

## Our Dying Culture: The New Pragmatism

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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If I asked you the question, “What is the greatest problem within the evangelical church today,” how would you answer? The major crisis within evangelicalism today’s is that we have forgotten our **theology**.

### IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS OF LIBERAL CHURCHES

#### 1. *The World’s Wisdom*

The Bible could no longer be regarded as authoritative.

- A. This produces a state of uncertainty about what to believe.
- B. Churches began to embrace the outlook and moral values of the world.
- C. They began to make decisions based not on the teachings of the Bible, but as a response to the prevailing opinions of the time.

#### 2. *The World’s Theology*

- A. Human beings are **basically** good.
- B. No one is really **lost**.
- C. Belief in Jesus Christ is helpful, but not **necessary** for anyone’s salvation.

These churches, in an effort to gather the people, have redefined traditional biblical terminology:

*Sin* is no longer defined as rebellion against God and His righteous law, but rather ignorance or the oppression found in social structures.

*Jesus* is no longer the incarnate God, a divine savior who died for our salvation, but rather a mere pattern or example for living.

*Salvation* is no longer necessary for the forgiveness of sin, but rather liberation from oppressive social structures.

*Evangelism* is no longer defined as carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world, but rather working to overthrow entrenched injustice.

### 3. *The World's Agenda*

The theme of the 1964 gathering of the World Council of Churches was “The world must set the agenda.” This meant that the church’s concerns should be the concerns of the world, even to the exclusion of the gospel. If the world’s main priority was world hunger, racism, ecology, or the spread of disease, that should be the church’s priority as well.

### 4. *The World's Methods*

The three methods that God has given us to do his work are:

- A. **Participation** – Joining with God in His work
- B. **Persuasion** – 2 Corinthians 5:20
- C. **Prayer** – Petitioning God to work in and through us

These three methods, especially that of persuasion and prayer, have been jettisoned by many mainline church’s as hopelessly inadequate. When we jettison God’s ways of doing ministry, we are left to devise or adopt humanistic ministry strategies that cause the Spirit of God to depart from our efforts. One pastor has said that in his opinion, many major denominations are nothing more than real estate holding companies.

## **EVANGELICAL CHURCHES HAVE BOUGHT INTO THE WORLD'S SYSTEM**

### 1. *The World's Wisdom*

Most evangelicals believe that the Bible is God’s Word. Most would affirm that it is authoritative and inerrant. This is the “right” answer. The sad reality is that many evangelicals, just like the liberals, have also abandoned the Bible as being adequate for the challenges of our day. They don’t see it as being sufficient for winning people to Christ, so they turn to sermons, if they even call them sermons, that are driven by felt-needs and services that are designed to entertain. They don’t think the Bible is sufficient for Christian growth, so they turn to therapy groups or psychology and call it Christian counseling. They don’t think that the Bible is sufficient for making God’s will known, so they look for extra-biblical revelations. Lastly, they don’t think that the Bible is adequate for changing society, so they establish evangelical lobby groups in Washington that work to elect “Christian” congressmen, senators, presidents and other officials.

### 2. *The World's Theology*

Like the liberals, evangelicals have sadly redefined biblical terminology to fit our culture:

*Sin* has become **dysfunctional** behavior.

*Salvation* has become **self-esteem** or wholeness.

*Jesus* is an **example** of holy living more than a savior from God’s wrath.

The problem here is that sin is not a dysfunction; it is a transgression of God's law. Likewise, our major problem is not a lack of self-esteem, but rather the peril of God's wrath toward us, and what we need from God in Christ is not merely an example, but an atonement. You see Sunday after Sunday people are told how to have happy marriages and raise nice children, but not how to get right with God. This preaching, if it is divorced from clear gospel proclamation, causes people to tragically suppose that if they succeed in these areas, all is well with them even if there has been no repentance of sin.

### 3. *The World's Agenda*

What is the world's real agenda? It is happiness. This is seen often in the teaching of prosperity preachers, who claim that God's number one desire is that people be wealthy and feel satisfied. This misguided understanding of God's priorities or desires is also seen in preaching that exemplifies the good life as being a valid Christian goal while failing to address the sins of living for yourself instead of the glory of God.

Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.  
*Exodus 34:14*

I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.  
*Isaiah 42:8*

### 4. *The World's Methods*

We see this evidenced by the trending emphasis on numerical growth, bizarre approaches to evangelism, and pastors who increasingly tone down the "hard edges" of biblical truth in order to attract people to their services.

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| 1. The air conditioning feels great.                  | 6. You can sleep in and still make it to Church.        |
| 2. Coffee and goodies for everyone after the service. | 7. Childcare and children's church provided.            |
| 3. The music is upbeat and easy to sing.              | 8. Free parking!  |
| 4. You get to meet some really neat people.           | 9. You can go to the beach and still make it to church. |
| 5. The sermon is always relevant to everyday life.    | 10. You will discover an awesome God who cares for you. |

## **OUR POSTMODERN WORLD**

The dominant philosophy of today's generation is relativism - the **rejection** of absolutes.

If truth is relative, as the majority of people living in our age believe, then one idea is as good as another and the only criteria for choosing one course of action over another is:

1. **Pragmatism** – Does it accomplish what we want?
2. **Pleasure** – Do we feel good after we have done it?

Evidences:

People no longer agree or disagree, instead, they either “like” or “dislike”. We no longer ask the question, “What do you think about this?” We ask, “How do you feel about this?” People are no longer guided by principle; they are guided only by what they prefer. In such a climate, the only remaining virtue is tolerance.

Recent polls by sociologists George Gallup Jr., and George Bara reveal that the majority of “evangelicals” no longer believe in absolute truth:

1. 76% believe that human beings are, by nature, good.
2. 86% believe that in salvations, “God helps those who help themselves.”

Gene E. Veith, who writes both for World Magazine and Ligonier’s Table Talk, describes the impact of our postmodern times on two things: 1. The content of our preaching and 2. The church growth movement:

*In a “mega-shift” away from the classic Protestant theology, many evangelicals are proclaiming a touchy-feely, therapeutic god who is light years away from the Holy One of Israel. This is a god of tolerance, who condemns no one and who can be reached by many different paths. Instead of the forgiveness of sins, the mega-shift preachers offer the gospel of good self-image and earthly success through positive thinking.*

*Often accompanying mega-shift theology is the church growth movement, which seeks to build mega-churches by adjusting Christianity to the desires of the culture. Doctrine does not go over well in a age of relativism, so in order to attract new members, theological content must be minimized. Nor do people wish to hear about sin, so the church must cultivate an atmosphere of moral tolerance. Since people choose their religious beliefs not so much on the basis of whether they are true but whether they “like” the particular church, the life of the congregation must be made as pleasant and undemanding as possible. The exaltation of the pleasure-principle means that worship services above all must be entertaining. The exaltation of the will means that the customers must be given what they want.*

Veith says that Christianity thrives “not by trying to offer people what they already have, but by offering them what they desperately lack, namely, the word of God and salvation through Jesus Christ.

## WHAT IS THE ANSWER

### 1. *Scripture Alone (sola Scriptura)*

When the Reformers used these words, they were expressing their concern for the Bible's authority. They were saying that the Bible alone is our ultimate authority. Sola Scriptura has been called the formal principle of the Reformations, meaning that it stands at the very beginning and thus gives form and direction to all that Christians affirm. The question that this doctrine is seeking to answer is, is God's Word sufficient? Do we really believe that in this book God has given us all that we need for life and godliness? Unfortunately, many evangelicals, though they would claim the sufficiency of Scripture, effectually repudiate their claim by thinking that other things need to be brought in to accomplish what the Bible cannot do. Consider these important areas of the church's work:

Evangelism: Do we need sociological techniques to do evangelism? Must we attract people to our churches by showmanship or entertainment?

Sanctification: Do we need psychology and psychiatry for Christian growth?

Discerning God's Will: Do we need extra-biblical signs or miracles for guidance? Does God speak by personal revelations or "in our hearts"?

Impacting Society: Is the Bible's teaching adequate for achieving social progress and reform?

### 2. *Christ Alone (solus Christus)*

The church of the middle ages began to add human achievement to the work of Christ. Christ was definitely a part of salvation, even the major part, but it was taught that salvation was added to by human merit, especially the merit of the saints. These saints were said to have been so exceptionally holy that they had accumulated masses of merit that could be applied to lesser believers by the sacraments. The church was able to effect salvation by tapping into this "treasury of merit." It was the work of God plus the work of man.

The Reformers sought to repudiate this heresy by affirming "Christ alone." They proclaimed that Christ accomplished salvation once for all by sinless life and substitutionary atonement. Christ alone is the basis for our justification and any gospel that fails to acknowledge that or denies it is a false gospel that cannot save.

### 3. *Grace Alone (sola gratia)*

This means that humans have no claim on God; He owes us nothing except just punishment for our sins. Therefore his saving of sinners is by His free pleasure (Psalm 115:3). God is not constrained by any outside persuasion to save sinful men. By insisting on "grace alone" the

Reformers were denying that human methods, techniques, or strategies in themselves could ever bring anyone to faith. It is grace alone expressed through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ, releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from death to spiritual life.

#### 4. *Faith* Alone (*sola fide*)

Martin Luther said, “Justification is by faith alone” was the article by which the church stands or falls. The Reformers called justification by faith Christianity’s “material principle,” because it involved the very matter or substance of what a person must understand and believe to be saved. Justification is the act of God by which He declares sinners to be righteous because of Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. It is important to remember that we must not put our faith in our faith. We must put our faith in the person and work of Christ. Snorkeling Illustration.

#### 5. To God Alone be the *Glory* (*solī Deo gloria*)

There are many reasons that churches have departed from the Reformation gospel. We have become preoccupied (obsessed) with the culture, consumer minded, and we have recast the gospel in worldly terms that appeal to unbelievers, but the chief reason is that we have forgotten God and are not living for His glory. We have forgotten the meaning and importance of the essential doctrines that the Word of God unashamedly proclaims and the church rest upon.

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

### **WHAT CAN WE DO NOW**

1. *We must recognize and understand the problem.*
2. *We must repent of this sin.*
3. *We must recover the historic Christian faith.*

## Our Dying Culture: The Pattern of This Age

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Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

*Romans 12:2*

Two key words: Conform (form, mold, shape) and World (age in which you live),  
Literally: Do not be **shaped** by the thinking of the **age** in which you live.

This is a natural follow up to last week's study of the world's pattern...

### **1. SECULARISM: "THE COSMOS IS ALL THAT IS"**

If there is any word that best describes the worldview of our culture, it is secularism. Secularism is an umbrella term that includes a number of other "isms," such as humanism, relativism, materialism, and pragmatism. The word secular comes the closest to what Paul is talking about in Romans 12:2 when he refers to, "this world." The English word secular is derived from the Latin word *seaculum*, which means "age," Paul's exact word in the Greek. Paul is saying, "Do not be secular in your worldview."

Secularism is the philosophy that sees nothing **beyond** this world. If we think in terms of our existence here, it means operating within the limits of life on earth. If we think in terms of time, it means disregarding the eternal and thinking only of the "now." A very popular phrase that has been advanced recently, primarily by the Hip Hop industry, is "You only live once," YOLO for short. If there is nothing more than the here and now, and happiness is my ultimate goal, why would anyone worry about God or righteousness, or sin, or judgment, or salvation. Instead of being conformed to this world, we are to see all things as relating to **God** and **eternity**. If we are to have a modern reformation, we must, by God's grace, learn to think biblically.

### HOW IS SECULARISM REFELCTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- Secularism finds expression in our churches when we aim for immediate, visible success rather than trusting God while we do things His way and await His invisible, spiritual blessings.
- Avoid theology or any "God-talk" that would turn off the unsaved.
- We must make ourselves as worldly as possible so the lost feel at home.

## 2. HUMANISM: “YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD”

It should be said that just as there is a proper concern for secular things, there is also a proper kind of humanism. We call this humanitarianism. People who care for other people are humanitarians. Humanism, on the other hand is looking at people, particularly ourselves **apart** from God. Instead of looking at people as creatures made in God’s image whom we should love and show care for, humanism sees man as the center of everything. Humanism says that everything revolves around **man** and is for his glory.

Where does humanism lead? It leads to deification of self, and ultimately a growing disregard for other people. If humanism is the worldview that man is at the center of everything, and I deify myself (make my self a little God), then you are just an obstacle to me getting my pleasure and my glory. In deifying self, humanism actually deifies nearly **everything** but God. Think back to Romans 12:2. We are not to conform any longer to the pattern of this world. Don’t put yourself at the center.

### HOW IS HUMANISM REFLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- If we cannot talk about God, Christ, eternal life, judgment, or salvation and the world is all about man, we must make man the center of our messages.
- We preach “felt-need” messages in which the “audience” is instructed about how to overcome failure, grief, or depression, raise nice families, and be happy – but not how to get right with an offended God.
- We teach people to ask the question, “What’s in it for me?” when they come to church, and to evaluate what they experience by that standard.

## 3. RELATIVISM: “A MORAL MORASS”

Relativism assumes that there is no God and therefore there are no **absolutes** in any area of life. Everything is up for grabs. This is the prevailing mindset of the day, everybody seems to believe this. Think about education according to relativism? You can teach somebody a skill: how to drive a truck or write software, but you cannot teach them to discern error from truth. Question: Could a relativist pass an algebra or chemistry class?

### HOW IS RELATIVISM REFLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- Because truth doesn’t exist, we don’t proclaim truth anymore.
- Instead we “share.” We base our words on the feelings of our listeners.
- We fall into this mindset when we speak of the gospel as “what it means to men” or what it has done for me.”
- What I feel or believe is not the most important thing.

#### 4. MATERIALISM: "THE MATERIAL GIRL"

If the cosmos is all that there ever has been, is currently, or ever will be, then nothing exists except that which is material, and if there is any **value** to be found in life, it must be in material terms. Materialism says, be as healthy as you can, live as long as you can, get as rich as you can. Accumulate, accumulate, accumulate, because your value is wrapped up in what you have.

How different is Christ! He was born into a poor family, was placed in a borrowed manger at His birth, never had a home or bank account of His own. He said of Himself, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). If there was ever a person who operated on the basis of values above and beyond the world in which we live, it was Christ.

I think about two other verses that pertain to materialism:

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life **does not** consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:2

##### HOW IS MATERIALISM REFLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- Since everything is regarded as a product to be sold, we try and sell the gospel.
- Church growth theorists hold seminars in which pastors are trained to think of the masses as their market and gospel as something to be attractively packaged.
- We see this in the marketing of Bibles in every color shape and size.

#### 5. PRAGMATISM: "IT WORKS FOR ME"

Pragmatism is the philosophy that measures truth by its **utilitarian** value. The only way to determine what is true is by determining what **works**. It is probably safe to say that nothing is more characteristic of American thought and life than pragmatism. The chief force behind pragmatism in our culture was the industrial revolution. The goal was to find the fastest, least expensive way of producing products and getting them into the hands of the consumer. This mentality has had a powerful influence on the church.

##### HOW IS PRAGMATISM REFLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- The claim that "it works for me" seems to justify almost any belief even if it has no biblical foundation.
- As far as evangelism and church growth strategies are concerned, anything is justified as long as it brings people into the church.

## 6. MINDLESSNESS: “AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH”

Mindlessness is the **inability** or **unwillingness** to look at life in a thoughtful way. We have been called to renew our minds. There are a number of causes for mindlessness, many that we have discussed already – materialism, the fast pace of modern life, philosophical skepticism... We won't think about much, at least that has any real value, if all we are concerned about is earning money. We won't think deeply if we are always rushing around and are too busy to think. We won't think at all if we believe that thinking is not worthwhile.

Perhaps the greatest cause of our mindlessness **television**. What is wrong with television? Is it that it shortens our attention spans? Is it that it glorifies violence and hypes immorality? The chief problem with television is that undermines and eventually destroys our ability to **think**. Television discourages reflection, tells us what we already know, relies on instant accessibility, reminds us of something else, and reflects the desires of self. It doesn't develop great minds, and even more detrimental, it forms people who are incapable of meaningful thought, especially the claims of Christianity.

When we read something, we are **required** to think. We are not necessarily swept along by the words we read. We can analyze, ponder, weigh, compare, contrast, and disagree. We can reread a paragraph if we don't understand its argument. We can look up vocabulary that we don't know. We can challenge conclusions. We don't cheer on a well-written sentence or applaud a powerful paragraph. Written words promote thinking. The better people read and the more often they read, the better and longer they can think! What does television give us? It gives us **amusement**. “a” meaning “not” and “muse” meaning “to think”

### HOW IS MINDLESSNESS REFLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES

- Church needs to be entertaining, you can't just read the Bible, we need videos, dramas, skits, etc...
- We pipe church through the television to people who don't desire to “assemble” with other believers.

## YOUR MIND MATTERS

What is the answer? Romans 12:1-2

## Scripture Alone

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Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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### THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD'S WORD

The most serious issue facing the church today is a denial of the Bible's **sufficiency**.

*Is it possible to believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and yet neglect it and repudiate it just because we think that it is not sufficient for today's tasks and that other [sources] need to be brought in to accomplish what [it lacks]? This is exactly what many evangelicals and evangelical churches are doing.*

Three great passages that deal with sufficiency of scripture: Psalm 19; Matt 4; and 2 Tim 3. The first contrasts the written word with God's general revelation. The second shows how Jesus used the Bible to overcome temptation. The third is Paul's advice to Timothy in view of the terrible times that are coming (are here). Each stress that the Word of God alone is sufficient for these challenges.

*Psalm 19 – Contrasts God's written Word with His general revelation.*

The law of the LORD is *perfect*, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is *sure*, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are *right*, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is *pure*, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is *clean*, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are *true*, and righteous altogether. More to be *desired* are they than gold, even much fine gold; *sweeter* also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant *warned*; in keeping them there is great *reward*. *Psalm 19:7-11*

The revelation of God in nature is wonderful (v. 1-6), but it is limited. By contrast, the revelation of God in Scripture is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, desired, sweeter, and rewarding!

*Matthew 4 – Shows how Jesus used the Word of God to overcome temptation.*

Man shall not live by bread alone... *Deut 8:3*

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test... *Deut. 6:16*

You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve... *Deut. 6:13*

Jesus didn't reason with Satan... he didn't resort to supernatural power... He did not ask God for a special sign or angelic intervention. Jesus knew the Bible, He stood on it, and He used it forcefully.

*2 Timothy 3 – Communicates Paul's warning to Timothy in view of difficult days he saw coming.*

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 2 Timothy 3:2–4

Interesting to note what Paul says right on the heels of this statement... He says, "Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people." 2 Timothy 3:5

This cannot be referring to pagans. Paul would have never described the world as having a "form of godliness." Think about how Paul describes the pagan of Romans 1. He doesn't refer to them as having a "form of godliness," he refers to them as unrighteous, truth suppressors. So who must Paul be referring to in 2 Timothy 2:5? Boice posits that he must be referring to the church, or at least professing Christians. Boice writes, "The problem that Paul is describing is not that the world will be evil in the final days before Christ's return, but that the church will be like the world, as it is today."

What do we find Paul recommending that Timothy do in these terrible days? He is not encouraging him to think of something new strategy, but rather exhorting Timothy to use the Word because the Bible is sufficient even for terrible times like these.

## **1. GOD'S WORD IS SUFFICIENT FOR **EVANGELISM****

The only way that the Holy Spirit works to regenerate lost men and women is through the **Word of God**.

Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 1 Peter 1:23

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:14–17

Jesus believed that faith comes by hearing. Mark, in his gospel, introduces Jesus with these words:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, *proclaiming the gospel of God*, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." *Mark 1:14–15*

And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was *teaching*. *Mark 1:21*

And they were astonished at his *teaching*, for he *taught* them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. *Mark 1:22*

And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new *teaching* with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." *Mark 1:27*

What is the point? The point is that Jesus had come as a preacher. Look a little further at verses 30-38.

[30] Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. [31] And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. [32] That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. [33] And the whole city was gathered together at the door. [34] And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. [35] And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. [36] And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, [37] and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." [38] And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." *Mark 1:30–38*

Why did Jesus refuse to carry on a healing ministry? It was because He knew that if He allowed the miracles to eclipse the teaching, the countryside might soon be filled with thousands of fit and healthy people, who despite their physical health were spiritually destitute. On the other hand, if Jesus focused on preaching the gospel, many, despite their less than perfect health, would repent and believe.

We want the church to remember that there is something worse than death and something better than human flourishing. If we hope only for renewed cities and restored bodies in this life, we are of all people most to be pitied. *Kevin DeYoung (What is the Mission of the Church)*

## 2. GOD'S WORD IS SUFFICIENT FOR **SANCTIFICATION**

There are two prevailing thoughts as to how Christians are to pursue sanctification:

1. **Methodologically** - Do these 3 things to become holy...
2. **Experientially** - Now you need some second work of grace, to be baptized by the Holy Spirit...

Paul's "method" for sanctification is **biblical doctrine**. That is, to live as Christians we must know what God has done for us in salvation. Then, because we know what God has done for us, we are to apply these truths to our daily lives.

In other words, we are to let the **indicatives** of God's Word move us to the **imperatives**.

[1] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? [3] Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. [5] For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin. [8] Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. [9] We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. [10] For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. [11] So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. [12] Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

*Romans 6:1-13*

For Freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. *Galatians 5:1*

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called... *Ephesians 4:1*

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek things that are above, where Christ is... set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. *Colossians 3:1-2*

Do you know why we see such immature even sinful behavior among Christians today? It is because they are not being taught what God has done to them and for them when He saved them. Our churches are **immature** because pastors are not teaching Bible **doctrines**.

### 3. GOD'S WORD IS SUFFICIENT FOR **GUIDANCE**

How are we to seek God's guidance in our lives as Christians? Do we wait for a sign or a voice? That is **mysticism**. Sometimes you hear someone say, "I prayed about it and God told me to..." God has given us all the guidance we need in His **word**!

God's word is replete with Guidance. As a matter of fact, He has told us that His word has supplied us with everything that we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

- It is God's will that we have no other **God's** before Him. *Ex. 20:3*
- It is God's will that we do not worship Him by the use of **images**. *Ex. 20:4*
- It is God's will that we do not **misuse** His name. *Exodus 20:7*
- It is God's will that we **honor** our parents and the authority over us. *Ex.20:12, Rom. 13:1-2*
- It is God's will that we do not **take** another human life. *Ex. 20:13*
- It is God's will that we are **faithful** to our wives and to our husbands. *Ex. 20:14*
- It is God's will that we use our tongues to proclaim truth instead of **lies**. *Ex. 20:16*
- It is God's will that we don't inordinately **desire** what doesn't belong to us. *Ex. 20:17*
- It is God's will that as believers, we **love** one another. *Jn. 15:12*
- It is God's will that we be **holy**. *1 Thess. 4:3*
- It is God's will that we should **pray**. *1 Thess. 5:17*
- It is God's will that we not **conform** to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of our mind. Why, so that we can test and approve what God's will is. *Rom. 12:1-2*

In areas about which the Bible doesn't explicitly speak, we Pray for wisdom and then are **free** to act as we think best, knowing that God who cares for us will keep us in His providential care. This is assuming that we are obeying God and seeking to live a godly life.

This does not mean that God does not have a detailed, definitive plan for our lives in all areas. He does! But it does mean that we do not have to **know** God's plan in advance.

## *Solus Christus: Christ Alone*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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When you think about the phrase "Christ Alone" what comes to mind? Justification because of Christ alone means that Jesus has done the necessary work of salvation utterly and **completely**, so that no works performed by man, no merit on the part of man, and no merit of the saints can add to His completed work. Titus wrote, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." *Titus 3:5*

Any attempt to add to Christ's perfect finished work on the cross is a **perversion** of the gospel and in fact is no gospel at all. Paul said that adding to the gospel has devastating consequences:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. *Galatians 1:6-9*

To proclaim Christ alone is to proclaim Him as the Christian's one and only sufficient **Prophet**, **Priest**, and **King**. We need no other prophets to reveal God's Word or will. We need no other priests to mediate God's salvation and blessing. We need no other king's to control the thinking and lives of believers.

### **THE CROSS AT THE CENTER**

It is **impossible** to overstate the importance of the Cross – it is central to the Bible and therefore to Christianity. Apart from the cross we have no hope and we stand condemned in our sin. Let's take a brief survey of the centrality of the Cross in the Bible.

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. *Genesis 3:15*

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. *Genesis 12:3*

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53:5–6*

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. *Zechariah 12:10*

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. *Malachi 4:2*

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." *Matthew 1:21*

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" *John 1:29*

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. *Hebrews 9:27–28*

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.  
*Revelation 1:5–6*

There are two truths about the essence of the Cross that we must understand:

1. There is great **simplicity** in the Cross.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. *1 Corinthians 15:3*

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

2. The full measure of the Cross will always lie greatly **beyond** our exhaustive comprehension.

One writer has said that the Cross is "a **pool** in which a child can wade" as well as "an **ocean** in which an elephant can swim." We can begin to see the complexity of the Cross when we think about the words that are commonly used to explain it: substitution, sacrifice, satisfaction, atonement, expiation, propitiation, purchase,, redemption, ransom, mediation, and

reconciliation. Of those words, the three words that are most essential for understanding what the Cross is about are **satisfaction**, **sacrifice**, and **substitution**. We will spend the rest of our time this morning looking at the work of the Cross through these three lenses.

## THE CROSS AS SATISFACTION

The word satisfaction, as it pertains to Christ's work on the Cross, has to do with the character of God which we have offended. It has to do with our sin. To make satisfaction means to make reparation for **damage** that has been done. Our sin has violated God's law and His honor and therefore it is necessary that laws demands and the honor of the infinitely glorious God be satisfied. In other words, God cannot just sweep our sin under the rug. James Montgomery Boice says, "We cannot understand the Cross until we take God's honor seriously." Another way to say that is to say, "You cannot see the Cross as something done for you until you see the Cross as something caused by you."

Anselm of Canterbury, who was the archbishop of England in 1093, made a major contribution to theology when he wrote his masterful work *Cur Deus Homo?* or "Why the God-Man?" In this book Anselm set out to explain the doctrine of the Atonement. He did so by explaining sin in terms of an infinite offense by man against God's honor. He said, "Nothing is less tolerable in the order of things, than for the creature to take away the honor due to the Creator and not to **repay** what he takes away." In other words, our sin against God is infinitely grievous, but it is also infinitely personal to God. We have not sinned against an inanimate object or an impersonal being. We have sinned against the living God and payment must be made for our sin. We have incurred a sin debt and God's righteous character demands that satisfaction be made. Anselm, speaking about our sin debt said:

*The debt was so great that, while man alone owed it, only God could pay it, so that the same person must be both man and God. Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of His person, so that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be [found] in a person who could... The life of this man was so sublime, so precious, that it can suffice to pay what is owing for the sins of the whole world, and infinitely more.*

Martin Luther expressed the Cross as satisfaction this way:

*Since all of us, born in sin and God's enemies, have earned nothing but eternal wrath and hell so that everything we are and can do is damned, and there is no help or way of getting out of this predicament...therefore another man had to step into our place, namely Jesus Christ, God and man, and had to render satisfaction and make payment for sin through His suffering and death.*

In order for us to understand the Cross we must begin by considering the **seriousness** of sin.

## THE CROSS AS SACRIFICE

Sacrifice has to do with satisfying God's **wrath**. We have personally offended God. He is angered by our sin, and His wrath must be turned aside if we are to be reconciled to Him. We use the theological term **propitiation** to describe the turning away of God's wrath. Propitiation carries the basic idea of appeasement, or satisfaction. Let's look at propitiation in a few texts:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. *Romans 3:23-25*

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. *Hebrews 2:14-17*

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. *1 John 2:1-2*

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

In our post modern world and secular culture, the idea of propitiation is not popular. As a matter of fact some modern thinkers think that the concept of propitiation is inappropriate. They say, "God isn't angry; He doesn't need to be appeased. He has shown us that He is a God of love." William Neil, a liberal theologian says:

*[Those who hold to] the "fire and brimstone" school of theology, who revel in ideas such as that Christ was made a sacrifice to appease an angry God, or that the Cross was a legal transaction in which an innocent victim was made to pay the penalty for the crimes of others, a propitiations of a stern God... are not biblical Christianity.*

How can anyone informed person say that the anger and wrath of God are not biblical themes? The Bible teaches - from **Genesis** to **Revelation** - that it is precisely the wrath of God that is our problem. Propitiation and sacrifice both teach us that God's wrath must be dealt with.

In ancient pagan religions, as in many religions today, the idea of man trying to appease God by bringing Him various gifts and sacrifices was common. But in the Bible propitiation always refers to the work of God, not of man. God, out of His great love for sinners, provides the way by which His wrath against sin can be averted (Romans 5:8). We are utterly **incapable** of satisfying God's justice except by spending eternity in hell. The only satisfaction, or propitiation, that could be acceptable to God and that could reconcile Him to man had to be made by Himself. For that reason, God in human flesh "gave Himself as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). God Himself **placates** His own wrath against sin in the person and work of Christ!

This brings us to one of the most beautiful pictures of the work of Christ: the ark of the covenant. The ark was kept within the Most Holy place of the tabernacle and was the focal point of Israel's worship. The ark was a wooden box about a yard long, covered with gold, and contained the stone tablets of the law that Moses had received from God on Mount Sinai. The ark had a cover that was called the mercy seat. Upon the mercy seat, at each end, facing each other were two statues of cherubim (angels) whose wings were stretched out over the ark. In a symbolic way, God was imagined to dwell above the ark, between the outstretched wings of the cherubim.

The ark was a picture of judgment. What God saw when he looked down upon the inhabitants of earth was the law of Moses which each of us has broken. He sees that He must act toward us in judgment to uphold His righteous character. God cannot ignore sin, he cannot turn a blind eye, He cannot sweep it under the rug and pretend that it never happened. Sin must be punished. That was the declaration in the Garden of Eden and it still stands in Romans 6:23.

This is where the mercy seat comes in. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and make propitiation for the people's sins. First, the high priest would offer a sacrifice in the courtyard of the tabernacle for his sins and the sins of his family. He would then take the blood of a second animal into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. Now, as God looks down from heaven between the outstretched arms of the cherubim, He sees not the broken law of Moses, but the blood of an innocent substitute. He sees that punishment has been meted out, propitiation has been made, and His wrath has been appeased. God, on behalf of Christ's spilled blood, saves all who come to Him through faith in that perfect sacrifice.

## THE CROSS AS SUBSTITUTION

The idea behind the word substitution is that we need a **mediator**. What is a mediator? A mediator is someone who comes between two parties in order to represent each to the other for the purpose of reconciliation. This is what we desperately need. We need Christ's atoning work to stand between us and a Holy God. It is Jesus' mediatorial work that makes our **justification** possible. Let's look at a few texts that point us to Christ's substitutionary work:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.  
*1 Timothy 2:5*

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. *Hebrews 8:6*

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. *Hebrews 9:15*

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

The early church Father Irenaeus expressed substitution by saying, "For the sake of His infinite love He [Jesus] has become what we are in order that He might make us entirely what He is." Now, we have to be careful here that we cannot reduce Jesus' work merely to His death on the Cross. Make no mistake this is the center of the gospel message, but it is only half of what is necessary for our salvation. Theologians have often spoken of Jesus' work in terms of His active and passive obedience.

**Active obedience** – Christ fulfilled the laws demands and in therefore able to impute righteousness to sinners accounts.

**Passive Obedience** – Christ's substitutionary death on the Cross in sinners place.

In Romans 4, Paul explains this doctrine by showing us two biblical examples of people who were saved: Abraham, the greatest of the patriarchs; and David, the greatest of the kings. In the case of Abraham, Paul refers to Genesis 15:16, writing, "What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3). There you can see the Active obedience applied to Abraham in the imputation of Christ's righteousness to Him. In the case of Dave, Paul refers to Psalm 32:1-2 writing, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him" (Romans 4:7-8). It is because of this two-fold transaction that we, who are sinners, are able to stand forgiven and clothed in Righteousness before a holy God.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. According to the Bible, **Calvary** and not Bethlehem is the center of Christianity.

The Bible teaches that the reason for the incarnation is that a God-man was required to die for our salvation.

2. If the death of Christ on the Cross is the true focal point of Christianity, then there can be no **gospel** without the Cross.

The good news is not just that God became a man, or that God has spoken in Christ to reveal the right way to live. The good news is that our sin has been dealt with because Jesus has suffered its penalty as our representative!

3. Just as there can be no gospel without the atonement, so also there can be no **Christian life** without it.

Apart from Christ's atonement, religion, even the Christian religion, becomes a sordid type of self-deification. Jesus' death on the Cross becomes for the Christian an example of the kind of self sacrifice that we should be making. It leads us to give all that we have to Christ. Isaac Watts, the 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn writer understood this truth and he penned these words:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

## *Sola Gratia: Grace Alone*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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What comes to mind when you think about the phrase "grace alone"? When the Reformers spoke about "grace alone" (*sola gratia*), what they meant is that sinners have absolutely no claim upon God. In other words, God **owes** us nothing but punishment for our sins, and if He chooses to save anyone, which He graciously does, it is only because it pleases Him to do so and for no other reason. Do you remember what Paul said in Romans 11:33-36:

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

What are some ways that you can think of that professing evangelicals might undermine the grace of God? Evangelicals undermine and deny the doctrine of grace alone by:

1. Insisting that humans are **basically** good.
2. Presumptuously thinking that God must **owe** everyone a chance to be saved.
3. Falsely thinking that if we are saved, it is because of our **own** good decision to receive Christ.

One of the reasons that the doctrine of election is opposed by so many is because it doesn't seem **fair** to them. But the moment that we introduce the doctrine of fairness, we introduce a standard by which God has to save or at least give everyone an equal chance of being saved - at this point we no longer have grace. If God were motivated only by what is right, without any consideration of grace made possible by the work of Christ, we would all be **condemned** to spend an eternity in Hell. Paul tells us in Romans 3:10-11, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." We will look back at the verse in a few minutes...

Grace is the most amazing thing in the universe. The problem is that, like all familiar things, grace has lost its ability to **enthrall** us. J. I. Packer once said, "Amazing grace has for many become "boring grace." Why is this? Packer suggests that it is because of a failure to understand four great truths that the doctrine of grace presupposes:

1. The **sinfulness** of sin.
2. Man's spiritual **inability**.
3. God's **judgment**.
4. God's **sovereign** freedom.

## THE SINFULNESS OF SIN

It is sad, harmful, and even characteristic of sin not to recognize how serious it is and to try and excuse it by treating it lightly. The more we understand the holiness of God, the more we will recognize the seriousness of sin. The tax collector in Luke 18:13 didn't take sin lightly. He cried out, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." Turn over to Psalm 51 and let's look at an Old Testament example of a man who understood the seriousness of sin.

Be gracious to me, O God, according to your loving kindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Psalm 51:1-2

Notice that David uses three words in verse 1 to express the grace of God: "mercy," "unfailing love," and "compassion." He also uses three corresponding words in verses 1 and 2 to express the sinfulness of sin: "transgression," "iniquity," and "sin."

1. TRANSGRESSION - This word refers to crossing a forbidden boundary. Our sin, in one sense, is like rebelliously trespassing. We have crossed the boundary of God's moral law and consequently we are all at war with Him. Alexander Maclaren once said, "It is not merely, then, that we go against some abstract propriety, or break some impersonal law of nature when we sin, but rather we have rebelled against a rightful sovereign."
2. INIQUITY - This word literally means "perversion" and refers to what we call "original sin" or the innate "depravity" of our natures. David goes on in verse 5 to say, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." We aren't born good and corrupted by a sinful society. We are born with a wickedly evil nature and apart from Christ we only grow to be more crafty at our sin.
3. SIN - This word is actually taken from the sport of archery. The word sin means to fall short or miss the mark. We see this same language in Romans 3:23. Paul says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We miss God's high mark of perfection, falling short just like an arrow might fall short of its target. Here is a thought for you this week... Sin not only falls short first and foremost of God's glory, but sin falls short of its own target since by sinning we never hit what we are aiming at.

The nature of sin has left us in a deplorable state before God. Paul points this out in Romans 3:10-11. Let's look there together:

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God" *Romans 3:10-11*.

1. NO ONE IS **RIGHTEOUS**: We are unrighteous, this does not merely mean that we are bit less righteous than we need to be to somehow get to heaven. It means from God's point of view we have no righteousness at all. We love to judge ourselves against the moral standard of other people, but all our comparisons with other people do is keep us from appreciating and appropriating God's amazing saving grace. We may be righteous in our own eyes, even sometimes in these eyes of others (that just means they don't know us very well). But we do not have any righteousness before God.
2. NO ONE **UNDERSTANDS**: The second spiritual pronouncement that Paul makes about human beings is that no one understands spiritual things. When Paul talks about having no understanding, he doesn't mean that we have a lack of human knowledge; he means that we lack spiritual knowledge and understanding. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 1:18-21:

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.*

Think about this question for a second...What is it that men lack apart from the grace of God in order to understand the things of God? The Holy Spirit. Spiritual realities can only be known by the Spirit of God. Paul tells us that in 1 Corinthians 2:14. He says, "The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Make no mistake, this does not mean that a person cannot have a rational understanding of Christianity. A smart person can understand doctrine just like he can understand the laws of gravity. Historians can understand the Protestant reformation and describe perfectly justification by faith. But they don't believe it, and therefore it has no transformative impact in their lives.

3. NO ONE **SEEKS** GOD: Having spoken about our moral and intellectual failures, Paul moves lastly to man's will and concludes that "no one seeks God." Not only does man not seek after God, and therefore fail to appreciate God's grace, but he even hates God for it. In our sinful flesh, we resent the fact that God even needs to be gracious to us. What is even more incomprehensible is that many true Christians, who should understand the nature, depth, extent, and horror of their sin, fail to be shocked by it and therefore find grace boring.

## **MAN'S SPIRITUAL INABILITY**

Our culture has taught us that anything is attainable if you just **try hard** enough. If that is what we believe, it is natural to conclude that we don't need the grace of God in order to get right with God. We assume that it will always be possible for us to mend our relationship with God and that we can take care of it ourselves in due time (later). Those who think that way fail to

appreciate another biblical doctrine: the spiritual inability of man. This is the truth behind Paul's statement that there is "no one who seeks God." The reason that no one seeks God, apart from a prior work of God in an individual's heart, is because no one **can** seek God. Martin Luther said:

*It is not in your power to turn to God. If you think that it is in your power to turn to God you have missed the whole Reformation and don't understand total depravity. It is not in your power to turn to God. You are a sinner, you're dead, you're eaten up with corruption. Every free choice of yours is evil and not good. So how can we turn to Him who is light, righteousness, holy and good?*

Apart from God's prevenient (before) grace, man:

#### 1. HE CANNOT **THINK** AS GOD DOES:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. *Isaiah 55:8-9*

#### 2. HE CANNOT **UNDERSTAND** GOD:

These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you. *Psalms 50:21*

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? *Job 11:7-83*.

#### 3. HE CANNOT **SEE** SPIRITUAL THINGS:

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." *John 3:3*

It is interesting that the all of the physical infirmities that Jesus healed in the gospels is reflective of our spiritual condition. Blindness: Mark 10:46-52, John 9:1-41. Paralytic: Mark 2:1-12. Deaf and Mute: Mark 7:31-37. Leprosy: Matthew 8:1-5. Death: John 11:38-44.

#### 4. HE CANNOT **KNOW** HIS OWN HEART:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? *Jeremiah 17:9*

#### 5. HE CANNOT PROPERLY **DIRECT** HIS OWN STEPS:

I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. *Jeremiah 10:23*

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. *Proverbs 14:12*

6. HE CANNOT **FREE** HIMSELF FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." *Galatians 3:10*

7. HE CANNOT **RECEIVE** THE HOLY SPIRIT:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. *John 14:16–17*

8. HE CANNOT **HEAR** (receive & understand) GOD'S WORDS:

Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. *John 8:47*

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. *1 Corinthians 2:14*

9. HE CANNOT **BIRTH** HIMSELF INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. *John 1:12–13*

For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. *Romans 9:15–16*

10. HE CANNOT **PRODUCE** REPENTANCE AND FAITH IN CHRIST:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. *And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* not a result of works, so that no one may boast. *Ephesians 2:8–9*

Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. *For not all have faith.* *2 Thessalonians 3:1–2*

For it has been *granted to you* that for the sake of Christ you should not only *believe in him* but also suffer for his sake. *Philippians 1:29*

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. *God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 2:24–25*

#### 11. HE CANNOT COME TO CHRIST:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. *John 6:44*

And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." *John 6:65*

#### 12. HE CANNOT BELIEVE ON CHRIST:

But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. *John 10:26*

#### 13. HE CANNOT PLEASE GOD:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. *Romans 8:5, 8*

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. *Hebrews 11:6*

The doctrine of Total Depravity holds that because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the Gospel. The sinner is dead, blind and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free; it is in bondage to his evil nature; therefore, he will not -- indeed he cannot -- choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ -- it takes regeneration, by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation; it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God.

### GOD'S JUDGMENT

The fact that God is going to judge every man at the end of human history and punish sin seems like a **fantasy** to some. There are three parables in Matt 25: 1. The five wise and foolish virgins; 2. The parable of the talents; 3. The parable of the sheep and goats. Let's look at a few of the common threads of truth contained in these three parables:

1. There will be a future day of judgment for **all** people.

In the first parable, the bridegroom returns suddenly, and the women who are not ready for His coming are excluded from the marriage feasts. (v. 10)

In the second parable, the master returns to settle His accounts, and the evil, lazy servant is condemned: “Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 30).

In the third parable, the King separates the sheep from the goats, sending the wicked to “eternal punishment” and the righteous “to eternal life” (v. 46).

2. The judgment will be based on our **good** works or lack of them.

We are saved by grace through faith apart from works; but our faith is not dead. To say it another way: We are not justified by our works, but if we do not do good works, we are not justified. In the first parable the foolish virgins fail to prepare for the Lord’s coming; in the second parable the servant misuses the talents entrusted to him by His master; and in the third parable, it is the neglect of those who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned. These stories do not deny that salvation is by faith, but they do teach us that saving faith must be active.

3. None of our **excuses** will hold any weight before God.

The people in these parables all made excuses for their actions. The foolish servant said, “Master, I know you are a hard man...so I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground” (v. 24-25). In the third parable, the wicked are judged because they did not care for Christ’s brothers. They said, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick in prison, and did not help you?” (v. 44). We see excuses in Matthew 7:21-23 as well:

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”*

We use justification theology to excuse our failure to care for others practically, our knowledge of predestination to excuse our failure to evangelize; the doctrine of perseverance to excuse our laziness. We are not saved by works (repeat it over and over) but do not think for a second that you will not be held accountable for the deeds done in the body.

4. Many who are condemned will be utterly **surprised**.

These parables paint a great picture of the visible but unbelieving church, a picture of the many that called out in their life Lord, Lord; but never did the things Jesus asked of them. Instead of judgment, each of these persons expected to be rewarded. If people like this will be shut out,

shouldn't we then heed Peter's exhortation and to "make our calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10)? Peter goes on to tell us how to do this: add goodness to faith, knowledge to goodness, self-control to knowledge, perseverance to self-control, godliness to perseverance, brotherly kindness to godliness, and love to brotherly kindness (5-7). He then says at the end of verse 10 that if you do or practice these things you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The emphasis here is on "DO"!

## **GOD'S SOVEREIGN FREEDOM**

This is the essence of what grace means. God is free to save whomever He wills. He is under no obligation to save us. He is not in debt to us therefore He owes us nothing. The best passages on sovereign grace are in Ephesians chapter 1 and 2. Chapter 1 looks at it from God's point of view and chapter 2 looks at grace from our point of view.

### **1. The role of God the Father: Election.**

Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. *Ephesians 1:4-6*

### **2. The role of the Son: Redemption.**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight *Ephesians 1:7-8*

Redemption is a commercial term of buying in the marketplace so that the person might be freed from the object. We have been freed from slavery to sin and our bondage of the will by Jesus' blood.

### **3. The role of God the Holy Spirit: Effectual Calling.**

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. *Ephesians 1:11-14*

Do you remember the story of Jesus raising Lazarus? When Jesus arrives, Lazarus has been dead for four days and he reeked of death. That is us. Just like Lazarus couldn't raise himself from the dead; he was hopeless, so are we without the work of God's Spirit. Without God's choosing, Christ's dying, and the Spirit's calling there would be no salvation for any of us.

# The Implications of Sola Fide

Eric C. Coher

Romans 3:27-31

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## 1. THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE STRIPS US OF OUR PRIDE. (v. 27)

*Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.*

I know that there has been a break in between our teaching of the latter verses of Romans chapter 3; however, in these final verses, specifically verses 21-26, Paul has clearly, convincingly, and powerfully taught that our justification (right standing before God) comes not by our own works, not by our own merit, but through faith in Christ alone. Justification is a judicial (courtroom) term that means to be declared righteous (innocent) before God. Justification has to do with how God deals with both the offense and the guilt of our sin as well as imputing (giving) Christ's righteousness. Two things are necessary to be right with God: punishment for our sin and perfection for our lives. In verse 23 Paul says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We have all missed the mark of perfection that God's holiness requires. Paul tells us that back in verses 10-12, "No one is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." In other words, in and of ourselves, we are spiritually bankrupt and condemned in our sin. That is the human condition apart from Christ. But thank God that Justification answers the question of how a sinful person can be made right with God. Paul answers that question for us in verses 21-26.

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Immediately after teaching that our justification is secured by faith in Christ alone, Paul sets his sights on the issue of boasting. Boasting is the external form of the internal condition of pride. Pride is the epicenter or the origin of every human expression of sin. The Bible is replete with passages that demonstrate the ugliness of pride in the human heart. It is pride that incites the wrath of God in Romans 1:18 where Paul said, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." Instead of submitting ourselves to God's truth in humility, we seek to put ourselves above it and suppress it. We see Pride in verse 21 when Paul says, "For although they knew God, they did not honor Him or give thanks to Him." Pride is at the heart of the great exchange of Romans 1:25; Paul said, "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is forever praised!" Haughtiness and boasting are also included in the list of sins that Paul enumerates in Romans 1:29. All of these sins are fruits of the root of pride, but notice verse 30. Paul says, "[They are] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, [and] boastful..."

In chapter 1, Paul is dealing with the pride of the irreligious Gentiles. In chapter 2 we see, even more dangerously, how pride distorts the view of the "religious" and their thinking about their relationship with God. The Jews thought that they were right before God because of their national heritage as God's chosen people, because of their circumcision, and because of their feeble attempts to obey to the law. They boasted in these things. They were proud of what they thought they contributed to their relationship with God. Paul rebukes them in verse 23 when he says, "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law." The greatest lie that the world has ever known is that sinful men can somehow make themselves acceptable to God on their own. This is the lie that Paul is refuting in Romans 3:21-26. Those who think they are righteous already see no need for the justifying grace of God. They are proud of what they think they have accomplished on their own. Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 illustrates the difference in the heart of a self-righteous boaster and a humble, Christ-needing sinner:

*He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted. Luke 18:9-14*

The tax collector understood that he had nothing to offer God except his sin. He knew that he could never measure up to God's righteous standard. He was profoundly humbled by his need for grace. The puritan Thomas Watson said, "We are never more precious in God's eyes than when we are lepers in our own eyes." Thank God that He offers grace, mercy, forgiveness, and righteousness to anyone who receives Christ by faith alone. It was on the basis of his faith in Christ alone that the tax collector went home justified.

One of the glorious implications of the doctrine of justification by faith alone is that it leaves us nothing left to boast in. It is a work of God from beginning to end and that should profoundly humble us. James Montgomery Boice said, "If pride is the greatest of all sins and God's plan of salvation does not destroy pride – rooting it up, casting it out, and dusting off the place where it stood – then it is not a good plan. It has failed, and we need a faith other than Christianity."<sup>1</sup> God's plan does destroy all grounds for boasting. God's plan excludes boasting. Why? Because we aren't saved by our works; we are saved by faith, and faith itself is a gift (John 6:44, 65).

Ephesians 2 tells us that apart from Christ we are spiritually dead, cold and lifeless. We are dependent on Christ to give us new life. Are you trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, or are you trying to add your good works to Christ's perfect work? Are you the Pharisee who thinks that you are right with God because of your own merit, or are you the tax collector, poor and needy, who understands his spiritual bankruptcy, and instead of presenting his merit to God, casts himself on the mercy of God? God has designed salvation so that we can take no credit for having any part in saving ourselves.

## **2. THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE FREES US FROM OUR STRIVING. (v. 28)**

*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

The doctrine of Justification by faith is an incredibly freeing doctrine. It means that we don't have to strive and strive and strive our whole lives futilely trying to work for God's favor. If we had only sinned once, a lifetime of self-striving would never be enough to pay for our sin debt. In Matthew 11:28–30 Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor (weary) and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find *rest* for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The Greek word *Kopiaō* (weary, labor) carries the idea of working to the point of utter exhaustion. Jesus calls to Himself everyone who is exhausted from trying to find and please God in his own strength. He invites the person who is wearied from his vain search for truth through human wisdom, who is exhausted from trying to earn salvation, and who has despaired of trying to achieve God's

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans 1-4, Justification by Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 404.

standard of righteousness by his own efforts to cast themselves upon Him.<sup>2</sup> I am reminded of the lyrics to the song, In Christ Alone:

*What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease*

*My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.*

This isn't just good news for the person who hasn't yet come to faith in Christ, this is good news for you, Christian. How often do we forget our justification and momentarily think that we must strive again. Isn't that what happened with the Galatians? They forgot their justification. Paul asked them, "After having begun by the spirit, are you now [seeking to] be perfected by the flesh?" Not only does the doctrine of justification by faith mean that there is no room for prideful boasting on our part, but it also means that in Christ we are freed from futile striving. I want to take a few minutes here and flesh out some of the glorious truths and implications of the doctrine of justification by faith. What follows will be all too brief and non-exhaustive, but I hope as you reflect on these truths that your soul will be encouraged, and the affections of your heart will be stirred.

## 1. Justification by faith alone magnifies the grace of God.

*But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4–7*

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

## 2. Justification by faith alone rightly directs all glory to God.

Because salvation is a work of God from beginning to end, He gets the glory as the giver of all good things. God says, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols" *Isaiah 42:8*.

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 8–15, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Accordance electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 275.

### 3. We are not justified because of our faith.

It is important that we understand that we are justified *by* or *through* our faith and not *because* of our faith. In other words, your faith is not your righteousness; Christ is your righteousness. Faith is simply the instrument by which the righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. Faith is the hand that receives grace. If you have ever been snorkeling, you know that the snorkel is only an instrument. You don't breathe the snorkel, you breathe air through the snorkel. Another way to illustrate this is to think of the coupling or linkage that connects two train cars together. The coupling has no power of its own; the engine provides the power and the coupling connects the train car to the power of the engine. This is not a trivial distinction...If your faith is in your faith, your faith is misplaced. Martyn Lloyd Jones says:

*Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which this righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's Cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God [crediting] Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness.<sup>3</sup>*

### 4. Justification by faith alone changes my legal status before God.

Instead of me standing condemned for my sin, Christ stands condemned in my place. He bears my awful load and drinks the bitter cup reserved for me. Now in Him I am declared innocent before the Father on the basis of insufficient evidence. Jesus said in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." How about Paul's glorious truth in Romans 8:1-2, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."

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<sup>3</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 3:20-4:25, Atonement and Justification*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970), 120.

## 5. Justification is more than forgiveness.

Justification goes beyond forgiveness. Not only are we forgiven because of Christ, but God also declares us righteous because of Christ. God requires two things of us: punishment for our sins and perfection in our lives. Our sins must be punished, and our lives must be righteous. [The problem is] we cannot bear our own punishment (Ps. 49:7-8), and we cannot provide our own righteousness. “None is righteous; no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). Therefore, God, out of His immeasurable love for us, provided His own Son to do both. Christ bears our punishment, and Christ performs our righteousness. And when we receive Christ [by faith] (John 1:12), all of His punishment and all of His righteousness is counted as ours (Rom. 4:4-6; 5:1, 18-19; 8:1; 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:8-9).<sup>4</sup> Drop down to Romans 4:7. Paul quotes Psalm 32:12 saying, “Blessed are those whose lawlessness deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

## 6. We are not justified by good works, but if we do not do good works, we are not justified.

If we have truly been justified before God, saved and given a new heart, our lives will bear fruit (witness) to the reality of the change that has taken place within us. This is what James means in James 2:24 when He says, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” I want to be really clear here so that no one leaves confused on this point. Paul, when he says Romans 3:28, “We hold that one is justified apart from the works of the law,” and James when he says in James 2:17, “Faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead,” are saying the exact same thing. There is a perspectival difference here, not a theological difference. Paul is speaking to the self-righteous who want to earn their salvation and James is speaking to the apathetic who think since they are saved, if they truly are, they don’t have to do anything.

Just as it is impossible to have an encounter with a MAC truck and not be forever changed, so it is impossible to have an encounter with the God of the universe and not be forever changed. Jesus essentially says the same thing in John 15:16, “For you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed [purposed] you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.” True saving faith will move a person to practical obedience. Faith is not just believing a set of truths. Martyn Lloyd Jones said, “A man can give intellectual assent to the teaching of the whole Bible and go straight to hell.”<sup>5</sup> What does true saving faith look like? True saving faith is:

A. A conviction of the truth of the gospel.

B. A commitment to the Christ of the gospel, which produces fruit or good works.

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 46.

<sup>5</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, 123.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every *good work*. *2 Corinthians 9:8*

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. *Ephesians 2:10*

[Wealthy believers] are to do good, to be rich in *good works*, to be generous and ready to share... *1 Timothy 6:18*

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every *good work*. *2 Timothy 3:16–17*

[Older men in the Church] show yourself in all respects to be a model of *good works*, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity... *Titus 2:7*

The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to *good works*. These things are excellent and profitable for people. *Titus 3:8*

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and *good works*... *Hebrews 10:24*

7. Justification by faith should motivate personal holiness.

There is a story from the Civil War days of a Northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the young girl and said, "You are free." With amazement she said, "You mean I am free to do what ever I want?" "Yes," he said. "To say whatever I want to say?" "Yes, anything." "And to be whatever I want to be?" "Yes!" "And to go wherever I want to go?" "Yes," he answered with a smile, "You are free to go wherever you would like." She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I will go with you." This story is illustrative of 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Paul says, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." John Murray says, "Nothing makes God-service more impossible than guilt."

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:11–14*

### **3. GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN OF SALVATION HAS NEVER WAIVERED OR CHANGED (v. 29-30)**

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

What Paul is saying here is that God doesn't deal with different groups of people in different ways regarding salvation. There is one God, one Savior, and one plan of salvation. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [faith in] me" John 14:6. Anyone can come to Christ for salvation, but everyone who is justified before God is justified by Christ's work alone. The cross has always been God's plan A! Listen to the following texts that tell us that God's plan of redemption through Christ was planned from eternity past:

*Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:18–21*

*To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, Ephesians 3:8–11*

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Acts 2:23

The doctrine of justification by faith alone has massive implications for our evangelism. It means that there is no one that is too lost, no one who is outside of the reach of God's grace. Regardless of the depth of your sin, God's grace is deeper. Praise the Lord that we don't have to stand before God on the basis of our own sin-marred record. Praise the Lord that while we all like sheep had gone astray, each one turning to his own way, the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

#### 4. THE CROSS ESTABLISHES GOD'S LAW. (v. 31)

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

A. Law and grace are not like oil and water.

B. The laws demands must be inflexibly met.

C. The gospel message is that God doesn't just give us commands; He gives us what He commands!

*For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." Galatians 3:10–13*

*As we come to Christ, then, empty-handed, claiming no merit of our own, but clinging by faith to His blood and righteousness, we are justified. We pass immediately from a state of condemnation and spiritual death to a state of pardon, acceptance, and the sure hope of eternal life. Our sins are blotted out, and we are "clothed" with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In our standing before God, we will never be more righteous, even in heaven, than we were the day we trusted Christ, or we are [right] now. Obviously in our daily experience we fall far short of the perfect righteousness God requires. But because He has imputed to us the perfect righteousness of His Son, He now sees us as being just as righteous as Christ Himself.<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel for Real Life*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 20092), 107.

## *Soli Deo Gloria: Glory to God Alone*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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#### THE PROBLEM IN TODAY'S CHURCH

When he was just 20 years old, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled "The Proper Study of God's Elect is God." In this sermon he said, "The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father." He argued that thinking about God improves and expands the mind.

AW Tozer in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* wrote:

*The church has surrendered her one lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic. This low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us. A whole new philosophy of the Christian life has resulted from this basic error in our religious thinking.*

*With our loss of the sense of majesty has come the further loss of religious awe and consciousness of the Divine Presence. We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence. Modern Christianity is simply not producing the kind of Christian who can appreciate or experience the life in the Spirit. The words, "Be still, and know that I am God," mean next to nothing to the self-confident, bustling worshiper in this middle period of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.*

*This loss of the concept of majesty has come just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred years. But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal; and since it is the quality of our religion that is affected by the internal conditions, it may be that our supposed gains are but losses spread over a wider field.*

Do you think our situation has improved any over the last five decades? We have inoculated ourselves with an ever-escalating preoccupation with television and an insatiable appetite for me-centered entertainment. The result is that most Christians are completely unaware of the shift that is slowly taking place in their hearts and minds away from a high and lofty view of God. A loss of the sense of God's high and awesome character always leads to the loss of people's

highest ideals, moral values, and understanding and appreciation for God's Word. We will never rise higher than our idea of God. The problem in the church today is that we have become preoccupied with everything but God. We have failed to stand in awe of Him.

## A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW TEXT

There is no better example in history of someone standing in the awe of God than the Paul. There is perhaps no better example of his thoroughly God-centered worldview than Romans 11:36. At the end of a doxology in which he is marveling at the unfathomable knowledge and wisdom of God Paul declares, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen (It is True)."

The doxology comes at the end of Chapter 11, which marks the end of a theologically dense pericope of Scripture. Paul has labored to explain our hopeless, sin-depraved condition and the glorious rescuing work of Christ. He has been explaining world history how the rejection of the Jews has led to the bringing in of Gentiles how God will once again focus His attention on the Jews. When Paul gets to the end of chapter 11, he does not glory in what he knows and has been able to explain to others. Rather, after he has explained all of this he exalts God for how little he actually knows and understands about God. To understand God is like trying to hold your breath and search out the bottom of the ocean; He is unfathomable.

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

There are several areas in which we need to think about what Paul means in Romans 11:36.

**1. God and creation** - We think about creation first because of the words "all things." Romans 11:36 teaches us that everything in the universe is from God, has come into existence and is sustained by God's creative power, and is for God's glory. John Murray (greatest commentary on Romans) writes, "God is the source of all things in that they have proceeded from Him; He is the Creator. He is the agent through whom all things subsist and are directed to their proper end. And He is the last end to whose glory all things will redound."

There was a time when God was alone. In that time before all time, when even space did not exist, God, the great "I Am," existed and was as perfect, glorious, and blessed in His eternal essence as He is now. Before there was a sun, the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelt in ineffable light. Before there was an earth on which to rest it, the throne of God stood firm. If God chose to create anything at all, its conception and plans must have come *from* Him

Not only has all creation come from God, but the actualization of this creative plan came *through* Him. When God set out to create the heavens and the earth, he did not call for help. He did not make use of any existing matter, for matter in itself did not exist. God created everything out of nothing (ex nihilo) Gen 1:1.

Creation is from God and through Him, but most importantly, it is for His glory. Why did God create the heavens and the earth? Did He have to? No. We often times think, or at least our actions reveal that we think, that the universe was made for us. The motive for creation must be found entirely in God himself. Jonathon Edwards, the 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher and theologian, wrote an essay titled, “The End for Which God Created the World” in which he asked why God created the world and mankind to inhabit it. Edwards concluded that it was not because He had any need or inadequacy in Himself. God cannot be improved in any way. Nor could creation have been demanded by anything outside of God. Only God’s overflowing nature and delight in revelation of His nature could have caused it. Because of who God is, God did not merely wish to be all-powerful, holy, faithful, and true. God wanted to exhibit these qualities, so He created the world to manifest His great glory. David expresses this glorious truth in Psalm 19:1-3 when he says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaim the work of his hands. Day after Day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.” Compare that to the wisdom of Carl Sagan, who looked out at the same starry splendor and said, “The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.”

If God created the universe to display His glory, He must have created us for the same great purpose. God tells us in Isaiah 43:7 why He made man saying, “Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” The Westminster Confession rightly states that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Compare that to the shallow, self-centered culture in which we live. This radically biblical view of the glory of God offer hope by reminding us that there is something infinitely better than a preoccupation with our own person gains and happiness, and warns us that anything less than this radically biblical worldview is ultimately unsatisfying. John Piper calls this the continental divide of theology, “If you really believe this,” he says “all rivers of your thinking run toward God. If you do not, all rivers run toward man. Setting this issue is worth many nights of prayer and months of study.”

**2. God and the Gospel** – The second area in which we need to think about the meaning of Romans 11:36 concerns the gospel. Salvation is *from* God, He is the one who planned it. Who else could have came up with it? No priest, no rabbi, no shaman, or no guru could have conceived of such a great plan of salvation. Only God could have planned a way of salvation that meets the requirements of His unyielding justice and yet also justifies sinners. Only God could have planned a salvation that is apart from human merit or works- all of grace- but yet transforms us who are saved and enables us to do Good works (Titus 2:11:12).

Salvation is isn't just from God, but it is also *through* God, through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not accomplished through anything that you or I have done or can do. On the contrary, it is what we have done that is the problem. This truth of God's work alone is what the Reformers were expressing when they joined the word *sola* to the core doctrines of the faith.

When the Reformers spoke about sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) they were concerned with the authority of God's Word. The Bible alone is our ultimate authority – not the pop, not the church, not the traditions of the church or church councils, still less our personal intimations or subjective feelings. These other sources of authority are sometimes useful and may have a place, but Scripture alone is ultimate. Therefore if any of these authorities differ from Scripture, they are to be judged by the Bible and rejected. This was so important to the Reformers that they called it the “formal principal,” meaning that it gives form or substance to everything else. It was their intention, in affirming Scripture alone, to give glory to God alone.

When the Reformers spoke about Solus Christus (Christ alone) they were saying that salvation has been achieved for us by Jesus alone and that this has been accomplished entirely outside of us, apart from anything we have done or might do. Christ's death on the Cross made perfect atonement for our sins and we cannot contribute to that atonement in anyway. Moreover, in salvations Christ's righteousness is applied to us by the Father, and this is the sole ground of our justification. Our righteousness (Isaiah 64:6) does not enter into our being made right with God in any way. Martin Luther referred to the righteousness as “alien righteousness.” When the Reformers spoke about Christ alone, they did so in order to give glory to God alone.

When the Reformers spoke about sola gratia (grace alone) they did so insisting that sinners have no claim upon God. God owes us nothing but punishment for our sins. If God chooses to save some, which by His grace He does, He saves them in spite of their sins and only because it pleases Him to do so (Psalm 115:3). By affirming that salvation is by grace alone, the Reformers were giving glory to God alone.

When the Reformers spoke about Sola Fide (faith alone) they were concerned about the purity of the gospel. They affirmed that the believer is justified by God through faith entirely apart from any works that he might do. The doctrine of justification by faith alone became the chief (principal) doctrine of the Reformation. In insisting that justification is by faith in Christ alone, the Reformers were ascribing glory to God alone.

All of the *solas* lead to this last one: To God alone be the glory. Why is this true? Think back to the first half of Romans 11:36. For *from* Him, *through*, Him, and *to* Him are all things!

**Scripture:** It is from God; He is its source. It has come to us through God's agency, that is, by the Holy Spirit, Through what we call inspiration. It will endure forever to God's glory. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:25).

**Christ:** He is *from* God, because He is God. He became a man by a virgin conception, accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and He lives *for* God glory.

**Grace:** is *from* God. It is God's by definition. It comes to us *through* the work of Christ and is for God's glory.

**Faith:** Ephesians 2:8-9

Clearly the plan of salvation is to glorify God. Our own personal happiness is not God's chief end. Think about this: Why are some chosen to be saved while others are passed over? Why are some rejected? In Romans 9:22-24 we learn that the plan of salvation is to glorify God and that is God is glorified in each case. In the case of the elect, love mercy and the grace of God are displayed. In the case of the lost, patience, power and the wrath of God are displayed.

Do you have any longings after God? Do you want to pray? Do you want to read His word and understand him better or worship Him? These things are not from you. Romans 3:11 tells us that "No one is good, no one understands and no one seeks God." How about victory over temptation? What keeps you from falling, or gives you the ability to stand under persecution? It is God alone. 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful, he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. But when you are tempted He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

It is God alone who saves us and it is God alone who preserves us. All things are from Him, through Him, and to Him – to Him be the glory forever!

## *Reforming our Worship: Part 1*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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If I asked you what is true worship, how would you answer that question? True worship is the praise of God for **who** He is and **what** He has done. It must be God-centered and God-honoring. If what we call worship is not God-centered and God-honoring, it is not true worship at all. John Stott once said, "Christians believe that true worship is the **highest** and **noblest** activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable." Not only is this a true statement, but it also highlights what is probably the greatest shortcoming of evangelical churches today. That is that in large segments of the church, true worship is becoming nonexistent. A. W. Tozer made this observation 50 years ago concerning the state of worship in our churches:

*Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the dissemination of the Word, there are today millions of people who hold "right opinions," probably more than ever before in the history of the church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the "program." This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us.*

There are a few critical questions that we must answer if we are to see a reformation take place in our worship: 1. What is worship? 2. Why do we see so little true worship today? 3. What can be done to recover true worship for our own spiritual health and the health of our churches?

### **A DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

If we had been living in England in the days of the formation of modern English, the period between Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare, we would not have used the modern word "worship," we would have spoken about God's **"worth-ship."** When we worship God, we are ascribing to Him, insofar as finite human beings can, His true worth or value. David modeled this in Psalm 29:1-2 when he said, "Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness." Worship is declaring the worth of God with every faculty of our lives. Remember the Great Commandment. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" Mark 12:30.

We might also define worship as **glorifying** God. We get the word glory from the Greek noun *doxa*. It means to praise, honor or glorify. It was originally used to praise nobility. Kings were often assumed to possess glory in a special measure and were therefore "glorified." IT is interesting to note that in Psalm 24:9-10 David calls God the King of glory. He says, "Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory!" Philologically speaking, to glorify God, to worship God, and to praise God are indistinguishable terms to describe the action of worship. There are a couple of things that we need to say about worship here:

1. The first and most important thing to be said about true worship is that it is to **honor** God.
2. The second most important thing to be said about worship is that it has **bearing** on the worshiper.

No one ever truly comes to know, honor, praise, or glorify God without being changed in the process. Just as it is impossible to have an encounter with a MAC truck and not be forever changed, so also it is impossible to encounter the God of the universe in true, unfettered worship and not be forever changed. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3:18 said, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury may have penned one of the best definitions of worship when he said:

*To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.*

In this definition the attributes of God - His holiness, truth, beauty, love, and His wise purposes - are foremost. But these attributes rightly known, acknowledged, and praised, impact the worshiper in five incredibly transforming ways:

The <i>holiness</i> of God...	<b>Quickening</b> of the conscience
The <i>truth</i> of God...	<b>Feeding</b> of the mind.
The <i>beauty</i> of God...	<b>Purging</b> the imagination.
The <i>love</i> of God...	<b>Opening</b> the heart.
The <i>wise purposes</i> of God...	<b>Devoting</b> (committing) of the will.

True worship is praise of God for who he truly is and for what he has done, and if that is not the very center and heart of what we are doing, our so-called worship is not true worship at all. This is not only a clear definition of worship, but it is also an excellent description of the Christian life!

## 21ST CENTURY WORSHIP

Why is so little of the worship that characterized past great ages of the church seen among us? Let's look at several reasons:

1. This is a **trivial** age, and the church has been deeply affected by this pervasive triviality.

C. T. Studd once said, "Some men die by shrapnel, some men die by flames, but most men die inch by inch playing life's silly little games." We have no heroes, especially heroes of the faith. But we have a plethora of movie stars and sports figures that command our attention. We live in the age of technology and subsequently, the number one objective of our technological culture is pervasive entertainment. The average household has a TV on for seven hours a day. Instead of having our minds renewed and transformed by the word like Paul talks about in Romans 12:1-2, we allow our minds to be molded by a worldview that says that man's chief end is to by things and be entertained. Boice asks the question:

*How can people whose minds are filled with the brainless babble of afternoon talk shows or evening sitcoms have anything but trivial thoughts when they come to God's house on Sunday mornings - if, in fact, they have thoughts of God at all? How can they appreciate His holiness of their heads are full of the moral muck [that is much of television]? They cannot. [Sadly], all they can look for in church, if they look for anything, is something to make them feel good for a short time before they head back to the television.*

2. This is a **self-absorbed**, man-centered age, and the church has become sadly, even treasonously, self-centered.

We have defined worship as being concerned with God and His attributes. It is knowing, acknowledging, and praising God for who He is. But we cannot do that if all we are thinking about is ourselves. Kent Hughes, former pastor of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois hit the nail on the head when he said:

*The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for us - to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment-focussed, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus - preaching to felt needs - man's conscious agenda instead of God's. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attendee uncomfortable is removed from the service, whether it be a registration card or a "mere" creed. Taken to the nth degree, this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects man. This terribly corrupts ones theology.*

3. Our age is **oblivious** to God, and the church is barely better, to judge from its so-called worship services.

The problem is that, although we know Bible truths, those truths don't seem to make a difference. It is painfully evident that there is a decreasing presence of traditional (biblical) service elements in our modern worship.

A. **Prayer**:

ACTS Method

B. The **reading** of the Word:

The reading of substantial portions of Scripture is vanishing from our churches. The Puritans often read a chapter of the Old Testament and a chapter from the New Testament in their public worship services. If you have ever used Matthew Henry's commentary, what you have read are not his sermon notes, but his comments on the Scripture reading for any given Sunday morning. If we speak to God in prayer and God speaks to us through His Word. Paul encouraged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13 saying, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching."

C. The **exposition** of the Word:

There is very little serious teaching of God's Word today. Instead, preachers try to be personable, to relate funny stories, and to stay far away from any topics that might cause people to become unhappy with the church and leave it. One popular preacher, whose name is familiar to us all, won't even mention sin. He doesn't want to make anyone in his congregation feel bad. He says that People feel bad enough already. Preachers often want to be liked, popular, entertaining, and successful. Remember Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions."

D. **Confession** of sin:

Instead of coming to church to admit our transgressions and seek forgiveness, we come to church to be told that we are pretty nice people who do not need forgiveness. Model of Repentance: Psalm 51...

E. **Hymns**:

The praise songs that we find in the Psalms don't fall me-centered worship trap, which is one reason why they are great models for our worship. Let's close our study this morning looking at the last five Psalms as a model of God-centered praise and worship.

## **Psalm 147**

This Psalm uses the personal pronoun "He," referring to God, fourteen times and "Lord" eight times, which reminds us that worship is about God and not about ourselves. The word "I" doesn't even occur at all and the word "our" is used only twice. Get the picture! Psalm 147 is also replete with reasons to praise God:

### 1. His care of His **people** (v. 2-3)

*The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

### 2. His care of the **least significant** things and people (v. 4-6)

*He determines the number of the stars; He gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure. The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked to the ground.*

### 3. His care of the **animal** world (v. 7-9)

*Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! He covers the heavens with clouds; He prepares rain for the earth; He makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry.*

### 4. His delight in the **godly** (v. 10-11)

*His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.*

### 5. His **provision** for Jerusalem (v. 12-14)

*Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! For He strengthens the bars of your gates; He blesses your children within you. He makes peace in your borders; He fills you with the finest of the wheat.*

### 6. His **rule** over the entire created order (v. 15-18)

*He sends out his command to the earth; His word runs swiftly. He gives snow like wool; He scatters frost like ashes. He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before*

*His cold? He sends out his word, and melts them; He makes his wind blow and the waters flow.*

#### 7. His **gift** of the written Word (v. 19-20)

*He declares his word to Jacob, His statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know His rules. Praise the LORD!*

### **Psalm 148**

This Psalm explains where God must be praised:

From the **heavens** above (v. 1-6)

To the **earth** below (v. 7-12)

It calls on every created thing to praise God: angels, sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, lightning, hail, snow, clouds, winds, mountains, hills, trees, wild animals, cattle, birds, kings, princes, rulers, young men, maidens, old men, and children. The Psalmist concludes in verse 13, "Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven."

### **Psalm 150**

This Psalm answers four great questions:

#### 1. Where should we praise God?

Answer: **Everywhere**, in heaven above and on earth below. (v. 1)

*Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!*

#### 2. Why should we praise God?

Answer: Because of **who** God is and **what** He has done. (v. 2)

*Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!*

#### 3. How should we praise God?

Answer: With **everything** we've got. (v. 3-5)

*Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

#### 4. Who should praise God?

Answer: Everything that has **breath**. (v. 6)

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!*

## *Reforming our Worship: Part 2*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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The secularization of the church did not happen over night; It's been somewhat of a slow fade. Just as it didn't happen overnight, so also, it can't be cured overnight either. But this isn't to say that we cannot have revival and reformation both in our churches and in our personal lives. We absolutely can, and we must if we desire to live in such a way as to honor God. There are scores of texts that deal with how we are to worship. As a matter of fact, every text in the Bible is directing us as to how we ought to worship. The Bible is a worship manual. From beginning to end, it reveals the nature, character, and attributes of God who alone is worthy of our worship. We have clear directives in the Old Testament from inspired men like David who exhorts saying, "Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness" Psalms 29:1–2. But Jesus also had a lot to say about worship. Perhaps one of the clearest of Jesus' teachings is found in John 4:

*So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is*

*coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:5–24*

1. There is but **one** true God, and genuine worship must be of **this** true God and none other.

What do we call the worship of any other god but God alone? We call it idolatry. Remember God's own words through the prophet Isaiah, "I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols" Isaiah 42:8. What bearing does this have on our lives this morning? Remember that we live in a relativistic age in which anyone's opinion about anything is equally valid. Nothing could be more dangerous than worshipping a god other than the God of the Bible. This is what is taking place every time a person abandons the self-revealing God of the Bible for a made up God of their own choosing. What Jesus is saying to the Samaritan woman is essentially, "You don't even know who you are worshipping." Any so called worship that is not of God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture is invalid, because it is the worship of an imaginary God.

What are some examples of imaginary gods that you have seen people try and worship:

1. A god who doesn't hold me accountable for my sin...
2. A god who universally welcomes all people into heaven...
3. A god who is okay with me being the center of my universe...

2. Today the only way this one true God can be worshiped is "in **spirit** and **truth**."

With these words, Jesus is revealing a change in dispensations. Before this, worship was centered in the temple in Jerusalem. Every Jew was to make his way there three times a year to worship God in the temple. But Christ's coming marked the inauguration of a change in the way that Christians would worship God. Jesus was the fulfillment of everything the temple worship symbolized and anticipated. This meant that worship would no longer be confined to a specific location, but would be in spirit and according to the truths of God's Word.

## **WORSHIPING GOD IN SPIRIT**

What does it mean to worship God "in spirit?" This is not a reference to the Holy Spirit. We know that, because in the Greek there is no definite article preceding the word spirit in John 4:24. The definite article in Greek is what identifies something as being specific (e.g. John 1:1 – *Pros ton theon*). Jesus was speaking of our spirits. You will notice that there is not a capital "s". Jesus was teaching that in the new age which He was inaugurating, the place for our worship would not matter, since Christians would be able to worship "in [his or her] spirit.

Many people associate worship with the body. They suppose that they have worshiped if they have been in the right place, doing the right things, at the right time. For some this means

occupying a pew on Sunday mornings and for others it may mean lighting a candle, crossing oneself, or kneeling. These are not worship. Worship goes beyond our location and our actions.

Not only should worship not be confused with actions, but it also shouldn't be confused with feelings. This is a bit tougher to nail down, because true worship does sometimes affect our emotions. At times we are filled with inexpressible joy, other times we feel the weight of the Holy Spirit's conviction, and at times tears may fill our eyes. But it is possible for feelings to be present when true worship isn't. True worship only occurs when the spirit of a man or woman actually meets with God and finds itself praising God for who He is. William Barclay once said:

*Genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.*

The fact that worship must be an actual meeting with and adoration of God forces us to consider how we use music in church. Remember last week we talked about that fact that our worship must be God-centered. Much of what passes for worship music today is man-centered. Remember that we looked at three Psalms (147, 148, 150) to get a sense of how God-centered our worship ought to be. The chief end of every element of our worship service is to turn the attention of the worshiper away from himself (and even from the service itself) to God. Does our music do this? Does it direct our thoughts to God? Does it remind us of something about God and encourage us to praise Him for being like this? Does it recall the great acts of God in our salvation and evoke a sense of gratitude for what He has done? If not, people will leave saying, "Wasn't that a worshipful service?" when all they really mean is that they had a good time.

## **WORSHIPING GOD IN TRUTH**

What does it mean to worship God "in truth?" Here are several things it should mean:

1. We must approach God **truthfully**.

We must come to God honestly. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said of the people of His day, "You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" Matthew 15:7–9. According to Jesus, there is no true worship unless there is honesty on the part of the worshiper. We must not pretend to worship. We must worship in truth, knowing that our hearts are open books before God (Hebrews 4:13).

## 2. We must worship on the basis of biblical **revelation**.

If we are to worship God “in truth,” our worship must be according to the doctrines of the Bible. Remember Jesus’ prayer in the garden in John 17:17. He said, “Sanctify them in the truth; your Word is truth.” It is interesting to note that during and after the Reformation, there was an immediate elevation of the Word of God in Protestant worship services. John Calvin ordered that the altars, which had long been the center of Latin mass, be removed from the churches and a pulpit with a Bible on it placed at the center of the building. This was so that every line of architecture would carry the gaze of the worshiper to the Book which alone contains the way of salvation and outlines the principles upon which the church of the living God is to be governed.

## 3. We must come to God only through **Christ**.

We must worship God “in Christ.”

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to *God in Christ Jesus*. *Romans 6:11*

Nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of *God in Christ Jesus* our Lord. *Romans 8:39*

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as *God in Christ* forgave you. *Ephesians 4:32*

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of *God in Christ Jesus* for you. 1 *Thessalonians 5:18*

Jesus said of Himself in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” It is only through Christ that we can have confidence in approaching God. There is no other way to come to God. Let me leave you with a quote from John MacArthur where he explains what happened in his church when people began to take the true nature of worship seriously:

*They began to look at superficialities as an affront to a holy God. They saw worship as a participant’s activity, not a spectator sport. Many realized for the first time that worship is the church’s ultimate priority – not public relations, not recreation and social activities, not boosting the attendance figures, but worshipping God. And they were drawn to the only reliable and sufficient worship manual, which is Scripture.*

## *Reforming our Lives*

Eric C. Coher

### Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace

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Surveys of contemporary Christian beliefs and conduct tell us that most Christians do not act much differently from non-Christian people. This is not surprising, since little contemporary preaching teaches about or encourages a difference. *But we should be very different, at least if we take the gospel seriously...*

- How should Christians be different (Brainstorm)? In All ways
- 5 areas that we need to be growing in specifically:
  1. A fresh awareness of God's presence...
  2. Repentance...
  3. Ordering our lives by that which is invisible...
  4. Christian Community...
  5. Christian Service...

### **RECOVERING AN AWARENESS OF GOD**

- There are really two things in life I can be preoccupied with:
  1. Myself
  2. God
- We need to be growing in a renewed awareness of the reality of the presence of God instead of being preoccupied with ourselves and our felt needs...
- There is a balance of course, but the pendulum today has clearly swung in the direction of man-centered theology, worship, and church life.
- People come to church, if they come, with a "What's in it for me" mentality.
- And because of the declining desire to order our lives around the truth, the tendency of churches has been to reorder the message and the life of the church to answer that question...

"The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially (not important / insignificantly) upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace too ordinary, his judgment too benign, his gospel too easy and his Christ too common..."

**David Wells** – God in the Wasteland

The Gospel of Christ has been replaced and its power has been removed from the churches around the globe. Where Jesus called his people to abandon this world, love God, and love one another, we now declare that one must simply pray a prayer or join a church. Where Jesus' message demanded the entirety of one's life, today's gospel demands nothing. Unfortunately, where Jesus' Gospel had the power to save us from sin and death, today's gospel is only a candy-coated trip to Hell.

**Unknown**

Preoccupation with self is the chief sin in the modern world (Pride). And this means that without opposing the absorption with self, even a renewed effort to teach about God will be fruitless, since it will only be presenting a God to be used by us rather than a God who demands from us a surrender of self and radical obedience...

***James Montgomery Boice***

- There are four things that we need to be growing in an awareness of to be moving forward in having a right view of God...

## **1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD**

- "The absolute authority, determination, and rule of God of all his works and creatures."
- The most important thing that can be said about God.
- In order for God to be sovereign, he must also be all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely free.
- He cannot be limited in any way...
- Speaking of the doctrine of "The Sovereignty of God"

It is the doctrine that gives meaning and substance to all the other doctrines. It is the foundation of Christian theology... The center of gravity in the system of Christian truth – The sun around which all the lesser orbs are grouped."

***A.W. Pink***

- If God is sovereign over all things, what does that mean about us... WE ARE NOT!
- We are not in control of the least detail of the affairs of our personal lives.
- We should never be so self-consumed that for a moment think the world revolves around us...

## **2. THE HOLINESS OF GOD**

Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?"

***Exodus 15:11*** – Moses

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.

***Isaiah 6:3***

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.

***Revelation 4:8***

- There are a few challenges here...
- #1 The holiness of God rests lightly upon us... Why? We have a hard time understanding it...
- Holiness speaks of God's transcendence – That he is completely / totally other than us.
- #2 The holiness of God is something that we are to stand in awe of...
- Reality... There is very little these days that people stand in awe of – least of all God...
- #3 Holiness is the standard against which human sin is exposed, and we don't like that.
- In scripture, exposure to God's holiness always produces feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment and even terror...

- One evidence of this is that our culture today has eliminated Sin as a category for human actions.
- Sin is now something that is someone else's fault, caused by my environment, parents, or genes.

### 3. THE IMMANENCE OF GOD

- That is that God is at every moment present with us and in everything...
- He exists and operates within the believer.

For in Him we live and move and have our being.

***Acts 17:28***

Brother Lawrence – 17<sup>th</sup> Century believer who lived and worked in a monastery after his conversion. He was assigned to work in the kitchen, specifically to be in charge of the utensils. At first he hated kitchen work, But he set himself so to walk in God's presence that he could worship God and serve others in the most humble circumstances. In time Lawrence came to worship God more in the kitchen than on the cathedral, praying "Lord of all pots and pans and things... Make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the dishes..."

- It (Immanence of God) should be rediscovered by many who imagine that they are close to God because they can talk about him glibly when actually they know very little about him and are hardly conscience of his presence in daily life.

### 4. THE WISDOM OF GOD

- In order for God to be all-wise, he has to also be all-knowing.
- A person can have a great deal of knowledge not know what to do with it.
- He can know a great deal about a lot of things and still be a fool.
- Wisdom consists of knowing what to do with knowledge one has, and the ability to direct that knowledge to the highest moral end.
- We need to be humbled by Gods wisdom and learn to trust it.
- We need to seek God wisdom in his Word fervently and consistently.

"We are accustomed to admit freely that God is more powerful than we are, but not that he is wiser than we are. To be sure, we say that he is; but when it comes to a showdown. We do not want to act on what we say."

***Martin Luther***

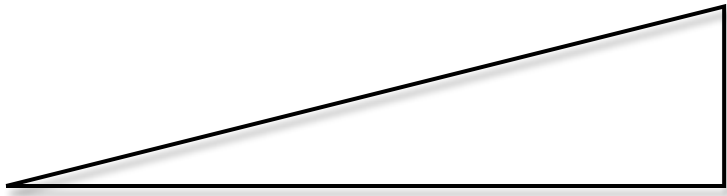
### RECOVERING REPENTANCE

"If your faith hasn't changed you, it probably hasn't saved you..."

***Anonymous***

- If God is holy and if we actually come face to face with him or get to know him, then the first thing we are going to become aware of is that we are not holy. That will lead us to repentance...

- Illustrate:



- Sadly, many of us reveal that we do not know God very much by our lack of repentance and seeking God's mercy. We assume that repentance is something that we did in the past – When we became Christians.

When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, "Repent," he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance.

***Martin Luther***

- What does repent mean: Turn From – Turn Too, 180 Degree, About Face, Change mind, Convert...
- We need a life characterized by repentance...
- Faith cannot exist where repentance doesn't...
- Three evidences that we are living a lifestyle of repentance:

### **1. A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN**

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a clean (right) spirit within me.

***Psalms 51:10***

### **2. A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD SELF**

- Repentance also means dying to the old ways...Crucifying the flesh...

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

***Galatians 2:20***

- We are no longer what we once were, but we are not yet what God calls us to become.
- As long as this is the case we are called to an ongoing battle for holiness...

### **3. A NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD**

- As we grow in an awareness of the holiness and justice of God there must also be a growing awareness of the amazing and abundant grace and mercy of God!

## **RECOVERING THE INVISIBLE**

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

***2 Corinthians 4:16-18***

- We are so materialistic and hooked on the things of earth.

- We can't imagine living life without our trinkets / stuff...

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

**Matthew 6:18-20**

- If you want visible , worldly success and a comfortable life...Get a job and play the market...
- Most things that have lasting value are not like that.
- God has promised to bless His Word and t bless those who set their minds and affection on Him.

## **RECOVERING COMMUNITY**

- The church can model community as no other secular organization can...
- No business, school, center of entertainment, government or city agency...
- Why... Because the church gets us outside of ourselves to think about and care for others.
- We don't want to be a "holy huddle" we want to get out and invite others in...Meeting needs on the way.
- That was Jesus' model...
- There are 2 major challenges:
  1. Our present day mechanized society treats people as things that have a function rather than people who have a purpose...
  2. We have become preoccupied with ourselves, rather than seeing ourselves in community with and existing to serve others (Lone Ranger)...

Our churches are one of the last strongly defended communities, still, they do not escape individualism... Many of us drive to church, listen to the sermon, say, "Hello" to our circle of friends, and return home without ever having really experienced community. Earlier evangelicalism was so focused on corporate spirituality that communion was taken with a common cup... We hear endless sermons on spiritual gifts and how the body of Christ is supposed to operate in concert. And, yet, our services are often made up of the professionals who entertain us the individual, separate believers who are entertained.

**JMB**

- What makes a community? A community holds together because of a higher allegiance and priority.

## **RECOVERING SERVICE**

- We need to recover the importance of good works as the necessary and inevitable outcome of genuine conversion. True Christians must lead lives that are different from and better than those they led before they came to Christ. God expects it; indeed, he requires it (Eph 2:10). And the world expects it to!
- When our eyes are off of ourselves and on Christ we begin to see others and the joy of serving them in Christ name!