

**THE FULLNESS OF** **CHRIST**

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Discipleship Resource

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# INTRODUCTION

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

~ Ephesians 4:11-15

**T**he Bible tells us that when we first place our faith in Christ, we become literal new spiritual creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have eternal life and understand life in a profound new way! As John Newton, author of “Amazing Grace,” expresses it, “How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.” Freshly reconciled, we now understand that our holy God not only exists, but loved us while fallen sinners and brought us out of a life of darkness.

At the same time, every Christian can tell you that their understanding of God and maturity as a believer was minimal when they first believed. They can probably share many things God has taught them over the years! The Bible, in fact, instructs us that we must move beyond the very simple basics as we grow (Hebrews 6:1). The remainder of our time on earth after salvation is meant for us to grow in our understanding of the gospel. We can see this above. God calls us to maturity in our faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to go about works of service, and to speak the truth in love so that we might *attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*. That is, we are to become *like Jesus* as we mature! As Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we “are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.”

The goal of these studies is to help believers grow in maturity to become more like Jesus. As such, they depend on God’s word, as “all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (1 Timothy 3:16). By understanding God’s word, we can avoid falling victim to Satan’s lies and the “cunning and craftiness of people.” The studies are also meant to be undertaken together, with a more mature or experienced Christian leading others--preferably at least two in a group--through each lesson. As we see above, we are to be built up and mature as a *body*, so that *we all* reach unity and knowledge of Christ together. Discipleship exists only in the context of community and relationships!

Read each study together and take time to talk through the questions along the way. If you can think of an important question for any scripture or topic that seems left out, ask it! Lastly, remember that we never outgrow the gospel. The gospel saves us, and it is also transforms us. My prayer is that these studies will help others build lives centered around the gospel, growing into the image of Christ--who really is the heart of the gospel.

## **Acknowledgments**

While supreme credit goes always to God and His inerrant Word, there are very many throughout history who have shaped what’s put into these lessons. What God has shown them, they have kindly shared with others. Names which come to mind include Timothy Keller, John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Paul Washer, Charles Vogan, John Murray, John Calvin, and Martin Luther. Credit is due also to Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) ministry and the writings of Bill Bright, Roger Hershey, and others, especially the *Compass* tool. And perhaps most significant is the impact of personal mentors and friends, including Edgar Lei, JW Betts, Tom Rudelius, Larry Lin, Brian Green-Cariño, Will Poon, Gary Rosenblatt, Jon Lamers, Joel Hopkins, Ben Hutton, David Liu, and my wife Rongkui.

Should any of these folks read through these chapters and notes, they would probably recognize their ideas in them! And there are many others who God has used to teach and mold me. If you are one of them and you see your influence here, then I thank you--and please send me a message to let me know.

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# CHAPTER 1

## OUR POSITION IN CHRIST:

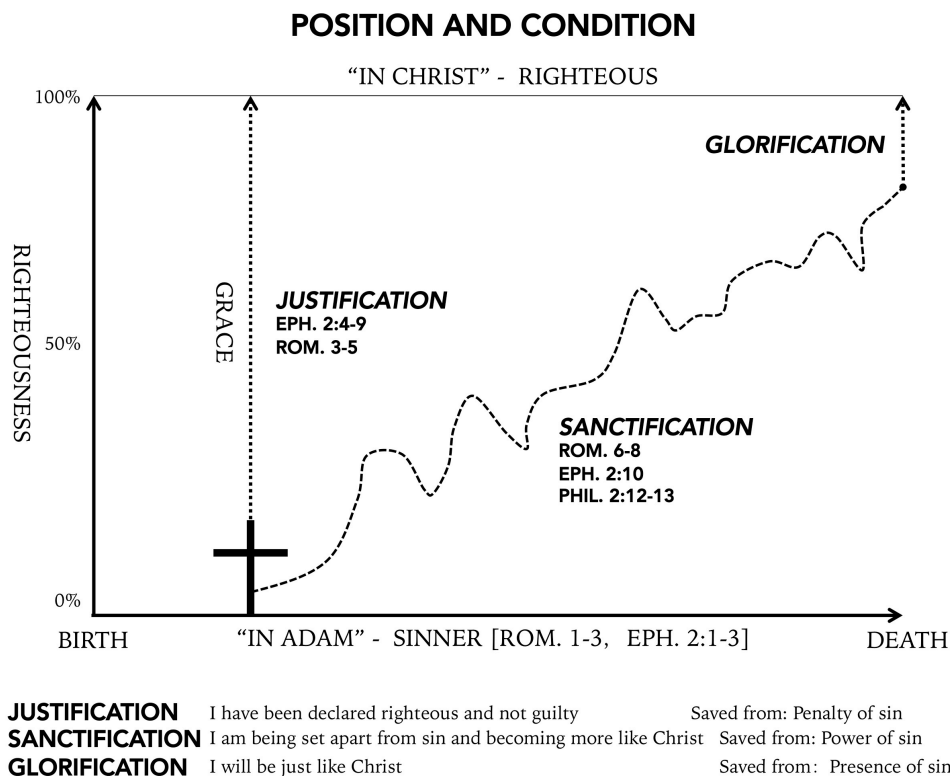
## SIN, DEATH, AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

**A**s Christians, we know the basics of the gospel--the good news of Christ. And these basics are glorious! But as Christ-followers we need to grow in maturity and understanding beyond the basics alone (Hebrews 6:1-3), learning ever more about who God is, who we are, and how the gospel changes our lives. Because faith comes from hearing the gospel, the “Word about Christ” (Romans 10:17), and with faith we receive the Spirit (Galatians 3:2) who makes us like Christ, we need to dig deeper into the Word to grow in maturity.

It’s also true that as Christians, we know God is holy, perfect, and righteous (each of these descriptors could have a study of its own!). Look at Isaiah 6:1-4 for a mere taste of how awe-inspiring God is. In this study, we’ll begin look in more Scriptural detail at the great “gap” we know exists between God’s character and our own, and how Jesus Christ “bridges the gap” and restores our relationship with the Holy Father. How is it that despite our sin, we can still *personally* know God?

### ***Getting Our Bearings***

Before we start, let’s introduce a handy diagram (designed by author and discipler Roger Hershey) that describes our lives in light of the gospel. The diagram is of course not the word of God like the Bible, but it depicts spiritually inspired truth. Take a second to study it and then see if you can summarize what’s going on. What is the graph showing? What do the title and axes mean? What do the different lines mean? Let’s take a look:



Of course that’s a lot to take in at first, but don’t worry, a general understanding is good for now. We’ll look at different parts and reference it frequently in the future. In this study, we’ll mainly consider the left part of the diagram, exploring this “0% righteousness” concept and begin to see how Christ on the cross brings us to 100% (that first vertical, dotted arrow). This part deals with our **position** before God--how He views us in judgment apart from and then in Christ.

## ***Sin, Death, and the Law***

As we see in the diagram, and probably already understand to some degree, apart from Christ--that is, before we place our faith in Christ--we have no righteousness of our own. We are sinful from the time we are born (Psalm 51:5) and our “righteous deeds” are like “filthy [menstrual] rags” (Isaiah 64:6), an extension of our own selfishness. The Bible does not mince words when talking about fallen human nature--who we *naturally* are.

*Let's read Ephesians 2:1-3 and consider the following questions:*

- 1) What is your initial reaction?
- 2) What does this say about our position apart from Christ (before believing)?
- 3) What sort of "dead" is Paul referring to?

*Now let's look at Romans 3:9-20.*

- 1) What does this passage tell us about who we are apart from Christ? Do you think you have been guilty of any of these condemnations?
- 2) Verses 10-18 are quotes. Where are they from?
- 3) What is "the law"?

Let's think about "the law" for a second. This too deserves a whole lesson, but for now, let's just touch on it. When most of us think of the "law," we think of police, the US legal system, and speeding tickets ("but officer, I..."). But for Paul and his audience, "the law" referred to the Old Testament **Law of Moses**--instructions from God given to His people through Moses at Mt. Sinai after delivering His people from slavery in Egypt. A large section of the Bible deals with the law (the term sometimes, in fact, refers to all the commands recorded by Moses in the first five books of the Bible), and it's important! We'll briefly consider its primary function here, as it deals with *our sin*.

*Re-read Romans 3:20. In addition, read Romans 5:20, 7:7-13, and Deuteronomy 31:24-28.*

- 1) What purpose does the law seem to serve?
- 2) How does it relate to sin and to death?
- 3) How can the law "increase" sin ("the trespass")?

Once we see that righteousness was never gained by observing the law (in both the Old and New Testaments), we may wonder why it was given at all. Paul anticipated this question 2000 years ago (Galatians 3:19), and hopefully we now have an answer. The law is composed of God's temporary instructions for His people on how to live and worship their king in a reflection of the heavenly kingdom we will one day be a part of. Since we are unable to live without breaking these commands (remember Romans 3!), the law therefore reveals and increases our sin and rebellion, and *shows us our need for a savior*. As we are told in Galatians 3:24, "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

So far, we've explored the negative. We've been looking at the bottom line of that diagram, exploring the fact that in our rebellion we bring literally *nothing* of worth before a perfect and holy God. In our sin we were spiritually dead and headed for an eternity in hell, separated from God.

## ***The Good News and Imputed Righteousness***

But the gospel is indeed the good news! So where is the good part? We saw part of it in Galatians 3 above. The law and the prophets testify as to our need for salvation, and so too testify as to the savior who provides it.

***Take a look at Romans 3:21-26.***

- 1) Apart from the law, where does our righteousness come from?
- 2) How does God demonstrate "justice" (NIV) in the sacrifice of Christ?
- 3) What is true of our position when we have faith in Jesus Christ?

These truths of Romans 3:21-26 are especially striking when compared to the law-based condemnation earlier in the chapter. Here we see how powerfully the law leads us to Christ--the good news of the gospel only appears *really good* when presented against the



backdrop of sin and judgment we deserved. Grace is only amazing when we know what grace is saving us from and why!

As we wrap up, let's take a closer look at our position in Christ through faith. Jesus tells us that He came "not to abolish [the law and prophets] but to fulfill them" and that "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17,20). Now maybe we can understand how Jesus fulfilled the law and prophets by being the only one to live a perfect life and remain uncondemned by the law that points us to Him, but what about that second part? We still have the reality that unless we are righteous as God is, we cannot dwell with Him (if you recall, God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden following their sin). So how can we be righteous to be in His presence for eternity?

*To answer this, let's read Romans 4:1-7, 23-25, and 2 Corinthians 5:21*

- 1) According to Gen 15:6, quoted here, where did Abraham's righteousness come from?
- 2) What does the word "credited" (or "counted") mean?

Take a second to think about this profound truth. By faith, we receive Christ's righteous, perfect character before God and He takes the curse of our sin. He takes the death owed to us, that we might live in Him. This should lead us to worship!

And this explains the meaning of the vertical arrow at the cross in our diagram. As for our *position*, how God views us in judgment, we are now at 100% righteous--entirely by faith--and justified (found not guilty). And it's not that our faith is something amazing or righteous in and of itself. It's not "having strong faith" that saves us. Consider Luke 17:5-6, where Jesus states that with "faith like a grain of mustard seed," seemingly impossible things can happen. Now of course, growing in faith is good! But even that increase in faith is an act of God's grace. Nothing of our own is inherently righteous. Not even our faith.

The righteousness we have is often referred to as **imputed righteousness**. Imputed essentially means attributed or given. It's a term that expresses the idea that righteousness is not from us. It is Christ's righteousness, attributed to us by faith, given to us in its entirety (it's an all or nothing matter) when we believe. When properly understood, this is a mind-blowing concept. That God, enthroned in splendor, sent His Son to the cross to bear our curse and give us His righteousness. That is holy love.

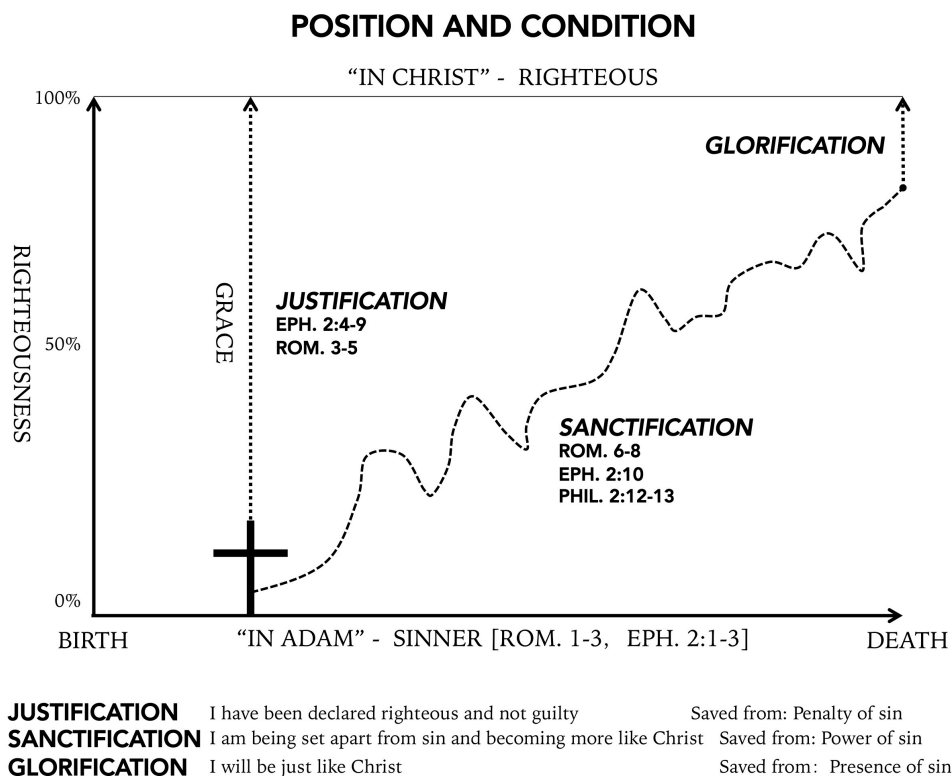
*In light of this, let's close by discussing a few questions:*

- 1) What are some ways you try to earn your standing before God with "filthy rags" rather than rest in the righteousness given to us?
- 2) Are there times you especially doubt your position of God's love and acceptance in Christ? How do you respond when realizing sin? Do you try to earn His favor back?
- 3) Satan is known as the "father of lies" (John 8:44) and "the accuser of our brothers and sisters" who "deceives" (Revelation 12:9-10). What are some lies and accusations Satan has tempted you to believe about your standing before God? What are the consequences of believing them and how can you fight them?

# CHAPTER 2

## OUR POSITION IN CHRIST: REDEMPTION

In our last study, we resolved to grow deeper in our understanding of the gospel (Hebrews 6:1-3). We spent some time unpacking our sinfulness and spiritual death, how the law highlights our failure, and how the Word points us to Christ as our savior. We also looked at the idea of **imputed righteousness**--that when we place our faith in *Christ and His work* on the cross, He receives the punishment for our sin and we receive His righteousness. Essentially, we looked at the left-hand part of our diagram, including the vertical dotted line illustrating the way we receive “100% righteousness” by faith.



Hopefully, an understanding of just how great the “gap” spanned by the cross is will lead us to worship! Today, we’ll explore additional aspects of our salvation (our **position** before God), which we’ve grouped under the term “redemption.” **Redemption** refers to taking something broken or of little worth and giving it value in exchange for payment. When God

saves us, He redeems us. These additional aspects of salvation are all part of God redeeming us to be that which we were originally made to be. We'll take a brief look at repentance, justification, and regeneration. I encourage you to explore each of these further on your own.

## **Repentance (and Faith)**

We've seen that faith in Jesus Christ and His work is critical in our salvation. What we also see in scripture is **repentance** and faith go hand-in-hand.

*Read Mark 1:14-15 and Acts 11:17-18*

- 1) What does it mean to “repent” and believe the good news? What comes to mind when you think of repentance?
- 2) Some might think that repentance is a “work” by which we are saved. How can we address that based on what we just read?

These days we often avoid the word repentance. But if we neglect the idea of turning from unbelief and idols and only talk about believing in Jesus, we are--according to Jesus himself--missing half our response to the gospel. In fact, truly believing the good news requires us to recognize sin and quit putting our faith in false hope. That is why repentance and faith come together when receiving and growing in the gospel.

*True repentance involves confessing not only our actions, but our sinful heart, unbelief, and rebellion against God--recognizing how sinful we really are.*

How have you dealt with sin in your life, both when you accepted Christ and now? Are there any excuses you make to justify your sin? (ex: “I was having a bad day...I just made a mistake”). Do you feel sorry for yourself, or do you have Godly grief (2 Corinthians 7:10)? What would true repentance and faith look like in these situations? Discuss.

## **Justification**

As Christians, **justification** is often what we think of first when thinking of salvation. That won't stop us from looking at it again here.

*Read Romans 3:25-26*

- 1) What do you think "justifies" mean?
- 2) Why did God justify us?

Justification deals with God's judgment of us. When justified, we are essentially proven right, or not guilty before God. That's odd, considering what we've seen about sin (and what we've seen of our personal sin that God reveals to us). How are we justified? "To the man who does not work but *trusts God* who *justifies* the wicked, his *faith is credited as righteousness*" (Romans 4:5). So we see, imputed righteousness--the righteousness of God credited to us (and Christ receiving our punishment)--makes justification possible. It is nothing of our own doing, none of our own works. We are found not guilty because by faith we receive the verdict Christ should receive if judged. What an amazing act of love this is!

*Tim Keller, expounding on Martin Luther's Treatise Concerning Good Works, notes that "Beneath any particular sin is this sin of rejecting Christ salvation and indulging in self salvation....All our failures to trust God wholly or to live rightly are at root idolatry--something we make more important than God."*

We may intellectually understand "justification by faith," but what are some things your heart turns to for justification besides Christ's righteousness? Do you ever try, functionally, to be your own savior? Discuss.

## **Regeneration**

You may also have heard of the phrase "born again." It's a phrase we Christians use a lot, and we see that being born again, or **regenerated**, is an aspect of our salvation.

*Read John 3:3-8 and Ephesians 2:4-9.*

- 1) Nicodemus is clearly confused by this “born again” concept. Like many of us, he focuses on physical things rather than “things above” (Colossians 3:2). What sort of rebirth is this? How would you explain it?
- 2) Where does regeneration come from? Who gives us life? Who raises us up? Why?

It is important to note that being born again is a passive process. As we see, it comes from God--specifically the Holy Spirit--when we believe. Just as the righteousness we receive through faith is “passive righteousness,” to quote Martin Luther, so our rebirth is received “passively.” Think about the word Jesus uses. *Birth*. Do you remember when you were born? Did you have a say in it? Did you earn your way out of the womb? Or did it just happen, with your mother’s labor? So our spiritual rebirth happens only with Christ’s labor and the Spirit’s gift. We also see that in redeeming us, God doesn’t just “fix us up.” We have totally new life, born again in the Spirit. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*Jesus indicates pretty clearly that this regeneration is necessary to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Have you been “born again”? Can you remember a specific time when new life was given to you? How did you know? How did it feel? And if regeneration is entirely a work of God (we make no contribution), how does this make you feel about yourself and God?

Discuss these questions.

Our **redemption** (and our **position in Christ**), we’ve seen, is multi-faceted. Jesus does “pay the penalty” for our sin when we believe, but He does so much more! Along with faith come repentance, justification, regeneration--totally new life--and as we explored last time, His righteousness imputed to us. Redemption involves restoring our value, bringing us back to right relationship and standing with God as man was created (Genesis 1:26-27) to dwell

with Him forever. As such, it is no simple concept. In fact, we're not finished! We have two more aspects of redemption to look at next time. Until then...

### ***Amazing bonus exercise!***

Read Ephesians 1 and list (or simply note) every truth you find relating to our position before God as believers in faith. What is true of who we are as believers? What promises are we assured of? Some of these truths we've discussed, some we'll unpack later. There's quite a few, and hopefully this will lead you thank and worship our loving God.

# CHAPTER 3

## OUR POSITION IN CHRIST: ADOPTION AND UNION

**T**his is our third and final study on our position in Christ. After first discussing God’s holiness and the problem of our sin and death, we looked at the idea of **imputed righteousness**, by which we gain our right standing before God. We also talked about **repentance**, **justification**, and **regeneration** as aspects of our salvation. Today we’ll explore **adoption** and our **union with Christ** and conclude with a big-picture look at God’s redemptive plan for us. While this may be our last “position in Christ” study, understanding our position in Christ is a life-long process which affects everything we will discuss from this point forward (and everything on the right side of our diagram, if you recall).

### **Adoption**

As believers, we are children of God! Once rebellious and dead in sin, we have been given new life and we live that life as **adopted** children of the Almighty Father. Let’s take a look.

*Read Matthew 12:46-50 and Galatians 3:26-29.*

- 1) We can be in Jesus’s family if we do God’s will. What did Jesus say God requires of us above all? (Hint: check out John 6:28-29)
- 2) According to Paul, how is it that we become “children of God”? How can there be “neither male nor female”?

We see then that our position before God, through faith, includes *adoption* into the family of God. As children, we are loved and accepted unconditionally by a perfect, holy Father, and we also have a huge family of spiritual brothers, sisters, and parents. Just as physical birth illustrates our regeneration in the Spirit, so too does the earthly family illustrate the profound spiritual truth of our adoption by God.



*J.I. Packer, in Knowing God, says “If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father.”*

What do you make of this thought? What are some rights and privileges that come with being adopted as a child (rather than a hired worker)? How can the ideal relationship of a child and his or her dad model our relationship with God? Discuss.

## **A Step Further: Our Union with Christ**

You may notice that because of the adoption aspect, we often refer to fellow Christians as our brothers and sisters “in Christ.” Have you thought about why we say *in Christ*? It’s even in the title of these studies. This qualification is used frequently in the New Testament, and in a few different ways, but here we’ll look at how it relates to our *union* with Christ. Connected to Him, we can join the family of God. This is a profound truth!

*Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 and Ephesians 5:28-33.*

- 1) To what does Paul compare our union with Christ?
- 2) Does this change the way you view marriage? The way you view your relationship with Christ?

*Read John 15:4-5*

- 1) What metaphor does Jesus use to illustrate our union with Him? How does this metaphor illustrate our union?
- 2) What are some results this union produces?

Minister and theologian Anthony Hoekema has noted that “Once you have your eyes opened to this concept of union with Christ, you will find it almost everywhere in the New Testament.” Look for references to this union as you read the New Testament. Aside from

the outright statements of oneness we've read, you'll see it manifested as Christ "in" us, our being "in" Christ, and Christ "with" or "united with" us. You'll even see it in some of the passages we've looked at. John Murray writes that, moreover, "Union with Christ is...the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation....It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it *underlies every aspect of redemption.*"

**Take a look at the following passages:**

- "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that *Christ may dwell in your hearts* through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:16-18).
- "But if *Christ is in you*, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10).
- "For he chose us *in him* before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.... *In him* we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:4,7).
- "If anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- "So *in Christ Jesus* you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26).
- "For if we have been *united with him* in a death like his, we will certainly also be *united with him* in a resurrection like his" (Romans 6:5).

Take a few minutes to discuss these passages. What do we see about the role of our union with Christ in our redemption? How do we become one with Christ?

In these few passages alone, we see that our union with Christ is involved in every part of redemption we've discussed and more--imputed righteousness from God, justification, spiritual regeneration, adoption, forgiveness, etc. Only by being joined with Christ the Son, as branches with a vine, can we receive His righteousness and status as a child of the Father,

and He receive our punishment for sin. If we are one with Jesus, God can judge us as He does the perfect Son. As Paul summarizes in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “No matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ *in Christ*. And so *through him* the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

We often say our faith is about “relationship with Jesus” and now we see how profound this relationship really is. It is one of *union*--like a husband and wife, but spiritual and eternal with the holy King and Lord!

## ***The Amazing Story of Redemption***

Let’s step back to creation. When God made man, He said “let us make mankind in *our* image” (Genesis 1:26). Odd that He should use say “our” and not “my,” right? The key is to remember the trinity--that God in three persons has given and received perfect love and always will. Why make man, and why in this image? According to Tim Keller in *King’s Cross*:

*“There’s only one answer. He must have created us not to get joy but to give it. He must have created us to invite us into the dance...That’s what you’re built for. You are made to enter into a divine dance with the trinity.”*

We were made to be part of the unhindered, selfless, love relationship of the trinity. Because of our sin, rebellion, and death, we lost this relationship and deserved eternal punishment apart from God in hell. The story of redemption is the story of God bringing us back, uniting us as unworthy sinners to God the Son by grace through faith. In this unity, all aspects of redemption are accomplished so that we might once again experience and give this divine love for eternity.

- 1) Have you heard of the idea of union with Christ before? If so, has anything new been introduced to you?
- 2) How does thinking about our spiritual connection with Jesus influence your view of God? Your view of yourself? Your view of Jesus? What response does it bring?

- 3) How might you live differently if you are aware that at every moment you are one with the eternal Christ, as a branch is with its vine, meant to experience and give divine love as the trinity does?

Next time, we'll look at the way our redeemed position in Christ affects who we are here in this world, where we still experience sin. Until then, let us close with song lyrics reflecting the story of creation, the fall, and redemption--the story told in the Word. May this story be always on our minds and hearts.

*At creation's birth, when we walked as one,  
Your beauty shone, like the morning sun.  
We were face to face, but you turned away,  
To become a god, bathed in foolish pride.  
You scream in chains, writhe in filthy shame,  
As creation weeps to be free again.*

*Cup of light, purge my soul. Wash me pure. Take this hate.*

*While heaven weeps, you curse the light.  
You're burning with your cold dark hate.  
At the cross I bled, bled with burning love.  
I give my flesh to feed your soul.  
Come away with me, my mourning child.  
I will heal your wounds, and dry your tears.*

*Father, I'm coming home.*

[From "Sangreal," by Synnöve]

# CHAPTER 4

## THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

*“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

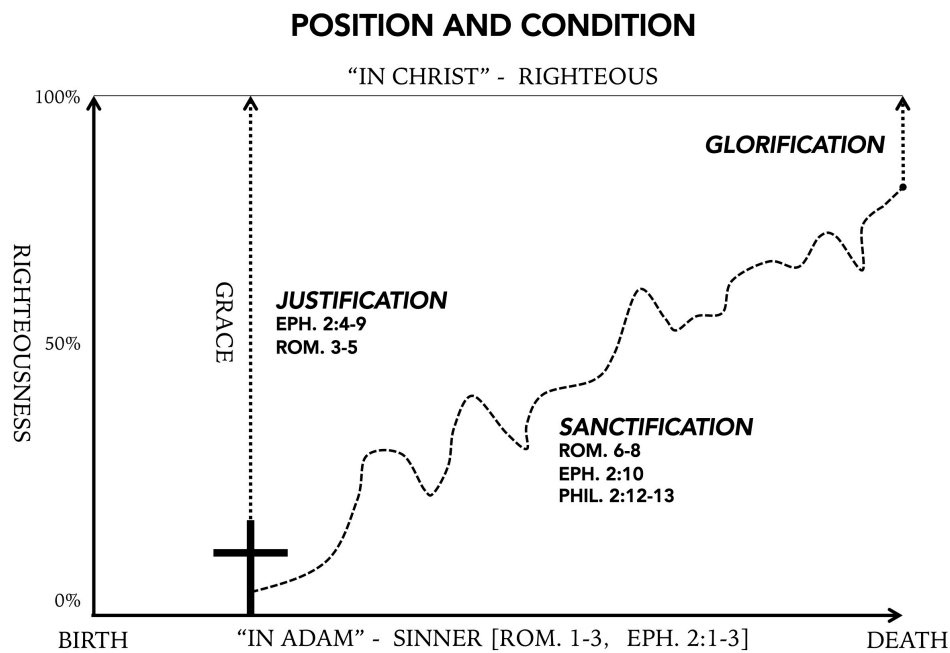
~ John 10:10, ESV

In the last three studies, we took an in-depth look on what our position in Christ is like as believers. We ended with a summary of redemption--the idea that by uniting us with His son Jesus Christ, God the Father has restored us to eternal, right relationship with Him, the way things originally were upon creation. Because of this union, Jesus on the cross takes the curse for our sin and rebellion, and we receive the righteousness of God when we believe the gospel. We have new, eternal life and will be with God for eternity!

Yet we all realize that while our *position* in Christ may be one of restored status like the Son, united to Him, we aren't perfect here on earth. We mess up, fail to trust God and find joy in Him, and put our own interests above His. We should be very aware that we sin after being saved. As Charles Spurgeon preached, “When we believe in Jesus Christ all our sins are pardoned; yet the power of sin...tarries in us, and will do so to our dying day.” At the same time, we see in John 10 that Jesus came to give us *abundant* life. How do we live this abundant life, filled with joy in knowing and obeying God?

### **Getting Our Bearings...Again**

Let's re-orient ourselves with Roger Hershey's diagram. Not inspired, but quite handy.



<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	I have been declared righteous and not guilty	Saved from: Penalty of sin
<b>SANCTIFICATION</b>	I am being set apart from sin and becoming more like Christ	Saved from: Power of sin
<b>GLORIFICATION</b>	I will be just like Christ	Saved from: Presence of sin

We’ve looked in detail at how believing in Jesus and His work brings us to “100% righteousness”—that first vertical dotted line. *In Christ*, we’re new creations judged as righteous by God. But you’ll notice a longer, much bumpier line labeled “sanctification” describes the rest of our life after salvation. This deals with our still imperfect *condition* here on earth. Once we’ve been given new life, **sanctification** means we’re set apart from sin and gradually, with ups and downs, we become more like Christ. Having received Jesus’s position as a righteous child of God, we now become more like Him in our condition here in this life. As Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18, we “are being transformed *into his image* with ever-increasing glory.”

Does this mean that once we’re eternally saved, the onus falls upon us to do everything right and become like Jesus? Hopefully you recognize that’s not the gospel—but if not, you wouldn’t be the first! Paul addressed believers in Galatia who had this idea when he said “Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by

means of the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3) Just as new life was given to us by the Spirit, our sanctification is powered by the Holy Spirit.

## **Review: The Holy Spirit**

Who, then, is the Holy Spirit? Most of us know that He is God, but the Spirit remains a nebulous--and sometimes forgotten--concept for many Christians, as evidenced by the way “He” is often referred to as “it”!

*Before moving on, discuss the following questions (and cover up the text below them when you do):*

- 1) Who is the Holy Spirit?
- 2) What role does He play in our lives?

There are volumes devoted to describing the Holy Spirit as He appears in scripture, but for now we'll say the **Holy Spirit** is *God, the third member of the trinity, whose role is to bring the presence and power of God to bear in the world.* In the Old Testament we see the Spirit of God present in the world and empowering God's people on many occasions, but the OT itself predicted a time when the Spirit of God would be present and working in a new way (as part of the *new covenant*) among believers. Isaiah 32:15, for example, predicted a time coming when “the Spirit is poured upon us from on high.” What we see is that since coming upon those in the early church in Acts, the Holy Spirit lives permanently in all believers and empowers us. As Jesus tells His disciples, “he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). This amazing truth is often referred to as the *indwelling of the Spirit*. God is actively present in us!

Here is a brief list of some roles of the Spirit in our lives as believers. He...

- Shows us our sin and need for Jesus (John 16:8-11, 1 Thessalonians 1:5)
- Gives us new life in our regeneration (John 3:6-7)
- Teaches and helps us understand truth (John 14:26, 1 Corinthians 2:12-15, Eph 1:17)
- Purifies us and produces holiness (1 Corinthians 6:11, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Gal. 5:22-23)
- Gives spiritual gifts to equip us for serving (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12)
- Assures us of salvation and the presence of God in us (2 Corinthians 1:22, 1 John 4:13)
- Guides and directs us (Acts 16:6-7, 20:22-23, Romans 8:5, Gal. 5:18)

The Spirit enables us to experience the abundant, obedient life God has for us. In fact, life change is inevitable! While we still struggle often, an absence of growth in one's life is reason to suspect true salvation never took place. This is why the apostle Paul tells us "examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

- 1) Have you thought of the Holy Spirit more as a person or as an "it"--an impersonal force? What might help you think of the Holy Spirit as a person of God?
- 2) Have you ever noticed the Holy Spirit empowering or guiding you in a particular way in your life? It could be while praying, teaching, sharing the gospel, worshiping, or some other time. How were you aware of His presence?



## **Sanctification**

It is important to understand that the process we call sanctification begins right when we first believe! From the time we're regenerated, God calls us and enables us to put our lives at His disposal and live in obedient joy. We don't wait until we're "good Christians" to do this. Let's look more at more of what the Word says about sanctification.

### ***Read Romans 6:5-18.***

- 1) Look at vv. 5-11. What does Paul say is our basis for living a holy life?
- 2) How is our life different when we are "alive in Christ"?
- 3) What does it mean for sin to not be our "master" or have "dominion" over us (v. 14)?
- 4) How can we have "freedom" in Christ yet also be "slaves to righteousness" (v. 18)?
- 5) What are some ways the Spirit has enabled you to offer yourself to God in the past? Are there any parts of your life you're still holding onto that He may be calling you to give to Him? Are there any thoughts or habits you'd like to be "set free" from?

We see that when we are saved, we are called to give our *whole life* to God as "those who have been brought from death to life" (Rom 6:13). He demands it all! And from the moment we believe, we are free from sin's "dominion." Yet we still struggle with sin and need to fight, empowered by the Spirit, to believe that with God we can change. As the Apostle Paul described himself, "Not that...I am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (Philippians 3:12). In this sense, once set apart from sin, we cooperate with God to grow more like Jesus. God has the power to change us, but our part isn't just passive--we *press on* to grow in holiness.

## ***Being Filled with the Spirit***

So what is “the Spirit-filled life”? What does it mean to be Spirit-filled? In the early church, the apostles were “filled” with the Spirit on many occasions (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:23, 4:31, 7:55, 9:17, 13:5, 9-10, and more), and Paul urges us to “[continually] be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). In these cases, the filling of the Spirit results in supernatural power to worship and to do what God desires of us for His glory. While every believer has the Spirit living (*indwelling*) in him or her, the *filling of the Spirit* is an additional process that involves surrendering control of our lives and being specifically empowered by the Spirit to grow as a believer. We can be filled with the Spirit repeatedly, on specific occasions, and also to greater and greater degrees and frequency. Bill Bright, founder of Cru, describes the spirit-filled life as “an exciting adventure” of living “constantly moment by moment, under His gracious direction.”

***What does the Spirit-filled life look like? Read Galatians 5:19-24.***

- 1) What does Paul list as products of “the flesh”? Have you been guilty of these things?
- 2) What does Paul list as “fruit of the Spirit”? Can you think of specific ways you’ve seen this fruit in your life?
- 3) Which fruit do you desire to see more of in your life?
- 4) How can we be filled with the Spirit

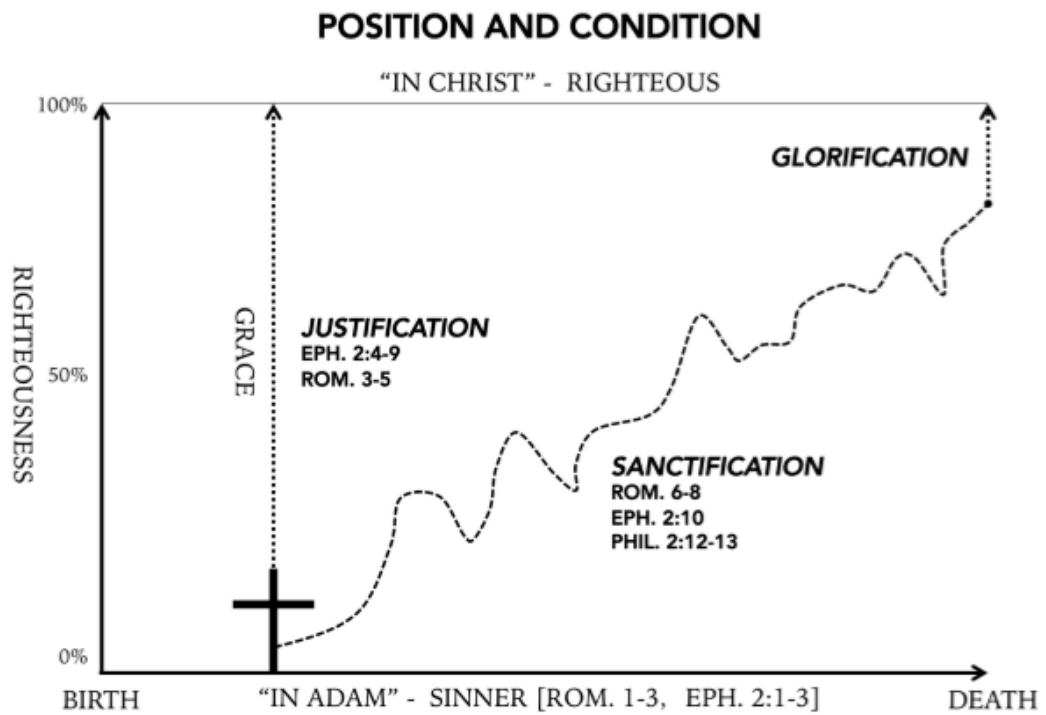
Preacher and missionary Paul Washer says “When God saves a man, He is regenerating his heart, turning him into a new creature, and *the evidence* is this: he will live like a new creature and confess Christ.” God made the world and made all of us for His glory. When we are saved and given new life, we no longer live for our own glory, but for God’s! So the apostle Paul instructs believers, “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is important that we understand our sanctification, living a Spirit-filled life for His glory, is a necessary result of our salvation and justification--and it is equally important to get the order right! We don’t merit God’s acceptance by doing good things. Jesus Christ has merited

that acceptance for us, because He is perfect. Christian progress, then, is about becoming more and more in this life *what we already are eternally* in Christ. And next time, we'll see how our new, abundant life relates to other believers in our spiritual family--*the church*.

# CHAPTER 5

## COMMUNITY AND THE CHURCH

Remember this diagram? In our last study, we looked at who the Holy Spirit is and how He empowers us in our sanctification--that long, bumpy line. While we never completely overcome sin, we live a Spirit-filled life to become more like Christ in our *condition* here on earth, living in light of our righteous, adopted *position* in Christ.



<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	I have been declared righteous and not guilty	Saved from: Penalty of sin
<b>SANCTIFICATION</b>	I am being set apart from sin and becoming more like Christ	Saved from: Power of sin
<b>GLORIFICATION</b>	I will be just like Christ	Saved from: Presence of sin

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul tells us that Jesus equips us so “the *body* of Christ may be built up until *we all* reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God

and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:12-13). There are two things to notice here. First, this sounds like sanctification--growing to become more and more like Christ. Second, this appears to be a group process. It happens with other believers, so we all grow in unity and knowledge together! As we’ll see in detail soon, God has designed us to need other people in order to grow and thrive. We first and foremost need God, and we also need each other. The Christian walk can’t be done alone.

- 1) What are some valuable relationships you’ve had? Who are you thankful for? Has God used anyone in particular to help you come to know Him or know Him better?
- 2) Do you think it’s important for Christians to stay “in community”? Why?

## ***The Biblical Example***

Far back in Genesis 2, before sin even entered the world, God noted that “it is not good that the man should be alone” (v.18)--and made Adam a companion. Because God is a relational God (one God in three persons), we were made to be in relationship both with Him and with other men and women. In the Old Testament, God’s people lived very much together--in fact, they were for the most part a distinct people group and political nation! The turbulent and often war-ridden nature of Canaan in those times, the heavily agrarian society, and specific ordinances of worship in the Law of Moses combined to make communal living a must for the Israelites. Day-to-day life revolved around relationships with others.

But what about now, in New Testament times? Things have changed, people can survive in the modern economy on their own, and we can have a personal relationship with Jesus because of His death and resurrection. Can we just live out our relationship with Jesus without other people involved, or without “going to church”? Let’s see what the New Testament says.

## **The New Testament Example**

The New Testament Greek word we usually translate as “church” is *ekklesia*, which at its root means something like “call out”--in other words, a group of people called from their individual residences and lives to assemble together. What we know as **the church**, or the “universal church,” is composed of *every Christian in the world* called out from the world to be a part of God’s people--the New Testament, New Covenant version of God’s people Israel. Jesus referred to the church a few times, and the church was officially born at Pentecost in Acts 2. Discuss the following questions:

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:1-2, Philippians 1:1.**

- 1) Who did Paul address his letters to? In general, how do you think the epistles (letters) in the NT were received and their contents made known to people?
- 2) What is the difference between “the universal church” as discussed above and a **local church**? How are they related? Is there any basis for local churches in the Bible?

Both implicit and explicit in the New Testament is the idea that God’s people should live life together and regularly assemble for scripture reading, teaching, worship, and more, all for His glory. Skimming through letters like 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus (often called the “pastoral letters”) will confirm that God even gives us some rules and regulations for what our local churches should look like! As J.I. Packer concludes, “you can’t live the real Christian life except as part of the church.”

## **The New Testament Commands**

Furthermore, the NT is saturated with instructions on how we should live relationally. The phrase “one another” is two words in English, but only one word in Greek. This word for “one another” is used *one hundred times* in the New Testament, forty-seven of which involve direct commands to Christians. Consider a few of them:

- ❑ Love one another (Jn 13:34, 15:12,17; Ro 13:8; 1 Th 3:12,4:9; 1 Pe 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11, 4:7,11; 2 Jn 5)
- ❑ Be of the same mind with one another (Ro 12:6)
- ❑ Gently, patiently tolerate one another (Ep 4:2)
- ❑ Be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another (Ep 4:32)
- ❑ Bear with and forgive one another (Co 3:13)
- ❑ Seek good for one another (1 Th 5:15)
- ❑ Through love, serve one another (Ga 5:13)
- ❑ Wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14)
- ❑ Be devoted to one another in love (Ro 12:10)
- ❑ Be subject to one another (Ep 5:21)
- ❑ **Bear one another's burdens** (Ga 6:2)
- ❑ Pray for one another (Ja 5:16)
- ❑ Confess sins to one another (Ja 5:16)
- ❑ Encourage one another daily (He 3:13)
- ❑ Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom (Co 3:16)
- ❑ Spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up on meeting together (He 10:24-25)

Are there any specific commands from the list you feel like you've failed to obey? In what ways have you fallen short? Remember that when we recognize our shortcomings we can repent, receive forgiveness in Christ, and ask the Spirit to help us do better. Can you remember any particular times when someone you know blessed you through these commands? (Ex: loved you, served you, prayed for you, admonished you, etc.).

## **Members of One Body**

The Bible frequently refers to the church as a “body.” Whose body, and what is the head? If you think back to our discussion of *union with Christ*, you’ll recall that underlying every aspect of redemption is the fact that we’re united to Christ when we’re saved. We are in Him, He is in us, and we have the same eternal relationship with the Father that the Son does. When comparing this union to marriage in Ephesians 5, Paul specifies that “Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior” (Eph 5:23). As believers, then, we are the *body of Christ*, and each of us is a part of it. You’ve probably heard this term before, but maybe you’ve never thought about where it comes from. It makes sense that as Christians we form one “body.” If every believer is united to Christ, then certainly we’ll all be united to each other as well. In fact, the apostle Paul concludes that “in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5). We really are in it together!

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.**

- 1) What metaphor is Paul using? What is his main point?
- 2) Have you ever thought of yourself as one part of a larger body? In what ways do you need the other parts? Do you suffer and rejoice with other Christians?

The 18th century preacher John Wesley once said that “‘Holy solitaires’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers.” Today as in the early church, relationship with Jesus means having relationships with other members of the body, our spiritual family. Of course, we do know God personally, and we aren’t saved by “going to church.” But we’re all united together, and if we live solitary lives there’s just no way we can live out all that God requires of us as His church, and no way we can *receive* all He intends to give us from others! Not only that--we’re called to engage with those don’t know Christ and share the



gospel with them too. So Jesus saves us to a life of community as part of His church, and also saves us to life *on mission*. More on that next time!

*Close by discussing the following questions:*

- 1) Do you, or have you in the past, had any mistrust of “the church”? Why? Have you ever thought of Christianity as a personal relationship with Jesus that doesn’t necessarily entail being part of an organized group or being subject to others? How can you reconcile your thoughts with what we just learned?
- 2) What sort of relationship do you think exists between the universal church, the local church, and a college fellowship community like Cru? Do you attend any local church? Can Cru replace a local church?

**Summary Exercise if Time Permits.**

Fill in the following chart as a group!

<p><b>LOCAL CHURCH:</b> Functions and spiritual benefits</p>	<p><b>ALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY:</b> Functions and spiritual benefits</p>	<p><b>COLLEGE FELLOWSHIP:</b> Functions and spiritual benefits</p>

# CHAPTER 6

## SHARING THE GOSPEL

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

~ Matthew 28:19-20

**T**hese words were the last Jesus spoke to His disciples in the Gospel of Matthew, right before He ascended to heaven--where He is seated at the right hand of God the Father now. It's a rather famous quote. Just think about that last part, that Jesus is always with us. How amazing is that? If you remember from our previous discussions, Christ is in heaven now but when we believe we are *united to Him*, and He really is always with all of us! So what about that first part? If Jesus's second sentence applies to us, surely the first does too. This command of Christ's is commonly called the **great commission**. Taking part in the great commission is part of what we're *saved to*, part of living a Spirit-filled life. We are called to take the gospel and share it with the world so that others can be disciples of Christ, knowing Him like we do. As the apostle Paul says, “faith comes from hearing the message...through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17).

### **What is the Gospel?**

Jesus began His earthly ministry with a call to “repent and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). So what *is* the gospel? To be Christian, we must know the gospel, but it can be difficult to summarize the message in a clear, accurate way. Furthermore, as imperfect disciples we are prone to forget the gospel ourselves on an everyday basis! The word gospel means “good

news,” so before we talk about sharing the news, let’s review what the news is and why it’s so good.

- 1) Can you summarize the gospel in under a minute? Give it a try.
- 2) What are the main points of the gospel?
- 3) How is the gospel “news”? How it different from a command? Why is it good?

## ***Why Do We Share the Gospel?***

The answer is simple in one sense, right? We share the gospel because God commands us to in His word. But there are other good, Biblical reasons for it. Consider a few of them here:

- ❑ **To glorify God.** God made us for His glory, and sharing the gospel glorifies God. We bring Him glory when we “declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). If anyone comes to Christ when we share the gospel, they can worship and praise God now too! Glorifying God is the highest and ultimate purpose to which we are called.
- ❑ **To love God.** Jesus said (quoting Deuteronomy 6:5) that the “greatest commandment” is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind” (Matthew 22:37). We know that we can love because He loved us first (1 John 4:19), and loving Him means obeying His commandments (John 14:15).
- ❑ **To love the lost.** Because Satan has “blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:4), lost people live “without hope and without God” (Ephesians 2:12). For believers the wrath of God is satisfied by the cross, but His wrath and judgment remain on those who don’t have faith in Christ. The apostle Paul wrote of the “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” in his heart for the lost who will spend eternity in hell. Like Paul, our love for the lost should motivate us to bring them the gospel of life and hope. We were once like them!

- ❑ **For our reward and joy.** Paul refers to those he led to faith in Christ as his “hope and joy and crown of boasting before the Lord at his coming” (1 Thessalonians 2:19). We should experience great joy when God uses us to bring people to Him!

As Maximus famously proclaims in the movie *Gladiator*, “What we do in this life echoes in eternity!” We love the lost and share the gospel in the time God has us on earth, and the results have eternal impact.

- 1) Which reason for sharing the gospel motivates you the most? (It’s okay to pick one--we won’t think you’re less spiritual for not choosing all of them).
- 2) Are any of these reasons new to you? Can you think of any other good motivation?

## **Successful Evangelism**

Another world for sharing the gospel is **evangelism**. You’ve probably heard that word. It’s based on a Greek word from the New Testament that essentially means “proclaiming the good news.” So what does successful evangelism look like? Maybe someone coming to faith? Crowds of people listening? Becoming Billy Graham? The following is a definition of successful evangelism that Cru has used for many years:

*Success in evangelism is taking the initiative to share Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God.*

Interesting, huh? Biblically, success doesn’t depend upon the results! What matters is sharing the gospel accurately and faithfully in the power of the Spirit (remember that the Spirit enables us to do what He calls us to). This is a critical concept for understanding evangelism.

## **Responses to the Gospel**

What can we say about the responses people have to our evangelism? Read Acts 17:19-33.

*What can we say about the responses people have to our evangelism? Read Acts 17:19-33.*

- 1) Where is Paul? Who is he sharing the gospel with?
- 2) How does Paul share the gospel?
- 3) In what different ways do his listeners respond to his message?

In just this one instance, we see that even the apostles received a variety of responses when they shared the gospel. Not all of them are what we might consider positive! Here, one group mocked Paul (or “sneered”) and called him a “babbler” (v. 18). In other cases, the apostles were scoffed at, beaten, jailed, or even killed. This sort of reaction, even when only a mild dislike, is the one we fear most. It usually drives us to feel either embarrassed, because people think we are silly for believing in God, intolerant, backwards, etc., or guilty because we’ve somehow “messed up” the evangelism opportunity. Both reactions are rooted in a failure to *leave the results to God*. Evangelism isn’t about you. It’s about God and the lost. And the lost, apart from the Spirit’s work, will always reject God. As wayward Israelites told the prophet Isaiah, “Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things...and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 30:10-11). The message of the gospel is offensive (Gal 5:11) because it confronts our sin with God’s holiness and claims Christ is the only way to God. We shouldn’t be surprised, or take it personally, or be too discouraged when people reject the gospel. We expect that, and it doesn’t mean we aren’t faithful.

Looking again at Acts 17, we see on a more positive note that this first reaction wasn’t the only one people had. Some said “we want to hear you again on this subject” (v. 32). These folks were interested, but still had questions and weren’t ready to believe. These are the sort of people we follow up with, grab lunch with, and continue to share the gospel with while

praying God brings them to faith. And finally, “some of the people became followers of Paul and believed” (v. 34). This is everyone’s favorite response, quite understandably! These new believers have been brought from death to life, and now enjoy every aspect of redemption that comes their position in Christ. They are new members of the spiritual family!

We could study evangelism in the Bible much, much more, but we’ll settle with what we’ve covered for now. As always, remember that evangelism--like any of our good works--doesn’t earn us any extra acceptance or a better standing before God. We are secure because of our position in Christ, and we work from that position when we live out the great commission, offering others the same security and hope we have. Let’s close by discussing a few questions:

- 1) Do you like sharing the gospel? What is your biggest fear regarding evangelism?
- 2) Have you shared the gospel before? If so, what sort of experiences have you had?
- 3) How can understanding the definition of successful evangelism help you as you share?
- 4) How is sharing the gospel different from saying to your non-Christian friend something like “Hey, I went to church this morning” or “Want to come to my small group?” How is each useful?
- 5) Write down the names of five to ten friends you want to share the gospel with over the next couple months. We’ll check back in a while and see how things have gone!