that the principal reason God saves is so that we won't go to Hell. We take for granted that the highest purpose in salvation is our eternal good. We think we're the reason why salvation happens.

Just as salvation has to do with God, the reason God saves also principally has to do with God Himself. God has his own reasons for saving evil, rebellious people. Let's look at the main ones that are found in the Bible.

### **Because He Loves Us**

It can't be denied that salvation is a product of the great love God has for us:<sup>(41)</sup> God saves us because He loves us. We're his creation, made in his image, and God loves us — that's why He saves us. But looking only at this reality might make us think that we're the principal reason God saves us. God does save us because He loves us, but there's another factor that motivates Him even more than his love for us.

### **So That He Will Receive Glory**

The most important reason God saves us is in order to receive glory. In Ephesians 1, Paul gives one of the most glorious descriptions of salvation ever written. Three times in this grand explanation, he says the reason God saves is that in salvation, God receives glory.<sup>(42)</sup>

God receives glory in salvation: When He saves a wicked person, He displays his mercy; when He overcomes our sinful nature and makes us decide to submit to Him, He displays his power; when He rescues us from life and

*(41) John 3:16*

*(42) Ephesians 1:6, 1:12, 1:14*

eternity without Him, He displays his goodness; when He transforms us and causes us to be born again, He displays his dominion over all his creation. At every step in salvation, God reveals his attributes; He displays his greatness, power, goodness, compassion, and sovereignty.

There are many reasons God saves, but showing his glory is the overriding reason. His purpose in saving, more than anything else, is to reveal Himself to the world.

## God Saves

God saves: He decides to save us, He pursues us, He draws us to Himself, He forgives us, He adopts us as his children, and He makes us new. Only God can save. And by doing so, He receives all of the glory for saving; no one else can take credit because it is God who saves.

## By Grace

So we receive salvation by God's grace<sup>(43)</sup> — grace being “unmerited favor”. When God saves us, it's because of the favor He has towards us, favor that we don't deserve — because we could never earn it. He saves us because He decides to save us.<sup>(44)</sup> We're worse than we could ever imagine being,<sup>(45)</sup> yet God decides to save us, to give us life, and to forgive us;<sup>(46)</sup> He makes us part of his family.<sup>(47)</sup> This

(43) *Ephesians 2:8*

(44) *Ephesians 2:5*

(45) *Ephesians 2:1-3*

(46) *Ephesians 2:4-5*

(47) *Ephesians 2:6*

## God Saves

is the message of the Gospel: God saves and transforms people who have rebelled against Him.

### **Pride Removed**

Seeing God's sovereignty in salvation shatters the legalistic mindset that we all have by nature: we feel we have to do something to save ourselves. But realizing we're not saved by our own works, but rather by the decision, grace, and work of God strips us of our pride and helps us enter into a correct relationship with God. We bring nothing to the table; God gives everything and does everything.

### **Application Questions:**

What do you trust in apart from God for your salvation?

Which good works make you feel like you are in good standing with God?

Why is it hard for us to believe that it's God who saves us, and not we who save ourselves?

### **Catechism:**

#### ***Who saves?***

- Only God saves: by choosing, drawing to Himself, and regenerating those He saves.

#### ***What does God do when He saves someone?***

- He completely transforms him; He makes him born again.

## Foundations

### ***Why does God save us?***

- Because He loves us and to receive glory.

# Chapter 6

## We Respond to God

Salvation is the total transformation of a person — from someone who rebels against God, to a person who lives completely devoted to Him. This transformation is something that God does: He decides whom He will save, and He does the work of saving; He does this because He loves us and so that He will receive glory.

### What Does We Do in Salvation?

So, if salvation is the work of God, then what do we do in salvation? Could it be that we don't do anything? Do we sit by just waiting for God to save us?

Looking at God's sovereignty in salvation could lead us to have a fatalistic attitude (to think: "God will do what He wants to do, and we can't do anything in the process"). Thinking this way is a mistake, because although the Bible is very clear in saying that only God saves, it also teaches

and repeatedly demonstrates that we actively participate in the salvation process.

If we don't affirm both God's sovereignty and our participation in salvation, we easily fall into one of two errors:

### ***Not Doing Anything***

When we realize how sovereign God is in salvation, we can easily think that if God is going to save someone, He will do it whenever He's ready. This attitude quickly leads us to not actively participate in our own salvation nor to seek others' salvation.

Having this attitude means ignoring one of God's story's great themes: God always saves by and through people's active participation. (Some examples being Abraham,<sup>(1)</sup> Israel,<sup>(2)</sup> and the new People of God<sup>(3)</sup>.) Also, embracing this fatalistic mindset ignores the urgency of God's story: every person will face his judgement,<sup>(4)</sup> but only God's sons and daughters will be saved — everyone else will spend eternity in torment, far from God.<sup>(5)</sup>

### ***Trying to Do Everything***

At the other extreme of not participating in the work of salvation is the error of taking on all the responsibility for becoming saved ourselves. It's trying to save ourselves. This

(1) *Genesis 12:2-3*

(2) *Isaiah 42:6-7*

(3) *1 Peter 2:9*

(4) *Hebrews 9:27*

(5) *Revelation 21:7-8*

attitude is feeling that we have to earn our own salvation by transforming ourselves into a better person. It's also thinking that other people's being saved or not depends entirely on how much we fight for their salvation. But taking the exclusive responsibility for salvation is putting ourselves in God's place. And only God can save.<sup>(6)</sup>

### **We Participate When God Saves**

While God alone saves, the reality is that we participate in the process of salvation. Our participation takes nothing from God's sovereignty in salvation, rather it is this way because that's how He desires it to work.

#### ***Like an Iceberg***

Salvation is kind of like an iceberg: It has two parts, one visible and one invisible. The visible part of the iceberg appears to be huge, but the invisible part, the part below the water's surface, is much bigger.

In the same way, salvation consists of two parts, one visible and one invisible. The visible part is what we do in salvation, our participation. The invisible part is what God does in salvation. This invisible part is the bigger and the decisive part of salvation.

#### ***Passive Participation***

On the one hand, our participation in salvation is very passive. It's passive because anything we do in the process of entering into salvation is the result of God's work in us.

(6) *Isaiah 43:11-13*

## Foundations

In other words, God causes and produces our participation in our salvation:

- We only approach God if He draws us to Himself.<sup>(7)</sup>
- The faith that we come to have in Jesus is a gift from God.<sup>(8)</sup>
- If we decide we want to follow Jesus, it's because God made us see Him as more valuable than everything or anyone else.<sup>(9)</sup>

The only way that we can be saved is if God changes our will and makes us respond to Him. That's why our participation in salvation in no way earns us our salvation; God saves us completely by his grace.<sup>(10)</sup> What we do to participate is nothing more than the manner in which God has decided that his salvation will be received. It isn't what we do to work or merit our salvation; we're saved by the work of Christ, not by any work of our own.

### ***Active Participation***

On the other hand, our participation in the salvation process is very active: We do not stand by idly as God is saving us; rather we participate in the process. That is to say that our participation is necessary and essential: God doesn't save anyone who doesn't participate in their own salvation.

(7) *John 6:65*

(8) *Ephesians 2:8*

(9) *2 Corinthians 4:6*

(10) *Ephesians 2:9*

Every person God saves responds to God as he or she is being saved.<sup>(11)</sup>

### ***God Causes Our Participation***

The best way to think about our participation in salvation is like this: God causes our participation when He saves us. God's work in saving us is what makes us respond to Him.<sup>(12)</sup>

## **Responding Is Our Participation**

So what exactly do we do as we are being saved? How do we participate with God in our salvation? We participate by responding to God. God takes the initiative and does the work of salvation, and we respond to Him when He draws us to Himself and saves us.

### **We Respond By Hearing**

Responding to God begins by us hearing Him. In order to be saved, we must hear the Gospel. What is this "Gospel" we must hear? The Gospel is the great news of salvation in Christ. The summary of the Gospel is this: We're evil (we've rebelled against God), but God offers salvation in Christ (by Jesus's perfect life, undeserved death, and resurrection from the dead).<sup>(13)</sup> Every single person God saves must hear this in some form or other.<sup>(14)</sup> If we don't hear this (either because we don't want to listen or because no one tells us),

(11) *Acts 2:40-41*

(12) *Acts 13:48*

(13) *Acts 4:12*

(14) *Romans 10:13-15*

then we cannot be saved. So, we must participate in our salvation by hearing the Gospel.<sup>(15)</sup>

## **We Respond By Believing**

We also participate in our salvation by believing the truth we've heard about Jesus.<sup>(16)</sup> This belief is called "faith".<sup>(17)</sup> Jesus said that believing in Him gives us entrance into eternal life,<sup>(18)</sup> and also that by believing in Him we receive his Spirit.<sup>(19)</sup>

We can know and believe a lot of things about God. However, even among Jesus's followers there is a good deal of conflict and disagreement about many doctrines and Biblical teachings. If having faith is essential to being saved, it's logical to ask what exactly do we have to believe in order to be able to follow Jesus? In what do we have to have faith in order to participate in our salvation? In short, we respond to God by having faith in the Gospel — the good news of salvation in Jesus, and we must believe it in order to be saved.<sup>(20)</sup> Believing the gospel includes:

- Believing in our need;
- That in our natural state, we're bad;
- that we live in rebellion against God;
- and therefore deserve and will receive his wrath;

(15) *Galatians 3:2, 5*

(16) *Romans 10:8-11*

(17) *Galatians 3:5, 6, 26*

(18) *John 11:26*

(19) *John 7:38-39*

(20) *1 Corinthians 15:1-4*

## We Respond to God

- and that as such, we're destined to an eternity of punishment and torment.<sup>(21)</sup>
- Believing in Jesus:
- That He's the One and only Son of God;<sup>(22)</sup>
- that He came to our world and became a man;<sup>(23)</sup>
- lived a perfect life, died an undeserved death, and rose triumphantly from the dead.<sup>(24)</sup>
- Believing in God's salvation:
- That in Jesus, God offers salvation;<sup>(25)</sup>
- offering peace with Himself<sup>(26)</sup>
- and adoption as his children;<sup>(27)</sup>
- That He offers eternal life in his Kingdom.<sup>(28)</sup>

Believing the Gospel, placing our faith and trust in it, is part of responding to God and participating in our salvation.

## We Respond By Making a Decision

We also respond to God by making a decision, which is the product of our faith.<sup>(29)</sup> Having saving faith involves more than intellectually believing some historical facts,<sup>(30)</sup> rather

(21) *Romans 1:18-25, 2:5, 3:23, 6:23*

(22) *John 1:1-4*

(23) *Philippians 2:5-8*

(24) *1 Corinthians 15:3-4*

(25) *Acts 4:12*

(26) *Romans 5:1*

(27) *Galatians 3:26*

(28) *John 17:3*

(29) *Acts 2:41*

(30) *James 2:19*

it's believing the Gospel in a way that moves us to action.<sup>(31)</sup> Truly believing — that is, having real faith — produces action. Really believing the Gospel moves us to respond to Jesus; it moves us to decide to follow Him.<sup>(32)</sup>

The Bible demonstrates how we decide to follow Jesus: we do so by repenting and being baptized.<sup>(33)</sup> The Bible describes in the book of Acts, how in the days after Jesus ascended back into Heaven, every time someone decided to follow Jesus, he made a conscious decision by repenting and being baptized. In the same way, today we also should respond like this to Jesus by deciding to follow Him.

### ***Repentance***

Part of deciding to follow Jesus is repenting. Repentance involves making a decision with the mind and the heart. Repentance starts by recognizing our sin — that we've rebelled against God —, and realizing that the only just punishment that our rebellion deserves is death. This realization makes us feel profoundly sad, as we come to understand how much we've offended our Creator.<sup>(34)</sup> And this sadness produces true repentance, causing us to renounce our attempt to be sovereign over our own lives, and to humbly accept God's sovereignty.<sup>(35)</sup>

So, repentance is more than simply experiencing sadness or pangs of conscience because of our sin, but rather represents

*(31) James 2:14, 26*

*(32) Acts 22.16*

*(33) Acts 2:38*

*(34) Acts 2:37*

*(35) 2 Corinthians 7:10*

our experiencing this sadness to such a degree that it makes us turn from our own way to God's and submit to Him. When we repent, we decide to give God all of our life and everything we are.<sup>(36)</sup>

### **Baptism**

We also decide to follow Jesus by being baptized.<sup>(37)</sup> If repentance is making the decision to follow Jesus with our heart and our mind, then baptism involves making that same decision with the entire body. Baptism is the decisive moment when we finalize our decision and enter into a new relationship with Christ.<sup>(38)</sup>

The word to "baptize" in the New Testament comes from the Greek word that translated means to "submerge." Being baptized is simply the physical act of being submerged in water. At the same time, though, Christian baptism is much more than merely going down into the water, it's part of making the decision to follow Jesus. Baptism is the moment of finalizing this decision and is our way of saying to God (and to others) that we are making this decision. In this moment, we are joined with Jesus's death and resurrection, and God gives us new life.<sup>(39)</sup> So then, baptism isn't a religious ritual that magically "saves you"; the significance of baptism isn't going down into the water, but rather it is the decision to follow Christ that we are making in that moment.<sup>(40)</sup> For this reason, baptism isn't something you can

(36) *Luke 9:23*

(37) *Acts 2:38*

(38) *Galatians 3:27*

(39) *Romans 6:3-4*

(40) *1 Peter 3:21*

do to others (for example to babies), because being put into water in and of itself doesn't do anything for the person. What causes something eternal to happen at the time we are baptized is that we make the decision to follow Jesus and to submit ourselves to Him with our whole body as we are being baptized. Baptism isn't a spiritual ritual separated from the decision to follow Christ, rather it's the physical element of that very decision.

That's why getting baptized isn't a work that we do to earn or merit our salvation. Being baptized is simply submitting ourselves to God. It's the physical demonstration of the decision we make, and the rest of our participation with God in salvation (hearing, believing, and repenting) is internal. So no one sees those portions of the decision at that moment, but baptism is the visible element of our decision.

Deciding to follow Jesus by repenting and being baptized is nothing more than making this decision in the way that God asks us to make it.<sup>(41)</sup>

### **We Enter In When We Respond**

God saves us, He does the work of drawing us to Himself and making us new, and we respond by making the decision to follow Him. We make this decision by believing in Him, repenting, and being baptized. And we enter into salvation when we respond to God in this way.<sup>(42)</sup> We respond because God is saving us, and God saves us as we respond to Him.<sup>(43)</sup>

*(41) Acts 2:38*

*(42) Romans 6:3-4*

*(43) Acts 2:41*

### ***How to Tell If God Is Saving Someone***

When we look at how sovereign God is in salvation, as we saw in the last chapter, doubts can arise as to how to know that God is saving someone in particular; how can we tell if God is regenerating them (making them new)?

Now, after all that we've seen in this chapter, we can know when God saves someone. We know by looking at the way that person responds: When they believe in Jesus and decide to follow Him by repenting and being baptized, it's because God is saving them. Every time someone responds in this way to God, it's evidence that God is saving them. In the Bible, when someone received salvation, they responded in this way to the work that God did in them.<sup>(44)</sup>

### **Application Questions:**

Have you responded to God in faith, repentance, and baptism?

If you haven't made this decision, what's keeping you from doing so?

If you have made this decision, can you think of someone in your life who hasn't responded to God in this way? Why not you pray for this person, that God would save him? Would you be looking for an opportunity to talk with them about their relationship with God?

(44) *Acts 13:48*

## Catechism:

### *What do we do in salvation?*

- We respond to God's saving work.

### *How do we respond to God when He saves us?*

- By hearing, by believing, and by making the decision to follow Him by repenting and being baptized.

## Part 4

### Follower

So now, what happens afterwards? What happens after the moment when God saves a person who has lived in rebellion against Him? What happens after that person responds to God by believing in Jesus and deciding to follow Him, by repenting and being baptized?

Our tendency is to put so much emphasis on the decision to be saved, and then to assume that what happens afterwards is automatic. We treat the Christian life as if it were the flight of a huge airplane. The most intense work of the flight is the take off: Taking off is difficult and consumes most of the pilot's focus, but after taking off, the plane practically flies itself. In fact, the autopilot can take over its navigation. In the same way in the Christian life, we focus a lot on a person's conversion — as if it were like the plane's take off — and then expect the rest of life with Christ to be automatic, almost like autopilot.

## Foundations

However, we are totally mistaken when we think this way. Living life as a follower of Christ is only the start of the decision to follow Him. Everything starts when we decide to enter into a relationship with God.

By thinking about the decision we make when we respond to God in salvation, we find the answer to the question "What happens afterwards?". The decision isn't just to be saved; the decision is to follow Christ. So, by entering into salvation, we enter into a life of purpose, a life of actively following Christ, — not a life of autopilot.

What we'll see now is how we live life as Jesus's followers, how this looks in real life, and practically speaking, what we do next. We'll see that the answer is found in Jesus's call: Jesus called people to follow Him. And following Him means imitating Him. Imitating Him means being like Him and working with Him. We follow Christ by living as He lived. So we'll look at how to be more and more like Him; we'll also look at how to work with Him in our daily lives. In this way we'll learn how to live as followers of Jesus.

### **Catechism:**

#### ***What is Jesus's call?***

- Jesus's call is to follow Him.

#### ***What does it mean to follow Jesus?***

- Following Him means imitating Him.

¿What does it mean to Imitate Jesus?

- Imitating Jesus means 1) being like Him and 2) working with Him.

# Chapter 7

## New Identity

**W**hen God saves us, we make a decision. What is the essence of this decision? It is that we are deciding to following Jesus.<sup>(1)</sup> And by making this decision, we say that we want to spend the rest of our lives being disciples — or followers — of Christ.

Now, following Christ essentially means imitating Him — or becoming like Him.<sup>(2)</sup> So, following Jesus means becoming like Him in every way: In our emotions, our words, thoughts, attitudes, and actions. It means not sinning, obeying God, and showing love; it means serving others and sacrificing our lives to help others come to know God. The reality is that imitating Jesus means becoming exactly like Him, which is a very high call. So high that frequently his followers abandon the goal of imitating Him and become content with simply trying to be good people

(1) *Matthew 28:19*

(2) *1 John 2:6*

who go to church on Sundays. The reason that imitating Christ appears to be an impossible goal is because we all have a very big problem:

## **Our Sin Owns Us**

Sin is disobedience to God, and we commit it because we want to be the gods of our own lives.<sup>(3)</sup> We rebel against God because we want to take his place. The irony of our sin is that we sin because we want to control our own life, but our sins end up controlling us;<sup>(4)</sup> our vices, internal character, habits, and appetites control us.

### ***Active, Progressive, and Malignant***

Our sin owns us because of what it is. All sin — the "bad" ones and the "more acceptable" ones — share three characteristics: They're active, they're progressive, and they're malignant.

Sin is active because it moves and it works; sin does something inside us when we commit it, and our sin also affects others. It's not inanimate. It's like yeast in that even though yeast appears to be just a powder, it is active. So sin is also active.

Sin's activity isn't aimless movement without meaning or purpose; rather, sin is progressive. Sinning some always leads to sinning more.

(3) *Isaiah 53:6*

(4) *John 8:34*

Likewise, sin's progress is never neutral; it isn't benign; it isn't innocent. Sin is living — active and progressive —, and always has an extremely negative effect on our lives.

### ***It Grows, It Changes Us, and It Destroys***

Sin's characteristics — it's active, progressive, and malignant — explain the inevitable and negative effect sin has in our lives: it grows, it changes us, and it destroys.<sup>(5)</sup>

Because sin is progressive, it always grows. We can't contain rebellion against God: If we tolerate it in our lives, it will grow. It is impossible for it to be present and to not convert itself into a larger and larger presence.

Sin is active, and this means that it changes us. We cannot remain the same when there is sin in our lives. Sin transforms the person who commits it, which is why it has so many negative effects.

Sin is malignant — it destroys everything it touches and everyone who touches it.<sup>(6)</sup> It destroys us, because it makes us its slave.<sup>(7)</sup> It destroys us, because it ruins friendships and relationships with others.<sup>(8)</sup> It destroys us, because it makes us miss out on the purpose and potential that God has for us. It destroys us, because it fills us with habits, vices, and character problems that remain as weaknesses in us. It destroys us, because it leaves us with bad memories and

(5) *Hebrews 3:12-13*

(6) *John 10:10*

(7) *John 8:34*

(8) *Hebrews 12:15*

regret. It destroys us, because our rebellion separates us from God.<sup>(9)</sup>

## Mistaken Obedience

When we follow Christ, we try to fight against our sin. Unfortunately, the best efforts we make towards conquering sin end up with few results. Battling for years without being able to dominate a persistent sin is a common experience for children of God; and many times when we don't see results, we stop resisting and refocus our energy on hiding our sin, instead of overcoming it.

We struggle and fail precisely because we try to obey God for mistaken reasons. We work hard to become better people, but we feel that the same sins still keep us trapped and enslaved. We feel this way because we're fighting the wrong way — for the wrong reasons. Why are our motives important, as long as we obey God? Jesus said that what is in the heart — its motives, desires, and emotions — is more important than our external actions.<sup>(10)</sup> God wants our hearts, not just our external actions.

There are three mistaken motives that are often times behind our struggle against sin: our pride, the condemnation we feel, and our desire to manipulate God.

### **Pride**

Pride is the motive behind many of our attempts at obedience. We obey because it makes us feel worthier — as

(9) *Galatians 5:21*

(10) *Matthew 15:8-9*

though we really are good people. In other words, we obey in order to complete ourselves and to please ourselves, and not in order to submit ourselves to God.

When pride is the motive behind our obedience, we obey so that we'll be the good people we know, inside, that we are; we obey because we want others to see us and think well of us; we obey in an attempt to make up for the bad things we've done — so that we'll be even with God.

Having pride as our motivation for obeying God poisons our obedience: When we struggle and fail, our pride makes us hide our sin and pretend we're better than we really are.<sup>(11)</sup> On the other hand, when we fight against our sin and are successful, pride makes us feel like we're good, worthy, or better than others.<sup>(12)</sup> A “well behaved” Christian who is prideful is just as bad in God's eyes as a Christian enslaved by vices.

### ***Condemnation***

Another erroneous motive that prods our obedience is condemnation. We obey because we feel guilty for all the bad things we've done. We look at our past — even the way we behaved yesterday — and realize we're evil. On the inside, we hang our head in shame, and on the outside, we force ourselves to behave better. Condemnation can motivate us to change and better ourselves, because then we feel like we'll be paying something of the price for the bad things we've done. We also feel as if by behaving better, we'll prove we're not as bad as our past actions show us to be.

(11) *1 John 1:8-9*

(12) *Isaiah 64:6*

## Foundations

Obedying out of guilt and condemnation is a trap, because at its root is basing our perception of our identity on how we behave. Condemnation says, “You’re evil because you have done evil things”. The solution it offers us is to behave better, and in this way, become a better person. Its promise is “You are bad, but if you’d just behave better, you’d become better.” This promise is a trap because, as we have seen, we’re all evil. If becoming better depends on our behaving better, then we’re all lost; because we’re all evil and we always mess up. That’s how condemnation traps us: it promises us we’ll become better, if we only behave better, then we fail and it condemns us once again. And it always ends up offering us the same impossible promise all over again.

The problem with being motivated by guilt and condemnation is that it goes against the Gospel of grace. God saves us through Jesus, not by our good works. God accepts us in Jesus, not because we behave better today than yesterday; God loves us because of Jesus, not because we deserve his love. Condemnation's lie is that you can merit God's love, you just need to try a little harder. When we believe this lie, we live as people who believe they’ve entered into a relationship with God by his grace, but are then accepted by God afterward because of their good works.

The message of the Gospel and of the cross is that we could never, ever deserve God's compassion, love, and pardon, but in Christ, the Father accepts us, loves us, and forgives us.

### ***Manipulation***

At times what motivates us to obey God is nothing more than an unrefined desire to manipulate Him. Simply put,

## New Identity

we obey in order to get something from God. We feel that what God asks of us is difficult; it's not what we want to do; it means sacrificing our life. So, it logically makes sense to think that if we sacrifice and obey Him, then He'll end up owing us. So, we obey God to make God owe us — so that He's obligated to bless us and give us what we want.

### *It Doesn't Work*

When all is said and done, obedience that is motivated by these reasons doesn't produce good results. Even when it produces external obedience, what the bad motivations produce inside of us ruins all the good they produce on the outside. Obeying out of pride produces more pride — our obedience makes us even more prideful. When condemnation motivates us, the only thing we're able to see the more we obey, is how much more we should be doing, and that makes us feel more condemnation. Trying to manipulate God with our obedience produces disillusionment with God in our hearts, because He doesn't let Himself be manipulated, and we end up feeling like He isn't coming through with what He owes us.

By obeying from bad motives, we end up with more guilt and end up feeling more burdened — we end up farther away from God.

## **Motivated By the New Identity**

The bad motives of our obedience have their roots in false identities. The motivation of condemnation has its roots in an identity that says: "I'm bad; I have to try really hard to become better". The motivation of pride is based in an

identity that thinks: “I am good; I have to act good to show how good I really am”.

In the Bible, God gives a motivation for obeying Him that’s totally different from pride, condemnation, or manipulation. This motivation is the new identity of being his forgiven child. The message of this identity is, "You’re new, forgiven, loved, and accepted; so now act like a new person."<sup>(13)</sup> Our motivation for obeying is we’re new people — dearly beloved sons and daughters of God; and dearly beloved children obey their Father.<sup>(14)</sup>

There are three parts to this new motivation that comes from the new identity of being a child of God. All three are very important, and when they form a person's core, they produce an obedience to God that is exceptional. The components of this new motivation are: 1) that you’re new, 2) that new people live differently, and 3) that God fills his children with the power to obey.

### **Totally New**

This identity as children of God is based in the work God does when He saves us: He makes us new.<sup>(15)</sup> God's sons and daughters are new people;<sup>(16)</sup> on the outside it appears as though we’re the same as before, but on the inside God has made us completely different.<sup>(17)</sup>

*(13) Ephesians 5:8*

*(14) Colossians 3:1–6*

*(15) 1 Peter 1:22–23*

*(16) James 1:18*

*(17) Ephesians 2:5*

## New Identity

Because we're new, who we are changes: Being God's child means assuming a totally different and new identity. So, we should look at how the Bible describes the new identity we have in Christ, because this identity is the foundation of our new motivation for obeying Him.

### ***Adopted As His Children***

In Christ, God invites people who are far from Him to come near.<sup>(18)</sup> The most incredible thing about salvation is that God doesn't just forgive us, He also makes us part of his family<sup>(19)</sup> — He adopts us as his children.<sup>(20)</sup> So our new identity is that we're God's adopted children.<sup>(21)</sup>

### ***Totally Pardoned and Perfect***

Along with accepting us into his family, God erases his children's sin. He can erase their sin because Christ paid the price that was the punishment of our rebellion.<sup>(22)</sup> God's children receive the complete pardon for their sins. Even though we're forgiven, we don't obey God as we should, so God trades our imperfect life for Jesus's perfect life.<sup>(23)</sup> So then, our new identity is that we're totally reconciled with God,<sup>(24)</sup> without guilt or shame in the eyes of our Father.<sup>(25)</sup>

(18) *Ephesians 2:12-13*

(19) *Ephesians 1:5*

(20) *Galatians 4:4-7*

(21) *1 John 3:1*

(22) *Hebrews 9:28*

(23) *2 Corinthians 5:21*

(24) *Romans 5:1*

(25) *Romans 8:1*

### ***Completely Loved and Accepted***

Even when we know about God's grace and forgiveness, it's difficult for us to truly believe God loves us, because of Christ and not for our good works — we feel that at the end of the day, our standing before God really depends on how well we've behaved. In reality, God says the opposite: He says He saves and adopts and accepts his children because of Christ's good works, not theirs.<sup>(26)</sup> In other words, our standing before God and the approval of our Father do not depend on our behavior. Christ lived a perfect life, because we cannot. And it's because of his life that the Father accepts us.<sup>(27)</sup>

That is why simply obeying more will not make God love us more or be happier with us, and obeying less will not make God love us less or approve of us any less. God's children are totally accepted and loved by their Father.<sup>(28)</sup>

### ***Completely Free***

Furthermore, God gives freedom from sin to his children. He promises that now sin and vices will not have to control us.<sup>(29)</sup> He frees us by breaking the power that sin has in our lives.<sup>(30)</sup> He effectively changes our character, so we don't have to be slaves to our flesh any longer.<sup>(31)</sup>

*(26) Ephesians 2:4-10*

*(27) Colossians 2:10*

*(28) Ephesians 1:6*

*(29) Romans 6:14*

*(30) John 8:35-36*

*(31) Romans 6:6*

### ***Completely New Desires***

When God makes us his children, He also changes our desires. He gives us the desire to love Him, to know Him, to follow Him, and to be like Jesus.<sup>(32)</sup> As God's children, our deepest desires change: Even though at times it's hard for us to live it out, what we desire most is different — our idols aren't able to satisfy us or hold our attention like before. Instead we have the new desire to be with our Father.<sup>(33)</sup>

### **New People Live Differently**

At the heart of this new motivation for obeying is the idea that new people live differently.<sup>(34)</sup> That is to say that if we have a new identity — if we're adopted, loved, accepted, pardoned, perfect, and free —, then the way we live will also change; what we do will flow from whom we now are. The more we understand what we've received, the more we'll live as we should.<sup>(35)</sup>

Now, we shouldn't just try to obey God so that we can be the kind of people we should be — as if our obedience could give us a new identity, rather we obey because God has already given us this new identity.<sup>(36)</sup> Our new way of living is a reflection of what we now are, and it's our expression of gratitude to God for having made us new.<sup>(37)</sup> The reason God gives his children for obeying Him is that "you should

(32) *Romans 8:5*

(33) *Ezekiel 36:24-29*

(34) *Ephesians 4:1*

(35) *Ephesians 4:20-24*

(36) *Ephesians 5:1*

(37) *Colossians 3:1-5*

live like who you are," in other words: "you are my children, now act like my children."<sup>(38)</sup>

### **Power to Obey**

Along with our new identity, God gives us great power to be able to battle sin. This power gives us the hope that we'll be able to live like the new people we are.

### ***New Strength***

Even when we understand our new identity, it's hard for us to live as new people. We struggle against sin with our own strength; our answer when we fail is, "I'll try harder," "I'll fight better," or "I'll work harder." We try to be the hero who can save us.

Again and again we bump up against the reality that our strength isn't enough: we can't live as new people by our own power. In order to live as the children of God that we are, we need to receive power from outside ourselves.<sup>(39)</sup>

### ***Supernatural Power***

God gives his Spirit to his children; the Spirit of God dwells in — or inhabits — his children.<sup>(40)</sup> One of the great works of the Holy Spirit is that He helps us overcome our sin.<sup>(41)</sup> God promises his children that through the work of

(38) *Colossians 3:12*

(39) *Romans 7:15-25*

(40) *Romans 8:9*

(41) *Romans 8:4-9*

his Spirit, they will be able to overcome the persistent sins that bind them.<sup>(42)</sup>

Through his Spirit, God gives us the strength we need to obtain victory over our flesh (with its evil desires). It's also the Spirit who gives us new desires to follow and know and love God.<sup>(43)</sup> Our job as new people is to follow these new desires,<sup>(44)</sup> and to battle our flesh with this new power from the Spirit.<sup>(45)</sup> When we follow the Spirit, we live like the new children of God that we are.

## The Process

Now, practically speaking, how do we use this new motivation to live as the accepted, pardoned, full-of-the-Spirit children of God that we are in our battle against our sin? Becoming new is something that happens in an instant — when God saves someone, He does it in a single moment. However, learning to live in agreement with this new identity as a child of God is a process; it takes time to learn to live like the new people we are.

Changes in our behavior are progressive. During this process, God always asks for more changes in the lives of his children, while at the same time He offers them continuing and constant forgiveness.<sup>(46)</sup>

*(42) Romans 8:10-11*

*(43) Romans 8:5*

*(44) Romans 8:5*

*(45) Romans 8:12-14*

*(46) Romans 8:29-30*

### ***We Battle***

This process is a battle. We have to strengthen ourselves in order to live like the new people we are. Our flesh (with its evil desires) wants what goes against God's will.<sup>(47)</sup> If we're going to live like the new children of God we are, we have to battle against and kill our flesh.<sup>(48)</sup>

We battle against our evil desires by confessing our sins.<sup>(49)</sup> Confessing means recognizing our sin and accepting it for the rebellion that it is. We confess to God and confess to other children of God. When we confess, God frees us from the power secret sin has.<sup>(50)</sup>

We battle against our sin with the Holy Spirit.<sup>(51)</sup> We follow the Spirit<sup>(52)</sup> in this battle by letting the Spirit guide us<sup>(53)</sup> and by remembering — repeating — the verses from the Bible that have to do with our specific sin.<sup>(54)</sup> This is how Jesus battled when Satan tempted Him in the desert.<sup>(55)</sup>

We also battle our sin by remembering our new identity. When we feel tempted, we must tell ourselves that "new people don't do this," that "you're new"; "live like the new person you are," and "your Father loves and accepts you."

*(47) James 1:14-15*

*(48) Galatians 5:17-25*

*(49) 1 John 1:8-9*

*(50) James 5:16*

*(51) Romans 8:13*

*(52) Romans 8:14*

*(53) Romans 8:5-9*

*(54) Ephesians 6:17*

*(55) Luke 4:3-13*

### ***All the Difference***

Our new identity makes all the difference in this process of learning how to live like new people. Our identity gives us the motivation to live differently ("My Father loves me, and I just want to thank Him."). It gives us peace even when we haven't lived like new people. ("My Father accepts me because of Jesus's perfect life, not because of my life.") It gives us hope when the battle against sin appears to be impossible ("I'm new in Christ, I don't know how but the same God who made me new will make me live like a new person.").<sup>(56)</sup>

### **Application Questions:**

Are you living with condemnation, because of your sin?

How can you believe more in the new identity God has given you?

Are there areas in your life in which you're living like the old person you used to be?

Have you resigned yourself to tolerating that one sin in your life and now you don't even struggle against it?

What should you change in order to live more like the child of God you are?

(56) *Philippians 1:6*

## Catechism:

### ***Why should we live differently?***

- Because we're different than we were before. We're God's accepted and loved children, and loved children live to please their Father.

### ***Who changes us after being saved?***

- God changes us through the power of the Spirit.

### ***What is our responsibility in this process?***

- To follow the Spirit and leave our sin.

# Chapter 8

## World Changers

**T**here are two parts to following Jesus: becoming like Him (which we looked at in the last chapter) and doing what He did. To truly follow Christ, we have to do in our lives what Jesus did in his.<sup>(1)</sup>

### **Saved, Well-behaved, and Normal**

A very common idea is that being a Christian means being saved, well-behaved, and normal and that the most important activity a Christian performs is "going to church." The root of this idea is the thought that being a Christian is about getting saved, and then being a well-behaved, normal person — basically being a better version of the person you would have been if you hadn't become a Christian.

*(1) 1 John 2:6*

## Jesus Calls Followers

The problem with this idea of being a Christian, is that Jesus never called people to merely be saved, well-behaved, and normal, and to "go to church." This isn't his call. Jesus's call to those who wanted to be with Him was: Follow me!<sup>(2)</sup> Deciding to follow Him was — and still is — the requirement for being with Him. Following Jesus means much more than just "adding a little bit of salvation" to one's life.<sup>(3)</sup>

## Followers Imitate

If Jesus calls us to follow Him, then what does it mean to be Jesus's follower? What does it mean to follow Him? In the Bible, the word "disciple" is used to describe people who follow Jesus; and a disciple is someone who imitates his master. In Jesus's day, being a "disciple" meant spending time with one's master in order to observe what he was like — in order to be able to imitate him.<sup>(4)</sup> Being a disciple meant repeating what He said, doing what He did, thinking as He thought. It meant trying to become a carbon copy of Him.

## Following Him by Working with Him

If following Christ means imitating Him, then how do we do that? A huge part of imitating Jesus is working with Him — giving ourselves to the purpose and mission He

(2) *Mark 1:16-20*

(3) *Luke 9:23-25*

(4) *Matthew 8:23*

had during his life. The more we dedicate our lives to doing the same things He did, the more we'll become like Him.

### **He's Still Working**

We can work with Jesus because He's still working. Even though He isn't physically present here on earth, He continues working in this world. He works through his Spirit<sup>(5)</sup> and through his followers.<sup>(6)</sup>

### **His Mission Is Reconciliation**

Jesus's mission was, and still is, the reconciliation of people to Himself.<sup>(7)</sup> We've all rebelled against God, but He wants to bring us into his family as his pardoned children.<sup>(8)</sup> Jesus's purpose was to undo the death and destruction that results from our rebellion against God.<sup>(9)</sup>

### **He Asks for Our Help**

Jesus asks his followers to work with Him in his mission of reconciling people to Himself and to his Father.<sup>(10)</sup> One of the purposes of our salvation is for us to work with God.<sup>(11)</sup> The great task, or commission, that Jesus gave his followers before leaving the earth and going back to Heaven was

(5) *John 16:7-15*

(6) *John 14:15*

(7) *Luke 19:10*

(8) *1 Timothy 2:4*

(9) *John 10:10-11*

(10) *2 Corinthians 5:18-20*

(11) *Ephesians 2:10*

to continue working with Him.<sup>(12)</sup> We work with Christ by helping others come to know and follow Him.<sup>(13)</sup> God expects his children to focus their lives on fulfilling his mission.

## Mission Impossible

The only problem with what Jesus asks of his followers is that we're not capable of saving anyone, nor of changing anyone's heart. We can't even transform our own hearts, much less someone else's! We don't have the ability to replace anyone's evil desires. In other words, we're not capable of completing the mission that Jesus gave us.

Fortunately, Jesus described how his followers would be able to fulfill his purpose of reconciling people to God. In Jesus's words, we find hope that we also could be used by Him to bring people to God.

## Communion with Christ

We can only work with Jesus when we're connected to Him. The work we do in his Kingdom is work *with* Jesus, more than work *for* Him.<sup>(14)</sup> It's more like the father who takes his children to the field to work with him and less like the boss who sends his servants to the field to work for him. In the same way, our work with Jesus is an extension of our relationship with Him.

(12) *Matthew 28:18-20*

(13) *Romans 10:11-17*

(14) *1 Corinthians 15:58*

That's why the key to working with Jesus and seeing results — or fruit — of our work is being close to Him.<sup>(15)</sup> We can't do his work by ourselves; we have to do it *with Him*. What breathes life to our work is living in communion with Christ. In order to achieve this communion we read the Bible (we listen to Jesus), we pray (we talk to Jesus), we fast (we bring more intensity to our prayers), and we meditate in Jesus's words (we think about what we have read in the Bible).

### **A Family on a Mission**

In order to work with with Jesus, we have to work together with God's other children. God doesn't call one person to complete his mission, rather He calls his whole family to work together to accomplish his purpose in the world. That's why the Bible says there's a special sense of being a family that comes when we work together with Jesus.<sup>(16)</sup> A metaphor that is used in the Bible to describe all of Christ's followers together is that we are his physical body on the earth;<sup>(17)</sup> we represent Him here in this world.<sup>(18)</sup>

It's true, no one can accomplish Jesus's purposes and change the hearts of people who are far from God, but Jesus works through all his followers — working together — to do this.<sup>(19)</sup> We're a community united with one purpose: to help others come to know Jesus. So, while one person talks about Jesus to his friend, another prays for them. While some

(15) *John 15:1-7*

(16) *Luke 8:19-21*

(17) *1 Corinthians 12:27*

(18) *2 Corinthians 5:20-21*

(19) *Acts 1:8*

preach, others set up chairs and stage and lights; while some counsel, others take care of children. While someone opens their home for a study group, another teaches the study. As we all work together, we're able to take the beautiful message of having peace with God to everyone around us.

### The Power of the Spirit

Jesus gives his Spirit to his followers so they can do his work in the world.<sup>(20)</sup> The Spirit's purpose is to equip us and empower us to fulfill Jesus's mission.<sup>(21)</sup> The Holy Spirit inhabits — or dwells in — Christ's followers;<sup>(22)</sup> we receive Him when we make the decision to follow Jesus.<sup>(23)</sup> What's more, God gives us more of his Spirit when we ask,<sup>(24)</sup> and when we dedicate ourselves more to his work.<sup>(25)</sup> The Spirit fills us with power<sup>(26)</sup> so that we can accomplish a great deal in Jesus's Kingdom.<sup>(27)</sup>

How does the Spirit equip and prepare us to do Jesus's work? He guides and teaches us everything we need to know,<sup>(28)</sup> He reminds us of the things that Jesus said,<sup>(29)</sup> He gives us courage to talk confidently about Jesus,<sup>(30)</sup> He gives

(20) *Luke 24:46-49*

(21) *Acts 1:8*

(22) *John 14:16-17*

(23) *Acts 2:38-39*

(24) *Luke 11:13*

(25) *Acts 4:29-31*

(26) *Ephesians 3:16*

(27) *Ephesians 3:20, Juan 14:12*

(28) *John 16:13-15*

(29) *John 14:26*

(30) *Acts 4:31*

## World Changers

us talents and abilities to be able to do the work that Jesus gives us,<sup>(31)</sup> and He gives us words to speak when we get the opportunity talk about Jesus.<sup>(32)</sup>

The Spirit doesn't just empower us to fulfill Jesus's mission, He also works in other people's hearts, so that our work will produce results. It's Christ's Spirit that makes people be born again — every conversion is the product of his work.<sup>(33)</sup> Furthermore, the Spirit makes us conscious of our sins; He makes us see our rebellion against God and have a feeling of God's coming judgement.<sup>(34)</sup> He also gives testimony about Jesus; He makes people come to know and love Christ.<sup>(35)</sup>

Doing Jesus's work in this world, that is, helping others come to believe in and follow Jesus, is difficult — actually, it's impossible. We just can't do it. Having Jesus's Spirit gives us confidence God is working through us and that we will accomplish His goals and fulfill His mission in this world.<sup>(36)</sup> Our responsibility is very simple: our task is to listen to and follow the Spirit.<sup>(37)</sup>

## How Do We Work with Jesus

If a large part of Jesus's followers' lives should be spent working with Him, then we need to figure out what it actually means to work with Christ. Practically speaking,

*(31) 1 Corinthians 12:4-11*

*(32) Matthew 10:19-20*

*(33) John 3:3-8*

*(34) John 16:7-11*

*(35) John 14:26*

*(36) Romans 15:13*

*(37) Romans 8:14*

how do we work with Jesus? How will we have to change our lives in order to accomplish his purposes in our daily lives?

### People and Projects

God gives us tasks to complete,<sup>(38)</sup> and we are supposed to simply do this work that He gives us to do. These tasks He gives us take on different forms: First of all, helping the people in our lives follow Jesus and have a relationship with God; and second of all, to complete the projects that He gives us the opportunity to do. And this is how we work with Jesus.

We can see this pattern of working with both people and projects in Jesus's life too: He invested his life in his 12 disciples, while at the same time He was focused on the huge project of getting to the cross and becoming God's perfect sacrifice. In the same way, God gives us work with people and projects.

Tasks that have to do with people generally have to do with those people who are around us — both Christians and non-Christians. Jesus asks us to be his representative to them,<sup>(39)</sup> and to help them follow Him.<sup>(40)</sup> The way we work with each person depends on the person and on how open they are to God. The work could be nothing more than developing a friendship with them; it could be praying for them; it could be inviting them to a church service; or it could be offering to study the Bible with them. We work with the people in

(38) *Ephesians 2:10*

(39) *1 Corinthians 5:20*

(40) *Matthew 28:18-20*

## World Changers

our lives by always being focused on helping them take their next step to move closer to God.

While the projects God gives us are related to people — they have as their goal the salvation of other people, they are bigger than working with a single person. Projects in Jesus's Kingdom are about creating structures to organize people and work in the Kingdom, and equipping others to work with Jesus.<sup>(41)</sup> These projects could include starting a new community of Christians (planting a church); being a leader at your church; helping to put on your church's big weekend service; leading a community group; writing Bible studies, songs, or messages; etc. The specific projects that God gives are often determined by the church you are part of.

We are used by Jesus to build God's Kingdom, when we work diligently and faithfully with the people He's put in our lives and in the projects He's put before us.

### **Time, Money, and Thoughts**

Following Christ and working with Him is a very practical thing: We work with Jesus when we give our time, money, and our thoughts to his cause.<sup>(42)</sup> The best measure of our devotion to Christ is what we do with what's ours.<sup>(43)</sup> We can know we're devoting ourselves to building our Lord's Kingdom when we see that we give more and more of our time, our money, and our attention to fulfilling his mission.<sup>(44)</sup>

(41) *Ephesians 4:11-12*

(42) *Luke 9:23-27*

(43) *Luke 12:32-34*

(44) *Luke 14:25-33*

## Start Something

Sometimes Jesus's followers waste a lot of time talking about working with Jesus, trying to figure out how to work with Jesus, and waiting for the best opportunity to be able to work with Jesus, instead of just starting to work with Him. The way to not waste our lives is to simply start doing something: Starting to spend more time with the people who are already part of our lives (our family, relatives, friends, work and school-mates), praying for them, and looking for opportunities to talk to them about Jesus and help them take their next step. It also involves starting to work on our church's projects, without waiting for everything to be perfect first. Working with Jesus isn't difficult, we just have to get started.

We shouldn't wait for the perfect moment, when we're better prepared, when we have fewer distractions and personal demands, or when the ideal opportunity presents itself. To work with Jesus, we start with the people around us and the opportunities we have in front of us. When we're faithful in the work God gives us, He promises to give us more.<sup>(45)</sup>

## Lives that Make an Impact

Instead of living lives focused on ourselves and selfishly wasting our lives, Jesus calls us to work with Him to take his good news of peace with God to people who are far from Him. When we work with Jesus, He changes the hearts and eternal destinies of the people around us.<sup>(46)</sup> Also, God receives much glory when his children live lives devoted to

(45) *Luke 19:17*

(46) *John 14:12*

his Kingdom.<sup>(47)</sup> When we work with Jesus, we unite our lives with God's story and we don't waste them, rather, we do things in our short lives that will last forever.

### **Application Questions:**

Who are the people God has put in your life? What can you do to help them get closer to God?

What are the projects that God has put in your life? What can you do to faithfully accomplish the work He's given you?

### **Catechism:**

***What does God want to accomplish in this world?***

- Others coming to believe in and follow Jesus.

***What does God desire that his followers' mission be?***

- To help others come to know Him through Jesus.

(47) *John 15:8*



# Epilogue

## A Summary

### God

God is the great, sovereign King of the universe. In all of creation, God is telling an epic story of redemption.

### Us

We are made in the image of God, for the purpose of reflecting Him. But, instead of looking for our satisfaction in Him, we rebel against Him and try to be the god of our own lives.

### Salvation

God sovereignly saves people who are in rebellion against Him by transforming their hearts, so that they love Him. And, we respond to God as He saves us when we hear the Gospel, trust in Christ, and decide to follow Him by repenting and being baptized.

## **Followers**

Being God's child means being a Christ-follower. We follow Christ by trying to become like Him in our personal lives, which we do as we leave behind sin and as we love God. We also follow Christ by working with Him and guiding others into having a personal relationship with the Father.

# A Catechism from Foundations

## Questions and Answers

- 1) What is theology?

*Theology is the study of God.*

- 2) Why is it important to study theology?

*Theology teaches us to know God, to see the world and life in the way that God sees them, to live how God wants us to live, and it fills us with joy from and love for God.*

## God

- 3) Who is the center of the universe?

*God is at the center of the whole universe — we are not.*

- 4) Who is God?

*God is the all-powerful King of the universe.*

## Foundations

*God is three Beings in one: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.*

- 5) What does God do?

*He creates everything and rules sovereignly over all.*

- 6) How do we know God's will? — How does God communicate with us?

*God communicates with us through his Word, the Bible.*

- 7) What is God doing in the world and through all creation?

*He's telling an epic story of redemption, of his goodness, and of his power.*

- 8) What is the purpose of the story (and of everything), and what does God want more than anything else?

*To receive glory.*

- 9) Who is the hero of God's story?

*Jesus is.*

## Us

- 10) What are people?

*People are the beings that God created in his own image.*

A Catechism from Foundations

- 11) What's everyone's natural condition?  
*Totally corrupted and rebellious against God.*
- 12) Why do we rebel against God?  
*We want to be the god of our own lives.*
- 13) What do we desire most in life?  
*Satisfaction: happiness, purpose, love, and security.*
- 14) Who can completely satisfy us?  
*Only God can.*
- 15) What is an idol?  
*Anything, person, or activity that we put in God's place by depending on it for our joy, satisfaction, security, and approval.*
- 16) What is idolatry?  
*Seeking our happiness or satisfaction in something created, instead of in the Creator, and thus replacing God in our hearts.*
- 17) What lies at the root of all sin?  
*Seeking our happiness in an idol instead of in God Himself.*
- 18) What is every person's purpose?  
*To give glory to God*

## Foundations

19) How do we glorify God?

*We glorify Him by putting Him in the center of our hearts.*

## Salvation

20) What is humanity's biggest problem?

*We can't please God, we can't love God, and we can't glorify God.*

21) What is God's salvation?

*Salvation is being born again, being transformed by desiring and being made able to love and value God above all things, and to glorify God with our whole lives.*

22) Who saves?

*Only God saves: by choosing, drawing to Himself, and regenerating those He saves.*

23) What does God do when He saves someone?

*He completely transforms him; He makes him born again.*

24) Why does God save us?

*Because He loves us and to receive glory.*

25) What do we do in salvation?

*We respond to God's saving work.*

## A Catechism from Foundations

- 26) How do we respond to God when He saves us?

*By hearing, by believing, and by making the decision to follow Him by repenting and being baptized.*

### **Follower**

- 27) What is Jesus's call?

*Jesus's call is to follow Him.*

- 28) What does it mean to follow Jesus?

*Following Him means imitating Him.*

- 29) ¿What does it mean to Imitate Jesus?

*Imitating Jesus means 1) being like Him and 2) working with Him.*

- 30) Why should we live differently?

*Because we're different than we were before. We're God's accepted and loved children, and loved children live to please their Father.*

- 31) Who changes us after being saved?

*God changes us through the power of the Spirit.*

- 32) What is our responsibility in this process?

*To follow the Spirit and leave our sin.*

## Foundations

- 33) What does God want to accomplish in this world?

*Others coming to believe in and follow Jesus.*

- 34) What does God desire that his followers' mission be?

*To help others come to know Him through Jesus.*