

A person is walking, captured from the waist down, against a bright, hazy sunset background. The person is wearing dark pants and dark sneakers. The lighting is warm and golden, creating a silhouette effect. A dark brown horizontal band is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing white text.

FOLLOW ME

From the Cross to Glory

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Introduction

MY THREE BURDENS

As a Christian, God has placed three primary, ever-increasing burdens (or convictions) on my heart. The first is that the Bible is the Word of God and, as such, is the standard for all things (2 Timothy 3:16). The second is that at the center of the Bible, and at the center of everything, is the awesome truth that all things exist for the glory of God (Isaiah 43:7).

Before I get to the third primary burden I simply want to draw your attention to the enormity of the first two claims. The Word and glory of God! Are there two more significant things in the universe? Can you imagine anything more significant than God and communication with God? Therefore, to mention something else in the same context as those two is, for me, a very significant and humbling thing.

With that said, I want to offer my third primary burden, and the focus of this booklet: Christianity is primarily a call to glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Many people, when they think of Christianity, think of all kinds of things like belief in God and “nice Jesus” and going to church and reading the Bible and up-front pastors and saying prayers and following rules. However, while each of these things may have a place in Christianity, they can only be properly understood under the umbrella of following Jesus. Again, the point of this booklet is to help explain and defend this claim.

JESUS CALLED HIS FIRST FOLLOWERS TO “FOLLOW ME”.

This claim (that Christianity is primarily a call to glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit) begins with the fact that Jesus’ main call on the lives of His first followers was, “Follow me”. Please consider the following verses in this regard:

Jesus calling Simon and Andrew - *Matthew 4:18-19* *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Jesus calling a scribe - Matthew 8:19-22 (Mark 1:17) *And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." ²⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ²¹ Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ²² And Jesus said to him, " **Follow me**, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."*

Jesus calling Matthew - Matthew 9:9 *As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, " **Follow me**." And he rose and followed him.*

Jesus calling the disciples to call everyone - Matthew 10:37-38 (Luke 9:23) *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and **follow me** is not worthy of me.*

Jesus calling the disciples and everyone - Matthew 16:24 (Mark 8:34) *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and **follow me**."*

Jesus calling the young man - Matthew 19:16-21 (Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22) *And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, **follow me**."*

Jesus calling Levi - Mark 2:14 (Luke 5:27) *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, " **Follow me**." And he rose and followed him.*

Jesus calling a man - Luke 9:59 *To another he said, " **Follow me**."*

Jesus calling Phillip - John 1:43 *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, " **Follow me**."*

Jesus calling all His sheep - John 10:27-28 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* ²⁸ *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

Jesus calling all His servants - John 12:26 *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.*

Jesus calling Peter - John 21:18-22 *Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go."* ¹⁹ *(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, " Follow me."* ²⁰ *Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who had been reclining at table close to him and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?"* ²¹ *When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?"* ²² *Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"*

To be sure, Jesus called His followers to repent (Matthew 4:17), believe (Mark 5:36), have faith (Mark 11:22), love (Matthew 22:36-39), glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31), etc. However, these, and all the other callings that Jesus issued are contained in the two simple words, "Follow Me." Follow Me away from sin. Follow Me into holiness. Follow Me into believing all that the Father is. Follow Me in trusting all that the Father says. Follow Me in loving God and mankind. Follow me in glorifying the Father. Follow Me wherever I lead and whatever it may cost you!

Indeed, Jesus main call on the lives of His first followers was, "Follow me". But what does this have to do with us today?

JESUS CALL TO US IS STILL, "FOLLOW ME".

I believe that one of the keys to truly understanding Christianity is in recognizing that the essence of Christianity is still a call to follow Jesus. That is, the chief calling on our lives is still to glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus issued the call, "follow me," during His earthly ministry He was calling people to become His disciples. Further, one of the primary commands that Jesus gave to His disciples (those who followed Him) was to

make disciples. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”. That is, one of Jesus’ expectations of his followers was (and still is) that they would continue, until He returns, calling others to follow Him. Therefore, we have today, through the witness of faithful Christ-followers and the unchanging testimony of God’s Word, the same call on our lives as those who walked with Jesus: follow Jesus!

This means, once again, that Jesus did not then, and does not today, primarily call people to believe that there is a God or pray a certain prayer or to come to church a certain number of times each week or to read a certain number of verses in our Bibles each day or to stop doing bad things or even to believe certain true things. Instead, He calls us to follow Him with all that we have and all that we are; to follow Him wherever He leads and whatever it costs; to follow Him by becoming like Him in His life and in His death; to be reconciled to the Father by following Him; to inherit eternal life by following Him; to follow Him first to the cross, and then to glory and all for the glory of God and in the power of the Spirit!

Therefore, when we think of Christianity and things like the cross and sin and grace and glory and church and the Bible and holiness and the like come to mind, we must recognize that these things cannot be separated from Jesus’ larger call: follow me. That is, we must come to understand that these things are exactly the things that Jesus had in mind when He called His first followers and when He calls us today to follow Him. He means follow me to the Father...by the way of the cross...through the forgiveness of your sins...by grace...through faith...for the glory of God...according to the word of God...in the context of the Church...while being made holy in the power of the Spirit.

But what does it really mean to follow Jesus? And how do I begin?

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS? HOW DO I BEGIN? WHY WOULD I WANT TO?

Because we believe the bible teaches that the essence of Christianity is following Jesus, at our church we've found it helpful to talk about following Jesus in two senses. First, we talk about following Jesus to the cross and second, we talk about following Jesus from the cross in becoming like Him.

In other words, there are two key aspects to Jesus’ call (“follow me”). The first aspect, or starting point of following Jesus, is following Him to the

cross. This means truly recognizing that there is a God who is infinitely glorious, that this God created us for His glory, that we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory, that the wages of sin is death, that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the wages of sin for all who would repent, believe, and love Him (for those who place their faith in Him), and it means surrendering ourselves to Jesus as our Lord by grace through faith for the forgiveness of our sins and everlasting life.

The second aspect of following Jesus is living the new life that Jesus purchased for us at the cross. This means trusting in God while fighting with all that we have to become more like Jesus. And this means growing in the process of rightly understanding God and His Word, becoming a worshiper/lover of God, recognizing our dependence on God, living as a part of the body of Christ, becoming a suffering servant, growing in godliness, and becoming a debtor/lover of people, by grace through faith.

Again, the focus of this booklet is to examine each of these two aspects of following Christ. My prayer is that it might awaken you to a greater understanding of, and a deeper satisfaction in, the greatness of God by pointing you to the cross of Jesus Christ so that by grace, through faith, you may glorify God by following Jesus in the power of the Spirit to the cross.

Part One: Following Jesus to the Cross

The Glory of God - One

There is a God who is infinitely glorious

"Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. ⁶ "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you" (Nehemiah 9:5-6).

THE GLORY OF GOD

Please take a minute to honestly answer the following questions:
Do you believe in God? Why or why not?

Who or what do you think God is? What do you think of when you think of God (what is the first thing that comes to your mind)?

How do you know what you know about God? If you do believe in God, from where does your knowledge of God come?

Please understand that your answers to the questions above will have eternal (or everlasting) consequences. Your belief in God's existence or non-existence alike, as well as your view on the nature and knowability of God, will greatly impact your life and the lives of those around you. There are perhaps no bigger (more pressing, more significant, more impacting, more life-altering) questions in the entire universe. People's answers to these questions have led to war, abuse, murder, and tragedy of tremendous proportions. And people's answers to these questions have also led to healing, recovery, service, and blessing of tremendous proportions. The one thing that we can't be indifferent about questions of the existence, nature, and revelation of God. The aim of this chapter is to help you to think through these questions (and a few others) clearly, carefully, and biblically.

As I mentioned in the introduction, there is a calling on all our lives to follow Jesus and this calling begins at the cross. From our finite perspective, the road to the cross begins with an understanding of who God is. That's what this chapter is about.

THERE IS A GOD WHO IS INFINITELY GLORIOUS!

Christianity has at its center the truth that there is a God and that He is infinitely glorious. What a spectacular claim. Actually, what spectacular claims! There are at least three astounding claims in this sentence. Let's look at each.

First, there is a God. So many people today claim to believe in God without even batting an eyelash. The radicalness and amazingness of this claim (that there is a God) is all but lost inside and outside of the Church. We have secular songs considering the question, "What if God was one of us?", and then joking that, if he were, he would be lonely because he would receive no phone calls "except for the pope maybe in Rome". We see t-shirts with the slogan, "Jesus is my homeboy," being worn by non-Christian celebrities. And we have numerous polls claiming that a huge majority of Americans claim to believe in the Christian God while engaging in exactly the same sinful behavior as those who make no such claim.

Just think for a moment about how remarkable of a claim this really is. Believing in the Christian God—that there is a being who cannot be seen, tasted, touched, smelled, or felt (in the normal sense), yet created the universe, created mankind for the purpose of knowing and delighting in him, has chosen to reveal himself to mankind by entering into time (in the person of Jesus), died (though He is invincible) to reconcile mankind to himself, is present right now with you, listens to you when you pray, interacts with you every moment of your life, and has directed different men throughout history to write down His thoughts (in the Bible)—is no small thing! The claim that there is a God (at least the Christian God) is much, much bigger than many people realize.

Claiming that God exists means that there is purpose and meaning to life. It means that there is objective truth. It means that there is a universal moral code—that there is true good and evil. It means that we will be held accountable for our thoughts, words, and actions. It means that there really is such a thing as beauty. It means that culture isn't wholly subjective. It means that math works. And it means that hope is founded and peace is possible and satisfaction is attainable. What a claim!

Before we move on, please consider this: If believing there is a bomb in your room that is about to go off compels you to emotional highs and aggressive action, believing that there is a God in the universe should overwhelm your

soul and completely captivate your body because it is an infinitely more radical claim. And, if you recognize the utter fatalness of one who does not or cannot respond in great alarm to the knowledge that there is a live bomb in their room, then you must also recognize the eternal fatalness of one who does not recognize the magnitude of the claim that God exists.

Coming to recognize this (the significance of the existence of God) is a gift of God (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5). The Bible is clear on the fact that apart from the work of God our view of God will be a boring, unglorious, unimpressive one, if we believe at all (2 Corinthians 4:4). One of the central teachings of the Bible is that if you find yourself indifferent to God, it's not because of a shortcoming in God's nature, but because of one in yours. Cry out to God that he might bring this understanding to you in joy and power!

Truly, the claim that there is a God is no small claim.

Second, this God is glorious. One of the most significant discoveries that can ever be made is that there is not only a God, but that God is glorious. For most of my life I believed in some semi-personal, generic, grandfather/butler type god. This god was powerful, but certainly not all-powerful. This god was wise, but certainly not all-knowing. This god was occasionally concerned, but certainly not intimately personal. This god was worth paying attention to, but certainly not surrendering to. This god was good, but certainly not glorious.

Then, in 1995, for the first time, I met the real God and began to see that He was far different than I had ever imagined. This God wasn't just OK, He was (and is) awesome - glorious! Everything changed when I began to see the gloriousness of God.

What does it mean that God is glorious? It means that God is not ordinary, plain, common, vulgar, passive, weak, or dull. That is, it means that God is beautiful, majestic, praiseworthy, splendid, fierce, mighty, and amazing! Please consider the following verses in this regard:

***Nehemiah 9:5-6** "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. ⁶ "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.*

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Revelation 5:6-14 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Psalms 19:1-5 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

Psalms 29:1-11 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of

Lebanon. ⁶ He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" ¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. ¹¹ May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Isaiah 6:1-7 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.

Job 5:8-20 ⁸ "As for me, I would seek God, and to God would I commit my cause, ⁹ who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number: ¹⁰ he gives rain on the earth and sends waters on the fields; ¹¹ he sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety. ¹² He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. ¹³ He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end. ¹⁴ They meet with darkness in the daytime and grope at noonday as in the night. ¹⁵ But he saves the needy from the sword of their mouth and from the hand of the mighty. ¹⁶ So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth. ¹⁷ "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty. ¹⁸ For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal. ¹⁹ He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you. ²⁰ In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword.

Psalms 40:5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

Do you believe in *this* God? If something this grand is not what comes to your mind when you consider God, I submit then that you are not considering God. If this is not what comes to your mind then it's because, as Jesus says, you do not have eyes to see (Matthew 13:13). If God seems plain to you, it's because somewhere along the line you have been lied to or deceived—either by others or by your own sinful nature. If you are bored when you think of God, you are not thinking of God. There is a God and he is glorious!

Third, this God is infinitely glorious. Sunsets, mountains, and newborn babies along with certain paintings, books, musical compositions, and roller coasters are glorious (they are not ordinary, plain, common, dull, etc.), but their glory (and the glory of all created things) is contingent (meaning, it is wholly dependent on something else [God] for any glory that it has) and finite (meaning, it has not always existed and, at some point, will cease to exist).

For example, amusement park rides are remarkable. They give a thrill and a rush that you can get in few places on this earth. However, amusement parks build new rides each year. They have to do this because the glory of the rides fades quickly. The thrill and amazement leaves after a few rides. I recently experienced this first hand. Growing up, my family and I made an annual trip to the world's greatest amusement, Cedar Point. At that time, the ultimate display of courage was to ride the towering 125' rollercoaster known as the Gemini. Over 4000' this ride reached speeds of 60mph. This was what made boys into men.

Several summers ago my wife and I decided to take our sons to Cedar Point for the first time so that they could experience the thrill of riding such a rollercoaster. However, the Gemini, which used to command lines well over an hour long and provide bragging rights for months was absolutely dwarfed by several other rides, including the Millenium Force, a 7000' long rollercoaster that traveled over 310' in the air and over 93mph and the Top Thrill Dragster which went up 420' and down at 120mph. What once seemed remarkably glorious now seemed decidedly unimpressive.

God's glory is very different however. God's glory is original and infinite. The fact that it is original means that all other glorious things get their glory from God. The fact that it is infinite means that it never ends (in quantity or quality). Unlike the rides at amusement parks God never becomes stale. Every moment with God is like a completely new moment with God and so He never gets old. He is infinitely glorious.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude by noting two things. First, we must come to realize that the only reliable way that we can know about God is through the Bible. The Bible is God's word to us. He inspired different men – over many years – to write down His thoughts for us. All of our thoughts, feelings, experiences, etc. about God (and all things, for that matter) must be filtered through the Bible. That is, whatever you may believe about God must be in line with Scripture. There are many myths out there concerning God. The Bible is the only way to distinguish myth from Truth.

Second, we must come to realize that all of this really matters. But, why does it matter? It matters because, without a right understanding of who God is, we cannot have a right understanding of what He wants, how He acts, how we are to relate to Him, etc. A right understanding of God is at the heart of Christianity and at the beginning of following Jesus to the cross. A belief (regardless of its strength and sincerity) in anything other than the true God means nothing. All of this matters because without a proper understanding of God we are lost and cannot follow Jesus.

Indeed, The God of the Bible is infinitely more beautiful and wonderful and holy and majestic and powerful and awesome than the greatest human mind can comprehend. His power knows no end, His justice is perfect, His mercy is like a never ending tide, His holiness is whiter than the whitest snow, His knowledge is exhaustive, His love cannot be contained by all creation. He has existed and will continue existing in all His beauty forever. He has no beginning and no end. He placed every star in the sky. He knows every atom in the universe by name. He stands alone in honor and value and worth. His name is above all names. He has no equal (Exodus 15:11).

My prayer is that as you continue through this booklet you would grow in your amazement at these amazing things. If they do not take your breath away please pray that they would. It takes an act of the Holy Spirit for this not to be foolishness to you (1 Corinthians 1:18). I pray that He would act and act mightily.

The Purpose of Man - Two

We were created by God for His glory

“But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made’” (Isaiah 43:1-7).

THE PURPOSE OF MAN

As a reminder, we’ve already said that the essence of Christianity is following Jesus. We’ve already said that following Jesus begins at the cross. We’ve already said that our desire and ability to follow Jesus to the cross is a gift from God. We’ve already said that the path to the cross is found reliably only in the Bible. And we’ve already said that coming to the cross begins with understanding who God truly is (infinitely glorious). In this chapter we are going to take another step closer to the cross by looking at the fact that you and I (and all people) were created by God for a purpose.

Many people throughout history have gone to great lengths in seeking out purpose and meaning for their lives. Practices such as pilgrimages, meditation, medication, education, religion, aestheticism, service, prayer, and numerous other things have been used by countless men and women as means to discover a sense of personal or universal significance. Consider the following conclusions:

Aristotle: “What is the essence of life? To serve others and to do good.”

One of the Dalai Lamas: “Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them.”

Another of the Dalai Lamas: "I believe the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness. That's clear. Whether we believe in a religion or not, whether one believes in this religion or that religion, we are all seeking something better in life. So, I think the very motion of our life is towards happiness."

Bob Doyle: "When it's all over, it's not who you were. It's whether you made a difference."

Whoopi Goldberg: "We're here for a reason. I believe a bit of the reason is to throw little torches out to lead people through the dark."

William Shakespeare: "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not be false to any man."

Henry Miller: "Life has to be given a meaning because of the obvious fact that it has no meaning."

Jean-Paul Sartre: "Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is."

Francis Schaeffer: "If God exists and we are made in his image we can have real meaning, and we can have real knowledge through what he has communicated to us."

Again, whatever you make of the conclusions of those listed above, the point of this chapter is to take a step closer to the cross of Jesus by examining the biblical (Christian) claim that all people were created by God for a purpose: to glorify Him.

WE WERE CREATED BY GOD FOR HIS GLORY

Indeed, the Bible is clear about the fact that we were created by God for His glory (Isaiah 43:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:31). But what does this mean? Again, let's look at the three aspects of this claim.

What does it mean that you were created by God? It means that you do not come from nothing. It means that you are not here by chance. It means that God planned you and knew you before you were even born. It means that he formed you made you (Psalm 139:13). It means that your life is not your own—you belong to God. And it means that God crafted you, and all

mankind, in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27).

What does it mean that you were created by God for something? It means that it is not up to you to go out and determine whether or not your life has purpose or meaning. It means that it is not up to you to go out and determine what that purpose and meaning is. It means that your existence is not random. It means that God, in creating you, lovingly and graciously bestowed upon you purpose and meaning. It means that your plans and goals and ambitions—even your very life itself—are under the authority of God. Emphatically, it means that God created you for a reason, a purpose, and with a goal in mind (Isaiah 43:1-7).

What does it mean that we were created by God for His glory? It means that your reason/purpose/goal in life is to glorify God. Whether you are young or old, black or white, Asian or American, tall or short, Lutheran or Catholic or Baptist or Presbyterian, Buddhist or Hindu, rich or poor, your purpose in life, your reason for existence, is to glorify God. God created all things, including and especially mankind, for His glory. Please consider the following verses in this regard:

Isaiah 43:1-7 But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³ For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴ Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. ⁵ Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ⁶ I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

I Corinthians 10:31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Psalms 86:11-13 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. ¹² I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. ¹³ For great

is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

1 Corinthians 6:20 You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

The Bible is not ambiguous about why you and I exist. The Bible is clear about the fact that our Maker designed us with a purpose. And there can be no doubt that the Bible teaches that the chief end of man is to glorify God.

How do we live for the glory of God? You and I live for the glory of God by recognizing and then responding to the infinite and eternal glory (or greatness) of God. That is, the first aspect of living for the glory of God is recognizing that God truly is infinitely glorious (this is what the previous chapter is about). You must recognize that God created you to be truly and eternally satisfied, to have your soul filled, to live abundantly through, by, and in Him (Psalm 107:9). You must recognize the utter inferiority and inadequacy and inability of all other things to satisfy your soul. Again, we live for the glory of God first by tasting and seeing His uniquely astounding and everlasting goodness (Psalm 34:8).

The second aspect of living for the glory of God is responding to God's glory with your entire life. We are called to respond to God's glory by delighting in God (Psalm 37:4), obeying God (1 John 5:3), reflecting God's glory to others (Mark 16:15), fighting against sin (1 Corinthians 6:18-20), trusting God (Psalm 4:5), loving God with everything that you have (Matthew 22:37), eating and drinking for God (1 Corinthians 10:31), etc. This means doing all things with a view of the absolute superiority of God in mind. It means surrendering to God in all things. It means loving what God loves, hating what God hates, and desiring what God desires. In short, you and I live for the glory of God when we see God for who he truly is and respond appropriately.

How does God show His love for us in his purpose for us? In one sense God could have created us to do (or be) anything that He wanted. He could have made us for the purpose of cleaning rocks. He could have created us to hula hoop. He could have created us to eat lint. None of these things, presumably, would be very fulfilling or satisfying (at least not for any significant length of time). Nevertheless, God could have (it would have been well within his rights as our creator) made us to these ends (Romans 9:21).

However, if love is to be understood as something like “the affectionate pursuit of what’s best,” and therefore that loving someone is to be understood as something like “affectionately pursuing what’s best for another,” and, if we acknowledge the simple fact that God is what’s best, then we should expect to see a relationship between our purpose and the glory of God. Indeed we do. In His love and grace, God created us for the one thing that is truly fulfilling (His glory). God created us for the one thing that is able to satisfy us eternally (His glory). God created us such that we have, as our purpose, the very thing that we need most (the glorious God Himself). There is nothing (anywhere, ever) that is (or will be) able to satisfy us but, like, or more than the glory of God. And this is what we were created for, to recognize and respond to the glory of God. God shows His love for us in His purpose for us by offering to us, as a purpose in life, that which is best for us: Him!

CONCLUSION

Why does all of this matter? All of this matters because, without a right understanding of our reason for existence, we are bound to pursue and think and feel wrong things. That is, if we are not clear on why we are here, we will inevitably suffer the frustration that comes from working against ourselves – like a fish out of water or an elephant on ice or a Vikings fan in Green Bay – it just does not work right. More importantly, it matters because (as we will see in the next two chapters) by failing to live according to our purpose we bring terrible and eternal consequences upon ourselves.

Again, my prayer is that as you consider the content of these pages you would grow in your amazement at these amazing things, that you would consider the bigness of these claims, and that you would hear the sweet voice of Jesus calling you to follow Him to the cross.

The Problem of Man - Three

Everyone has sinned and failed to live for the glory of God

“As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’” (Romans 3:10-18, 23).

THE PROBLEM OF MAN

As you may remember, we started with the Biblical principle that the essence of Christianity is following Jesus. Then we noted that following Jesus always begins at the cross and that following Jesus to the cross begins by truly recognizing that there is a God who is infinitely glorious and that God created us for His glory. The next step in following Jesus to the cross, and the subject of this chapter, is coming to realize that everyone has sinned and failed to live for the glory of God.

As a young man, before becoming a Christian, I definitely had a concept of sin as relating to right and wrong. I generally felt good about doing (what I perceived to be) right and bad about doing (what I perceived to be) wrong. However, three things stand out to me as I reflect back on my understanding of sin. First, while I had a certain limited knowledge of the biblical notion of sin, and while I made semi-serious attempts to avoid sin, my working definition of sin was something like, “Things that God probably didn’t want me to do”. As we will see in a moment, this falls woefully short of the biblical teaching on sin. Second, I was almost always able to come up with some justification for engaging in behavior that I knew was sinful. In other words, I had a relatively active, but reliably tamable conscience. Third, all in all, I felt like I was a pretty good person.

The contents of this chapter (and the next) are especially crucial for understanding Christianity and for following Jesus. Coming to grips with our condition before God is a prerequisite for the cross of Christ to hold any appeal to us. Again, as in all aspects of following Jesus, it takes a work of God to give us right understanding (1 Corinthians 1:18). Whether you’ve

never heard the biblical take on sin or you've written a book on it, please take a moment to ask God to open your eyes in order that you might see yourself the way God sees you.

EVERYONE HAS SINNED AND FAILED TO LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

It doesn't take tremendous insight to recognize the fact that there is a great deal of injustice and immorality in this world. All around us marriages are falling apart because of the unfaithfulness of a spouse, families are being torn apart because of addiction, government corruption is assumed, corporate greed seems insatiable, and even churches are filled with strife because of gossip, pride, a lack of self control, and other more "respectable" sins. It's easy to see that we are imperfect and that we live among imperfect people.

To tie this into the previous chapter, we must also note the obvious fact that all of us have failed to fulfill the purpose for which we were created: living for the glory of God. Indeed, it's easy to see that all people (including ourselves) live for all kinds of things other than God's glory. As Romans 3:23 puts it, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".

All of this leads to a few straightforward questions regarding the nature and consequences of sin.

What is sin and how does sin relate to the glory of God? Most people tend to think of sin as doing things that God has told them not to do (don't murder, steal, lie, etc.). However, while it is true that failing to obey God is always sin, sin is much more than that and it runs much deeper than that.

Sin, in its most basic sense, is failing to live for God's glory. This means, in light of what we covered in the previous chapters, that every time we fail to recognize the glory of God (His greatness and beauty and wonder and majesty and perfection) and respond to it rightly (not delighting in God, joyfully obeying God, reflecting God's glory to others, trusting God, etc.), we are sinning. The Bible makes clear that anything that we do that does not proceed from a view to glorifying God, according to the Word of God, is sin (Romans 14:23).

Deeper still, though, is the fact that sin is not only failing to know and do the right thing, but it is also failing to know and do the right thing for the right

reason or with the right heart (Matthew 5:19-30). So we can know that lying is wrong, tell the truth, and still be sinning (if our ultimate aim in truth telling is reputation or personal gain rather than glorifying the God of Truth). We can know that adultery is wrong, remain outwardly faithful to our husband or wife, and still be sinning (if the ultimate aim of our fidelity is convenience or comfort rather than glorifying the God of Faithfulness). And we can know that failing to be a part of the body of Christ is wrong, be active in our church, and still be sinning (if the ultimate aim of our church involvement is conscience appeasement or a sense of personal fulfillment rather than glorifying the God of Love).

Deepest yet, is the fact that (as we will see in the next chapter) in our sin, we are not only failing to glorify God as we should (in our hearts, minds, and actions), but we are also seeking to glorify another. That is, we are pursuing glory in all of our actions—if not for God then for ourselves or someone or something else. When we sin we are not simply failing to rightly serve God, but we are also always simultaneously submitting ourselves to a different master. All sin, then, is disobedience coupled with idolatry.

Once again, sin, therefore, is any heart condition, thought process, or action absent recognizing and responding appropriately (in the ways that God has prescribed) to the infinite and eternal glory of God alone. That is, sin is thinking, feeling, or doing anything that does not intentionally and joyfully bring glory to God.

This means that while everyone has a level of awareness of the fact that they are not perfect, the Christian notion of sin goes well beyond what we do, and even beyond what we think, down to our very hearts and our ultimate allegiances. Consider Jesus' words on this:

Luke 6:45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery...'²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed

adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 15:1-9 Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." ³ He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, ⁶ he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Again, Jesus (along with the rest of the Biblical authors) makes it plain that anything (eating and drinking and teeth brushing and studying and working and marrying and web-surfing and TV watching and talking and playing and dying and going to church and studying the Bible and ...) that does not flow from a right heart (a heart that loves and trusts and delights in the infinitely glorious God; a heart that desires to glorify God alone in all things), is sin.

It's one thing to recognize that we sin by doing bad things and failing to do good things, it's a whole new level of awareness, however, to recognize that our sins flow from deep within us, from our hearts (or motivations), according to our allegiance, well before we ever act on them.

What is the holiness of God and how does it effect our understanding of sin? Again, we must recognize that sin is failing to live for the glory of God and that it originates in our hearts. We must also recognize, I believe, that the true nature of sin is only seen in contrast with a particular aspect of God's glory: His holiness. Most of us, if we consider our sinfulness at all, consider it in light of the people around us. That is, even if we think about our failure to rightly glorify God, we usually do so relative to other sinners, not to God. The fact of the matter is that God will never compare us to another mere man or woman. It is according to the standard of His nature and the example of His Son, Jesus Christ, that we are measured. And again, the particular aspect of God's nature and Christ's example that is most

immediately relevant to understanding our sin is God's holiness.

Psalm 99:9 says, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!" Theologian, Wayne Grudem, offers the following observation, "God's holiness means that he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor." That is, there is no sin in God. More than that even, there is only goodness and righteousness and glory in God. Indeed, our sinfulness becomes most readily and clearly and accurately seen when we hold it up against the holiness of God. Consider the following two verses describing the encounters of two different sinners with the holiness of God:

Isaiah 6:1-7 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.

Revelation 4 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." ² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a

man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" ⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ¹¹ "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

How can these texts not take your breath away? How can anyone stand before this God? He is holy and we are not. Our sin is not something that we can be indifferent about. If we do not tremble before God because of our sin, it's because we don't truly understand our sin. And if we don't truly understand sin, we can't follow Jesus to the cross. Again, please take a moment to ask God to allow you to rightly see yourself.

What does it mean that everyone has sinned? Finally, when Paul tells us, in Romans 3:23, that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," he means at least two things. First, he means that every one of us has inherited sin from our parents. Second, he means that every one of us has made sinful choices. That is, we are all sinful by nature and choice.

Regarding our sinful nature (or our inherited sin), in Romans 5 we are told that through Adam's sin (way back in Genesis 3), sin entered the human race. That is, because Adam chose to sin by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (and therein bringing sin into humanity) our parents don't just pass on their gene pool they also pass on their sinful nature. This means that from conception we inherit our eye color, our skin tone, our athletic ability, and a nature that is both corrupt and guilty (Psalm 51:5). So, the first sense in which everyone has sinned is in the fact that we are all born with a sinful (corrupt and guilty) nature.

Regarding our sinful choices, this is much easier to see. As we discussed above, we certainly don't need to examine ourselves too closely to see that there is corruption and guilt in us. We certainly don't need to think too hard to recall choices stemming from selfishness, pride, lust, greed, or some other form of sinfulness. And we certainly don't need to be Bible scholars in order to recognize that we have all broken many of God's laws (just consider how many of the Ten Commandments you have kept). We all regularly make sinful choices—this is plain to see.

Please consider Paul's sobering words in relation to this:

Romans 3:10-18 ¹⁰ As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Truly, none of us have done that which we were created to do. That is, every one of us has sinned by failing to glorify God as we should. We have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). In other words, we choose constantly to glorify God's creation (toys and money and sex and relationships) rather than God Himself. When God sees us, He does not measure our goodness in comparison with other people. Instead, God measures our goodness against Himself—a standard which we all fail to meet.

What does it mean that everyone has sinned? It means that, from the moment of our conception, none of us have given God His rightful place in our hearts, minds, or lives.

CONCLUSION

So far, we have said that there is a God who is infinitely glorious, that this God created us for His glory, and now, that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. If we accept these first two claims, then the third claim is especially astounding. God created us for something and we are not doing it. This is an extremely significant truth. The purpose of the next chapter is to explain just how significant it really is.

The Wages of Sin - Four

The wages of sin—of failing to live for the glory of God—is death

“When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death...”
(Romans 6:20-23a).

THE WAGES OF SIN

Please remember that we’re ultimately talking about the fact that the essence of Christianity is glorifying God by following Jesus in the power of the Spirit. And please remember that we’re focusing specifically on the first aspect of what it means to follow Jesus: following Jesus to the cross. We’ve said that following Jesus to the cross begins (from our perspective) when we recognize that there is a God and that He is infinitely glorious, includes the understanding that while we were created by God for His glory, we have all sinned in that we have all fallen short of the glory of God, and continues (as we’ll look at in this chapter) with the realization that death is the wage of our sin. The questions above are significant in that they force us to consider the consequences of our sin. The point of this chapter is to highlight the straightforward, unambiguous teaching of the Bible that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

A few years ago a non-Christian friend of mine, a doctoral student in philosophy, gave me a list of questions or problems that he had regarding Christianity. Among his top three was the question, “How is the eternal punishment of sinners (hell) just (or fair)?” My friend understood on a very real level what is at stake in the statement, “the wages of sin is death”. The point I’m trying to make is that the Biblical teaching on hell is rather shocking. The claim that all (young and old, cute and ugly, talented and useless, black and white, smart and dumb, religious and secular, male and female alike) have sinned and thus deserve hell is a very serious claim, with very serious implications. It certainly arouses emotions (who among us doesn’t know someone who has died without having followed Jesus to the cross?). It certainly raises (as for my friend) questions of justice (how can hell be fair?). And it certainly ignites debate (there are branches of

Christianity who deny the existence of hell). Whatever your feelings, thoughts, or reaction might be regarding the notion of hell, it must be understood that coming to accept the Biblical teaching on the wages of sin and the reality of hell is part of following Jesus to the cross.

THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH

When we couple the fact that the wages of sin is death with the fact that all have sinned (last chapter) alarm bells should start going off in our heads. The logic is simple. The wages of sin is death. All have sinned. Therefore, all have earned the wage of sin; namely death. Not to state too obvious a point, but this is really bad news. In fact, it's far worse than you or I could ever imagine. Please consider with me just how bad this news really is.

What does it mean that something has a *wage*? Wages in the Romans 6 sense are probably best understood as a “fitting return” or a “recompense”. The idea is that a wage is something paid out for something done. In light of this definition it’s important to note that there is a master/servant relationship inherent to any wage. That is, apart from both a master and a servant there can be no wage. The master is the one who receives the service of the servant. The servant is the one who agrees to serve the master. And the wage is that which the servant receives for serving the master.

Usually we think of wages in terms of employment. For instance, when we (servants) work for an employer (master) we agree to perform certain tasks in return for a certain salary (our wage). However, there are many other nonemployer masters and nonmonetary wages as well. For instance, if we chose to serve arrogance our wage will likely be a lack of respect. If we chose to serve alcohol our wage will likely be pain and suffering. If we chose to serve laziness our wage will likely be hunger and poverty. And, as we will see in this chapter, if we chose to serve sin our wage will be death.

What does it mean that sin has a wage? Again, when we say that something has a wage, we simply mean that those who serve it will receive a certain return in exchange for their service. Therefore, the fact that sin has a wage means that it is a master and anyone who serves it will receive a certain return. Just as McDonalds will pay a salary to anyone who will flip burgers for them, all who chose to serve sin will receive a wage for doing so as well.

What are the wages of sin? We see in Genesis 2:17 that from the very beginning of human history God has assigned the wage of death to sin.

When we chose to serve sin rather than God we earn (or deserve) the “fitting return” of death. We have all sinned by falling short of the glory of God and choosing to raise up the glory of another; and in so doing we have all earned sin’s wage. Please consider the following verses:

Genesis 2:15-17 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Romans 6:20-23a When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death...

It is absolutely crucial that we notice a couple of things before moving on. First, it is God who sets the wage of sin (Genesis 2:17). That is, even though sin functions as a master it is God who has assigned its wage. Second, as we will see in a moment, it is God, not sin, who pays out the wages of sin.

Why would anyone want to serve sin given its wages? The promises of sin can be so enticing. We chose to serve and glorify sin because it offers us what God created us to desire. That is, sin deceitfully promises us the wages of happiness and acceptance and fulfillment and satisfaction. However, while sin does usually quickly deliver on at least part of her promises (many times serving sin feels good at first), serving sin always ends in death. All of the promises of sin are hollow lies. God alone can truly and eternally satisfy our souls. Ezekiel 16 paints a clear picture of this.

Ezekiel 16:15-21 But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his. ¹⁶ You took some of your garments and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore. The like has never been, nor ever shall be. ¹⁷ You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men, and with them played the whore. ¹⁸ And you took your embroidered garments to cover them, and set my oil and my incense before them. ¹⁹ Also my bread that I gave you- I fed you with fine flour and oil and honey- you

set before them for a pleasing aroma; and so it was, declares the Lord GOD. ²⁰ And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter ²¹ that you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?

From the beginning mankind has been given the choice to serve God or sin. But from the beginning mankind has believed the lies of sin. And therefore, from the beginning mankind in serving sin has earned the wages of sin: death.

What kind of death do we earn for our sin? Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. But what kind of death is it talking about? There are two types of death that result from our sins (the acts performed in serving sin, and thus, failing to rightly glorify God): physical and spiritual.

Physical death entered the human race with the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12). That is, if mankind had not sinned, mankind would never have had to experience physical death. Adam's choice to serve sin instead of God brought death (and sickness and disease and suffering of all kinds) into the world. Having inherited Adam's sin and having chosen to serve and glorify sin ourselves, we too experience physical death as a wage of sin.

The second kind of death, spiritual death, also entered the human race with Adam's sin. When Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he did not immediately die physically, but he did immediately die spiritually. That is, his spirit immediately became a slave to sin and an enemy of God. Likewise, because we are Adam's children we are born as sin's servants, and therefore we too have earned spiritual death.

Sin's wage is death – physical and spiritual.

What is it like when physical death meets spiritual death like? One of the biggest myths surrounding Christianity is that God is only mildly displeased with our sins. One of the biggest lies told about God is that because of His love He is able to look past our sins. God is not mildly displeased with our sins. His wrath is kindled white hot because of them. And God's love does not mean that He will look past our sins. God's love demands that the wages of our sin must be paid!

Hell is the place where sinners are punished for their sins. "Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked" (Grudem's Systematic

Theology). Hell is where God pours out His holy and righteous wrath on sinners. You know that you are being punished; you know that you deserve it, and you know that it will last forever. No one describes this better than Jonathan Edwards:

How awful are those words, Isaiah 63:3, which are the words of the great God. "I will tread them in mine anger, and will trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." It is perhaps impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things, viz. contempt, and hatred, and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least regard or favor, that instead of that, he will only tread you under foot. And though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard that, but he will crush you under his feet without mercy; he will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments, so as to stain all his raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you in the utmost contempt: no place shall be thought fit for you, but under his feet to be trodden down as the mire of the streets.

The MISERY you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end, that he might show what that wrath of Jehovah is... But the great God is also willing to show his wrath, and magnify his awful majesty and mighty power in the extreme sufferings of his enemies. And seeing this is his design, and what he has determined, even to show how terrible the unrestrained wrath, the fury and fierceness of Jehovah is, he will do it to effect. When the great and angry God hath risen up and executed his awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of his indignation, then will God call upon the whole universe to behold that awful majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it.

You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty.

It is EVERLASTING wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery. When you look forward, you shall see a long for ever, a boundless duration before you, which will swallow up your thoughts, and amaze your soul; and you will absolutely despair of ever having any deliverance, any end, any mitigation, any rest at all. You will know certainly that you must wear out long ages, millions of millions of ages, in wrestling and conflicting with this almighty merciless vengeance; and then when you have so done, when so many ages have actually been spent by you in this manner, you will know that all is but a point to what remains. So that your punishment will indeed be infinite. Oh, who can express what the state of a soul in such circumstances is.

Hell is real and it is awful and it is eternal and it is the wage that God has assigned to sin. Please cry out to God begging Him to grant you the ability to recognize the absolutely horrible reality of hell. Please call on God to grant you the ability to believe the Word of God regarding hell. Please consider the plea of the rich man who didn't come to understand these things until it was too late:

Luke 16:19-31 ¹⁹ "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' ²⁷ And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house- ²⁸ for I have five brothers- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' ³⁰ And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Is hell a just wage for sin? As I noted at the beginning, for many hell is a difficult concept to accept. That is, there are a good number of people who believe that the wages of sin are too steep to be fair; that the wages of sin are not a “fitting return”. While much more could be said in this regard, I’d simply like to draw your attention to the fact that justice or fairness are probably best understood as “giving to each what is deserved”. Further, when it comes to punishment, determining what kind of punishment one deserves is not just based on the nature of the crime committed; the value of the being offended must also be factored in. That is to say, we don’t punish people for killing dogs in the same way that we punish people for killing people (even though the crime is the same). We recognize the just nature of taking into account the value of the offended being. In other words, because people are more valuable than dogs, the just punishment for killing a dog is less than that for killing a person. Therefore, since God is (alone) infinitely valuable, any offence against God must be infinite to be just. Hell is fair, not because our crimes against God are so heinous, but because God is so valuable!

CONCLUSION

In choosing to sin, we are not doing the very thing that we were created to do – glorify God. Instead, we have pursued the glory of another. By our sin, we have separated ourselves from God and His glory. This act of rebellion brings with it extremely serious consequences. By failing to glorify God as we should, we have brought the wrath of God upon ourselves. Those who remain in their sin will ultimately be judged guilty by God and sentenced to physical and spiritual death—hell.

If you have spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear this will both shock and horrify you. It will cause you great heartache as you recognize the depth of your sin (and the sins of those around you) and the effect that it has on your life (here and in eternity). And it will cause you to cry out, seeking the mercy of God. Again, this chapter presents really bad news; the worst news possible. Graciously, however (as the next chapter highlights), the story does not end here.

We’re almost to the cross where the greatest act of injustice of all time puts on display the greatest acts of justice and mercy of all time. Please spend some time considering your condition before God. And please keep following Jesus to this cross!

The Solution of God - Five

In order to show His love, uphold His justice, forgive sinners, and display His glory, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the wages of sins with His death.

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10).

THE SOLUTION OF GOD

This entire booklet is about following Jesus to the cross. It’s about following Jesus to the cross because that is the essence of Christianity. Therefore, in order to understand and appreciate, and on our way to, the cross of Jesus we have looked at the facts that there is a God who is infinitely glorious, that God created us for His glory, that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God by serving sin instead of God, and that the wages for our sin is death.

These things help us understand and appreciate the cross of Jesus because they provide a stark and startling contrast between what we deserve and what we are offered; between what we are offered and what we choose; and between what we choose and what we get in Christ. In other words, if we don’t have a vision for the glory of God and the wickedness of our hearts then we will not be able to grasp, much less delight in, the sacrificial death of Jesus.

And these things are necessary steps on our way to the cross because they are the reasons for the cross of Jesus. If God were not infinitely glorious there would be no need for the cross. If we were not created for the glory of God there would be no need for the cross. If we had not sinned there would be no need for the cross. And if the wages of sin were not death there would be no need for the cross. So here we are...at the most significant point in all of human history: the cross of Jesus Christ. Before we dive in I want to point out three things:

First, the commonality of the cross of Jesus has all but numbed us to the significance of the cross of Jesus. Many people for many reasons display the cross in many ways (in the form of jewelry, interior decoration, lawn

ornaments, art, clothing, etc.). When something becomes as familiar as the cross has to us it can be very difficult to appreciate its terribleness and magnificence. This leads us to the next point.

Second, as we have noted several times already, common or not, true appreciation for the things of God require a gift of God to see and hear. We are born with physical eyes and ears and they allow us to see and hear physical things. We must be given new spiritual eyes and ears, however, if we are to see and hear spiritual things. As 1 Corinthians 1:18 reminds us, this is perhaps more true for the cross than anything else. "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." For the cross not to seem dull or foolish to us God must do a work in us.

Please cry out to God asking for eyes to see and ears to hear (Matthew 13:14-16). Ask God to replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19-20). Please ask Him to grant you the ability to see the (magnificent and terrible) significance of the cross of Jesus in order that you might follow Jesus there and be saved from the wages of your sin and brought into the kingdom of God! The following pages will explain the cross to you, but without God's gift of a fleshy heart and spiritual eyes and ears it will be of no benefit to you.

Finally, the crucifixion of Jesus is not some metaphysical concept or religious symbolism or fanciful story. It is a real event that took place in the course of human history. It is probably most clearly captured in Luke 22-23. The events described therein took place somewhere around 30 A.D. in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish activity. Crucifixion was widely held to be the worst kind of punishment imaginable and was typically reserved for the worst criminals. Before we get to the "why" of Jesus' crucifixion, then, consider the event itself.

Luke 23:26-46 ²⁶ And as they led him [Jesus] away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do

these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" ³² *Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.*

³³ *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.* ³⁴ *And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.* ³⁵ *And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!"* ³⁶ *The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine* ³⁷ *and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!"* ³⁸ *There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."* ³⁹ *One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!"* ⁴⁰ *But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?"* ⁴¹ *And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."* ⁴² *And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* ⁴³ *And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* ⁴⁴ *It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour,* ⁴⁵ *while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.* ⁴⁶ *Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.*

SOLUTIONS REQUIRE PROBLEMS

The title of this chapter is, "The Solution of God". Solutions require problems. Again, the problem that we all face is the fact that we have all sinned and earned death as the wages of our sin. That is, every one of us deserves to go to hell when we die because we have fallen short of the glory of God. To make matters worse, there is nothing that we can do about it. God has irrevocably declared that the wages of sin is death. We have all sinned, so there must be death for us all.

The solution of God was to send His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in the place of sinners. Indeed, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Consider the following verses that speak to this:

1 Timothy 1:15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 John 4:9-10 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

In order to show His love, uphold His justice, forgive sinners, and display His glory, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the wages of sin with His death. Let's look at each of these claims as we consider this remarkable gift.

How does the cross of Jesus show the love of God? In answering this question in a bit of detail I hope not to distract you from the obviousness of the answer. God the Father sent his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer the full wrath of God and to die on the cross as punishment for the sins of others. If the loving nature of that is not already apparent, I suppose there isn't much that could be said to make it so. Indeed, this is the defining act of love for all people for all time. To get a bit more specific though I want to briefly consider this act of love from the three primary perspectives involved: God the Father, God the Son, and sinful man.

From the perspective of God the Father, we find one whose image has been distorted, whose good gifts have been despised, whose patience and kindness have been scoffed at, whose laws have been ignored and broken, whose name has been profaned and whose glory has been exchanged, all by His own creatures; and yet, we also find one who gives His only Son to die on a cross to pay the wages of sin for those same sinners. The love of the Father is shown in the cross in His willingness to act kindly toward his antagonists—to His enemies—by sacrificing His own Son on their behalf.

From the perspective of Jesus, we find one who had been in heaven with the Father from eternity past, who created and sustains all things (Colossians 1), who has a name above every name (Philippians 2:9), who lived a life of perfect, sinless obedience, and yet, one who humbled himself by taking on the flesh of mankind in order to pay for the sins of mankind. Philippians 2:8 says, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” The love of Jesus Christ is shown at the cross in that He stepped out of His rightful place in heaven and into the humble form of man in order to suffer and die for the sins of others.

We also see the love of Jesus in the cross when we consider the physical and emotional suffering that he endured there on our behalf. Please imagine for a moment the kind of love that it would take to go through what Jesus went through on our behalf. Emotionally we see that Jesus was in utter anguish because of the abandonment of his friends (Mark 14:66-72) and the forsaking of his Father (Matthew 15:34). Jesus, in contemplating what awaited him at the cross, sweat to the point where his perspiration became like great drops of blood (Luke 22:41-44). Physically we see that Jesus was abused by his killers and punished by his Father beyond anything that we could ever fathom. To move from being flogged (John 19:1) to having thorns pressed in his head (John 19:2) to being punched repeatedly (John 19:3) to having his hands and feet nailed to a cross (John 19:18) to finally having the full wrath of God for the sins of men poured out on him is, without a doubt, the most physically grueling thing that any individual has ever had to withstand.

Finally, from the perspective of sinful man, we find ourselves in a condition of rebelliousness and helplessness, unwilling and unable to love or listen to God (Romans 8:7). Indeed, while serving sin, we are (whether we know it or not) enemies of God (Romans 5:10). We have no hope, no help, and nothing to offer. We are stuck in our sin; desperate, depraved, and deserving death. And yet, as we noted earlier, it is here that the love of God is most clear. It is precisely because there is nothing in us deserving God’s love that His love is so brilliantly displayed in the cross of Christ.

Romans 5:6-8 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

How does the cross of Jesus uphold the justice of God and forgive sinners? Again, justice is probably best understood as, “Giving to each what he deserves”. God is just by nature (Deuteronomy 32:4). Therefore, God must, because He is God, give to others what they deserve. Indeed, God can no more cease to be just than He can cease to be God. This means, then, that because we deserve death for our sin (as we looked at in the previous

chapter), God cannot simply pass over or forget our sins. His nature compels Him to pay out the wages of sin.

My prayer is that you would feel the tension at this point between the love of God, which wants what's best for mankind (namely, reconciliation with God), and the justice of God, which demands that that mankind get what he deserves (namely, death). We simply cannot appreciate the cross if we don't appreciate this tension.

The cross of Jesus is the answer and relief to this tension. God the Father lovingly gave His Son, who willingly offered Himself as a substitute sacrifice, for the sins of man. In other words, in the cross of Christ the wages of sin were paid so that the justice of God could be satisfied. Jesus exchanged His life for ours. Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to.

Simply put, the cross of Jesus combines the love of God and the justice of God to bring about the forgiveness of sinners. Because of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, the sins of men are forgiven. The Bible says that Jesus' washed out every spot, ironed every wrinkle, and removed every blemish (Ephesians 5:27) from those who would call on His name (as we will talk more about in the next chapter). The cross of Jesus makes us white as snow in the eyes of God (Isaiah 1:18). Our sins are removed from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). And in the cross the righteousness of God becomes our righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). We are forgiven at the cross because God's love and justice meet perfectly there.

How does the cross of Jesus display the glory of God? As we noted in the first chapter, there is a God who is infinitely glorious. And, as we noted in the second chapter, the ultimate reason that God does anything (including forgiving sins) is for His glory! Please understand that the glory of God is most clearly seen in the cross of Christ. The cross of Jesus is the pinnacle of God's display of His glory for the human race!

Astonishingly, we get to listen in on a brief conversation between Jesus and the Father as they speak directly to this point just before Jesus crucifixion. "[Jesus speaking] now is my soul troubled [because He is about to be crucified]. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven [God the Father]: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again" (John 12:27-28).

The cross of Jesus displays the glory of God by combining the attributes of God in a way that could not be seen previously. At the cross the magnitude of God’s love, justice, mercy, compassion, wisdom, wrath, faithfulness and patience, (indeed, His glory!) are put on display for all to recognize and rejoice in. All of human history before and since the cross of Jesus points to the glory of God demonstrated in the cross of Jesus.

We must also note, then, that because the cross of Jesus exists primarily to demonstrate the glory of God, the cross of Jesus isn’t primarily about your or me. When we look at the cross our response isn’t meant to be, “Look how valuable I am. Look how much I’m worth”. Instead, our attention is meant to be drawn to God. Our response must be then, if we rightly understand the cross, “Look how valuable God is. Look how glorious He is. I am unworthy. I do not deserve this. What a magnificent God!” Oh, how the glory of God is displayed in the cross!!!

How was Jesus able to die for sinners? Finally, please consider the unique ability of Jesus to save sinners. You and I could not pay for the sins of others because we have our own sin to pay for and because we are finite, limited creatures. Jesus, however, was uniquely able to die for the sins of others because He was uniquely sinless and uniquely both human and divine. That is, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, Jesus did not have a sinful nature (Matthew 1:18-23). And having lived a perfect (or sinless) life, Jesus did not earn the wages of sin for himself (Hebrews 4:15) and therefore had no death penalty of his own. Further, being fully man he was able to pay for the sins of man (Romans 5:15). And being fully God he was able to pay for all the sins of man (John 1:1). Again, what a glorious thing is the cross and the Son of God who died on it in our place.

CONCLUSION

What an awesomely perfect solution of God. What a remarkably loving and just and merciful and glorious God is the Father. What a tremendously kind and selfless and gracious act it was for Jesus, God the Son, to go to the cross on our behalf. God does not demand that we “fix” ourselves before coming to Him. He does not call us to perform some religious duty do demonstrate our worth. He did not wait until we felt remorse before sending His Son to die for us. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves in the cross of Jesus. Our salvation, then, depends not on our own will or work, but on God, who has mercy on us (Romans 9:16).

Because God is just, He must punish all sin. Because He is love He provided a savior. Because He is kind He forgives sin. And because He is glorious He did not leave us without hope in our state of enmity. Instead, He provided a way for us to again delight in His glory and be reconciled to Himself. Therefore, God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). That is, in order to show His love, uphold His justice, forgive sinners, and display His glory, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the wages of sin with His death.

In the next and final chapter we'll answer the questions, "For whom did Jesus die?" and "How do we gain access to the forgiveness purchased by Jesus' death?" In other words, in the next chapter we'll look at how it is that we, personally, can follow Jesus to the cross and be saved!

The Response of Man - Six

The forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life bought by Jesus' death is a free gift of God for all who trust in Jesus.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:1-9)

THE RESPONSE OF MAN

So far we've traveled quite a path on our way to the cross. We began by standing in awe at the nature of God (infinitely glorious), moved on to consider the purpose of mankind (to glorify God), grieved together as we discussed the problem of all mankind (sin), mourned together because of the wages of sin (death), and then paused to marvel at God's solution to our sin problem (the cross of Christ). We've taken this journey together because following Jesus to the cross (or coming to understand the gospel) is necessary for us to be saved and brought into a right relationship with God.

So again, here we are, at the foot of the cross and the point of decision. We now know the gospel and are left with the question of what we are going to do with it.

Some have never been to this point. That is, there are many people who have never heard the good news that Jesus Christ died to save sinners. Again, there are some who are simply unaware of Jesus' sacrificial work on the cross.

Others have been here (many times perhaps), but have turned away. Some turn away because the cross seems foolish to them. Some turn away

because they are afraid of what believing in the cross would mean. Some turn away because they reason that they can always come back later, when it's more convenient. Still others turn away because ...well...they're not sure why.

And yet, there are people (few in number the Bible says) who come to the cross, fall down before it, and cling to it with all that they have. There are people who joyfully leave everything to follow Jesus to the cross. There are people who consider everything else to be utterly worthless compared to the cross. Indeed, for some, the message of the cross of Jesus is the source of greatest hope and joy—like one who is shipwrecked spotting land or one who is sick learning of a cure or one who is starving finding food or one who is lonely finding love.

What is your response to the cross? Why do people respond so differently to the cross? How does your response to the cross relate to the forgiveness of your sins and everlasting life?

The point of this chapter is to answer these questions (and a few others) by describing and calling you to the kind of response that is pleasing to God and results in the salvation of your soul. In other words, in this chapter we'll examine what the Bible has to say about the relationship between knowing about the cross of Jesus (the gospel) and being saved.

TRUSTING IN JESUS

So, how do we receive the forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life bought by Jesus' death on the cross? The answer to this question is found clearly in the second chapter of Ephesians.

Ephesians 2:1-9 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience- ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

In short, the forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life bought by Jesus' death is a free gift of God for all who trust (or place their faith in) in Jesus. That is, we are saved, not by anything that we do (it is a gift of God), but by trusting in what Jesus already did (paid the wages of sin on the cross). Indeed, we receive forgiveness and life through hearing and trusting in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This means that God does not save us based on our own merit or performance. God does not determine who goes to heaven by our "religious deeds" or how we measure up against anyone or anything else. He does not forgive us and grant us eternal life because we've cleaned ourselves up enough or become acceptable to Him on our own. Instead, God saves, as an undeserved gift, those who trust in Jesus. In other words, Jesus died on the cross to pay for the sins of all those who trust in Him. Awesome!

What does it mean to trust in Jesus? To trust in something is to rely on or place your confidence in that thing. Trusting in Jesus, then, means relying on His work for the forgiveness of your sins, not your own. It means relying on His wisdom for guidance for all things, not anyone else's. And it means placing your confidence in Jesus to be ruler in your life, not yourself.

It's also important to note that trusting in Jesus is a continual, rather than a one-time, thing. That is, we are saved by trusting in Jesus, not by having trusted in Him, in some way, at some point in the past.

How do we *know* that we are trusting in Jesus? Many people claim to trust or believe in Jesus (Matthew 7:22). The Bible says that demons even believe in Jesus in some sense (James 2:19). But the Bible also gives us certain indicators or benchmarks that help us to distinguish between demonic belief and saving trust. Specifically, the chief marks of one who has been given the gift of trust in Jesus are belief, repentance, love, and obedience.

To trust in Jesus means believing the word of God concerning Jesus. That is, one necessary mark of one who trusts in Jesus is belief in the gospel. Not to state too obvious a point here, but it is important to note that believing in the gospel requires one to have heard the true gospel. We simply cannot trust in Jesus, and therefore we cannot be saved from our sins, if we are

ignorant of the basic points mentioned in the previous chapters. Believing in some idol god or pop-psychology-concocted, humanly-terminating concept of sin, or a vague notion of a savior does us absolutely no good. We cannot claim to trust in Jesus if we do not truly believe in Jesus.

Acts 16:31 Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

Repenting means turning away from your sin and towards God. When we truly trust in Jesus serving sin will become increasingly repulsive to us and serving God will become increasingly satisfying to us. We will grow to hate our sin and love the will of God. We are not saved by stopping ourselves from sinning. However, turning from our sin towards God is a necessary and telling indicator (or result) of our trust in Jesus and the salvation of our souls. We cannot claim to trust in Jesus if we do not repent of our sins.

Acts 3:19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.

Still another product of truly trusting in Jesus is an ever deepening love for Jesus. That is, saving trust produces biblical love. Biblical love means affectionately pursuing that which is best for another. You'll notice that there is both an emotive and a sacrificial component to Biblical love. Therefore, trusting in Jesus means loving Jesus which means joyfully pursuing that which is best for Jesus; namely, the glory of Jesus (we are satisfied by sacrificing our glory for the glory of Jesus). When the Bible calls us to love God, then, it is calling us to delight in reflecting the glory of God! Once again, we cannot claim to trust in Jesus if we do not have an increasing love of this kind for Jesus.

Luke 10:25-27 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; ... 'Do this and you will live'

Finally, we can have confidence that we are trusting in Jesus when we find ourselves increasingly burdened to obey the word of God. Obeying means (as we talked about in chapter three) not just doing the right thing, but doing the right thing for the right reason or with the right heart. Truly trusting in Jesus results in coming to the point where God's commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). Indeed, when we trust in Jesus we will be able to echo the psalmist's words, "I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight" (Psalm 119:174). We cannot claim to trust in Jesus if we do not find increasing satisfaction in obeying Jesus.

1 John 3:23-24 (NIV) And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them”

Once again, the forgiveness of sins and the everlasting life bought by Jesus’ death is a free gift of God for all who trust in Jesus. And we know that we trust in Jesus when we find ourselves growing in our hatred for sin, as well as our belief in, love for, and obedience to Jesus.

How do we trust in Jesus? Or, why do some people hear and believe the gospel and have their entire lives changed because of it while others scoff at it or ignore it or outright reject it? The Bible uses several different metaphors to answer this question, but they all come down to the fact that we naturally lack the capacity to comprehend spiritual truths. That is, apart from the work of God in our lives, we simply will not and cannot understand or accept the gospel. We will not and cannot trust in Jesus by our own devices. What we need, Jesus teaches, is to be born again. We need to be given new spiritual life in order to trust in Jesus.

John 3:1-3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

In order for you to trust in Jesus we must be born again. Being born again is the gift of God described in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” We must, then, cry out to God asking Him for that which we did not earn and do not deserve. We must ask Him for new spiritual life in order that we might trust in Jesus and be saved. It is humbling, but hopeful. It is undeserved, but unimaginable. And it is desperate, but definite. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved.

Romans 10:9, 11, 13 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

What is eternal life like? In chapter 4 we looked at the horrific nature of eternal death (hell). Here, I want to close our journey to the cross by looking at the glorious nature of eternal life (heaven). Hell is where God pours out His holy and righteous wrath on sinners. You know that you are being punished, you know that you deserve it, and you know that it will last forever. Heaven, on the other hand, is where God pours out his holy and righteous blessing on those who trust in Jesus. You know that you are being blessed, you know that you don't deserve it, and you know that it will last forever. Indeed, heaven is every bit as awesome as hell is awful. Let us again listen to the words of Jonathan Edwards whose description of heaven is perhaps unequalled as well.

They shall know that God and Christ shall be forever with them as their God and portion, and that his love shall be continued and fully manifested forever, and that all their beloved fellow-saints shall forever live with them in glory, and shall forever keep up the same love in their hearts which they now have. And they shall know that they themselves shall ever live to love God, and love the saints, and to enjoy their love in all its fullness and sweetness forever. They shall be in no fear of any end to this happiness, or of any abatement from its fullness and blessedness, or that they shall ever be weary of its exercises and expressions, or cloyed with its enjoyments, or that the beloved objects shall ever grow old or disagreeable, so that their love shall at last die away. All in heaven shall flourish in immortal youth and freshness. Age will not there diminish anyone's beauty or vigor; and their love shall abide in everyone's heart, as a living spring perpetually springing up in the soul, or as a flame that never dies away. And the holy pleasure of this love shall be as a river that is forever flowing clear and full, and increasing continually. The heavenly paradise of love shall always be kept as in a perpetual spring, without autumn or winter, where no frosts shall blight, or leaves decay and fall, but where every plant shall be in perpetual freshness, and bloom, and fragrance, and beauty, always springing forth, and always blossoming, and always bearing fruit. The leaf of the righteous shall not wither (Psa. 1:3). And in the midst of the streets of heaven, and on either side of the river, grows the tree of life, which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields her fruit every month (Rev. 22:2). Everything in the heavenly world shall contribute to the joy of the saints, and every joy of heaven shall be eternal. No night shall settle down with its darkness upon the brightness of their everlasting day.

Breathtaking isn't it?! Heaven is the great hope of, and promise to, everyone who trusts in Jesus. Heaven is the place where believers are forever in the presence of almighty, infinitely glorious God. In heaven we

are able to see Jesus face-to-face. In heaven God pours out all His strength to bless His children. Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of the glory of God and the joy that is found in it. In heaven, there will be no darkness, for God is its light (Revelation 21:25). In heaven there will be no more sickness or sadness, for God will wipe it all away (Revelation 21:4). In heaven there will be no more unmet needs or desires, for God will fully and eternally satisfy us. Heaven will be beautiful beyond our imagination. In heaven our fellowship with all the saints and with the Father, Son and Spirit will be eternally uninterrupted. Heaven will be a place of complete satisfaction and joy. Heaven truly is every bit as awesome as hell is awful.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to offer a brief thought as a challenge and as an encouragement. For most of my life I could not articulate any of the points of the gospel (the previous five chapters) or describe with any clarity a biblically acceptable response to the gospel (this chapter). I had a vague concept of the individual components of it, but nothing approaching a firm grasp on the whole. I lived my life on my terms (except where others put up boundaries for me) and for my own purposes. While I did not knowingly disbelieve any of the tenants of the gospel, I certainly did not accept any of them either. I was not trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins and yet, as I stated previously, I always believed that I would go to heaven when I died.

I mean this little biographical sketch to challenge the notion that feeling safe about your eternity has anything to do with where you're going to spend your eternity. I'd guess that most people in hell were (and will be) surprised to find themselves there. It does no good to believe in something false, no matter how zealously you believe it. Please consider the objective claims of Jesus and the biblical authors. Apart from a right understanding of and response to the gospel and you and I simply cannot be saved.

And I mean this as an encouragement because if God can capture the heart and mind and soul of a selfish, prideful, wretched sinner like me, after two decades of ignorance and defiance, He can save anyone. It is not too late to follow Jesus to the cross and be saved. If you can read this, understand this, and place your trust in Jesus, you too have the promise of God, because of the cross of Jesus, that your sins will be forgiven and you will be given everlasting life!

