

Progressing Together



DOCT 206

Salvation



www.progressingtogether.com

info@progressingtogether.com

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Syllabus for DOCT206 - Salvation

Certificate Level

Course Objectives

To lead believers and leaders into a deeper understanding of salvation in Christ, to clearer witness, and to the equipping of others for ministry in these subjects.

Course Description

The course begins by pointing to mankind's need for a Saviour and how God prepared the world for his coming. It then explores the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation process. From there it discusses the subjects of justification, regeneration, baptism by the Holy Spirit, and living a transformed life. The course ends with four essential aspects of salvation, showing how neglecting any one of the four can lead to imbalance and even heresy.

Learning Outcomes

Content: By the end of the course, the student will be able:

To describe sin in its various aspects: (1) “sinful nature” (principle of sin); (2) sinful acts (deeds of sin); (3) the absolute offense of sin (there are no big sins and little sins)

To understand the extent of human wickedness (depravity), and to realize the eternal destiny of those who have not heard the gospel.

To explain why justification by grace alone through faith alone is central to protestant thought.

To outline in simple and clear terms an evangelical understanding of atonement.

To differentiate between the ideas of justification, sanctification and glorification.

Character: *By the end of the course, the student will:*

Give clear testimony to and show personal commitment to salvation by grace through faith.

Demonstrate peace concerning his or her assurance of salvation and destiny in Christ.

Demonstrate a recognition of the eternal destiny of the lost, and a personal commitment to bringing people to saving faith in Christ

Competency: *By the end of the course, the student will be able:*

To give a simple and clear presentation of the plan of salvation (five to ten minutes).

To clearly defend the concept of justification by grace through faith alone from justification by works; and to describe the proper role of the law in bringing us to conviction and faith in Christ.

To persuasively defend evangelical teaching concerning the doctrine of salvation from common misunderstandings and heretical positions

To describe a number of ways in which salvation brings real change in the life of a believer.

Course Requirements

Certificate Level

To demonstrate knowledge of course material through
answering questions at the end of each section
completion of the final exam

To attend 18 of 20 instructor-led sessions (27 contact hours minimum)

To participate in discussions by listening, contributing as appropriate, and responding when asked a specific question

To present the following 3 activities:

Activity 1

Think of 3 people you know personally who need salvation in Christ. Then for each person, present

Their need for salvation

The specific barriers that keep the person from responding to the salvation message

The main points of the message you would address that particular person

(in one short paragraph for each point (9 paragraphs in all))

Activity 2* Choose 1 of the following 3 projects below:

Word pictures and biblical metaphors are powerful tools for communicating a message. They touch both heart and mind. Choose one biblical word picture among the following list and show how it powerfully communicate the salvation message. Noah's ark Gen 6-9

Cities of refuge Num 35

A planted tree Ps 1

Jesus washing the disciples' feet Jn 13

Redemption Mk 10:45

Adoption Rom 8:14-17

You may write your observations on a table or in an essay on a sheet of paper. This activity can be done individually or in a group.

Compare and contrast justification by faith and justification through works by enacting a skit. Divide the class in two parts; one half presents one viewpoint and the other half will present the other. Each skit should clearly present the theology of the viewpoint being portrayed.

Make a chart or table to present the key elements that contribute to people's salvation.

Activity 3*

Develop a gospel presentation you can use with people who are interested. You can choose to address a Muslim, an agnostic/atheist or a Roman Catholic.

*You may replace either activity 2 or 3 with a report on an approved reading of 40 pages.

Evaluation Methodology and Scale

Student performance and mastery will be assessed according to the following scale:

20% for class participation

20% for preparing lessons before class

30% for the final exam

30% for the activities and readings

The evaluation scale is as follows

passing grade - 70-79%

good grade – 80-89%

excellent grade – 90% or more

Credits Earnable

2 hours of credit towards a Certificate in Christian Studies

Prerequisites

Progressing Together DOCT201, or equivalent

Textbook and Related Materials

Required - Progressing Together Manual for DOCT206.

Additional readings may be required at the instructor's discretion

Recommended - Any book on Christian doctrine which devotes at least one chapter to this important subject (see bibliography).

Course Methodology

The student will work inductively, reading texts, answering questions concerning knowledge, application and analysis, and drawing conclusions which will be applicable to local context. After answering the questions in each lesson, students will gather to discuss answers and practical application. When possible, the course leader will give additional talks to reinforce what the students are learning through the lessons.

Course Schedule

To be announced.

Policies

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, because it is deemed contrary to Christian teaching and academic integrity.

Absences in excess of 3 class hours will lead to a reduced grade; no student missing more than 6 class hours will receive credit for the course. Students who show little or no interest in completing course work will first be warned, then asked to leave the course if they do not change their conduct.

Bibliography

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- Pabón, José M. *Diccionario manual: Griego*. Editorial Vox. Barcelona, Spain. 2006.
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Lesson 1: Introduction

Saved from What?

If we wish to speak of the salvation of mankind, we must first understand that we face a great danger, the eternal condemnation of our soul. The Bible teaches quite clearly that there are two possible destinies for those who leave this life through physical death: either Heaven or Hell (2 Peter 2:4-9, Rev. 20:11-15) “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). The Bible says that we deserve the judgment of God because we are sinners. Thus, if we wish to escape Hell to enter into glory, we must absolutely leave this state of being sinners. But what is sin? And how does one avoid eternal condemnation? This lesson seeks to answer the second question in particular, without forgetting the first one.

There are several ways of defining sin. We might say that it is disobeying God’s law, or else that it is any imperfection contrasted to the perfection of our Lord, or that it is an attitude of rebellion against the will of our Creator, etc. Whatever definition we may use, there are a few important distinctions to make.

On one hand, we must distinguish between “sin” (in terms of principle or power) and “sins” (in terms of evil actions, words, or thoughts). The first sense deals with “the state of sin” into which we are born. This is the inheritance we have from our ancestors, Adam and Eve. These are the seeds of rebellion against God which are present in our hearts from the time we are born. Even little babies are “sinners” in this sense of the word. It is a result of inherited sin if even children barely over a year old cry “No!” to their parents, fall on the ground in a temper tantrum, or scream “That’s mine!” as they grab a toy from another surprised child.

On the other hand, there are “sins” or “the acts of sin.” These are the inevitable results of inherited sin. Inherited sin pushes us to commit individual sins by acting in wrong or selfish ways in response to the changing situations of life. We are drawn to evil thoughts, to saying discouraging or unwholesome things, and to committing deeds contrary to the nature and will of God. As a result, we all deserve eternal condemnation in Hell. It does not matter whether we have committed many sins or only a few sins. We are born as sinners and if we are not saved from this condition, we will die as sinners, all meriting condemnation to Hell, that is, eternal separation from the holy and just God (Romans 3:23 and 6:23).

For this reason also, the popular notion of “big sins” and “little sins” is not valid. Both individual sins, big or small, and inherited sin, produce a separation between us and our Creator. Of course, we believe that since God is just, the punishment of those who commit “big sins” will be more severe than those who commit “little sins.” Besides, the consequences of little sins are less destructive than those of big sins. But in any case, both the “big sinner” and the “little sinner” will go to Hell if they do not find salvation before death!

Moreover, the idea that our good deeds can cover, erase, or compensate for our sins, or that they can save us in any way, is completely false. The Bible affirms that “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away” (Isaiah 64:6). “For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not of works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Of course, the idea that good works cannot save us goes against popular teaching as well as the doctrine of certain religions. Nevertheless, we are the ones who must conform to the Word of God, not the Word of God to our human beliefs. The Bible teaches that while we must do good works, it is not as a means to salvation, but as the logical and natural result of being saved by the grace of God (Matthew 5:16 and Ephesians 2:8-10).

Questions:

1. **Why is the topic of salvation so important?**

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2. **How do you define sin?**

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3. **Have you suffered from the consequences of sin in your life? How?**

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Saved by Whom?

Once we have understood that we are sinners in need of salvation, we must ask ourselves how we can obtain it. Any Christian already knows the answer: through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave his life as a sacrifice for us. Thus, God now declares us just by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

But someone could object: “Couldn’t God simply forgive us if we truly repent of our sins, without having to go through Jesus’ death on the cross?” Usually, people find that the way God chose to save mankind is an act of folly. The apostle Paul speaks of this problem in this way: “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Furthermore, God has taught us through the sacrificial system in the Old Testament that the shedding of blood is necessary to obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why was it necessary to have the shedding of blood? God alone can answer this question! But what we do know for certain that there was no other way to obtain forgiveness. When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane “Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” (Mark 14:36). Nevertheless God did not spare his only beloved son from a painful death on the cross. So to think that there would have been some other way to avoid the death of Jesus as a sacrifice is completely absurd!

Other people may ask: “Couldn’t there be other mediators before God? Why do you say that Jesus Christ is the only prophet able to save his people from condemnation?” There are at least two possible answers to this. First because the Bible, which is God’s Word, asserts: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6) The one who trusts in the Word of God does not need any other evidence besides these inspired words.

But logically, Jesus was the only one capable of saving us since our savior needed to be without sin, eternally living, and chosen by God. If he was himself a sinner, his sacrifice would be worth no more than the death of any other human sinner and thus without any universal value (Hebrews 7:26-28). If he had remained dead, his promises of eternal life would be empty and his prophecies of his own resurrection would be lies (Heb 7:25, 1 Cor 15:12-14 and Luke 24:1-8). If he had not been chosen by God to accomplish this vital task, his death would have no merit for humanity (Acts 4:24-31, 10:34-42 and Mat 12:14-21). Is there another prophet, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfills these qualifications? None!

4. **Who alone can serve as our mediator before God? Why?**

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5. **Place the Scripture references besides the corresponding truths expressed in this chart (Psalm 51:5, Philippians 1:21-24, Acts 4:11-12, James 4:17, Revelation 20:14-15, Romans 7:19-21, 1 Timothy 1:12-15, John 14:1-3, Proverbs 24:11-12, Matthew 25:41-46, James 2:10-12):**

Those who are not saved will go to Hell.	
Hell is a place of suffering.	
Those who are saved will go to Heaven with God.	
Heaven is a place of joy.	
Even babies are born as “sinners.”	
Small sins are just as worthy of condemnation as are large sins.	<i>James 2:10-12</i>
There is a relation between the severity of punishment and the crime committed.	
Sin in itself is a power that encourages us to sin.	
There is only one way by which we may be forgiven and saved.	
If we know the good we ought to do and don't do it, we sin.	
Even the greatest sinner can be saved from his sin.	

6. **What importance do people of the majority religion in your country place on good deeds? Read Titus 2:11-14 and briefly compare their thoughts on good deeds to Biblical teaching.**

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The History of the Atoning Sacrifice

Before continuing, we will briefly examine the history behind the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Atonement refers to the penalty of death which Jesus suffered in our place on the cross. This act is foreshadowed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. God prepared the people of Israel in such a way that they were able to understand the fulfillment of this atonement when it arrived.

7. Briefly review the following texts and explain how they prepared the people of Israel for the atonement of sins by the death of Jesus on the cross:

- a. Genesis 3:1-18 (100 years after the creation of the world?)

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- b. Genesis 4:1-7 (200 years after creation?)

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- c. Genesis 22:1-18 (around 2000 BC)

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d. Exodus 12:1-24 (around 1440 BC)

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e. Leviticus 1:1-13 (around 1400 BC)

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f. Isaiah 53:1-12 (around 740 BC)

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🕊 In this introduction we have examined the reasons why we are in need of salvation, the identity of the only person able to save us, and the preparations God made through the people of Israel to prepare a way for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(From this point on, the main text used in lessons 1 through 8 is reproduced, with permission, from the book *Précis de doctrine Chretienne*, (A Handbook of Christian Doctrine) by J-M Nicole, Editions de l'Institut Biblique, Nogent-sur-Marne, 1983, pages 168-206.)

Preliminary Remarks

To save is to snatch someone from a situation of distress or peril to bring them to shelter, safe and sound. In Scripture the word is used particularly to describe the process by which God delivers us from condemnation to grant us eternal life.¹ In this chapter we will examine it in a more limited sense, in order to refer to the passage from death to life, which is legitimate since Jesus declared to the sinful woman who was forgiven: “Your faith has saved you.” (Luke 7:50) and Paul told his readers: “You are saved by grace.” (Eph 2:5, 2 Tim 1:9, Titus 3:5) while using a verb tense which indicates a completed action. At the same time, we must not forget that salvation includes much more than simply justification and regeneration which mark one’s

entrance into the Christian life. All throughout our lives the Lord saves us, and a salvation ready to be manifested in the last days is reserved for us at the time of our Master’s return. (1 Peter 1:5; compare also Heb 6:9, Rom 5:9-10) “For in this hope we were saved,” (Rom 8:24) not in the sense that our salvation might be still uncertain, but in that the benefits which it includes have not yet all been given to us. It is a little bit like a drowning man who can be considered saved from the moment in which his rescuer grabs him, but he still must be brought back to the shore, revived and otherwise allowed to recover from the incident to fully appreciate the extent of his rescue.

We can note a range of analogous meanings in the use of the similar word “redemption.” It can be used to designate either the redeeming act accomplished by Christ once and for all (Romans 3:24), or the freedom which we enjoy from the very moment of our conversion through the forgiveness of our sins,ⁱⁱ or even the final fulfillment which will be ours to share when Christ comes again.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the following pages we will examine the topics of salvation and redemption while focusing our attention on the initial experience through which we cease to belong to the power of darkness and become members of the kingdom of heaven.

As are all the blessings which follow from salvation, this change is due to the work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, if everything that God has done for us, he has done through Christ, everything that he does within us he does by the Holy Spirit...

Questions:

8. **What are the different meanings that the word “salvation” can have in the Bible?**

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9. **In what sense is the word “redemption” used in each of the following verses?**

a. Ephesians 1:7:

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b. Romans 3:24:

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c. Romans 8:23

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10. **What convinced you of your need for salvation?**

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11. Read Luke 7:36-50. Jesus said that whoever has been forgiven much loves much. Who do you look like most? Simon or the sinful woman? Explain your answer.

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12. We have spoken of the popular notion of big sins and little sins. At the time of the story, who was the greater sinner:

a. In the eyes of society? Why?

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b. In the eyes of Jesus? Why?

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Lesson 2: The Role of God's Holy Spirit

In promising the coming of the comforter, Jesus said to his disciples: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” (John 16:8) “The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.” (John 14:17) Thus communion with the Holy Spirit is a privilege reserved for believers, though he is also at work among those who are not yet regenerate, precisely in order to bring about repentance and faith in their lives. Jesus insists on the work of the Spirit since Pentecost in particular, but we should not conclude from this that he was not at work in men's hearts beforehand.^{iv} No doubt his activity has taken on a greater scope since that time.

Perhaps also that by saying the Holy Spirit will convict the world the Lord means to underline the unlimited nature of this action, no longer confined to just the people of Israel but extending to all the nations.

The verb translated as “convict” implies that the truth is presented with so much power that it cannot be contested. Those who have been convinced know where they stand and are no longer in a place to be undermined by a valid objection. This does not mean that they are forced to make the decision which should be obvious to them. As one of our hymns says, one may be “nearly convinced, but forever lost.”^v

According to the word of our Lord, this work of the Spirit is carried out in three areas.

First area: to begin with he convinces the world of their sin. In general, people are aware that they are sinners. “No one is perfect,” they will admit. But they do not take the situation seriously, rather comforting themselves by thinking of all the others who are much worse than they are, or by imagining that God is too good to crack down on them severely. I have heard one person during a testimony, use the common expression: “I knew I was a sinner, but I didn't think that was a sin!”

The Holy Spirit comes to overthrow our false sense of security. As a general rule, he uses the Scriptures to do this, beginning with the law, “through which we become conscious of sin.” (Romans 3:20). He also uses other means, such as memories of a serious wrong we have done, the preaching of the Gospel, a brotherly warning, a manifestation of virtue in another believer. No matter the means, the main thing is that the sinner is, as were long ago the 3,000 hearers of the apostle Peter, cut to the heart (Acts 2:37) and reaches the point of saying, “What must I do?”

The Holy Spirit can convict us of the seriousness of any wrong, but he especially means to show us how guilty we are by our unbelief. “When [the Holy Spirit] comes,” says Jesus, “he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.” (John 16:9) At first glance, it seems that the unbeliever is more to be pitied than to be criticized. In reality however, refusing to believe is the worst offense that one can commit against the God of truth who has borne witness to his Son. “Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.” (1 John 5:10) Nothing is more dreadful than scorned love.

Moreover, as all heavenly blessings are only promised to those who believe, unbelief is thus the sin whose consequences are the most lamentable. From the fall of our first parents to the ultimate revolt of the antichrist and his followers, all of mankind's strayings from God have a common root: a refusal to accept the message of God. Thus it is not surprising that the Spirit comes to touch this sensitive spot to show the sinner how far off he has wandered. Even the most virtuous and zealous like the apostle Paul come to feel with great pain their miserable state (Rom 7:24, 1 Tim 1:15).

What shall we say then to those who claim to be ready to believe but cannot manage to overcome their doubts? Far be it from us to act out of condemnation as if we were in the place of God to judge them. We must rather encourage them to persevere in their search, and to stir them on with the wonderful promise of Jesus: “If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:17)

As a general rule, conviction of sin precedes one’s accepting salvation. A minimum of such conviction is required to recognize that we are in need of grace. Many a miscarried conversion is probably due to a deficiency in this area. One finds in Jesus a friend but neglects him as a Savior. And yet sometimes we throw ourselves in with sincere impulse, without truly having a real knowledge of the gravity of sin. In this case, conviction of sin, though it may be superficial at first, will grow in strength soon after the conversion. It is a bit like those who have been ill and only find out about the virulence of their disease after they are healed, or like alpinists who have been hiking just along the edge of deep chasms at night and are frightened in the light of day to think of the dangers they faced unknowingly. The order in which the experiences come is not essential; none of us are made out of the same mold nor are we compelled to follow exactly the same order of steps. The important part is that sooner or later the Holy Spirit must convict us of our sins.

Questions:

1. **What is the work of the Holy Spirit within the unbeliever? (John 16:8)**

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2. **Are conviction of sin and conversion possible one without the other? Explain your answer.**

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3. **Why is unbelief such a particularly serious sin?**

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Second area of the Holy Spirit’s work: the feeling of our guilt could lead us to despair. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t only convict us of sin, Jesus adds: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.” (John 16:8-10) Like a good surgeon, the Lord only opens the abscess to clean and bandage it afterward. As soon as we admit that we are guilty, the Holy Spirit reveals to us

that the Lord has provided for our acquittal. As we have said elsewhere, the resurrection of Christ is the proof of the value of his death to purchase our salvation. His ascension brings us confirmation. If the body of Jesus had stayed in the tomb, we would still be in total uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of his sacrifice. But since he has ascended into heaven, we know that his offering has been accepted by the Father and that we are justified. By raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his right hand, God puts into action his power for those of us who believe. (Ephesians 1:19-20) “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is seated at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:33-34) “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The Holy Spirit works in our thoughts to show us that this power is the power of God and that through it we obtain our sure and certain pardon. Just as the conviction of sin pushes us to repentance, the nature of conviction of justice is to bring about saving faith.

Third area: The Holy Spirit “convicts the world of guilt, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” (John 16:8 and 11) The world which by its very nature tends to want to accomplish the desires of the devil (John 8:44) must admit the enemy is condemned forever, even if he has a respite for “a little while longer” (Revelation 12:12) before he is finally crushed for good, his defeat has been established. By this third conviction, the Spirit completes the two others. Those he calls realize that they can escape the power of Satan, and that if they continue to submit to him, they risk falling into the same condemnation. All this is meant to bring them to a decision of saving faith.

There is in all this operation a mystery beyond our comprehension. How can a sinner unreceptive to the will of God be brought to a complete change of attitude? Even after having experienced this blessed change, one cannot explain it. But we know that it is true. To the humanly unanswerable question: “Who then can be saved?” we can only reply: “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:26-27)

Questions:

- 4. **What is the importance of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in regard to the conviction of sin brought about by the Holy Spirit?**

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- 5. **Of what does the Holy Spirit convince us besides our guilt before God and the possibility of being saved by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?**

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6. What do we learn after having accepted the salvation found in Jesus Christ? (Mark 10:25-27)

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This brings us to examine what it means to sin against the Holy Spirit. Regarding this, Jesus declared: “And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” (Matthew 12:31-32)

It would be rather simplistic to think that simply mentioning the Holy Spirit in a curse word would be enough to have committed this sin, though that does not mean we should disregard the scruple with which even profaners try to avoid this kind of irreverence.

Jesus addressed this warning to the Pharisees who were accusing him of casting out demons by Beelzebub. One should not conclude that all those who attribute to the devil a work done by the Spirit of God are guilty of having committed this unpardonable sin. Indeed, they may have confused the two out of ignorance, as did Saul of Tarsus, and like him be forgiven (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

Two passages from the epistle to the Hebrews can help us move forward in our study.

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy ... How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29)

Note that in these two passages the issue is a guilty attitude towards the Holy Spirit, the consequences of which are irremediable: it is thus legitimate to compare these readings with the words of Jesus we cited earlier.

At the same time, we have no right to say that this can be any sin committed after conversion.^{vi} The New Testament gives us plenty of examples of believers who, even after Pentecost, acted sinfully without being considered beyond hope.^{vii}

The role which the Holy Spirit plays to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment helps us to understand the meaning of these formal warnings. If someone has been enlightened and has received knowledge of the truth^{viii} and then at the same time refuses to surrender his life to God, whatever else could possibly bring him to a better state of mind?

Doubtless there are few who have yielded at the first prompting of the Holy Spirit. But resisting him is a serious matter, for doing so runs the risk of miring oneself even further into a stubborn revolt. Eventually one will reach a point of no return.^{ix}

The Pharisees whom Jesus was confronting were on this slippery slope. They had seen the Lord cast out a demon. Deep in their conscience, they knew that the Spirit of God was at work in this. (Matthew 12:28). But as they did not at any price want to submit to Christ, they proposed an absurd explanation for what happened, an answer for which a grain of good sense and a minute of reflection would be enough to show the foolishness. Note that Jesus does not accuse them of having already committed the unpardonable sin, but says that they are on the path towards doing so, given their evident bad faith.

In any case, according to this definition, the issue at stake is a peril to which only unbelievers are exposed. Those who are born again have already been persuaded by the Holy Spirit. Thus they have adopted an attitude completely opposite to that of unrepentant sinners. ^x At the same time they must still be watchful, for they are not immune to deliberate disobedience. And such disobedience is not without parallels to definitive rebellion.

If anyone is troubled at the thought of having committed such a terrible sin, the passage from Hebrews is meant to comfort them. Indeed, the apostle declares that those who have reached that state are no longer able to be brought back to a point of repentance. Thus the very anguish they feel and the regret they have show that they have not arrived at the ultimate stage of unbelief. Since they are repentant, forgiveness is offered to them.

Can we know if our neighbor has reached this desperate situation? Perhaps. The apostle John writes that it is useless to pray for those who have committed the sin leading to death (1 John 5:16). Nevertheless, it is better to run the risk of praying for someone who can no longer benefit from that prayer than to neglect interceding on behalf of those who may need it. It's a case of inverting the old adage to say, "In doubt, don't leave it out!"

Questions:

7. Must any sin after conversion be considered as unpardonable? Explain your answer.

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8. What does it mean to sin against the Holy Spirit?

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9. What can we say to someone who thinks he may have committed it?

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10. In your experience, how have you observed the reality of the Holy Spirit's work in a person's salvation?

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11. According to the teaching of the work of the Holy Spirit in this lesson, which of these declarations applies to evangelization?

- a. We are responsible for the response of people to whom we proclaim the gospel.
- b. We cannot know who will refuse the message of the gospel before having shared it.
- c. We can share the gospel with any person and pray with confidence for him or her, knowing that the Holy Spirit backs our message.

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For Further Study

12. To what extent is a Christian responsible for the conversion of another person? (Ezekiel 31:7-19, Matthew 10:14, Matthew 28:19-20, and Mark 16:15-16)

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13. Several Christian denominations teach that, even if the sin against the Holy Spirit is committed in very few cases, it is still possible to lose your salvation by consciously rejecting him after have believed in Jesus, since God does not do away with our free will after conversion. What do you think of this idea?

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14. What Bible verses do you know which support such an understanding of Scripture?

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Lesson 3: Justification by Grace

Unlike what its etymology may suggest, to justify does not mean to make just but rather to declare just. The accused in a trial who justified by the court is no more just afterwards than he was beforehand, but at that point there were suspicions against him and after the court's action his innocence is recognized.

Justification is a legal term. According to the laws of men it means, to obtain a verdict of acquittal, having avoided evil and done good. As a result the first idea which comes to a human mind is that to stand before the divine court one must have lived a virtuous life. This conception of things appears in all human religions and irreligions: in the man on the street who congratulates himself for having “neither killed nor stolen,” in the Marxist who dreams of bringing about a better world by his efforts, in the pagan who carefully follows the taboos of his clan, in the Muslim who fulfills the five main duties of Islam (confession of faith, prayer, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage), in the follower of Confucius passionate about moral living, in the Pharisee who seeks to establish his own justice by observing the precepts of the law. An impressive unanimity! Over and over again this temptation to seek justification by works has snuck into the Christian Church, in an outright manner among the Pelagians of the 5th century and in our day in a number of different sects too numerous to enumerate here, with a few nuances among several Church Fathers, in Roman Catholicism according to the definition of the Council of Trent^{xi} and among the majority of modernists.

The Bible states very clearly that to obtain justification by this route, one must have obeyed all the law without exception. Moses declared: And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.” (Deuteronomy 6:25, for example) Paul agrees: “Those who obey the law will be declared righteous.” (Romans 2:13) And Jesus also, concerning the twin commandments of love for God and our neighbor, says to one of the scribes: “Do this, and you will live.” (Luke 10:28)

But the Scriptures also show us that this way leads to a dead end. The one who by some superhuman effort manages to keep all the law but violates a single commandment has transgressed the entire law (James 2:10). That is quite obvious, if one reflects a bit. If I cross over a fence that marks off a forbidden plot of land, it matters little if I have breached it once or many times, I am now on the wrong side of the fence. As we saw earlier, “no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.” (Romans 3:20) By that route either we sink into uncertainty or even despair, as we are never sure of having done enough, and even, if we are honest with ourselves, we are certain of not having done enough, or else we bask in a dangerous illusion, as if God would lower his demands to the level of human abilities or inabilities!

Thus we never see in the Bible anyone who boasts of having deserved salvation, except perhaps for the Pharisee in the parable who is not an example to follow (Luke 18:11-12). Job himself, to whom the Lord renders such a piercing testimony, declares: “But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. [...] Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy.” (Job 9:2-3, 15) If anyone could have sought justification through the law, it was Paul, though he confessed that by doing so he only managed to become the chief of sinners, and he recognized that his salvation is due solely to the mercy and patience of the Lord (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

The criminal convinced of his guilt has only one solution: to receive grace from the chief of State. This is the same situation as that of the sinner who desires to be justified by God.

He must renounce trying to save himself by his own works, which are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:5) to accept the free justification by the grace of God, by the work of redemption which is found in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).

The word grace in the Bible has several meanings, just as it does in our language. In this context, two definitions are of interest to us: 1) It is God's benevolent disposition towards us,^{xii} and 2) It is the unmerited favor which he grants us by not holding our faults against us, but by declaring us just by the accomplished work of Jesus Christ.^{xiii} Often it is hard to know in a given text of Scripture if the first or second meaning is intended, or even if the two are overlapping, for instance when we read "that by grace [we] have been saved, through faith—and this is not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God."^{xiv}

Questions:

1. **On what basis does God justify sinners? Support your answer by citing appropriate Scripture verses.**

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2. **What does justification mean?**

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3. **What would be the requirements to be justified by works?**

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4. **Give two of the Biblical meanings of the word "grace" regarding justification:**

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5. **If someone tells you that he is saved because he was born into a Christian family, or because he was baptised, what would you say to him? (Ezekiel 18:19-20, 1 Peter 3:21-22, Acts 20:20-21)**
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Justification, Regeneration, and Forgiveness

In any case, it is proper to make a distinction between justification and regeneration, even though the two are as inseparable as Siamese twins. By justification our standing before God is settled, and regeneration changes our nature. The two happen simultaneously, but logically justification precedes regeneration and not the other way around. * It would be wrong to say that the Lord justifies us by a transformation of our personality and that consequently he declares us justified. “God credits righteousness apart from works,” (Romans 4:6) which means that he attributes to us, from the outside, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, independently of anything we have been or that we are.^{xv} Then as a result of this, he regenerates us.

This distinction is more important than it may first appear. Indeed, regeneration does not make us instantly into perfect people. If justification depended on regeneration, it would be imperfect and we would be brought to doubt. On the contrary, if justification is the basis of regeneration, we can be assured that we are seen by God as “whiter than snow,” (Psalm 51:9, Isaiah 1:18), not by virtue of the change that the Holy Spirit is working within us, but by virtue of the perfect sacrifice of our Savior. It is thus that the tax collector who trusts in grace “went home justified” rather than the Pharisee who trust in his own righteous behavior. (Luke 18:14)

There is an incompatibility between justification by grace and any intention to want to attribute any merit whatsoever to our works: “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. [...] Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:2-5) Any cause of glorifying ourselves is excluded, except it be in the cross of Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:27, Galatians 6:14)

Justification implies forgiveness of all our sins committed before conversion. Here too a number of clarifications are necessary. The grace granted to a man condemned to die does not prevent him from having to serve his sentence in prison and does not give him intimate access to the head of State. On the contrary, justification is much more than forgiveness, since by it, not only are our faults no longer imputed to us, but the righteousness of Jesus Christ is also put on our account, giving us the title of children of God.

At the same time, justification takes place once and for all and does not need to be repeated. “We have now been justified,” (Romans 5:9), says the apostle Paul. The sins to which we, alas, still succumb do not jeopardize our position as justified believers, but we still must ask for forgiveness along the way: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) This is why Jesus teaches us to ask in the middle of our other requests: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matthew 6:12)

Questions:

6. **Regeneration**

a. Give a Biblical definition of the word “regeneration.”

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b. What is the relationship between justification and regeneration?

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7. Explain how salvation by grace excludes any human merit.

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8. What is the reasonable basis on which the righteousness of God can be imputed to us?

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9. Fill in the appropriate Biblical term next to each illustration. Choose from the following terms: **justification – regeneration - forgiveness – grace - salvation**

- A caterpillar becomes a butterfly: _____
- A money transfer from one bank account to another: _____
- A withered plant brought back to life by abundant rain: _____
- A presidential pardon of a criminal’s sentence: _____

10. In what way should this teaching on regeneration and justification of believers in Christ influence my understanding of:

a. myself:

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b. my brothers and sisters in Christ:

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c. my non-Christian friends:

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For Further Study

If God is sovereign, to what extent can we say that man is responsible for his actions? In other words, do we have free will over what we do during the day do we simply do whatever God has destined us to do, without any will of our own? Is there such a thing as destiny? There is a great debate around this topic.

On the one hand, we believe that God is Sovereign (1 Timothy 6:13-15). Nothing escapes his control or his knowledge. This is true. But does this mean that we are not free and that if we commit sin, it is the will of God? If we understand the sovereignty of God in this way, we effectively make God guilty of evil and sin, while we are simply “innocent victims” or else pawns in God’s chess game!

On the other hand, if God knows the future (Psalm 139:1-5) and is all-powerful (Genesis 17:1), he knew that evil would enter the world through the sin of Adam and Eve. Someone could say: “Suppose that man sinned freely and that he was not led by God to do so. However, since God is the one who created man yet didn’t keep him from sinning, therefore God is responsible for the sin in the world and not man.”

The answer to this debate is complex. However the Bible speaks clearly of the personal responsibility of each person before God. Yes, God is Sovereign. Yes, God knows all things. Yes, God is all-powerful. And yet, he holds each man responsible for his own actions (Ezekiel 18:19-20, John 3:16-21) and will judge each person according to two principles: 1) If your names is written in the book of life, you will be saved. 2) If your name is not written in this book, you will be judged according to your works and eternally condemned (Revelation 20:11-15). Under the circumstances, what is important is making sure that your name is written in the book of life!

Lesson 4: Justification After Repentance

Salvation by grace rules out any contribution on man's part, but this does not imply that there is no condition required to receive it. This requirement is faith. Faith, however, includes repentance, which we must foster within ourselves.

Repentance is a result of the Holy Spirit's convicting us of our sin (John 16:8-9). While this conviction may seize us in spite of ourselves, repentance implies our consent. It is we who must repent, though the LORD leads us to this decision. (2 Timothy 2:25)

The Greek word *metanoia* is rich in meaning. It is a shifting of one's mindset in regard to God as well as to sin; our attitude must undergo a radical transformation. It is more than regret brought on by the consequences of our shortcomings or remorse that would push us to acts of desperation^{xvi}.

Authentic repentance is characterized by several elements:

First, what we call contrition, being broken by the weight of the sins we have committed. One thinks of David's pain after his fall (Psalm 32:3-5; 51:10), the tears of the woman at the well (Luke 7:38), and the multitude of other examples in the Old and New Testaments. This distress stems primarily from the regret of having sinned against the LORD. Paul taught that we must "turn to God in repentance" (Acts 20:21). Most people deplore their sins because they must then deal with the consequences of their actions. This is not enough. Contrition shows its true Christian character when we realize that it is our sins that nailed the Savior to the cross, and when we beat our breasts as did the witnesses on Calvary (Luke 23:48). The sincerity of one's repentance cannot be measured by the number of tears shed or theatrical self-deprecation. It is the utter brokenness at the thought of having trespassed against the God of justice and love that is essential.

Repentance must be put into practice through confession. Etymologically, the verb "to confess" in Greek means 'to speak in accord with.' We express our agreement, or accord, with the charges made against us. We abandon our attempts to justify our actions with denial, excuses, or extenuating circumstances. We openly recognize that we have behaved wrongly.

This confession must be directed to God, for it is against Him that we have transgressed. David said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."^{xvii} Must it also be accompanied by a confession to men? It is difficult to articulate a set rule on this subject. Here are a few suggestions.

When a fault has been committed publically, it is generally good to confess it publically. This is what the believers in Ephesus did, many of whom had openly practiced sorcery (Acts 19:18-19). But it would be improper to display before all the depravity of our private sins, and unprofitable to air one's dirty laundry to the world. David, for example, openly repented of his crimes, as he addressed his psalm to the director of music (Psalm 51:1), but he refrained from including the more shocking details of his conduct.

It is completely natural that we confess our sins to those we have wronged. It becomes imperative to do if they hold a grudge against us (Mathew 5:24). Perhaps there may be exceptions if the confession would cause an unbearable shock to the person we had wronged. There could also be pretention in wanting to admit to our brothers the sinful thoughts that may have crossed our minds but that we never acted on. It is up to each individual to assume their responsibilities, keeping in mind that it is better to be too conscientious rather than neglectful.

What to think, then, of confessing actions to a third party to relieve one's conscience? James' exhortation to "confess [our] sins to each other" (James 5:16) would encourage us to do so. This command was written primarily for those suffering illnesses brought on by sin, although it should not be limited to these people exclusively.

When we confess our transgressions to God, we know that He is omniscient, and we risk contenting ourselves with a too-vague admission of sin. If we expose our wrongdoings to men, however, we are forced to admit clearly what we have done. Furthermore, the person to whom we confess is likely to give advice, reassure us, or on the contrary, warn us, depending on the situation, and finally, guarantee us, Bible in hand, the certitude of our forgiveness, according to the promise, "If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23)

Moreover, we must avoid certain pitfalls. First, we must not attempt to extrapolate doctrine supporting the sacrament of penance from this text. James is speaking about mutual confession, not a one way confession. Imagine a Catholic priest's surprise if the penitent, after his confession, were to suggest they exchange roles!^{xviii} Secondly, it is impossible to list every single one of our shortcomings. David wrote, "But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults." (Psalm 19:12) We must be careful also not to confide in someone with loose lips, or we risk great disappointment. We must instead seek out a strong Christian who would be able to bear the weight of the confession, and not be tempted by it. Great caution must be exercised when sharing with someone of the opposite sex, unless that person is our spouse. Be on your guard so as not to fall into a dangerous dependence upon a brother or sister in Christ. A "father confessor" no longer holds legitimate authority under the New Covenant. Each person should take on their responsibilities and allow themselves to be guided by Scripture, and not lean solely upon human opinion, however respectable it may be.

The biggest danger of mutual confession is that it would then substitute for repentance towards God. I participated in an event where believers, following a revival, had gotten into the habit of sharing their shortcomings. Each morning, there was a moment reserved for these admissions, which troubles me— one got the impression that it became a formality, or ritual, after which these people felt exempted from authentic humbling of themselves before the Lord.

Another sign of true repentance is the desire to avoid falling back into the same sinful behavior. This is fairly logical, if we think on the meaning of the word. A change of mindset should result in a change of behavior. "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) John the Baptist exhorted his listeners to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance." (Mathew 3:8) Of course, we are weak and risk succumbing anew to temptation. It is only in Christ's glory that we will be perfected. But we must at least hate the sin that caused the death of our Savior, and grow in our desire to please God.^{xix}

We must take this even further— as far as it is possible, we must do our best to restore the wrong we have committed. The Israelite who was found guilty of fraud was commanded to give back not only what he had wrongfully taken, but also pay one fifth of its value, as well as bringing a guilt offering. (Leviticus 5:16, 23-24) In most cases, the sin is irreparable. A repentant murderer cannot bring his victim back to life! In a sense, even when we can offer compensation for the wrongs we have committed, we will never truly be even. This was highlighted in the ritual of a guilt offering, which emphasized simultaneously the necessity and the insufficiency of restitution, since to obtain pardon, there must be a victim.

Let us keep in mind that our repentance, no matter how essential, does not atone for our transgressions. The same goes for the suffering that can appear as payment for faults committed.^{xx} Divine pardon does not necessarily exempt us from earthly consequences that stem

from our previous behaviors. The repentant Samson may have regained his strength, but never regained his gouged out eyes. (Judges 16:22-30) David received assurance of his forgiveness, but it did not prevent his son, born of his adulterous relationship, from dying, nor was he spared family woes. (2 Samuel 12:11-14) I knew a drunk who, following his conversion, lived his remaining years completely sober and gave an excellent testimony, but who died just a few years later, his health completely run down by the alcohol he had imbibed in his youth.

Salvation by grace excludes any contribution that we could bring for our own salvation. True repentance convinces us that we are completely guilty and powerless to appease our Savior in any way^{xxi}. It pushes us, then, to put our trust wholly in Jesus Christ, who died and was resurrected. That is the principle of justification through faith alone.

Questions

1. What is repentance?

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2. What are the signs of authentic repentance?

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3. What are the advantages and the dangers of confessing to other people?

a. Advantages

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b. Dangers

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4. **What behavior does a person who is truly repentant for their sins exemplify?**

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5. **Can repentance atone for our sins? Explain.**

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6. **List at least two situations from the Bible where the person who repented still had to deal with consequences for their sin.**

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7. **In contrast, think of at least one situation where the person who repented was delivered from the consequences of their sin.**

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8. **Authentic repentance**

Read the following passages and fill in the chart below for three of the six passages, and distinguish whether the repentance was authentic or simply regret (remorse).

Bible passage	Person involved	Signs of true repentance	Signs of false repentance	Judgment (true/false)
1 Samuel 15	Saul			
2 Samuel 11-12	David			

Luke 15:11-32	The prodigal son			
Luke 7:36-50	The sinful woman			
Luke 19:1-11	Zacchaeus			
Acts 8:5-25	Simon the magician			

9. From your personal life: what signs or fruit of repentance...

a. did you experience when you came to Christ?

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b. have you experienced since then?

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c. is God working out in your life today?

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Lesson 5: Justification by Faith

The word faith (in Hebrew *emet* or *emouna*, in Greek *pistis*) has several meanings in the Bible just as it does in French. It can refer to good faith, faithfulness; and incidentally it is often this way that it is translated (Judges 9:16, Galatians 5:22).

In a few passages the word refers to the body of Christian doctrine, such as when Jude writes of the “faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” (Jude 1:3)

In other contexts it is the attachment to these truths; in English we have the word belief which corresponds to this sense (though there is no separate word in Hebrew or in Greek to express this nuance). This belief is indispensable; “anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) But alas this belief can remain sterile, without spurring us on to an appropriate attitude. “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” (James 2:19) One can be just as orthodox as the demons, because our beliefs are in accordance with what is true, without troubling ourselves about a satisfying relationship with God. It goes without saying that this kind of faith can justify no one.

Faith can also entail the aspect of trust with an eye to obtain this or that particular favor. To the two blind men following him and begging for his mercy, the Lord asks: “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” After their positive reply he adds: “According to your faith let it be done to you.” (Matthew 9:28-29) This kind of faith can exist even among the unconverted, who cry out to God for help in a particular time of need. Certain believers can also have this at different levels, such that Paul speaks of a gift of faith as a special manifestation of the Spirit granted to particular individuals.^{xxii}

Finally and above all, there is saving faith, that by which we cease to rely on men or on our own strength and entrust ourselves wholly to the grace of the Lord, not in order to receive this or that special advantage, but to be justified. This is why the Bible explains with such insistence the necessity of believing in Jesus Christ.

Questions:

1. **What are the different meanings of the word “faith” in the Bible?**

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2. **What kind or type of faith is necessary for salvation? Describe it or give a few of its basic principles.**

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Justification by grace alone (*sola gratia* in Latin) which we have spoken of previously is a counterpart of justification by faith alone (*sola fide* in Latin). These are the two distinctive mottoes of the Reformation. (There are also two more: *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone, and *soli deo gloria*, to God alone be the glory). If the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the only basis for

our justification, faith is the only condition which we must meet to receive it. Grace can be compared to God's hand reaching out to us from above to save us. Faith can be compared to our hand reaching back for him to grasp. By his grace, the Lord makes us righteous, from the outside, without any effort on our part, by virtue of the atoning sacrifice offered at Calvary. But he does not justify us automatically or despite ourselves. We must accept his grace to benefit from it. It is by faith that this acceptance takes place.

It would take too long to list all the different Scriptures which emphasize this truth, but we will mention a few which are especially important.

“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6) He trusted in the promise by which God had promised him descendants who would be a blessing for all the nations. (Genesis 15:4, 12:3) Thus he was placing, at least in an implied fashion, his confidence in the salvation which would result from the coming of Christ. Jesus said: “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56)

David celebrates the happiness of the “one whose sin the LORD does not count against them” and declares in the same context: “the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.” (Psalm 32:2,10)

Jeremiah cries out: ““Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh... But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.” (Jeremiah 17:5, 7)

Jesus declares to the sinful woman: “Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:48, 50)

We can also cite the central verse of the Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life... Whoever believes in him is not condemned” (thus he is justified; John 3:16, 18). Elsewhere Jesus says further: “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Paul is particularly specific. To the Jews of Antioch he says: “Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:39) To the Romans he writes: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” (Romans 3:21-22, 28) The apostle himself wanted to be found not with a justice that was his own “that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” (Philippians 3:9)

It is not that our faith acts as a sort of positive contribution to our salvation. But by it we place our confidence, no longer in our own works or in our efforts to be acquitted, but uniquely in the grace of our Lord Jesus who died and was raised to life.^{xxiii}

Any faith placed elsewhere can have but dire effects.

We must also distinguish between the faith which clings to Christ of the Scriptures and the superstition that according to the definition of Littré is a “sentiment of religious devotion, founded on fear or ignorance, by which one often comes to develop false duties, to dread chimeras and to place our hope in powerless things.” On closer examination, it is clear that superstition is the same as idolatry, for it turns our thoughts and minds towards things other than the true and living God. Sometimes, alas, an authentic believer may not be free from all superstition, such as when in the past the Israelites sought to mix their worship of God with that of the Baals and Astarte. And yet, in general, Biblical faith does away with superstitious fears and practices. Conversely, as men turn away from the message of the Gospel, they move towards the most ridiculous beliefs. One finds that Christianity is out of date, but still makes time to run after charlatans and fortune tellers, providing oneself with fetishes and amulets, consulting

5. **List the Biblical references which establish justification by faith.**

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6. **What difference is there between faith and superstition?**

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7. **What superstitions are present in your surroundings?**

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8. **In your life, are you dependent on anything else besides Jesus Christ? Explain your answer.**

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Faith results from the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts of justice, just as repentance results from the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin. (John 16:8-10) Here too we can say that this conviction comes to us independently of our will and that faith involves a personal agreement on our part. We are the ones who believe. If we do so, it is by a special grace granted to us from God (Philippians 1:29), but our entire being is committed to this attitude, thought, feeling, will. "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:10). And here the heart represents, as it often does in Scripture, the deep core of our personality, "ourselves" in the fullest sense of the term.

Moreover, faith does not just come into play exclusively for the purpose of justification. In all areas and throughout our Christian life, it has a role to play. Paul could say: “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God.” (Galatians 2:20)

When we are justified by faith, we can be certain of our salvation. In this respect we should not be lead astray by the difference between the Biblical meaning of the verb “to believe” and the sense it is used in by everyday speech. When you say in English: “I believe,” this implies that one is considering a possibility and not a certainty. It is more than “I suppose” but less than “I know.” In Hebrew, the verb “to believe” expresses a complete confidence in someone or something who is absolutely trustworthy. The word is from the same root of the adverb “amen” which means, “Yes, certainly,” (This is the word that is translated as “truly (literally “amen”) I say to you...”.) In Greek, the word “to believe” also means that one is fully convinced of a truth. Faith is contrasted to sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), but not to certain knowledge; it excludes doubt and fills us with joyful assurance.

The certainty of our salvation rests on the declarations of Scripture. The apostle John tells us: “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13, Psalm 32:5, Acts 15:11, etc.)

This external and formal guarantee which is given us by the Word of God is manifested to us internally by the Holy Spirit who “himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:16) This is not a product of self-suggestion. The believer may have trouble explaining what has happened within him, but an undeniable instinct enables him to sense that the Spirit has been given to him, and by that Spirit he cries, “Abba, Father.” (Galatians 4:6)

There are those who say that to declare yourself sure of your salvation is a sign of presumptuousness and pride. Admittedly those who seek to justify themselves by their own works are being reckless and quite blind if they claim to have achieved this, and one can understand that they remain in a state of uncertainty. And at the same time I do not deny that sometimes the testimony of Christians can take on a disagreeable tone. But since justification is a pure grace of God that we do not deserve, it is not a lack of humility to affirm that we have received it. If someone gives me a gift, I have the right to declare that it is mine without being accused of having an ego-trip. When Jesus forgave the sinful woman he told her: “Your faith has saved you,” (Luke 7:50), and she could go her way in peace, knowing that all had been made right.

Questions:

9. **What does the word ‘believe’ mean in the original languages of the Bible?**

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10. **Is it proud to be sure of one’s salvation? Explain your answer.**

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The reality of justification is proven by works. By justification, God attributes to us the infinite merits of Christ, without taking into account any of our own works; neither those accomplished before our conversion or afterwards play any role in this case.^{xxvi}

But God does not justify us in order to leave us as we were before. At the same time as he absolves us, he regenerates us. Since James makes a clear connection between justification and works, we can here already give a few explanations on the subject.

Faith brings us inevitably to obedience. (Paul wanted to call the Gentiles to “the obedience that comes from faith.” Romans 1:5). If I trust my doctor, I cannot do otherwise than to act in accordance with his prescriptions. I can no more trust in Jesus Christ and continue to live in the neglect of his will.

Moreover, the new nature which God grants us by the Holy Spirit when we accept his righteousness pushes us to live a life in keeping with the example set by Christ.

Works are by no means the basis for our righteousness, but they are its inevitable consequence. A faith that does not produce good works is thus illusory, “dead” as James describes it (2:17). When the sun shines, a room with its windows open is full of light. It seems almost ridiculous to have to specify that it is not the light of the room which makes the sun shine! But on the other hand, if the room is not full of light, it means that the sun is not shining. Similarly, our righteousness does not depend on our works, but if we do not do good works, it means that we do not have the faith which makes us righteous.

Works are thus necessary to prove that our justification has truly taken place. The example of Abraham is a good illustration. James writes: “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.” (James 2:21-23)

This faith was manifested by Abraham at least fifteen years before the birth of Isaac. We do not know how old Isaac was when Abraham was told to sacrifice him, but he must have been a teenager. So about thirty years had passed from the time Abraham was justified by his faith and the moment where he manifested the reality of his faith through his obedience. During this time, Abraham’s righteousness was not an unresolved issue, it was something he really and truly had received. And yet, if at the moment of trial he had given out or failed, this would have proven that his faith was not genuine. He could not at the same time believe in God and refuse to obey the divine command. Thus the patriarch is seen as truly justified through his act of obedience.^{xxvii}

Moreover, James does not imply that one might have an authentic faith without works. What might happen, and what he warns his readers against, is the risk of having faith “without having works.” (James 2:14). This is the danger run by hypocrites and superficial people who imagine that a certain number of orthodox beliefs are enough to be on the “right side” without thinking of putting their trust in Jesus Christ in order to be both justified and transformed. We are in great need of such a warning. James is not in any way fighting the teaching of Paul, but he warns us against a flawed interpretation of this teaching.

In fact the other apostles, including Paul, agree with him. After having massively declared to the Ephesians that we are saved by grace, through faith, and that this does not come of ourselves or from works, Paul adds: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10) Elsewhere he declares that “neither thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:10) Faith which has value to his eyes is faith which is “expressing itself through love.” (Galatians 5:6)

As signs of a true knowledge of God, John also mentions observing the commandments and a walk according to the example set by the Lord himself. (1 John 2:3, 6)

Above all else, Jesus who as we have seen spoke so clearly of salvation by faith alone said also: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)

The teaching of Scripture thus shows itself consistent. We are justified by virtue of divine grace, accepted by faith, and this faith inevitably manifests itself by works which glorify the Lord.

One point on this subject deserves special attention; that is the confession of faith. “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:10) Jesus declared: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32) Confessing Christ is not a human addition to salvation by grace,^{xxviii} but it is as the other works, an inevitable manifestation of a Christian conversion. “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34) If your mouth is quiet, it means that your heart is empty. “For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:37) For words reveal the state of the one who speaks them.

Questions:

The teaching of J. M. Nicole in the section above concerning the relationship of faith and works represents a traditional Reformed position of the Protestant Reformation. Some Evangelicals would take objection that it does not go far enough in safeguarding the Gospel of grace by faith alone leading to salvation. One danger is to question one’s own salvation, or the salvation of another, because a particular fruit or an expected change has not yet taken place in the experience of the believer, even though there are many clear biblical promises that assure that salvation comes by faith alone without requiring works (Jn 3:14-16; 5:24 ; Ro 10:10-11; Eph 2:8-9).

Whatever way one explains the role of works in relation to faith, two truths must be clearly kept in mind : 1) living faith will produce real and profound changes in the life of the believer, 2) these changes may rest hidden from sight for a certain period of time. There is no definitive list of criteria to determine the existence of faith for one who confesses Christ.

11. What is the role of works in justification?

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12. If the Bible teaches clearly that salvation is by faith and not by works, how do you explain James’s affirmation in his letter (2:24): “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”

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13. Read Romans 10:9-10. What role does confessing your faith play in salvation?

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14. Read Matt 13:24-32 and answer the following questions :

- a. What does the sowing of seeds in the two parables teach us regarding the fruits of faith that can be seen in the life of the believer?

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- b. Why did the master forbid his servants to pull out the thistles before the harvest? (v29)

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- c. In your opinion, what criteria could help us to discern if someone who professes faith in Jesus-Christ is truly born-again and saved?

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- d. In your opinion, how much time should we wait for changes to be manifest before we determine that a person is not saved?

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15. A friend has come to tell you: “I cannot tell my mother I am a Christian because that will make her too sad.” What would you recommend to your friend?

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Lesson 6: Regeneration

Of the Necessity of Regeneration

Regeneration, also called the new birth, is as necessary to us as is justification. We would not get very far if after having received grace we continued to stagnate in the same bondage to our inclination towards evil. We would resemble the dog that returns to its vomit or the washed sow who goes right back to its mud pile. (2 Peter 2:22) So the Lord does not simply declare us righteous without at the same time changing our nature. Paul affirms that the one who has died, that is, who has abandoned his old way of life, is justified.^{xxix} God in his holiness and his love does not forgive us in order for us to continue sinning as before, but in order for us to live a new life. We must not only be freed from the responsibility of our guilty action, but also delivered from our evil nature.

Jesus strongly underlined the need for regeneration: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”^{xxx} In the New Jerusalem, nothing impure can enter (Revelation 21:27), and already right now in the Church, only those who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit have the right to citizenship in heaven.

As a result of the fall, we have with us, from our very birth, a sinful nature. “He who is born of the flesh is flesh.” (John 3:6) The Holy Spirit must intervene at the very deepest level of ourselves to make us into a new creation. Thus we are, as in the beautiful expression of Scripture, “born of God.” (John 1:12-13, 1 John 3:9, 4:7, etc.)

The Nature of Regeneration

The very image of a birth forces us to recognize that this work is not the result of our own efforts. A number of theologians insist on the idea that in regeneration man is entirely passive.^{xxxi} It is certain that no one can give birth to himself! Moreover, before being regenerated, human beings are “dead in their trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1, Colossians 2:13) A dead man cannot give himself life. All the texts of Scripture dealing with this matter declare that it is God who brings us back to life by his Spirit.^{xxxii}

The means he uses in order to do this is his Word: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,” “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God... And this is the word that was preached to you.” (James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:23-25)

However the presentation of the truth, however important it may be, is not enough to change a person’s mindset. The Holy Spirit must work in his mind, his conscience, and his will for him to pass over from death to life. This is the miracle of grace, which we cannot explain, but whose effects we can observe. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”(John 3:8)

Every birth is painful. The new birth is impossible without first renouncing our old way of life. We must die with Christ in order to be raised to life with him. “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection... count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”^{xxxiii} When Paul declares: “For ... one died for all, and therefore all died,” (2 Corinthians 5:14), we can accept that this applies to our situation before the law. Jesus was subject to the condemnation that we deserved, so it is as if we were the ones subject to it, and the law no longer has any claim on us. But when we read that our old nature was crucified with him that the body of sin might be done away with (Romans 6:6),

this means that there has been a change in our condition. Part of ourselves has received a mortal injury. It's the same idea that Jesus described when he said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) Note that our old nature is crucified, but it has not yet been eliminated. Even while crucified, it tries to fight back. However its old power is broken and its old place has been cleared away for us to be able to live as a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"We are...created in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:10) The use of this verb implies a uniquely divine intervention by which God grants to us a new life.

When Does Regeneration Take Place?

This work may be preceded by a long preparation, and it always has far distant extensions. But the very picture of a new birth implies that it takes place at a specific moment in time. Physical birth is prepared for over the gestation period that last for months, and then is followed by growth which lasts for many years, and yet the birth itself does not last over days or weeks! It takes place in an instant. Certain Christians know the exact date of their new birth. Wesley could write that on the evening of May 24, 1738, around quarter to nine, he had "felt [his] heart strangely warmed." (Wesley, *Journal*, 24 May 1738). Many others before and after him have had a similar experience. Others would have trouble pointing to an exact date. They were brought to faith little by little and began growing without even realizing it at first. They never noticed the point at which they crossed over the line separating death and life. They have nothing to fear—all over the world, millions of humans do not know the date of their birth, but this does not keep them from being definitely alive. The important thing is to see the signs of a true change and to have the certainty of having been born again.

For the true believer, the new birth is something already gained. Peter declares: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth..." and "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." (1 Peter 1:3, 23, 1 John 3:9). We are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)

But this renewal only affects our spirit and our heart (Ezekiel 36:26). For the moment it does not change the state of our flesh which continues to be drawn to evil. (Romans 7:18, 8:7) "We wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 8:23) "Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him." (1 John 3:2-3) In the meantime we are being transformed, yet it would be an incorrect choice of words to call this process regeneration. The effects of regeneration are gradual, but regeneration itself is not. One is never more or less born again. One is, or one is not, and this establishes a radical difference between human beings, the only one which is absolute.

Questions:

1. **What is regeneration and why is it necessary?**

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2. **To what human experiences can we compare regeneration? How?**

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3. **Can one be regenerated to a greater or lesser extent? Explain your answer.**

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4. **What is the difference between the growth of a believer and regeneration?**

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Adoption

Believers who are born again, and they alone, are children of God. A number of theologians and non-theologians are quite willing to attribute this title to all men, but without a sufficient Biblical basis.^{xxxiv} Certainly all men are God's creation, objects of his solicitude and of his love. Adam, created directly by the Lord, is created good, and called "son of God."^{xxxv} Speaking of the people of Israel as a whole the Lord declares: "Israel is my firstborn son," (Exodus 4:22) and the people echo back: "You, O LORD, are our Father." (Isaiah 63:16) But this does not make of each human being a child of God. On the contrary, Jesus declares that his unbelieving hearers, despite being Israelites, have the devil as their father (John 8:44). By the goodness of God, that which we are not by nature, we become through grace by the virtue of adoption. The very use of this term (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5) implies the need for a change in our status in order for us to become sons and daughters of God. A father can only adopt children who are not his to begin with.

This adoption takes place in Christ, the only begotten Son. To those who receive him he gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12). Thus, Jesus becomes the firstborn among many brothers who are now coheirs with him. (Romans 8:29, 17) The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Son, comes into our hearts and enables us to cry with confidence: "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6. See also Romans 8:14. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God, are Sons of God.")

We receive this adoption from the moment of our new birth. By the Holy Spirit we are "born of God." (John 1:13) "Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known." (1 John 3:2) The proverb "Like father, like son," is in the process of becoming true for us, but it has not yet reached its full completion. Thus we can say in one sense "we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons." (Romans 8:23) During this period of waiting we must purify ourselves, since he, the Lord, is pure, and according to the rather paradoxical expression used by Jesus, we must strive to "be sons of our Father in heaven," and that characterized by, among other things, an attitude of gentleness and patience towards our enemies. (1 John 3:3, Matthew 5:45)

Nevertheless we have, even now, reason to rejoice without any reservations as we think that through Jesus Christ we are the beloved children of God Almighty, and that we have the right to come before him with confidence and call him: “Our Father.”

Questions:

5. Read John 3:1-21.

- a. According to this passage, are all men children of God? Explain your answer.

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- b. What else does this passage teach us about regeneration?

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6. What is adoption?

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7. What privileges come with adoption?

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8. What responsibilities come with adoption?

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Conversion

The word “conversion” has become a very technical religious term, and in the eyes of some it even has a lingering smell of pietism. In the Bible, in Hebrew as in Greek, the verb which we correctly translated as “to become a convert” in a number of passages in general refers to the very common act of returning or turning around.^{xxxvi} Conversion can thus be defined as the act by which we turn away from sin and reverse course to turn to the Lord.

There has been much discussion regarding the nuance to distinguish between conversion and the new birth. Some have put forward that the new birth is a work of God, and that conversion is a human decision. There is some truth in this distinction. However, as we have already seen above that man is perhaps not entirely passive in regeneration, since God tells us through the mouth of Ezekiel: “Get a new heart and a new spirit.” (Ezekiel 18:31) Certainly conversion is due, as is regeneration, to divine grace, according to the beautiful expression from Jeremiah: “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored!” (Lamentations 5:21)

It seems preferable to regard regeneration as an internal work which transforms the core of our nature, and conversion as a change of direction which affects our exterior attitude.

Furthermore the new birth is always authentic. A conversion may be superficial and even cut short. In Jeremiah’s day the people of Judah had returned to God under the influence of the good king Josiah, but did so with duplicity. (Jeremiah 3:10)

On the other hand it can happen that after having sincerely turned towards the Lord, believers stray from the right path and fall into serious sin. They must then return to God, as did Peter after he denied Christ. The Bible uses the same verb for being converted as for this return, but without including the aspect of renewing the original regeneration which has already been acquired.

Thus every new birth involves a conversion, but there can be conversions which do not include a new birth.

This does not justify the deplorable concept according to which a Christian must be converted every day. A motorist must constantly adjust the direction of his car, but if he spends all his time making U-turns he will not get very far! In the same way a believer is bound to adjust his conduct at every moment, and to repent after each sin committed. But it would be quite the misunderstanding to qualify as “conversions” the many impulses meant to help steer a straight course.

Another idea which must be opposed is that conversion is the passing from one religion to another. This meaning is common in modern language, but does not correspond to the Biblical sense of the word. It is just as false to pretend that only sinners who have sunk deeper than others into the mud of sin are in need of conversion.

In fact, by nature, “All have turned away, they have together become worthless.” (Romans 3:12) “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). No matter whether it be an elegant way or one which inspires disgust to everyone around, as soon as it is our own way rather than God’s, we must abandon it, turn around and walk in the opposite direction. What we said above regarding the necessity of regeneration applies here also to conversion, for the two are inseparable.

Conversion includes repentance, by which we turn from our sins, and faith by which we turn ourselves towards Christ. It can be a sudden about-face, or it can also take place gradually and almost imperceptibly, as in a large, slow curve. The main thing is for it to reach its destination. Like the Thessalonians, we must turn from our idols (and we all have some to begin with) to serve the living and true God. (1 Thessalonians 1:9)

A number of psychologists have studied this problem.^{xxxvii} They have tried to show the role of the subconscious in this process. They have made a few interesting observations, for example, that most people who become converts do so between the ages of 10 and 25, and rather rarely after the age of 30.^{xxxviii}

Things being as they are, however, their investigations focus on phenomena and explanations that can only be given from the natural world, which runs the risk of sidelining the work of the Holy Spirit.

Questions:

9. What is conversion?

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10. What is the nuance between conversion and regenerations?

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11. What is the difference between conversion and a change of behavior?

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12. Does conversion happen in an instant or does it take time to work itself out? Explain your answer.

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13. The Apostle Paul said that from now on we regard no one “from a worldly point of view” and that the one who is in Christ is “a new creation.” Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-18.

a. Explain the change that happens when we are in Christ.

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b. What does this imply regarding my relationship with the brothers and sisters in Christ that I know?

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c. What does this imply regarding my relationship with new believers in Christ?

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14. Complete the chart below:

a. Write each of the following terms next to the corresponding definition: **regeneration, adoption, spiritual growth, correction.**

Term	Definition	Reference
	Becoming a son of God and member of his family	
	Discipline from God, meant to help us grow in our faith and our relationship with him.	
	The experience of new birth which changes our old sinful nature for a new nature of holiness.	
	The process of putting off our old thoughts, practices and attitudes, and becoming more and more mature and stable.	
	The act of believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior which marks a total change in orientation.	

b. Write each of the following Scripture references next to the corresponding definition: Rom. 8:15-16 (John 1:12), 2 Peter 3:18, 2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Thes. 1:9, Hebrews 12:5-11.

Lesson 7: The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

As soon as someone is born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live within him. “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” (Romans 8:9) Scripture uses the expressions “receive the Holy Spirit” or “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” which means both to be immersed in the Holy Spirit and purified by him. Seven different Bible passages speak of this experience in these specific terms, and since they have given rise to a number of controversies, we will first examine them before drawing the appropriate conclusions which result.

First of all John the Baptist compares his ministry to that of Jesus when he declares: “I baptize you with water [...] He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” This declaration is found at the beginning of each of the Gospels.^{xxxix}

Jesus himself repeats the same expression at the time of his ascension: “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5—litt. “in the Holy Spirit”) Peter quotes these words regarding Cornelius. (Acts 11:16) And finally the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

It is clear from these texts that experiencing the baptism of the Spirit was not possible under the Old Covenant or even for the disciples before Pentecost. Of course, the Spirit was still at work among the Israelites in ancient times. The people as a whole benefitted when God “set his Holy Spirit among them.” “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them.” (Isaiah 63:11, Nehemiah 9:20) Certain individuals more than others were the tools of the Holy Spirit, especially the prophets who by Him were full of power to announce a divine message (Micah 3:8) and who could say with David that the Spirit of the Lord spoke through them (2 Samuel 23:2). Artists such as Bezalel (Exodus 35:30-31), leaders such as Joshua (Numbers 27:18), warriors such as Jephthah (Judges 11:29), and kings such as Saul (1 Samuel 10:6) could only carry out their work with the help given them by the Holy Spirit. But it would seem that they did not enjoy the permanent companionship of the Divine presence which came upon them occasionally. (Judges 14:6, 19, 15:14) There is also literally “The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.” Even John the Baptist, “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (Luke 1:15) did not yet have the benefits which are guaranteed to us by the New Covenant, since “He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matthew 11:11) The apostles had a privilege that many prophets and kings could have envied, since the Messiah was with them. (Luke 10:24) But the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit was only a promise to them during the earthly ministry of Jesus (“The Father will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. [...] he lives with you and will be in you.” John 14:16-17). At the time of the Ascension, they still had to wait for the baptism of the Spirit. (Acts 1:5) As long as Christ had not yet been glorified, one could say that the “Spirit had not been given.” (John 7:39) Of course he existed, since he is God and he is eternal, but his presence has been so much more pronounced since Pentecost that his previous work appears, in comparison, as almost nonexistent.

On the day of Pentecost, all believers—whether there were a hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15) or five hundred present^{xl}—received the Holy Spirit just as had been promised them. This experience was not for them alone, but “for [them] and [their] children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:39) Cornelius the centurion, without having been baptized by water, without having had the laying on of hands, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with just as much validity as did the disciples before him. (Acts 10:44, 11:15-16)

Questions:

1. Which texts speak of the baptism in the Spirit?

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2. Since when is this experience possible?

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According to the apostle John, the only requirement necessary to receive this grace is to believe in Jesus. (John 7:39) And Paul declares: “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body.” (1 Corinthians 12:13) The sign of this baptism is not necessarily the gift of tongues, for in the same chapter he adds: “Do all speak in tongues?”^{xli}

But he indicates the sign by which we can recognize whether we have received the Holy Spirit: “No one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3) Of course, anyone can simply repeat the words: Jesus is Lord! “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 7:21) But if someone has truly made Jesus Christ the Lord of his life, if he is ready to submit to him without reservations, he can be reassured. Such an attitude proves that he has received the Holy Spirit. This is why we speak of this doctrine in relationship to regeneration. The texts we have already quoted enable us to conclude that since Pentecost all those who are born again receive the Holy Spirit at the time of their new birth. In any case this is to be expected: born of the Spirit, how could we live if not by the Spirit?

The parallel between baptism with water and baptism with the Spirit, drawn in six of the seven Scripture passages which speak of this experience, point us in the same direction.

Baptism with water is a purification ritual. One bathes in water to be cleansed. Baptism thus represents the washing of our impurities, the forgiveness of our sins. (Mark 1:4, Acts 22:16) Of course, it does not in itself carry out this deliverance. One can receive forgiveness without baptism, as in the case of the sinful woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee or the thief on the cross. (Luke 7:47-48, 23:43) One can be baptized at any age and with any amount of water without being saved, as in the case of Simon the magician. (Acts 8:13, 18-23) The one who is baptized with the Holy Spirit is truly cleansed of his sin, since he has believed in the redeeming power of the death of Jesus.^{xlii}

Water baptism represents our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. We show our desire to bury our old life in order to rise again to a new life. (Romans 6:4) This symbol is clear in immersion baptism, but the idea still holds among those who advocate baptism by sprinkling^{xliii}. Of course, baptism itself does not cause this process. But the Holy Spirit, as we have seen in the paragraph on regeneration, enables us to do away with our past and begin a new life.

Lastly, no matter what may be the mode or manner of baptism, it is in all Churches a ceremony of initiation into the community. By receiving baptism one becomes a member of the local Church. One might wonder whether John the Baptist had this aspect in mind. A non-Jew today who wishes to become a member of the people of the covenant must, even before being circumcised, go through a total immersion, in order to cross the Red Sea which an Israelite by birth crossed through in the person of his ancestors. (Compare 1 Corinthians 10:2 “They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”) This tradition is recorded from the end of the

first century AD, and it is quite likely that it was already practiced in the time of John the Baptist.^{xliv} Obviously, being a member of a local community does not necessarily mean that one is a member of the body of Christ. It is by being baptized with the Holy Spirit that we become part of that body. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Thus in every respect we can say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit accomplishes everything that water baptism represents. And in every situation it is a case of a grace dispensed to us at the beginning of our Christian life, and not as an additional benediction which would be given to us after the fact. All this serves to confirm that under the New Covenant the baptism of the Holy Spirit coincides with regeneration.

Questions:

3. What are the signs of having been baptized with the Holy Spirit?

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4. What does this baptism represent?

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5. Summarize what takes place in the life of a person when God saves him.

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6. Read Romans 6:1-12 and 8:9-11.

a. What clues in these verses show us that they also apply to the baptism of the Holy Spirit rather than only to water baptism?

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For Further Study

The doctrine of the works of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers today, the use of the phrase “baptism with the Holy Spirit”, and the sign of speaking in tongues are understood in several ways by different evangelical communities. Because the Bible gives very little instruction in these subjects, an explanation of the first believers’ experiences must be given as well as application to our lives today. Not everyone comes to the same conclusions from their research, but everyone serves the same Master and the same Church. The Lord calls each one of us to live both according to our convictions and to consider our brothers and sisters as greater than ourselves.

In the spirit of humility and submission before God’s Word and in recognition of diversity in the Church, we will present two different interpretations of baptism with the Holy Spirit and of the importance of speaking in tongues as a sign of this baptism. Both authors we will examine agree in essence on the previous section-- that at the time of rebirth each believer receives the Holy Spirit, who baptizes the new born believer in Christ according to 1 Corinthians 12:13. The first author, Jules Marcel Nicole, gives his explanation in a footnote of his chapter entitled “Salvation, “ which is copied below. This view is representative of the Reformed perspective. The Pentecostal perspective is taken from *Bible Doctrines*, by authors Wiliam W Menzis and Stanley M. Horton. Many variations exist of each perspective, as well as many positions in-between.¹ Neither of these officially represents the view of the Progressing Together program, but we will present them in order to help you understand the different major evangelical perspectives on this issue.

¹ We can trace the roots of many current positions on the infilling of the Holy Spirit through a study of the history of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, which grew out of the Anglican tradition in the 18th Century. Wesleyan-holiness traditions emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit in cleansing believers’ hearts to empower Christians to live a life of obedience to God.

A key verse often cited within Wesleyan-holiness traditions with relationship to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, is Matt 3:11-12, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

At least three positions can be discerned among Holiness scholars. (1) “Suppressionist” scholars understand this infilling of the Holy Spirit to occur at the point of which people are saved; from this time, they teach that the believer is empowered to resist or “suppress” sinful impulses. This view is held today by the Keswick Community. (2) “Second blessing” scholars speak of a second definite work of grace after salvation in which the Holy Spirit indwells a believer and purifies a person from a tendency toward sin. The Church of the Nazarene and other conservative Methodists hold this view. Finally, (3) scholars within the Pentecostal holiness traditions believe that there are three or more works of grace available to the believer: a first act occurs when the Holy Spirit enters our lives at a moment of salvation; a second act occurs at a moment after salvation in which the Holy Spirit “sanctifies”, or “cleanses” the hearts of believers; a third act occurs at a moment in which the Holy Spirit comes upon believers empowering them with gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, healing, etc. This view is espoused by the Pentecostal Holiness Church. (Note that other branches of this movement, including the Assemblies of God denomination do not emphasize the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit or a second blessing when speaking of a baptism by the Holy Spirit, but rather the enabling power in ministry which accompanies the spiritual gifts.)

A Reformed Perspective on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit (Nicole)

However, since this doctrine (of baptism with the Holy Spirit) is disputed by some, particularly by most Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations^{xlv}, we will briefly examine the arguments that these groups hold on this question.^{xlvi}

They hold that Jesus, conceived and born of the Holy Spirit, saw the Spirit descend on him at the time of his baptism, 30 years after his birth (Matthew 3:16). This experience of our Savior is unique in its kind and cannot be compared to what happens to us. Moreover, nowhere is it written that Jesus received the Holy Spirit in that moment. During his years of obscurity, he inevitably was one with the Spirit as with the Father. The descent of the dove was the visible proof of the Son's being set apart for his ministry.

They underline also that the disciples of Jesus were first called to follow their Master during his ministry and only baptized with the Holy Spirit later on. To this we must answer that before Pentecost, believers were in a different situation than we are in currently, where the Spirit acted differently that he does now. Thus we do not have the right to try and model our progression on theirs.

In the book of Acts, we read that some Samaritans believed and were baptized with water by the ministry of Phillip, but that it took the intervention of Peter and John for them to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:12, 15-17) To justify this sequence of events, we can turn to two explanations, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

On the one hand, Jesus had given the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. (Matthew 16:19) As a result, he was the one who had opened the kingdom to the Jews by his sermon on the day of Pentecost and to the pagans by going to the home of Cornelius.^{xlvii} And yet the Samaritans were neither Jews nor pagans. Thus, a number of scholars suppose that Peter's action was necessary for them to enter into full possession of salvation. But now that the door is open to all, such a case would no longer occur.

Other interpreters have noted that among the Samaritans in question in this chapter, there was Simon the magician, who had also believed and been baptized, while in fact he remained completely a stranger to the Gospel. (Acts 8:13, 18-23) The Samaritans, before the coming of Peter and John, may have had only a superficial faith. Perhaps they had only "believed Phillip" (Acts 8:12) rather than believing in Christ himself. Thus they would need to take a step further in order to truly have saving faith.

Whatever the case may be, a one-time event cannot be appealed to as a way of contradicting a general rule well established in Scripture.

The case of the disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) is even easier to explain. From the very first contact, Paul realized that they were not in order. They were followers of John the Baptist^{xlviii} who did not even know that there was a Holy Spirit and who seem to have been missing information about Jesus, since Paul shares it with them. We can in no way compare them to born-again Christians.^{xlix}

Finally, Pentecostals and Charismatics appeal to the experiences of everyday life. Does it not happen that people become believers, but remain ignorant of the work of the Holy Spirit? Do they not need to go through a second experience, in which they might open themselves to him, which would bring about a radical reorientation in their Christian life? Do they not have reason to rejoice in the change that has happened within them, since they took this step?

Of course, what happens in the life of such and such believer cannot be held as the new norm. We must walk in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, and interpret our life experiences by its light.

That said, it is undeniable that too many Christians have lived a deficient spiritual life, that they do not realize what the Holy Spirit can do within them, and that they need to give him the place he ought to have in their lives. Hallelujah for those who have emerged enriched by a crisis of that nature. But it would be a regrettable error in vocabulary to call such a crisis a “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” When an expression is used in the Bible, we need to leave the meaning that the Bible gives to it. We do not wish to seek out a quarrel over words with our brothers who have received a true blessing and call it by an inexact name. But a linguistic error almost inevitably conceals an error of thought, and in a work of doctrine, we must be precise. It is wrong to imagine two categories of Christians, those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and those who have not. What is true, as we will see later, is that some Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and others are not. Besides, in this area we all have room for growth. Between us there is not a difference of nature but a difference of degree. A second experience may be beneficial, so long as it does not prevent us from a third, fourth or fifth one afterwards, and so on.

A Pentecostal Perspective on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit

(Menzis and Horton)

The Baptism in the Holy Ghost

All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31). This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth (Acts 8:12-17; 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9). With the baptism of the Holy Ghost come such experiences as an overflowing fullness of the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 4:8), a deepened reverence for God (Acts 2:43; Heb. 12:28), an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work (Acts 2:42), and a more active love for Christ, for His Word and for the lost (Mark 16:20).

What the Father Had Promised

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is rich and varied. Though deeply personal and internal, one aspect of the work of the Spirit is, nonetheless, primarily concerned with the expression of the Christian life, and in this sense is external in purpose. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not primarily for the development of holiness in the individual (although this may be and should be enhanced by the baptism in the Spirit); it is empowering for service. Jesus told the men and women gathered in the Upper Room, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). On another occasion “while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with {in} water, but in a few days you will be baptized with {in} in the Holy Spirit’ “ (Acts 1:4-5). Then just before He ascended, He said, “ ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (Acts 1:8).

Notice that this promise was given to disciples already in close communion with Christ. Their names were already written in heaven (Luke 10:20). “They were clean before God, having had a spiritual bath through Christ’s Word (John 13:10; 15:3).” From the time of Christ’s resurrection, they were also a new covenant body, the Church, the old covenant having been abolished at Calvary (Eph. 2:15). According to Hebrews 9:15-17, the death of Christ put the new covenant into effect. The emphasis of Acts 1:8 is power for service, not regeneration, not sanctification. So we conclude that one may be regenerated, may be a saint, and yet not enjoy the baptism in the Spirit and its anointing for service, which Jesus promised believers.

The means and power for service come through the gifts of the Spirit. But the gifts of the Spirit need to be distinguished from the gift of the Spirit. The baptism in the Spirit was necessary before the first disciples were to leave Jerusalem or even begin to fulfill the Great Commission. They needed power, and the very name Holy Spirit is connected with power. He came as the Gift and as the Power. He himself is the first-fruits of the final harvest, come to begin a work that will bring some from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation together around the throne (Rev. 5:9). The same baptism in the Spirit was experienced by others on at least four other occasions in Acts... as well as by still others later on, according to Titus 3:5.

Ephesians 1:13 indicates further that the sealing is after the believing. This does not mean God’s ownership is dependent on the sealing. We are made His through the blood of Jesus and through our response of faith to God’s grace. Therefore, the seal is a recognition of ownership; it does not produce the ownership. Then, since the seal was always something visible or tangible that others could recognize, the baptism in the Holy Spirit with its outward evidence of speaking in other tongues fits the New Testament idea of sealing.

Another important passage is 1 Corinthians 12:13: “We were all baptized by one spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and were all given the one Spirit to drink.” The preposition “by” (Gk. *en*) clearly means “by” in all the other verses where it is linked with the Holy Spirit in this chapter, John the Baptist declared that Jesus is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Paul makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is the One who baptizes us into Christ, that is, into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27). The two baptisms are clearly distinct. The Holy Spirit first baptizes us into the body of Christ, then Jesus baptizes us into the Holy Spirit.

The Initial Physical Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost.

An important question is how one may know when one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. To be sure, there should be many evidences along the roadway of life to indicate a life empowered by the Holy Spirit. However, the real question is not the long-range result of the baptism in the Spirit, but the immediate indication that one may point to as witness of the experience itself. Has God provided such an indicator?

If all the references to Pentecostal endowment in the Book of Acts are put together, the overwhelming evidence is that tongues was the initial, physical sign or evidence of receiving the experience. Since we do acknowledge the historical description in Acts as having a theological purpose and holding a pattern for the Church today, there is strong ground for our conviction that those who would be filled with the Spirit should expect to have the witness of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enables them.

Questions on Speaking in Tongues

There are a number of questions that have arisen concerning speaking in tongues. Some of them are worth considering here:

1. **Can doctrine be based on less than declarative statements?**

Although doctrine should not be based on substantial, implied truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is based not on a declarative statement, but on a comparison of Scripture passages relating to the Godhead. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is based on substantial portions of Scripture relating to this subject.

2. **Is speaking in tongues a phenomenon that belonged only to the apostolic period?**

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that speaking with tongues would be in effect only during the apostolic period or until the New Testament canon had been completed. When Paul made the statement that tongues would cease (1 Cor. 13:8), he also indicated when this would happen: He wrote, “When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” (1 Cor. 13:10). He also indicated that at the time tongues shall cease, knowledge will pass away and prophecies will cease (1 Cor. 13:8). The context of Paul’s statement makes it clear that the time when tongues shall cease is future, and other things such as knowledge and prophecy will change in significance at the same time. Until that time the words of Jesus apply, “These signs will accompany those who believe: ... they will speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17).

3. **When Paul wrote, “Do all speak in tongues?” (1 Cor. 12:30), was it not a rhetorical question which required a negative response?**

To understand Paul’s question it is necessary to recognize the various functions of speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues serves as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 10:46; 11:15). Speaking or praying in tongues in private is for personal edification (1 Cor. 14:2, 4). And speaking in tongues in the congregation – accompanied by interpretation of tongues – is for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:5).

There is no contradiction between Paul’s desire that all speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5) and the rhetorical question asking whether all speak in tongues. All believers at the time of their baptism in the Spirit begin speaking in tongues and may continue on in personal prayer for personal edification. All however, are not the agents through which the Holy Spirit manifests himself through tongues and interpretation in the congregation. In the congregation the Holy Spirit distributes the manifestations as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11). Rather than contradiction in these two statements of Paul, there is complementary truth.

4. **Why were there periods in Church history when the phenomenon seemed to be absent?**

The possibility exists that any biblical doctrine can suffer from neglect. In fact, great spiritual renewals have often been the revival of doctrine. For example, the doctrine of justification by faith was almost completely lost until the time of the Reformation, when Martin Luther and others reemphasized the biblical truth. The doctrine of sanctification had suffered neglect until the time of the Wesleyan revival, when it was again brought to the attention of the Church. Although the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues appeared in a number of revivals throughout church history, it did not have the emphasis it has received in the present revival.

5. **Is there danger that people will seek for tongues rather than the actual baptism in the Holy Spirit?**

Unfortunately this is a possibility, but the abuse of a doctrine does not invalidate the doctrine. Abuse and counterfeits, rather than disproving a doctrine, help to establish what is genuine.

6. **If people speak in tongues, will there not be temptation to spiritual pride?**

When people truly understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it will result in humility instead of pride. Believers are baptized in the Spirit not because of personal worthiness, but to empower them for humble service and a more meaningful life.

7. What about truly born again people who have accomplished great things for the Lord but do not speak in tongues?

There can be no question that dedicated believers who do not speak in tongues are indwelt by the Spirit and have accomplished great things for God. In considering the question, however, every student of God's Word must determine whether he will base doctrine on God's Word or on experiences of even the most devout believers. Because the Bible indicates that all may speak in tongues in personal devotions if not in the congregation, every believer must determine whether to accept or reject this provision of God's grace. Scripture makes it clear that believers must recognize their personal accountability to God and not evaluate Christian experience on the bases of human comparison. Paul wrote: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12).

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14. What should our attitude be towards other believers who hold a different position regarding this matter? How can we preserve the unity of Christ's body while acting according to our personal convictions?

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Lesson 8: The Transformed Life

A. The Signs of New Life

Regarding justification through faith, we have already insisted heavily upon the witness by which the Holy Spirit attests we are the children of God. (Romans 8:16; Galatians 4:6) This is the first and most important sign of rebirth. This witness, however, can be stymied by false teachings. In churches where the message of salvation by grace alone is obscured, even those who depend on grace may find it difficult to believe in their salvation with certainty. Furthermore, sins of certain gravity may lead us to doubt our conversion. While the Holy Spirit's testimony is always clear, our spirits may not be inclined to accept it. Regrettably, this leads us to feel as though we are fumbling around in the dark, going nowhere. The rule, however, is that we have a joyous assurance through the Holy Spirit. (see also 1 John 3:24)

Other signs confirm our certitude. We have already spoken about the confession of faith elsewhere.

An attitude of obedience is a necessary result of the new life that regeneration brings about for us. "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person." (1 John 2:3-4)

Of course, here on earth, no one is perfect. Even the best of us fall short and disobey God. But every parent knows that among their children, though they are all imperfect, some are more obedient, while others are more rebellious. The born again believer keeps the commandments in that he considers divine will to be decisive. He has the desire to accomplish God's will, and through the Holy Spirit, he does achieve it, as far as he knows how. The change in his nature which follows is an important sign of the initial experience of conversion.¹

The Lord commands us first and foremost to love, and more specifically, to love our brothers. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 15:12, 13:35) John also wrote, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death." (1 John 3:14) Like our obedience, of course, our love is still lacking. It is authentic, however, all the more because before our conversion, we may have held Christians in contempt.

Paul declares: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." (Romans 8:5) Prayer, reading Scripture, going to church, fellowship with believers, and other forms of devotion may seem dull or boring to the unbeliever, but they become a mission that the regenerated man fulfills with increasing joy.

Even the opposition we may encounter in a world hostile to Christ serves to confirm our certitude. It is best, however, to avoid misunderstandings on this subject. There may be times when a faithful Christian enjoys "the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:47) as did the Early Church initially. Alas! Other believers suffer, not for their Christian testimony, but because of their immoral character. (1 Peter 4:15) And yet the words of Jesus should prepare us: "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets... Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets." (Luke 6:26, 22-23) We need not seek out persecution. On the contrary, when we are pursued in a town, we are

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B. Sanctification

Sanctification: “The process of being made holy resulting in a changed lifestyle for the believer” (Butler, 1230)

The Greek verb “to sanctify” (*haguiadzo*) means “to make holy, to consecrate, set aside, separate, purify.” Biblically, it can be defined as being “prepared to come into contact with God.” This verb and its derivatives have an ethical connotation because what is not holy can never come into God’s holy presence. This is why we must first be purified by the blood of Jesus that was poured out upon the cross before we can be forgiven by God and live with him forever. (Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:13-15, Revelations 1:4-6)

The Bible says that God sanctifies all the elect who believe in Jesus Christ in three specific ways, or through the following three steps:

Sanctification accomplished in the past. The filth of our sin is washed away and we are made spiritually clean before God by the blood of Christ. This grants us access to God’s presence as though we had never sinned. This also refers to the transformation that God orchestrates in our hearts that now desire to live for him. This work is accomplished through our rebirth, at the same time as is justification, the baptism of the Spirit and adoption, when we accept Christ. (Hebrews 9:11-15, 13:11-12)

Sanctification progressing in the present. While the new believer is sanctified before God at the moment of his conversion, at that same moment he begins the continuous struggle to live in holiness day after day. His goal is to progressively imitate Christ in his thoughts, motivations, choices, and actions. He must constantly resist his soul’s enemies: the lust of his former nature and way of life, (1 John 2:15-17) the pressure to conform to the pattern of this world, and the temptation of the devil and his armies. Paul describes this battle in Romans 7:18-23.

Although from time to time the believer may stray and succumb to temptations, he picks himself back up to pursue this goal: to become more like Christ, through the Holy Spirit which lives within him. This is a process that will continue until the believer’s physical death. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. See also John 17:17, Romans 6:19-22, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-23, 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:13-18)

The ultimate sanctification: future glorification. At the end of time, the believer will enter the presence of the Lord; he will be like Christ and will dwell before the God of glory, in a place filled with his glory. (Revelations 21:1-8) He will have a perfect and glorious new body, imperishable and free from sin. (1 Corinthians 15:40-43; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4) In Romans 8:19-23, we learn that all creation waits in eager expectation for the glory of the children of God to be revealed.

Questions :

1. **Read Colossians 3:1-4 and write down what the passage teaches us concerning each step of our sanctification:**

Sanctification in the past	Sanctification in the present	Future glorification

2. **Why can Christians not live for God’s glory apart from the Holy Spirit? (Romans 7:5-18)**

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3. **Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. The conflict between the flesh and the Spirit is not limited to Christians whose flesh is weak. How can the believer live a life of holiness? Look up the following verses and fill in the chart with the Bible’s counsel:**

Bible passages	How to overcome the flesh and live a holy life
Romans 13:14	
1 Corinthians 10:13	
Galatians 5:14-26	
Galatians 6:7-10	
Philippians 3:3-14	

1 Peter 2:11	
Colossians 3:14-17	

4. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

a. What is God’s will for all believers? What practical aspect of life does sanctification address in this passage?

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b. How does verse 1 support the progressive nature of sanctification?

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c. What resource has God given us for sanctification?

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d. What is the importance of sanctification for all believers according to this passage?

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e. What are some practical ways to grow in purity in your own life? (Can principles from the chart above be put in practice here?)

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5. Read Romans 8:16-25

a. What is the expectation of all believers in Jesus Christ?

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b. Why does all of creation wait in eager expectation with the children of God?

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6. What is the relation between justification, sanctification, and glorification?

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For Further Study

7. Read 1 John 2:15-17. What are the three sources of temptation in the life of a Christian? Give a definition of each in your own words.

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To further this study on sanctification and new life in Christ, refer to the course PRAT 202 “Life in the Spirit” from the program “Progressing Together.”

Lesson 9: The Essential Elements of the Gospel

Introduction: The Four Essentials

In the past eight lessons, we have studied several aspects of the doctrine of salvation quite thoroughly. In this lesson, we want to highlight the fundamental truths that all believers must understand to have eternal life, increasingly resemble Christ, and guard themselves from being swayed by destructive heresies. How can the Gospel of salvation through Christ Jesus be presented simply yet soundly in its entirety? This lesson is inspired and adapted from a study by Jim Moore and Colin Smith entitled “The essentials of the Gospel” and is used with permission.

What are the essential elements of the Gospel? So you think you’re preaching the Gospel? Is it really the GOSPEL of life and transformation that you are preaching? If we do not teach the key points of the Gospel, there will be neither life nor transformation.

What are the essential and determining elements of the Gospel that activate the transformation? Is it really the powerful and living Word that you are preaching? Is it truly an impartial Gospel message you are preaching? Do you avoid placing more emphasis on certain elements than on others? What could result if this was not the case?

What are the spiritual problems that you encounter most frequently in believers?

- Intellectual consent instead of authentic faith?
- Salvation by works? (“Proper justice”; to depend on one’s own merit)
- A lack of involvement in sanctification? Tolerance of sin?
- No assurance of salvation?
- Legalism?

The essential elements of the Gospel affect **all** aspects of life:

Personal faith. Genuine faith is able to save us from God’s wrath (Romans 1:16)

The witness to unbelievers. A thorough understanding of the Gospel can keep us from distorting the message to others and thereby putting them in jeopardy. (1 Timothy 4:16)

Spiritual growth. It is through pure spiritual milk—the essentials—that we can believe in Christ. (1 Peter 2:2)

In our personal lives. The word of truth transforms our behavior towards others when we put it into practice, and keeps us from false reasoning. (James 1:16-27)

Before continuing, think about the doctrine of salvation we have just studied, as well as your typical method of presenting the Gospel. What do you consider to be the essential elements of the Gospel?

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A. Atoning Sacrifice: First Essential

Most are likely to agree that Christ's atoning sacrifice (his death on the cross to pay for our sins) is the first pillar of the Gospel message. Christ's atoning sacrifice implies and includes:

- God's wrath towards sin
- Mankind's entirely sinful nature
- Christ is the one and only way to salvation
- The eternal worth of his sacrifice

Man's pride is detestable (shameful, wicked, abominable) before God and it struggles against His sovereignty. The sinner dishonors God when he places other things before Him. WE GLORIFY WHAT WE LOVE MOST. It's only natural; it is compulsory. And what the sinner loves most is not God. Therefore sin is no small matter, because it goes against a God who is anything but small. The gravity of an insult increases proportionally with the dignity of the one insulted. Psalms 145:3 says "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." The creator of the universe is infinitely worthy of respect, admiration, and fidelity. Therefore refusal to love him is far from insignificant—it is betrayal.

Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice that took our place, did not simply cancel God's wrath; he took it upon himself, diverting it from us. The wrath of God is just and holy—it was unleashed, not restrained. Never make light of God's love, do not take His love for granted. We will never admire and adore God's love until we realize how serious our sins are face to face with the justice and anger of God against us.

And yet God is not content to show only his anger; he proves his love to us. So we see Christ's suffering and death, and join with the apostle John in saying: This is love:

- not that we loved God
- but that he loved us
- and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

Questions :

1. **Christ's atoning sacrifice implied and entails God's wrath toward sin. Look up the following Scripture passages and summarize the way in which they support the severity of sin and the justice of God's wrath against sin:**

Scripture passages	Indication of sin's gravity
Deuteronomy 4:24	
Isaiah 42:8	
Jeremiah 2:13	
Romans 1:18	
Ephesians 2:3b-5	

James 4:6-8

2. Briefly explain how these verses demonstrate God's love for us sinner: Romans 3:24-25; 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

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3. Briefly review the verses in Lesson 3, "Justification by grace," and choose two that particularly support the need for Christ's death. Then follow the example to fill in the chart below with explanations of each verses:

Scripture	Teaching on the importance of Christ's death
Romans 3:20-25	No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and all who believe are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus
	God saves us not by our works, but freely, by the gift of his grace

B. Resurrected Life: Second Essential

Have you also noted the importance of Jesus Christ's resurrection? While his atoning sacrifice is generally recognized as the central point of the Gospel, it is regrettably not the case for his resurrection. Resurrection implies and entails:

The transformation of our hearts through regeneration (being born again)

The Spirit who regenerates and lives in us

The fullness and fruit of the Spirit

The sanctifying power of the Spirit

Questions :

1. Read the summary of the teachings of resurrection below and

- a. fill in the blanks with the appropriate responses, according to the model below.

Before knowing the Lord, we were all spiritually dead and distant from God. But when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our _____ *former nature* (literally "old self" Romans 6:6, see Lesson 6 pg 39) is crucified and God makes us a new creation with a heart that yearns to

please him. (See Lesson 6) It is God who orchestrates this change in us that we call

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At the same time, we receive _____ of the Holy Spirit who unites us with the death and resurrection of Christ and who comes to live in us. (See Lesson 7) He becomes our point of contact with the voice and presence of God. It is also the Spirit who enables us to live in holiness. He accomplishes the work of regeneration and of _____ through which we become children of God. He begins the work of _____ through which he changes us to resemble more and more Christ’s likeness. This firstly enables an authentic _____ which is our commitment to turn from our old way of life and to pursue the will of God. Without the Holy Spirit, a victorious Christian life would be nothing more than wistful thinking; but his presence and work in us produces new life. (See lesson 8)

- b. After each term that you wrote into the above paragraph, write a verse or passage from Scripture that explains it. Refer to the Scriptures used in Lessons 6-8.

2. Read Ephesians 1:18-21. Describe the divine power that operates in the life of those who have been regenerated.

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The first two essential points primarily represent God’s extraordinary work in the lives of individuals, whereas the latter two are the response that comes from the heart and the will of the believer transformed by God.

C. Faith: The Third Essential

Paul told the Philippian jailer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:31) The Gospel reveals to us God’s righteousness, which we receive through faith and faith alone. (Romans 1:17) Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (Romans 10:17)

1. Faith that saves. At the beginning of lesson 5, we studied the various meanings of the word “faith” in the Bible. Here are four different aspects of faith from the Gospel:

- 1. Recognition of the Gospel’s message (intellectual consent to information—i.e., the death of Christ, His resurrection, the problem of mankind’s sin, etc)
- 2. Belief in the truth of the Gospel (to believe its credibility, its importance, and the necessity of repentance and faith)
- 3. Love of the Gospel’s truth (A Lord and Savior to cherish)
- 4. The joyous trust in God for his grace towards us through his Son, whose death and resurrection sealed our salvation

a. Which of the above are necessary aspect of a faith that saves? (Check all that apply)

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b. Briefly explain your answer

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2. Answer the following statements by labeling them true or false. A faith that saves must be comprised of the following elements:

_____ It is directed towards the future, towards God and his promises. Rom 4:18-25

_____ It never experiences doubt about God or its assurance of salvation in Christ.

Luke 7:18-19, 23, 28

_____ It has the power to generate obedience to God. James 2:14; Philippians 2:13

_____ It perseveres in the face of hardship. Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 10:35-36

_____ It must be strong enough to merit God's favor. Matthew 17:20

Notes:

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3. List 2 key verses from Lesson 5 that explain the importance of a response of faith from the believer who receives salvation in Christ.

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Here is an example of a prayer of faith:

Lord Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God who became man. You died on the cross to save sinners, you rose on the third day and you now reign as the judge of the living and the dead.

I recognize that I am a sinner lost without life. I need your forgiveness, and need you as my Savior.

I turn away from my sin and give myself to you, Lord Jesus, my Savior and my Master.

I ask you to forgive all my past sins, and that you purify me by your atoning blood. Thank you for your death on the cross for my sins, because you paid the debt for my sins with your blood.

I thank you for your forgiveness, and that you allow me now to commune with the living God through your Spirit.

I ask you to transform my life. I ask you to sit on the throne of my heart to direct me in your truth. Make me the person you desire me to be to bring you glory. Amen.

D. Repentance: The Fourth Essential

In God’s messages to mankind, we often see an urgent call to repent.

1. **Read the summary of the teaching on repentance from Lesson 4 below and fill in the blanks with the appropriate terms or phrases.**

Biblical repentance implies a genuine change of _____ towards God and towards sin. It is not enough to simply say, “I regret what I did.” It is not a superficial recognition of mistakes. Repentance begins with _____, which is the sentiment of being broken by the weight of our faults, followed by _____ by which we express our agreement with the consequences God ascribes us, without justifying ourselves, and accompanied by a deep desire not to _____
 The true penitent does not seek to defend himself but seeks pardon from God through _____ When he is able, he seeks to _____ what was stolen or destroyed.

Be aware! True repentance does not guarantee a holy and perfect life from the moment onward, but it signifies a strong and irrevocable decision to live according to God’s will and avoid sin. According to Jay Adams, “Repentance is different than simply regretting one’s past. Esau was saddened by the consequences of his sin, but not truly repentant. (Hebrews 12:16-17) When true repentance occurs, the Holy Spirit always orchestrates a change.” The renown author J.I. Packer offered the following definition: “Repentance is turning from what we know of sin to give what we know of ourselves to what we know of God.”

Here is an example of a prayer of repentance:

Heavenly Father, though alive, I am dead in my sin without You in my life. I have been running my life in darkness until now.

I recognize that I have been living under my own authority without submitting myself to You. I have a heart of stone without You in my life. I am like a pile of dried bones. Now I turn to You

Breathe on me, Holy Spirit. I turn from my own path that led me away from You and I submit myself to Your authority in my life.

I turn away from all the idols that give me a false sense of life and security. I commit myself wholly to You.

Questions :

2. **Explain in your own words what J.I. Packer’s definition means:**

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3. **Read Mark 1:1-15 and compare John the Baptist’s sermon with Jesus’.**

- a. What are the resemblances?

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b. Identify some differences:

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4. **According to 2 Corinthians 7:10, there are two types of sadness for sin. Read the passage and list some characteristics of each.**

a. Sadness which produces death:

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b. Sadness which saves:

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5. **The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) entails a sense of changing direction. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9 and apply this meaning to the verse:**

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6. **If we read James 4:6-10 in the light of repentance, what attitude is necessary so that repentance is authentic and satisfactory?**

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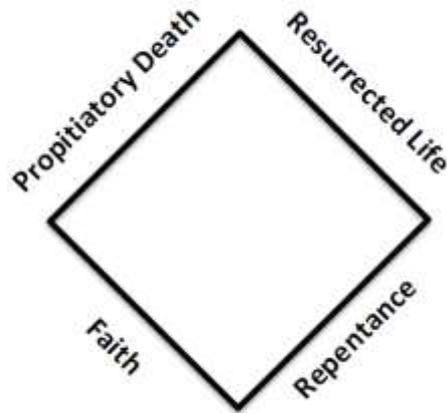
E. In Light of an Honest Gospel: Distortions Resulting from an Incomplete Gospel

Is it truly an impartial Gospel message you are preaching? Do you make certain that each essential element receives adequate emphasis? Do you carefully avoid calling more attention to certain points over others? What could result if this was not the case? Remember that the essentials of the Gospel affect every aspect of life.

When one or two essentials are neglected or dismissed altogether, this produces a dangerous distortion of the Gospel that can be detrimental to the spiritual growth of a believer, if not put his faith and salvation at risk. To conclude this study, we will introduce six (6) distortions of the Gospel—or heresies—that reoccur throughout the history of the Church.

But first, let us call to mind the four essentials:

The Four Essential Elements of the Gospel



1. **What aspect of the Gospel do I need to remember for myself and for those with whom I share the message? Fill in the chart below with a brief explanation of each essential element along with one or two key verses.**

Essential elements	Description	Scripture passages
The expiatory death of Christ for our sins		

2. **The six distortions of the Gospel.**

a. In the chart below, study the teachings of each distortion of the Gospel with its errors to be corrected then list at least one essential element that is missing in the principle of this doctrine.

Name	Description	Teaching	Correction	Missing essential(s)
Determinism	Intellectual consent “Intellectualism and faith”	All those who recognize the truth of the Gospel are true Christians.	Neither intellectual consent nor simple belief in biblical truths is enough to transform a life.	

Pelagianism	Salvation by works “superiority and faith”	Only those who practice an authentic repentance and lead a pious life are accepted by God.	Good works cannot save anyone, cannot communicate life in Heaven, and cannot transform the heart.	
Decisionism	Easy grace without transformation “Entitlement and faith”	All who respond to God’s extended gift of salvation will be saved.	The infinite and precious grace of God through Christ’s sacrifice transforms the heart and leads it to sanctification.	
Perfectionism	Mysticism “mysticism and faith”	There are certain criteria we must meet to gain God’s complete approval	Faith that transforms and gives life relies on both Christ’s work on the cross and His resurrection.	
Liberalism	I choose “My truth”; “independence and truth”	Each believer must find his own truth according to his inspiration and experience.	The person and work of Christ are the ultimate forms of God’s revelation and are the foundation of our faith.	
Legalism Stoicism	Christianity without the Holy Spirit. “The law and faith”	True Christians hold themselves to a certain code of conduct	True regret for sin leads to the cross and resurrection, and becomes the source of our sanctification, joy, and hope.	

b. Which of these heresies cited above threatens you or your church the most?

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c. Read the entire description of the heresy you identified above and complete the exercises that are included in the section entitled “To go further.”

d. Be ready to explain the danger of this distortion and how to correct it to your study group.

3. Do you need to be able to answer every question or know everything to be able to share the Gospel? Explain your answer.

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For Further Study

Distortions resulting from an incomplete Gospel

Study the five (5) other distortions and complete the exercises.

First distortion: Determinism

Determinism is an intellectual acceptance of the Gospel's truth. It is to acknowledge the atoning sacrifice and resurrected life as simple fact alone. This knowledge is thought to determine a chain of uninterrupted and ordinary events that lead to true saving faith. The Gospel is reduced to lifeless information. Those who view the Gospel in this way believe it is enough to recognize the truth. The concepts of faith and repentance are completely absent or remain in the shadows without any notice. But this is an intellectual acceptance of only two parts of the Gospel: Christ's atoning sacrifice and his resurrection. The lack of faith and repentance can lead to an apparent loss of belief if the person becomes intellectually convinced of another "reality" or false "truth."

Therefore the events to come (that is to say, the salvation to come) requires that past or present events be associated with human cognition (an intellectual acceptance at a specific moment in time.) This removes all supernatural intervention from God! And insinuated God grants "salvation" on an intellectual basis with no transformation of the human heart.

There are several characteristics of this faulty understanding of the Gospel:

- It is enough to Christianize people. The Gospel becomes a religion: Christianity.
- It is enough to communicate the facts of the Gospel. Teaching is enough.
- All those who claim to be Christians are Christian!
- Heresies spring up, such as Gnosticism: "salvation" is obtained through an understanding of supernatural mysteries. (Appeared in the 2nd-3rd century, more recent adherents aside)
- In the Far East, Universalism claims God is in everyone; people must simply be informed. "We will all go to Paradise."

What essential points are missing from these so-called gospels? Repentance and genuine faith! Regeneration! Consider once again the elements of faith and repentance explained in sections A3 and A4 of this lesson before moving on to the following exercises.

Questions :

1. **What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?**

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2. How does the Bible respond to this misunderstanding of the Gospel?

- a. Read John 1:12-13 and 3:3-6. What is necessary for a person to be saved?

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- b. Now read John 3:35-36. According to these verses, what else is necessary for a person to be saved?

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It is important to note that salvation occurs neither through a natural birth, nor under the impulse of human desire. It is not by the will of a man that we have become children of God; but it is of God that we were born.

He who believes (from the Greek *pisteuo*) in the Son possesses eternal life; he who does not believe (from the Greek *apeitho* – refusal to believe) in the Son will not be given life, but the wrath of God is over him. We must not disassociate “belief” from a new birth from above! In Greek, the verb “to believe” (*pisteuo*) implies action. It is to be persuaded; have faith; lean on; NOT simple belief!

Additionally, this new birth inevitably produces a change on the inside which is manifested progressively by a behavior which is more and more like Christ.

Second distortion: Pelagianism

Pelagianism is the belief that salvation is earned through works. Pelagianism, named after the ascetic monk Pelagius (360-422) of British descent is a theological theory (from the 4th-5th century) which holds to the belief that original sin did not taint human nature (men are divine since they were created from God) and that of their will, mortals are always capable of choosing between right and wrong without help from God, which implies that there is no need for supernatural intervention from God to receive salvation. Thus, Adam’s sin was merely a “bad example” for his descendants, and his actions had no other consequences of original sin. Pelagianists view the role of Jesus as “setting a good example” for the rest of humanity (thereby counteracting Adam’s bad example).

In short, humanity has complete control and is therefore solely responsible for his own salvation, as well as his own sin. Advocates and opponents alike of Pelagianism focus on the second part. According to Pelagianist doctrine, since humanity does not need God’s grace to be saved (beyond his creation of their will) Christ’s execution is stripped of all redeeming qualities the Bible and orthodox theology attribute to it.

What are the different characteristics of Pelagianism?

- It highlights only the sincerity of faith and repentance. All depends upon human will and regret; not true sadness according to God.
- It lacks an emphasis on grace from the death and resurrection of the Christ.
- The Gospel becomes a human accomplishment. Salvation is won by good works.
- The power of human will is pushed to the forefront.
- The focus is on religious efforts and sincerity.
- Sincerity in our faith in Jesus is enough.

- Men are free to choose to believe in Christ, without God’s help,
- Adam’s sin does not affect us.
- We follow Christ’s example because he is the role model for humanity. Human will is key!
- Pelagianists do not believe that salvation can be certain. Being assured of salvation is a sinful assumption, and religious dependence is compulsory.

Questions:

What essential points are missing? The atoning sacrifice, resurrection, and grace of God!

(See again the explanation of atoning sacrifice in section A1)

3. What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?

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4. How does the Bible respond to Pelagianism? Read the following verses and briefly explain how they refute the false doctrine of Pelagius:

a. 2 Corinthians 5:21

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b. Romans 5:12-14

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c. Romans 3:9-11

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d. Ephesians 2:8

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Third distortion: Decisionism

Decisionism is cheap grace—without any transformation required; it is easy pardon. Of the four essentials of the Gospel, decisionism includes only the atoning death of Christ and faith. The Gospel becomes a decision one must make. “Decisionism is a doctrine which affirms that moral or legal precepts result from decisions made by political or legal entities. According to

decisionism, it is not the actual content of the decision, but the fact that it is a decision made by a competent authority or the correct use of the right methods which determines its validity.”
(Wikipedia FR)

In this case (the Gospel) the term is used in the sense that it is not so much the implications of the decision that matters. The information included concerning Christ’s death and resurrection, and a decision based on this information of free pardon does not necessitate a transformation of the heart. Under this vision of the Gospel, the competent authority for making a decision is the individual itself, and the right method used to determine its validity leads to so-called true saving faith. Advanced methods for validating acquired salvation are: responding to a call to the altar, raising of hands, praying certain prayers, being baptized, and becoming a member of a church.

What are the dangers, then, of such a gospel?

-We can emphasize the superficial importance of making a decision to the point of neglecting the necessity for a transformation of the heart that leads to sanctification. -Regeneration can be completely excluded.

-It can lead to antinomianism, according to which laws of morality carry no weight (ἀντι, “against” + νόμος, “law”). There is no obligation to obey ethical laws or morality as presented by religious leaders. It is the opposite of legalism.

-Common saying: “We are under his grace, not the law!” Everything becomes subjective to personal judgment.

-Repentance and the resurrected life are absent or rendered insignificant.

-It is a concession to live according to the flesh; according to each man’s desires.

-It allows an excessive tolerance for sin.

-The gospel becomes only an immediate relief of one’s conscience.

What essential points are absent? The resurrection! (See again the explanation of resurrection in section B)

Questions:

5. **What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?**

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6. **How can we respond biblically to decisionism? Read the following verses and briefly explain how they counter this false doctrine:**

a. Romans 6:5-7, 17-18

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b. Romans 8:1-3a, 9b

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c. 1 Peter 2:24

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d. 2 Peter 1:3-4

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e. Romans 6:22

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f. Hebrews 12:14

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7. What distortion do you encounter most often?

- Determinism – intellectual consent
- Pelagianism – salvation by works
- Decisionism – cheap and easy grace without transformation

8. How could a more exhaustive comprehension of the Gospel remedy this?

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9. Which of these distortions are you most likely to fall into or be influenced by? Why?

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10. How can you improve the way in which you communicate the Gospel?

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Fourth distortion: Perfectionism

“Perfectionism is a moral principle which begins by a description of the good life, or a life to be desired.” (Wikipedia FR)

It characterizes this life in a very distinctive manner. In perfectionism, to lead a good life, a person must develop their values to a very high level, or realize what is fundamental to human nature. In the case of the Christian life, they search for what is fundamental to holiness: supernatural spiritual gifts and supernatural experiences.

It is likely that the different versions of this theory do not all agree on the specifics (definitions vary by groups) and diverge on what constitutes the foundation of a superior life. However, they all share the fundamental idea that what is good, ultimately, is the development of human nature.

Perfection, in this sense, is a goal that we strive to achieve even if it proves to be unattainable; the effort itself is considered good. There is a certain resemblance to Pelagianism in that they both highly value the role of human will with an added supernatural element.

What are the different characteristics of mystic perfectionism?

- Only a resurrected life and repentance are emphasized.
- It is without confidence in the grace of God by faith because the source of that grace is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.
- The loss of assurance of salvation, if one is not able to overcome the sin in one’s life (Believers who are held captive by sin are called retrogrades.)
- The Gospel becomes a call to holiness, a duty, and not a source of grace.
- Christian mysticism
- The search for supernatural gifts
- The search for supernatural experiences
- Sects which cut themselves off from the world and cultivate an attitude that they are the only ones in the truth.
- The search for perfectionism by mystical or monastic practices.

Questions :

11. **What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?**

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12. **What is a Biblical response to perfectionism? Read the following verses and briefly explain how they correct this false doctrine:**

- a. 2 Corinthians 3:18

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b. Romans 1:17-18

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c. Colossians 2:8-10; 15-23

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d. Philippians 3:9

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Fifth distortion: Liberalism

Liberalism proclaims the sovereignty of the individual: I choose “My truth.” Liberalism traces its roots back to the Enlightenment in the West. “Liberalism in its largest sense favors the rights of individuals and the equality of chances.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language) This can be a good on the political-social-economic level; but on the level of the Christian faith this amounts to choosing “one’s own truth!” The diverse forms of liberalism can offer very different political ideas, but they all agree to support a certain number of principles, including a widespread freedom of thought and expression, limits on the power of government, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, etc.

In what concerns the Christian faith, the term is used as an individual right, the liberty to think, sort and choose what is important to believe in the Bible to the exclusion of all that is considered unbelievable or not credible.

The supporters of this movement see liberalism as a century of light and liberation from restrictive orthodoxy. They offer a new definition of orthodoxy (called Neo-orthodoxy) which denies the incarnation, Christ’s divinity and physical resurrection, etc.

The inspiration (or so-called illumination) comes when I perceive something as being truth and it becomes for me the Word of God (not all the Bible is considered the inspired and infallible Word of God). Faith in experiences which have been personally lived are given priority and lived as true faith. Thus, individual beliefs and religious experiences are considered more important than the Word of God.

What are the different characteristics of liberalism?

- It focuses exclusively on faith and (virtual) resurrected life.
- It loses the sense of history, in other words, the historicity of Christ, of his incarnation, of his atoning sacrifice and of his physical resurrection.
- The Gospel becomes a mystic experience.
- The Gospel becomes simply an experience to be tried.
- Liberal Protestantism is ecumenical.

- Neo-orthodoxy.
- Those who deny God's incarnation, the miracles of Christ and the fact that God intervenes in the world.

Questions :

13. What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?

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14. How does the Bible respond to liberalism? Read the following verses and explain briefly how they correct these destructive teachings:

a. Hebrews 1:1-3

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b. Hebrews 9:26

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c. Psalm 119:160

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d. John 17:14-17

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e. Isaiah 40:8

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Sixth distortion: Legalism

Legalism is a life philosophy, a kind of Christian stoicism, without the Holy Spirit. In Christian theology, legalism is a pejorative term referring to a misplaced obsession with the law, rules of conduct, or legal concepts; it usually suggests an emphasis on the law to the detriment of the Spirit, an erroneous rigor, pride, and shallowness, a lack of mercy and omission of the grace of God. Legalism is accused of considering the law rather than faith in the grace of God as the predominant principle of redemption.

The opposite error to legalism is antinomianism (in other words, decisionism) which holds that moral laws are without value or are not important. It is an error to try and fight one with the other. Rather we must fight them both with the tools of the Gospel presented in an equal manner!

What are the different characteristics of legalism?

- It focuses uniquely on the atoning sacrifice and repentance.
- It prizes austerity and traditions.
- It loses the joy of salvation, for the Gospel becomes a duty to fulfill.
- A Christianized form of Stoicism; a life philosophy without the Holy Spirit.
- “Show your thankfulness!” is a command and not a pleasure! It promotes a debtor’s mentality: “What have you done for Jesus?” Guilt is used as a means of motivation. (But fear, guilt, duty, and conformity are not good motives.
- Rules of conduct are put in priority above everything else.
- Conformity is strong and traditions (habits) are sacred and firmly in place.
- Duty and order are promoted more than are grace, love, and compassion.
- It speaks little of the life of the Spirit.
- The lack of a heart’s transformation by the Spirit and the love of God!

Questions :

15. What would the testimony of someone who has been considerably influenced by this kind of teaching look like?

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16. What is the Biblical response to legalism? Read the following verses and explain briefly how they correct these destructive teachings:

a. Ezekiel 36:26-27

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b. Galatians 3:2-3

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c. Ephesians 2:8-10

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d. Ephesians 4:30-32

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e. Romans 14:12-13

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f. Colossians 2:16-23

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Legalism is a subtle plague which threatens every Christian community. To deepen your study of this tendency and to learn how to fight it, study Lesson 9 in the PRAT 202 course.

17. Which is the error which you come across most often?

- 1. Determinism – intellectual assent
- 2. Pelagianism – salvation by works
- 3. Decisionism – cheap grace without transformation
- 4. Mystic Perfectionism
- 5. Liberalism – I choose “My truth.”
- 6. Legalism – Christianized Stoicism without the Spirit

18. What are the results of this flawed understanding of the Gospel?

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19. How could a more thorough comprehension of the Gospel remedy this?

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20. Quickly review the six “Distortions of the Gospel”:

1. Determinism – intellectual assent
2. Pelagianism – salvation by works
3. Decisionism – cheap grace without transformation
4. Mystic Perfectionism
5. Liberalism – I choose “my truth.”
6. Legalism – Christianized stoicism without the Holy Spirit

a. Into which error are you most likely to fall?

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b. How can you improve the way in which you communicate the Gospel?

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Overview of Chapter 9

The Six Distortions of the Gospel:

1. Determinism – an intellectual consent; (intellectualism and faith)

Neither intellectual consent nor simple belief in the truths of the Bible are sufficient in transforming lives.

2. Pelagianism – Salvation by works; (superiority and faith)

Good works cannot save anyone, cannot communicate life in Heaven, and cannot transform the heart.

3. Decisionism – easy grace without transformation; (entitlement and faith)

The infinite and precious grace of God through Christ’s sacrifice transforms the heart and leads it to sanctification.

4. Mystic Perfectionism; (mysticism and faith)

Faith that transforms and gives life relies on both Christ’s work on the cross and His resurrection.

5. Liberalism – I choose “my truth;” (independence and truth)

The person and work of Christ are the ultimate forms of God’s revelation and are the foundation of faith.

6. Legalism—Christianized stoicism without the Holy Spirit (the law and faith)

True regret for sin leads to the cross and resurrection, and becomes the source of our sanctification, joy, and hope.

The Essentials of the Gospel and life in community:

1. The atoning sacrifice: (Perfume of Christ? – odor of life?)

The seriousness of sin and pride deserve the opposition and judgment of God.

The generous but costly pardon of the grace of God is our source of life.

The justice of God in Christ by faith and not by works of the law.

2. Resurrected life: (Perfume of Christ?)

The regeneration of our heart by the Holy Spirit for a life transformed from above.

The sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, by which I have all that I need.

3. Authentic Faith: (Perfume of Christ?)

Crucified and risen with Christ I live by faith for Him and not for myself.

Faith brings about love, obedience, hope, and perseverance.

4. Repentance according to God: (Perfume of Christ?)

Sadness according to God is tied both to faith and to the fruits of the Spirit which lead to salvation, victory, and deliverance.

Additional question for discussion: How do we keep these essentials together (atoning sacrifice, repentance, faith, resurrected life)?

Partial list of questions used throughout the course

- Question 1.** What are the different meanings of “salvation” in the Bible?
- Question 2.** What are the different meanings of “redemption?”
- Question 3.** Conviction of sin and conversion: is it possible to have one without the other?
- Question 4.** Why is disbelief a particularly serious sin?
- Question 5.** Should all sins committed after conversion be considered unpardonable?
- Question 6.** What is the sin against the Holy Spirit? What can we say to someone who thinks they have committed this sin?
- Question 7.** What does “justification” mean?
- Question 8.** What conditions must be fulfilled to allow justification by works?
- Question 9.** What are the different meanings of “grace” in the Bible?
- Question 10.** Describe how salvation by grace excludes any human contribution.
- Question 11.** What is the connection between justification and regeneration?
- Question 12.** What is repentance? What are the signs of genuine repentance?
- Question 13.** What are the advantages as well as dangers of confessing sins to fellow believers?
- Question 14.** What are the different meanings of “faith” in the Bible?
- Question 15.** List the passages that give ground for justification by faith.
- Question 16.** What is the difference between faith and superstition?
- Question 17.** Is it prideful to be sure of your salvation?
- Question 18.** What is the role of works in justification?
- Question 19.** What is regeneration and why is it necessary?
- Question 20.** Is it possible to increase or decrease one’s level of regeneration?
- Question 21.** Is every person a child of God?
- Question 22.** What is adoption? What privileges come with adoption?
- Question 23.** What is conversion?
- Question 24.** What connection is there between conversion and regeneration?
- Question 25.** What passages speak of baptism of the Spirit?
- Question 26.** Since when has this experience been possible?
- Question 27.** What are the signs of it?
- Question 28.** What significance does it hold?
- Question 29.** Are there Christians who have not experienced baptism of the Holy Spirit?
- Question 30.** What do you think of the following arguments that are used to support the idea that all Christians are not necessarily baptized by the Holy Spirit?
- The Apostles were believers before receiving this baptism
 - Samaritans did not receive the Spirit until the moment they believed
 - The disciples in Ephesus had not yet received the Spirit when Paul met them
- Question 31.** What should we think of what some call a re-conversion experience?
- Question 32.** What are the signs of an authentic Christian life?

Endnotes (from Nicole’s Précis de Doctrine Chrétienne)

ⁱ However it can also sometimes apply to the healing of a sickness. For instance, the woman who had been subject to bleeding said to herself: "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." (Mark 5:28). And

Jesus answered her by possibly playing on the double sense of the word: “Your faith has saved you.” (Luke 8:48) See also John 11:12 and Acts 4:9, etc.

ⁱⁱ Eph 1:7, Col 1:14: “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” See also 1 Peter 1:18: “You were redeemed from the empty way of life.”

ⁱⁱⁱ “You were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Eph 4:30). “We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom 8:23).

^{iv} Already in the book of Genesis we read that the Spirit of God abides in man (or contends with him) Genesis 6:3. The meaning of the verb is not entirely clear, but in one case or the other we can conclude that even in this very early time the Holy Spirit was at work among men to persuade them.

^v G. Guillod, *Chants de Victoire* n° 114.

^{vi} This was a teaching of the Church in the 3rd century, based on the interpretation of Novatius and his followers who refused to allow Christians guilty of serious sins to be brought back into the Church.

^{vii} Peter who acted hypocritically in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14), the believers in Ephesus who had lost their first love (Revelation 2:4-5), those of Pergamum who tolerated false doctrines (Revelation 2:14-16), those of Sardis who were spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1-3), those of Laodicea who were lukewarm (Revelation 3:15-20), the unfaithful member of the Church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:5-11), etc.... no one can claim to be without sin in the present world (1 John 1:8).

^{viii} One must understand the expression “who have shared in the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 6:4) as indicating that these individuals have benefited from his compelling work, without actually having received him in their heart. The declaration which indicates that such a person has been “sanctified by the blood of the covenant” (Hebrews 10:29) presents more of a difficulty. If need be one could translate the passage as “who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant by which it (that is the covenant) was sanctified.” But it is not essential to resort to this interpretation. It is a legitimate to understand the text as meaning that the blood of Jesus provided for the sanctification of the sinner, without that sanctification actually being applied effectively to him. One can also consider that the author was alluding to improper participation in Holy Communion. See also Calvin’s excellent commentary on these passages.

^{ix} Thus we understand why the Holy Spirit is understood as having been blasphemed in these conditions. It is not that he has a dignity above that of the other Persons of the Trinity. But one can blaspheme God the Father or oppose the Son of Man out of ignorance, whereas this resistance to the Spirit when he brings about conviction in our hearts means that individuals are fully aware of their revolt against divine grace. This is what makes their sin unlike any other and pushes it beyond repair.

^x One must still examine the question of whether a believer can or cannot lose his salvation. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews does not in any case think that his readers have committed this unpardonable sin. “Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation.” (Hebrews 6:9)

^{xi} We must recognize however that despite the texts of the Council of Trent, certain Catholics refuse to seek any amount of their salvation through works. Pascal declared that all glory was due to grace and saw only in himself “misery and error.” (*Pensée* 550 Brunschwig Edition)

^{xii} For example, when it is written that “the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” (Titus 2:11).

^{xiii} In the sense that we have “received grace.” (Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 6 :1).

^{xiv} Ephesians 2:8. It would not be unhelpful to cite the other Biblical senses of the word. Etymologically, the Hebrew word ‘Hen’ comes from a root which means to lean or to bow down, and the Greek word ‘Charis’ is related to the word for joy, ‘Chara.’ Grace in the first place can refer to exterior charm, such as when it is used in Proverbs to say: “Charm [Grace] is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting,” but this usage is rare in the Bible. As we have noted, grace is the disposition by which God leans benevolently towards his creation, and then the free and unmerited gift by which he forgives us. It can also mean any kind of unmerited favor, besides forgiveness. “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.” (John 1:16) Paul presents his apostleship as a grace given to him (Ephesians 3:8). An act of generosity such as that of the Christians in Macedonia and Greece for their brothers in Jerusalem is also described with this term (2 Corinthians 8:6-7, 19). Finally, the expression “to render grace” also means to be thankful (2 Corinthians 9:15).

^{xv} Theologians speak of “forensic” justification, that is, one which is extrinsic to the person. Modernists have a tendency to deny this exterior application of justification. They would do well to study Calvin’s vigorous attacks against Osiander (*The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter 11, § 5-12) who already subordinated justification to regeneration, and whose position was further condemned by the Lutheran Book of Concord (§3). Quite a judicious work on the topic appeared recently: F. Dunkel, *Arraché du Feu*, [Snatched from the Fire] Groupe d’évangélisation et de recherche biblique, Trevas les Villettes, 43600 Sainte-Sigolène 1981.

^{xvi} It is important that in relation to Judas, another term be used which implies only a problem which arose after the fact, but not the shifting of a mindset which is desired (Matthew 27:3). The apostle Paul also opposes sadness according to the world which produces death and sadness according to God which produces repentance with no regret. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

^{xvii} Psalm 32:5 It is remarkable to notice that in this psalm, the same verb is used in v. 5 and v. 1. It is only when David renounced covering or hiding his sin that his sin could truly be “covered” or pardoned.

^{xviii} For more on the dangers of Catholic practices, see Père Chiniquy’s work, *Le pretre, la femme et le confessionnal* (*The priest, the woman and the confessional*)

^{xix} This is what Saul was lacking. He rightfully confessed, but was solely preoccupied with saving face and being honored by the people, without any true change of heart toward God. 1 Samuel 15:24, 25, 30. David’s repentance was altogether different.

^{xx} Leviticus 26:41. By their captivity, the Israelites would “pay for their sin”

^{xxi} This is also one of the reasons why we use the term repentance instead of penitence, as penitence calls to mind satisfaction of the penitent based on merit.

^{xxii} 1 Corinthians 12:9. In the same context, Paul describes the possibility of having this faith to such an extent so as to move mountains (1 Corinthians 13:2), without it having any meaning if the heart is not also changed in such a way as to produce authentic love.

^{xxiii} In the same context, Paul declares that righteousness has been imputed to us, that is, treated as if it were ours through faith and that such faith is credited to us as righteousness. (Romans 4:5-6) This amounts to the same thing. Suppose I am hopelessly lost in debt and that some generous friend of mine gives me his fortune, in such a way that my deficit is wiped clean and that I suddenly find myself in possession of a positive balance on my account. I must accept this transaction in order to benefit from it. I could equally say that my account has been bailed out by my friend’s gift or by my accepting his gift. The two statements are equivalent, albeit that the merit of the operation belongs entirely to my friend, even though my agreement is also necessary. When in Scripture we read that our faith is imputed to us in light of righteousness, this does not mean that it is any form of off-setting for the sins we have committed. But faith is accepting the gift of grace, which, in itself, is more than sufficient compensation.

^{xxiv} Fideism teaches that faith depends on feeling and not on reason.

^{xxv} One of the most famous representatives of this strain of thought is Professor L. Ménégoz who also provided it with useful nuances.

^{xxvi} We have already cited the words of the Apostle: “However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.” Romans 4:5

^{xxvii} James describes this with the expression: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” (James 2:24) Some have postulated that faith justifies us before God, and our works justify us before men. The explanation is clever, but seems out of harmony with James’s intention in the passage. It would be better to say that justification is gained by faith but proven by works.

^{xxviii} Although psychologically, to become aware of an invisible reality, we must express it out loud. The Christian is strengthened in his faith as he testifies to it.

^{xxix} Romans 6:7. In most versions, the verb is imperfectly translated, but the word used is indeed “justified.” In the context of the epistle to the Romans, the apostle surely did not choose this word by chance.

^{xxx} John 3:3, 5. The word translated as “again” can also mean “from above.” This is how it is translated in John 3:31. However, it is unlikely that Jesus meant to play on the double meaning of the word, since in Aramaic the two ideas are described with two different terms.

^{xxxi} For example, L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids 1946, p. 465, N.E. Wood, *The Person and Work of Jesus Christ*, Philadelphia, 1908, p. 152.

^{xxxii} The only exception would be the passage from Ezekiel: “Get a new heart and a new spirit.” (Ezekiel 18:31) We must answer to this that such an obedience is not possible unless God himself gives a new heart, and places in the man a new spirit. (Ezekiel 11:19, 36:26) One could argue that the prodigal son passed from death to life as a result of a saving decision he took. (Luke 15:18-20, 24) But his restoration is due entirely to the grace of his father. It is true, as R. Saillens said, that “God does nothing in us without us.” (R. Saillens, *The Mystery of Faith*, Nogent-sur-Marne 1963, p. 203.) This does not mean that we must fall into the temptation of synergism, which is the theory according to which man collaborates in his salvation.

^{xxxiii} Romans 6:5, 11. We must carefully distinguish this death to sin from the death in sin mentioned a few lines above. The death in sin deprives us of the life of God and leads us to condemnation. The death to sin frees us from the power which sin exerted on us and enables us to be filled with the life of God.

^{xxxiv} They refer to the fact that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes God as the Father of his audience; but the Sermon on the Mount, even if it is given before the multitudes, is addressed to the disciples. (Matthew 5:1-2) It is also said that the Prodigal Son remains his father’s son even in a foreign land. But he himself declares his unworthiness to claim that title, and his father declares that he had been dead. (Luke 15:21-24) In a Psalm, the Lord calls out to the judges of the earth and tells them: “You are ‘gods’; you are all sons of the Most High.” (Psalm 82:6) By they have this privilege by virtue of their special function, and not by virtue of their being men.

^{xxxv} Luke 3:38. The word son does not appear spelled out in the text (no more so than in the rest of the genealogy of Jesus), but Luke uses a common Greek turn of phrase which expresses direct descent.

^{xxxvi} Thus Abraham has every intention of returning with his son after having gone to Mount Morija. (Genesis 22:5, also Jesus turned around to see the woman who had touched the hem of his garment, Marc 5:30).

^{xxxvii} See especially W. James, *Religious Experience*. R. Allier, *The Psychology of Conversion Among Primitive Peoples*.

^{xxxviii} See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids 1946, p. 489.

^{xxxix} Matthew 3:11 ; Mark 1:8 ; Luke 3:16 ; John 1:26, 33. The text literally says: “He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit,” except in a few manuscripts of Mark where the preposition is missing. But the Greek preposition “in” can often indicate the means by which one carries out an action. For the other phrase in the sentence, we sometimes read “in the water,” sometimes “the water” (without a preposition in Greek) according to the different Gospels, with some variations between the manuscripts. It would be rather pedantic de want to draw theological conclusions from these nuances of expression.

^{xl} 1 Corinthians 15:6. There is no reason why the disciples who were not in Jerusalem between Ascension and Pentecost would not have come to town in time for the feast.

^{xli} 1 Corinthians 12:30. Here some of our Pentecostal or Charismatic brothers introduce a subtle distinction. Paul is not excluding that these people may have spoken in tongues at the time of their baptism in the Holy Spirit; but he implies that not all would continue to have this gift in the future. We see that their explanation is meant to fit the Scripture with a preconceive theory, no matter what.

On this subject see Avril Edvarsen, *Spiritual Gifts*, Miami 1979, chap. 12 p. 154-155.

^{xlii} One might hesitate on the addition found in the words of John the Baptist, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16) Some see in this an allusion to the fire of judgment day, when Jesus will baptize some with the Holy Spirit, and others with fire. Others see in the fire a purifying aspect that is stronger than water, in such a way that the baptism by fire highlights one of the aspects of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not necessary to resolve the question here.

^{xliii} See Luther, *The Small Catechism*, The Sacrament of Baptism. “What does such baptizing with water signify? It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” (From *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: German-Latin-English*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

^{xliiv} This would fit well with his declaration: “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’” (Matthew 3:9) In light of the kingdom of God which was near, the Israelites had to recognize that they were not ready and that they needed to be baptized just as much as the lowest of the pagans did to become members of the kingdom.

^{xlvi} See for example Avril Edvardsen, *Spiritual Gifts*, Miami 1979, chap. 3 (p. 27-36 Ed. Vida in French version).

^{xlvii} At the Council of Jerusalem, Peter insists on the fact that according to the choice of God, Gentiles heard the Gospel from his lips (Acts 15:7), even though he served rather as the apostle to the circumcised, and Paul to the uncircumcised. (Galatians 2:7-8) But for the first contact Peter had to be the one who opened the door.

^{xlviii} Not necessarily because they had personally known the Forerunner of Christ, but it seems, according to this passage, that the disciples of John had continued to recruit followers from as far away as Asia Minor.

^{xlix} The interpretation which holds that they could have been true Christians, having the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9) but still missing a second experience of the baptism of the Spirit is not tenable, neither in their case, nor in the case of believers in Samaria, for what we are told is that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:2, compare with 8:15)

^l Even if occasionally, his now sharpened conscience makes him more susceptible to his weaknesses. He may get the impression that he is more wicked now than he was before, but he will soon realize that this comes from the fact that his faults are now highlighted, as disorder and dirt appear in a room flooded with light.