

Ten Essential Truths

(All scriptures are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. I urge readers to read and study using your choice of translation. Look up the Scriptures which I refer to but do not quote. In this way, you will benefit most from this study. There are additional Scriptures with questions at the end, for your further study. May God bless you as you read.)

This is the document that discusses the ten essential truths of which I wrote briefly in *Victory through Voice: How to Speak Truth When the Culture Demands Silence*. I believe that these are essential points of the gospel. They do not run counter to the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lausanne Covenant. My goal is to present the gospel as God intends us to experience it, so that we can speak it in love to our hurting culture. After all, if we don't know the truth, we can't share it and experience victory through voice.

My ten-point list is not intended to be all-inclusive. There is much in the Word of God which enlarges these points and brings out secondary points. But this is a start—a foundation. If we learn these things and are able to witness them to others with our voices and our lives, we will be doing the will of God. We will shine as light in the cultural darkness. We will speak truth to a culture that demands silence.

Point 1: The Triune God Created All That Is

Through the Word of the Son, God created all that is or ever will be. The Trinity collaborated in creation, as is evidenced in the words, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Not multiple gods, but three Persons in one God.

We see the Trinity from the beginning. There was God, who called forth the Light (Gen. 1:3), which is the Son, the living Word (John 1:1–9). He came into the world as the true Light, having been the Light over creation before the sun, moon, and stars were made. These two persons were joined by the “Spirit of God” that “moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). This is the Holy Spirit, whom we see throughout history.

Referring to Jesus, John 1:3 states plainly that “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Speaking of Jesus, Paul says, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col.

1:16–17). The *New Living Translation* words verse 17 like this: “He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.”

Hebrews 1:2 reiterates this truth, stating that God, who spoke through prophets has also spoken through his Son, “by whom also he made the worlds.” We see a song of full overcomers in Revelation 4:11 that praises the Lord, saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created” (NKJV). These are just a few Scriptures that assure us of God’s creation through Jesus, the Son.

Thus, the creation by the Triune God is the first foundational truth we need to understand. It explains our origin and points to our purpose—to fulfil the will and pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that our Creator God made everything should reassure us that there is purpose and order to this life. It should help us with decisions that relate to order and purpose. It brings understanding and clarity to questions about identity and morality. It vanquishes confusion over sexuality, gender, and the value of an unborn life.

Point 2: Sin Entered the World by Man’s Disobedience

A key point to the gospel is that sin has marred the human race, resulting in a need for atonement. Of course, other terms come to mind as well: reconciliation, redemption, salvation, forgiveness, and deliverance. All of these express facets of atonement, which I like to think of as “at-one-ment,” bringing mankind back into fellowship with God.

The very name of “Jesus” implies the reality of sin, for it is written that, “you shall call His name JESUS [Yeshua]: for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21 NKJV). Often we refer to him as Jesus Christ [Yeshua Ha-Mashiach—Jesus the Messiah or Anointed One]. That proclaims his deity and his work of salvation. But from what does he save us?

In Romans 3:23, Paul makes clear that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” He clarifies the statement in Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” This is the doctrine of *original sin*, as some denominations call it. And we all need to be saved from that condition of sin.

Sin entered by the disobedience of Adam in the garden. A more contemporary translation of Romans 5:12 says, “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.” (NLT). That first sin is recorded in Genesis 3:1–7.

In 1 Timothy 2:14, Paul explains this: “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” In other words, Eve was deceived by Satan, who appeared as a talking snake. Adam, to whom the command was given not to eat of that tree, willingly ate, in disobedience to God. But after Eve had entered the transgression by being deceived, the only way to keep the unity between them was for Adam also to enter the transgression. He did so, willingly because he loved Eve.

Adam, head of the old creation, is a type of Christ, head of the new creation. When Paul contrasts the physical and spiritual realms in 1 Corinthians 15, he makes this point:

And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. (vv. 45–47)

In Romans 5:14, Paul actually calls Adam a figure (or symbol) of Christ: “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.” The one who was to come was the Messiah, Jesus. Furthermore, we see these two contrasted in Romans 5:15–21. The head of the old creation, Adam, brought us down into sin. The head of the new creation, Jesus Christ, lifts us out of sin when we enter the new creation by being born again. But he had to take our sin upon himself, just as Adam did when he ate the forbidden fruit which Eve had tasted.

I discuss this question of sin in several chapters of *Victory through Light: How to Overcome the Growing Cultural Darkness*. Though our culture and many cultural Christians deny the reality of sin, by it a great gulf is fixed between God and man. Sin has separated us from fellowship with God. To regain that fellowship, we must get rid of sin. And the only way we can do that is to accept God’s offer of reconciliation through faith in his Son, who died and rose again for us.

Notice, that to accept the doctrine of original sin, we must also accept the truth of creation. If everything evolved from some slime in the water, where did sin come from? Is it genetic and, therefore, physical? Do lower animals sin? How did people first decide some things were sin, if they evolved from earlier primates like apes? Was the so-called Neanderthal man conscious of sin? Rejecting God as Creator leaves confusion and inconsistencies in our worldview. And it leaves the problem of sin—or evil—a mystery without explanation.

On the other hand, accepting God as Creator brings harmony to our worldview and thinking, especially as we see mankind made in a special way. God spoke all creation into existence except for man, whom he formed from the clay with his own hands. Furthermore, he breathed life into him, “and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). He made Eve from a rib of Adam (Gen. 2:22), a symbol of the making of a spiritual bride for Christ from a rib portion of the church, which is the spiritual body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:24; and others).

If we accept that biblical account, we must also accept what happened next. In Genesis 3, we read of the temptation, the deception, and the sin. That one disobedience by Adam brought upon the human race the penalty of death, disease, infirmity, sickness, disasters, pestilence, venomous and dangerous animals, and the propensity to continue to sin. That *original sin* stains every person born into this world. It plagues every living person through all generations.

Sin darkens our culture today. Secularists accept sin as “normal.” They defend, endorse, and embrace it. They demand that we do the same. They validate sins as normal emotional and physical experiences. And, of course, they do not call it sin.

For the most part, our culture today denies the existence of sin. From the sound-good mantra of “all people are basically good at heart” to the devious declaration that there is no such thing as evil, unbelievers brazenly call God a liar. John speaks to this point in 1 John 1:8 when he writes, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (MEV). Denying sin leaves us thinking we have no need for a Savior. However, acknowledging sin prepares us to receive God’s remedy for sin. And, indeed, God showed us this remedy over and over throughout the millennia of human history from the garden of Eden forward.

Point 3: God Sovereignly Provided for Mankind throughout the Ages

While it may seem that this is not really a main point of the gospel, it’s essential in understanding the character and nature of God and the depth of his love for his human creation. From that first sin forward, God provided a sacrifice to atone for sin and to restore fellowship. Each sacrifice up to Calvary typified the death of Christ on the cross.

The first such sacrifice is recorded in Genesis 3:21, where we read, “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” They were naked, in sin, and needed a covering. Their fig leaves (self effort) were insufficient (vv. 7–10). The first animal was slain—the first thing to die—and the skins used to cover sin. This gives a special meaning to

Paul's words in the New Testament to "put on the new man" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27), and "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14). God gave Adam and Eve animal skins to put on—skins from the first sacrificial animal slain. That animal served as a symbol of Christ's death, which was planned before creation (see 1 Peter 1:20 and Rev. 13:8).

In Genesis 4, we see the offerings brought by Abel and Cain. Abel brought a lamb, as God had instructed. Cain brought the products of his own labor, which was not accepted for atonement. We can't do enough works to earn salvation or to restore fellowship. Nothing we can produce makes up for our sin. But when God told Cain to bring a lamb, he refused to do so. Instead he slew his brother Abel. And, thus, sin spread.

After the flood, Noah offered a burnt offering to the LORD, resulting in the promise of God to never again destroy the earth with a flood (Gen. 8:20–22). As a sign of God's promise, he sent the rainbow (Gen. 9:11–17).

Later, God ordained the complex series of sacrifices under the law given by Moses. The sacrifices were not a provision for humans to attain their own atonement or to restore fellowship by their works. The sacrifices were typical of the sacrifice of Christ to be made on the cross in due time.

As mentioned before, Christ's death on the cross was planned from before creation. In 1 Peter 1:18–20, we read,

For you know that you were not redeemed from your vain way of life inherited from your fathers with perishable things, like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He was foreordained before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for you. (MEV)

In God's view, his Son, Christ, is the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 MEV).

Indeed, all of God's dealings with humans from the garden of Eden forward testify of his sovereignty over creation and his provision for us to be reconciled to him. His love is on display throughout history. And that essential point of the gospel brings us to "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4 NKJV) when the Son of God would enter the world as a man.

Point 4: Christ Came and Lived Among Us as a Man

The Son, Jesus, was born of the Virgin Mary and lived and walked as a human on earth, doing good, preaching truth, and working miracles. He was the living word fulfilling the written word. John expresses this in his gospel record, in John 1:1, 2, and 14:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God . . . The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. (MEV)

As for his words and deeds, we have only to read through the four gospel records to see all the evidence of his life. John sums it up with these words:

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. (John 20:30–31)

The first verses of Luke and Acts testify of the desire to leave eyewitness accounts of what Jesus did and taught. And Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:15–18:

And I will also be diligent to make sure that after my death you will always remember these things. For we have not followed cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received honor and glory from God the Father when a voice came to Him from the majestic glory, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And we ourselves heard this voice, which came from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain. (MEV)

Yet Peter says that the written word is more reliable than their testimony of the life of the Living Word. Not more reliable than his life, but than their testimony of his life. And he makes clear that the Old Testament prophecies of Christ are trustworthy and unfailing. He writes

And we have a more reliable word of prophecy, which you would do well to follow, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of the Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation. For no prophecy at any time was produced by the will of man, but holy men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:19–21 MEV)

Thus, the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 is to be taken literally: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name

Immanuel.” We read this literal fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 1:26–38. Thus, his name, Jesus, signifies “God with us” as our Savior.

Furthermore, we are not free to interpret the facts in any way other than that Mary was a virgin, that in a miraculous and unfathomable way the Holy Spirit came upon her and conceived in her the Son of God, and that she remained a virgin until after the birth of Jesus. Then she had other children by Joseph.

The virgin birth of Jesus is not up for negotiation. It is both fact and truth.

In the gospel records we have accounts of miracles, sermons, and parables by which Jesus taught the people. The written books carried his teachings through nearly two thousand years and continue to teach us today. His life speaks grace, love, forgiveness, hope, joy, peace, and life. He shines a light through all generations. He also speaks of judgment, and today’s progressive Christian would find his words to the Pharisees and Sadducees to be a bit “intolerant.” Yet, judgment is part of his message. “Neither do I condemn thee” is followed by “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Furthermore, he did no sin though he was tempted. We read of his first recorded temptations in Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; and Luke 4:1–13. In each temptation, he replied from the Word, showing us the way to victory through obedience to God’s written Word. In Luke 22:28, we read Jesus’ words to the disciples, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.” This indicates that he knew other times of temptation that are not specifically recorded. But we know that in all of them, he was without sin. We read in Hebrews 4:15 that he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” He “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He “did no sin” (1 Pet. 2:22). And “in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). But he was tempted so he can help us when we are tempted. It was part of his identification with humanity.

Additionally, he felt emotions that are common to mankind. He felt our sorrow, as seen in John 11:35. At the tomb of Lazarus, “Jesus wept,” even though he knew he was going to call Lazarus from the tomb to finish his life on earth. A read through the gospels will reveal other emotions that Jesus experienced—joy, assurance, peace, frustration, anger, disappointment, friendship, and weariness, to name a few.

And think of the miracles, deliverances, and healings that he performed. All these supernatural manifestations of his power must be accepted literally. We cannot water down these occurrences, “spiritualize” them as secular Christians do today, or discount them as merely

allegories or stories. Jesus did tell parables, but his miracles are not parables—they are real happenings that prove his divinity in the midst of his humanity.

Moreover, our worldview must include not only the reality of his life but also the reality of his death on the cross, which is our next point. The birth, life, miracles, and teachings of Christ are important. But more important are his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These points are essential to our salvation. Through these events comes our redemption from sin and our reconciliation to God. These are points 5, 6, and 7.

Point 5: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Was Crucified and Buried

The death on the cross of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the pivotal point of history. The entire Old Testament points forward to his sacrifice. The Gospels of the New Testament lead up to it and show it, and the Epistles teach truth based upon it.

We saw how Old Testament offerings pointed toward Calvary. Even the event of Abraham obeying God to sacrifice his son Isaac foreshadows God's offering up of his Son, Jesus. Though an angel stopped Abraham, an angel only strengthened Jesus (Luke 22:43). He could have called legions of angels to save himself from that torturous death (Matt. 26:53). But his final prayer was, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). He went freely and voluntarily to the cross (Phil. 2:8) for the "joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2).

In John 10:17–18, Jesus says, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I received this command from My Father" (MEV). He knew the price and willingly paid it—for us.

As we saw before, he was the Lamb foreordained from the creation of the world. John the Baptist announced him as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36). John the Baptist declared him also to be the Son of God (John 1:34).

This truth is the cornerstone of the foundation of the church, the family of God. Yet people today recoil from it as they did in Jesus' day. Some accused him of being a devil. They laughed at, mocked, and scorned him. And through mob rule they had him crucified by the Roman government—exactly as was prophesied. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 are just two of the Old Testament Scriptures which point to the suffering, torture, and death of Christ.

Many nominal Christians today shrink from the truth of the crucifixion and claim that it is “too bloody” of a doctrine to be adhered to. Instead, they focus on those teachings of Jesus they find palatable, and they ignore the problem of sin and God’s remedy for sin—Christ slain on the cross and buried in a borrowed tomb.

Why would God require any death as payment for sin? Those who ask that question miss the real heart of the death of Christ for us. Yes, his death brings our forgiveness. But his death was so much more than just substitutionary punishment for sin. As we saw before, he took the place of the head of the new creation, the last Adam, and lifted us from the *condition of sin* as well as from the *punishment and penalty for sins*. (In Point 9, we will see ourselves removed from the *presence of sin*.)

Christ’s death for us brought us back into fellowship with God—the fellowship that was severed upon that first sin in Eden. We come into the world estranged from God. We are born sinners. We are born condemned. But when we look upon Jesus—the Light—and accept his sacrifice for us, we are born again into the family of God, with full fellowship with the Father, and are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the “kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). We see this expressed by Jesus in John 3:16–21.

Furthermore, in Romans 5:8–11, Paul says,

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (NKJV)

Thus, we are justified (made righteous), reconciled to God (free to enter his fellowship), and saved from wrath (condemnation and hell). This also implies having our sins forgiven, even as was prophesied in Isaiah 1:18—“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

That Jesus was buried after his death is obvious. See Matthew 27:57–61; Mark 15:42–47; Luke 23:50–55; John 19:38–42; and 1 Corinthians 15:4, to cite a few Scriptures declaring this truth. But where did his spirit go while his body lay dead in the tomb? Did he go to wrestle with

Satan in the lowest depth of hell? No. His battle with Satan was finished at the cross. Jesus declared plainly, “It is finished”—literally, “I have won.” See John 19:30.

Nevertheless, he had a ministry to accomplish in “sheol,” or the grave. Scofield indicates that the Hebrew “sheol” is the same as the Greek “hades.”¹ It refers to the grave—the place to which all humans go upon death, where human activity has ceased. In the Old Testament, it is a place of sorrow. See 2 Samuel 22:6, Psalm 18:5, and Psalm 116:3.

In the New Testament “hades” is the “unseen world” where departed human spirits dwell between death and the resurrection. At the time of Jesus’ death, there were two abodes there—the place of the saved and the place of the lost. The saved were in “paradise,” which is where Jesus promised the repentant thief that he would be (Luke 23:43). Paradise was also called “Abraham’s bosom,” as we see in Luke 16:19–26.

Between the two compartments a great gulf is fixed. The souls in Abraham’s bosom were conscious and comforted. They awaited their transport to heaven. The souls in the other part were conscious, able to think and remember, and in torment.² They will remain there until the resurrection of the unsaved dead (Rev. 20:12–15).

Thus, it was to the “paradise” compartment that Jesus descended. He went there for a very specific reason—to preach to the souls there, announcing that he had triumphed over Satan, sin, and death. We see this in 1 Peter 3:19–20 and in Ephesians 4:8–10.

In Peter, we see that Jesus preached to the people of Noah’s day who had repented when the flood waters carried them away. They were too late to enter the ark, but their repentance placed them in paradise rather than the place of torment, where the unrepentant were. Also with them were others of the Old Testament who believed God: the patriarchs, judges, David, prophets, and ordinary people who accepted the truth of God.

In Paul’s letter to Ephesus, we see Jesus leading those souls from paradise in sheol to paradise in heaven. We know that paradise is now in heaven because Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 of being caught up into the third heaven, which he also called paradise:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful [possible] for a man to utter. (NKJV)

Thus, paradise is now in heaven, and only the unbelieving dead are in sheol, or hades. But how did these in paradise get transferred to heaven? Our next gospel point answers that question.

Point 6: Christ Was Raised from the Dead

Christ rose the third day, in a glorified body, triumphant over death, the surety of our resurrection and glorification. Jesus foretold this in Luke 9:22: “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.”

Another time he listed Jonah, three days and nights in the belly of the whale and then vomited forth onto dry land (Jonah 1:17 and 2:10), as a symbol of his own resurrection (Matt. 12:39–40; Luke 11:29–30). Just as Jonah was seen by the Ninevites after his experience, so also was Jesus seen by many, as a testimony of the reality of his resurrection.

Furthermore, we read in Matthew 27:52–53, of an earthquake on resurrection morning (Matt. 28:2), “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.” Note that it doesn’t say “all,” but rather “many.” Perhaps these are the worthies of faith (Hebrews 11) who died in faith, hoping to “obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35).

Jesus literally, in a glorified body, left the grave. He had glorified clothing and did not need the burial shroud in which he had been wrapped. He was alive and able to eat (Luke 24:41–43). He could pass through walls and enter rooms without using the door (Luke 24:36; and John 20:19, 26). He retained his crucifixion wounds, as proof that it was he himself (John 20:20, 27).

He reminded his disciples that the Old Testament spoke of his resurrection (Luke 24:46; Psalm 16:10). Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 reveal that we identify with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. This is key to our new life in him.

In Romans 4:25, we read that Jesus was “delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” If we try to separate salvation into two parts, we would come up with forgiveness of our individual sins (purchased at Calvary) and justification for original sin (guaranteed by his resurrection). However, redemption is one extended work, planned from the creation of the world and made manifest in AD 33.

Paul discusses the significance of Christ’s literal resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12–23. If Christ was not raised, then we have no hope of resurrection and would be quite miserable. I

remember hearing a song in the late 1970s that claimed that if there were no heaven, having Christ in this life would be enough. While I understood the sentiment, my spirit recoiled from that song. The Word states plainly that

If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:16–21)

The resurrection is a key doctrine of the gospel. Without the resurrection, the gospel is empty and insufficient. Those who claim to be Christians, but who explain away the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, are false teachers in need of correction. To say that he only spiritually arose, or that he didn't really die but was only comatose, is to denigrate the Son of God, pervert the gospel, and insult the Holy Spirit.

The risen Christ is as essential to our salvation as the crucified Christ. Note in the book of Acts, how many times the apostles emphasize the resurrection. See Acts 2:22–24, 32; 3:14–15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30–32; 10:40; 13:30, 34, and 37; and 17:31.

The risen Christ guarantees our eternal life. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor. 6:14). The fact that God raised Christ guarantees our resurrection as believers in Christ.

Additionally, In John 11:25–26, Jesus' words to Martha could not be more clear: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

In John 14:2–3, Jesus said: “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” He knew he would rise from the dead and return to heaven, which is the next point.

Point 7: Christ Ascended into Heaven and Will Come Again

Jesus ascended into heaven with the promise that he will come again (Acts 1:9–11). The “cloud” that “received him out of their sight” was the glorified believers who were raised at his resurrection—the Old Testament worthies whom we saw in Point 6.

Unbelievers may scoff at this. Yet the entertainment media thinks nothing strange of having a person go slowly up into a UFO, or pass through a transporter quickly. Think of the movies and television shows that portray these kinds of events. If we can imagine it in fiction, God can make it happen in reality. The people of Acts 1, disciples and others, saw and recorded his ascension. And they were willing to die for their testimony of it.

Jesus foretold it, even knowing he would be crucified for that truth. Not only would he ascend, but he would sit at the right hand of the Father and would come again to earth from that place. “Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). Mark also records this (Mark 14:62), along with the ascension, which he records in Mark 16:19: “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”

The truth of Jesus’ ascension is an integral part of the gospel. Risen in a glorified body, only two options existed for him: (1) remain on earth in that body until the end of time; (2) depart to heaven as he promised to prepare a place for us. A third possibility that some might mention would have been to have died again, as did Lazarus. But that was not possible since Jesus arose in a glorified body, not a resuscitated or quickened mortal body as those whom he raised during his ministry.

We have quickened mortal bodies—alive in the new creation but yet subject to physical death and decay. We can read about that quickening in Romans 8:11 and Ephesians 2:5. We will discuss this point later. The importance here is that Jesus Christ, who rose in a glorified body, ascended into heaven where he awaits the Father’s command to come and get his people.

Before we look at his coming again, let’s reassure ourselves of the fact that he ascended upon high. This is a point reiterated many times. It’s a key pillar of our foundational truth. Upon Stephen’s stoning, he saw Jesus in heaven:

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:55–56 NKJV)

And for this he was mobbed, dragged from the city, and stoned to death. If it were only a hallucination or fictitious vision, would he not have recanted to spare his life? But for him, and

countless others since, that truth has been worth dying for. And we may, in our deteriorating culture, be called upon to do likewise.

Paul writes in Ephesians 1:20, speaking of the mighty power of God, “Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” It is as though the ascension completed the resurrection, and the resurrection had to precede the ascension, as both necessary to the display of God’s power. Could God have taken him to heaven before the cross and the resurrection? Of course. But for the plan of God to be successful and complete, Jesus had to die, be buried, be raised, and THEN ascend into heaven.

Other references of Jesus in heaven include Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; and in 1 Peter 3:22, as just a few. Those Scriptures show him “sitting” not “standing” as Stephen saw. Most scholars agree that Jesus stood for Stephen, in the event that the scribes and Pharisees accepted the testimony and came to faith. Had all Israel believed at that time, Jesus would have returned and set up his Millennial Kingdom, with Israel ruling over the nations.

However, he knew, since God is omniscient, that they would not receive him. But they had to have the opportunity. Since they rejected Christ, he sat down to wait for the fullness of the Gentiles (non-Jews) to be completed. Paul speaks of this in Romans 11:25: “For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, lest you be wise in your own estimation, for a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (MEV).

God’s plan has always been for all of humanity, though he chose one nation in whom to work especially during the Old Testament times. Now, he’s taking a people out of the nations. That is his church, from whom he is preparing a company of mature and dedicated believers to be his bride. We will see more about this in Point 10.

For now, he ascended into heaven where he waits until the time when he will come and receive his people to himself. This will occur before he comes to set up his kingdom with Israel as head. We see this in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

He could not descend from heaven had he not first ascended to heaven after his resurrection.

However, before that time, another significant event occurred. Because Jesus went to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to earth to dwell with and in his people. In fact, he explains this

in John 16:7: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” And that leads us to Point 8—the Holy Spirit.

The sending of the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity—is an important truth of the gospel. It is an integral part of the ancient creeds.

Point 8: The Holy Spirit—Third Person of the Trinity—Teaches Truth

John the Baptist announced that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. He says in Mark 1:8, “I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.” This is also recorded in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16.

The people most likely wondered at John the Baptist’s words, pondering what that really meant. Jesus, at the end of his ministry, explained in part, but I’m sure they still had questions. In his last night with the disciples, he told them much about the Holy Spirit, whom he referred to as the Comforter (Counselor) and the Spirit of Truth. In John 14:16–17, he says,

“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that He may be with you forever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, for it does not see Him, neither does it know Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you, and will be in you.” (MEV)

The word translated “Comforter” in the *King James Version* and “Counselor” in the *Modern English Version* means an intercessor or consoler. It can also be translated “advocate.” Thus, the Holy Spirit is sent to believers to comfort us and advocate for us. He gives us wise counsel. He encourages us when we are in difficult times. He leads us to faith in Christ. Therefore, he is with us, as believers. We will see later how he comes to be “in us” as well. The promise is there. But the unbelieving world does not see him because they reject his presence with them. Those who reject Christ can never have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

The Spirit’s ministry to the world is detailed in John 16:8–11:

“When He comes, He will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I am going to My Father, and you will see Me no more; and of judgment, because the ruler of this world stands condemned.” (MEV)

The unbelieving world—our culture—recoils from the conviction of sin. Unbelievers redefine actions and deny sin. But they cannot escape the conviction of the Holy Spirit, who also

convicts them of their lack of righteousness based on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ who came from heaven and ascended into heaven. The culture of unbelief and darkness doesn't want to admit that its ruler, Satan, stands condemned.

The Holy Spirit impresses these truths upon unbelievers. Some remain in their darkness and will face the judgment of God. Some come to faith as a result and cross over into the family of God. For them, the Holy Spirit becomes Comforter, Spirit of Truth, a companion and an indwelling presence, a teacher and a guide.

In John 14:26, Jesus says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And not only those things which Jesus taught them, but the things he wanted to teach them, but couldn't because they weren't able to receive that teaching until after his death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:12–15, Jesus says,

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

And it does take the Holy Spirit for us to understand the deeper revelations of the Word, as well as the basic points of the gospel.

And once we know these, the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to testify and witness to others. Just as the Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus, so should we. In John 15:26–27, Jesus promised, "But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning" (MEV).

In Luke 24:49, Jesus says, "And look, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you. But wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are clothed with power from on high" (MEV). He repeated this statement the day he ascended, saying, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 MEV).

And, of course, in Acts chapter 2, we see the Holy Spirit poured out upon the believers who gathered in the upper room. Moreover, what they received was not limited to just them. Throughout Acts, we see believers in different cities and situations being filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the church was baptized into the Holy Spirit on that day of Pentecost in that upper room. That experience did not end that day, nor that century. See what Peter says in Acts 2:38–39:

“Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (MEV)

On that first day, the sign of the presence and infilling of the Holy Spirit was undeniable. Acts 2:2–3 (MEV) describes “a sound like a mighty rushing wind” that filled the whole house and “tongues as of fire” that rested “on each of them.” Verse 4 declares that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.” They spoke in languages they did not naturally know and had not naturally learned. And people from all over the known world recognized their own language as the disciples praised God and testified of his wonderful works (Acts 2:7–11).

My point in this discussion is not to prove that speaking in tongues has continued to this day, which I know it has for many believers. My focus is on the reality of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, and on his work through, for, with, and in believers.

When we realize that we have the Holy Spirit with and in us, we also realize that he does give us power to witness, even as Jesus promised. He helps us understand the Word. And in times of need, he quickens to our hearts and minds the Scriptures that we need in order to stand for truth and righteousness and to gain and remain in victory.

Furthermore, as we see in 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to the believers to operate in the church or assembly. In verse 3 of that chapter, we see that the Holy Spirit enables us to call upon Jesus as Lord. And then we read of the gifts, service or ministries, and working of God:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to

another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Cor. 12:4–11 RSV)

I will not here go into a description of these gifts or of their use in the assembly. We must understand, though, that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each believer as he sees fit. As believers, we are not limited to one gift. And we don't get to choose the gift or gifts we receive. It's the Holy Spirit's call.

Paul does exhort us to “earnestly desire the higher gifts” (v. 31 RSV). In 1 Corinthians 14:1, he specifies which gift he considers higher: “Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (RSV). He explains why in the following verses of that chapter. I encourage you to read and study his words about these gifts. (Additional resource available.)

In 1 Corinthians 12, we also see the metaphor of a body, to which the church is likened. Christ is the head, and we are the body (v. 27). Our unity is from the Holy Spirit. Paul explains in verses 12–13,

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (RSV)

Paul continues, discussing different body parts, like hand and ear and eye, showing that we have different places in the body and different functions. He asks, “If all were a single organ, where would the body be?” (v. 19 RSV). And he answers, “As it is, there are many parts, yet one body” (v. 20 RSV).

He moves from this to a list of ministries in the church which God has appointed and for which the Holy Spirit equips the chosen individuals: “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues” (v. 28 RSV).

Note that these do not line up 100 percent with the gifts, showing that these are the ministries given by the Holy Spirit to work in combination and cooperation with the gifts of the Spirit, for the benefit of the whole body (v. 7). The *New Living Translation* words it, “so we can help each other.” *Revised Standard Version* and *Modern English Version* say, “for the common good.” And *New King James Version* says, “for the profit of all.”

When we realize that the Holy Spirit unites us as a body, we should be slow to criticize other believers who are standing for the truth of the gospel. When we understand that we are individual members of a united body, each with our own function, purpose, ministry, calling, and gift, we should have a sense of responsibility to the whole and to the members of the whole. We should find it easy to “love one another.”

This is the unity that the Holy Spirit provides us. Moreover, the Holy Spirit produces fruit in us (Gal. 5:22–23), which was discussed in Chapter 11 of *Victory through Voice*. In our lives, we experience that spiritual fruit produced in us, as we live and walk in the Spirit, rejecting the lusts of the flesh.

Paul lists agape love as the first characteristic of that fruit, and we see what is called the “love chapter” (1 Cor. 13) sandwiched between two chapters on the gifts of the Spirit and their operation in the church (1 Cor. 12 and 14).

Paul writes at the end of 1 Corinthians 12, “Yet I show you a more excellent way” (v. 31 MEV), and moves into his discussion of agape love. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 14—after the discussion of agape love—Paul writes, “Follow after love and desire spiritual gifts” (MEV).

So, the fruit of the Spirit connects with gifts of the Spirit and empowerment by the Spirit for the work God assigns us and for our boldness to testify of Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to shine as light into our dark world. He empowers us to speak truth with love in our culture. He energizes us to live the new creation life, in victory over the old fallen nature which still lingers with us. This brings us to the next point.

Point 9: The Believer Has Two Natures

In Chapter 11 of *Victory through Voice*, we talked briefly about the new creation life and the divine nature in all who believe in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul describes the new creation life in 2 Corinthians 5:17, when he writes, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

That new life in us is dependent upon the spirit of Christ which is in us, because we are born again. His spirit in us gives us the faith and power to live a godly life. Paul writes, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for

me” (Gal. 2:20). “Flesh” in this verse refers to the physical body, not to the old creation, which produces works of the flesh—sin—when not yielded to the Spirit.

The same idea is expressed in Romans 6:4–7:

Therefore we were buried with Him by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in the likeness of His death, so shall we also be united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him, so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we should no longer be slaves to sin. For the one who has died is freed from sin. (MEV)

This doctrinal point is key to our victory over sin. When we learn that our sinful and sin-prone old creation is dead and that we are alive through Christ in a new creation life that cannot sin—when we learn by experience that truth—we can live godly and holy lives. And that is what God wants us to do, as Paul declares, “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12).

However, living godly comes with a price tag—persecution. We discussed this in the opening chapters of *Victory through Voice*. Paul writes to Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). But living victoriously is worth the suffering, for eternal gain will more than compensate us for temporal hardship. See 2 Corinthians 4:17–18.

Paul discusses the war between our two natures in Romans 6—8. And we do experience this war, because, though our old nature is dead, our body is alive and still subject to temptations. In Romans 6 we see that we must refuse to yield to sin and must choose to yield to righteousness. We do that by yielding to Christ in us, aided by the Holy Spirit. Paul explains in vv. 11–13 (MEV),

Likewise, you also consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and your bodies to God as instruments of righteousness.

In verse 11, the word translated “consider” in the *Modern English Version* is translated “reckon” in the *King James Version*, which signals a greater sense of determination. “Reckon” is to “count it so; to actively believe it is and to act on that belief.” This requires us to fully understand this truth.

Romans 7 shows this battle in real time, particularly in verses 14–25:

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.
(NLT)

That is the condition of the believer who doesn't "reckon" himself dead to the old creation nature of sin, as we saw in Romans 6.

How many times do we find ourselves facing that conundrum? All I have to do is get behind the steering wheel when I'm running late for an appointment. Stuck behind a slow driver or in heavy traffic, my old creation quickly surfaces. I have to choose to exercise patience, grace, and kindness, rather than impatience, anger, and name-calling. It's a constant struggle. I can't just win one time and never face it again.

The same may go for dealing with children, arguing with a spouse, or reacting to someone on the job (or on Facebook). We all have our battles. But the battle is not against the person or circumstance—it's against our own old creation flesh.

Paul shows the way of victory in Romans 8. He emphasizes that Christ living in us fulfills the righteousness of the law and does not sin (vv. 1–4). If we are yielding to the Spirit, who quickens our mortal bodies (v. 11), we will be "in the Spirit," "led of the Spirit," and will, "through the Spirit . . . mortify the deeds of the body" (v. 13).

Paul concludes, "Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live" (Rom. 8:12–13 NLT).

Death is the outcome of sin. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). We will see in the final point of gospel truth that this is not to say that if we, in a moment of weakness, succumb to

sin, we will lose salvation. We can't. But a life of sin can lead to an early death, and it certainly produces no eternal fruit or rewards. But if we count as dead our sinful nature—the old creation—and rely upon Christ in us—the new nature—our life will glorify God and produce a fragrant testimony of his grace.

The idea of mortifying the deeds of the flesh is found also in Colossians 3:5: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” *The New Living Translation* clarifies for today's readers: “So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world.”

Paul's instructions continue from Colossians 3:6—4:6, where we see what it looks like to put off the failings of the old creation and put on the character of the new creation. He gives the same basic information to the Ephesians in 4:20—6:20. We see the general instruction in Ephesians 4:22–24,

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (RSV)

This is followed by specifics as to how to accomplish that.

Again, it comes down to Christ's identification with us in death, where he bore our sin and sins at Calvary, and to our identification with him in his resurrection. Returning to 2 Corinthians 5, we see a clear statement of this following that of verse 17, with which we started this section. Verse 21 says, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (MEV).

Our old creation is sinful; our new creation is righteous. We get to choose which to yield to. Our strength for that choice comes from the Holy Spirit. And our choice results in our rewards in eternity, as we will see in the next point.

This final point of gospel truth unifies the other points and holds them together. This point answers questions and resolves what some people might call contradictions. (There are, however, no contradictions in God's Word or the gospel—only contradictions in how we understand it.)

Point 10: Believers Have Security, a Racecourse, a Prize to Win, and Rewards Promised

Knowing the two natures of the believer helps us understand the problem of Christians committing sin. It is possible for a Christ follower to yield to the old nature of sin while not forfeiting the new nature of Christ within. While such failure does not please or glorify God, it does not reverse salvation. As we see in Judges 14—16, although Samson lived in the flesh and died physically with the Philistines, he is in the *hall of faith* (Heb. 11:32–34), right along with Gideon and others. Samson did not lose his place in God’s family. He did not lose his salvation.

Security

If we could reverse salvation, then we would be greater than God. And that is impossible. Jesus plainly states our security, speaking of us as his sheep: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one” (John 10:28–30).

One summer at church camp, I held a stone tightly in one hand and covered it with the other, to illustrate this scripture. My only mistake was that I asked my strapping young grandson to try to remove the stone. He almost did, and I had to call an end to the demonstration. Everyone got a good laugh, and I commented that I was only a weak human. Had it actually been Jesus with the stone in his hand, my grandson would not have had the success he had. I decided to call on a timid and younger child the next time. However, the Scripture is clear. No one can remove us from the hands of our Savior and our Father.

I have heard the argument, “But you can take yourself out.” However, think about it. If you—a human being—could take yourself out, you’d have to be greater than the Father. And that is impossible.

Additionally, God promises “eternal life,” not “conditional life.” Looking at the experience of being born, does it seem possible that a birth could be reversed? No one in the natural can become *unborn* after being born. Sadly, a baby can die soon after being born. But that baby cannot enter the womb again and be an unborn one.

Likewise, how could we become *un-born-again*? A born-again believer who falls into sin may die; but he or she does not forfeit the born-again new life they received—the spirit of Christ in them, the new creation they have become (2 Cor. 5:17).

Furthermore, there are so many other verses we could cite regarding this, some of which will be in the readings for reflection and discussion. This is not intended as a comprehensive study of eternal security. Nevertheless, the assurance of salvation fits with the truth of the two natures and the truth of eternal rewards and ranks. However, salvation carries responsibilities which we benefit from meeting.

As Christ-followers, we have a responsibility to obey God, live and walk in the Spirit, and yield to Christ in us. We have a responsibility to count the old creation dead and ourselves alive to God, as servants of righteousness, to put off the old man and put on the new. We saw that in the previous point.

We also have a responsibility to shine as light in the cultural darkness and to speak the truth in love even when the culture demands our silence. Doing so, we have a responsibility to suffer with patience any persecution that comes to us as a result of living and speaking truth. And persecution will come. Second Timothy 3:12 promises, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

But what of those who don’t live godly but have been born-again?

How often have you heard the statement, “If we are assured of salvation, we can sin all we want.” To that I say, as did Paul, “God forbid.” See Romans 6:1–2, 15: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may increase? God forbid! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid!” (MEV).

What then is to motivate us to live godly lives in the new creation? And what do verses mean that reference a racecourse or winning Christ? Let’s examine this.

Racecourse

Because we are eternally secure in Christ, we cannot lose salvation, nor can we turn away from it. We can fail to yield to the new creation life in us and, instead, serve the old creation life of sin, but if we do so, *we will lose out on God’s best*. On the other hand, if we yield to the new creation life and live for God, *we will win the prize of our high calling*.

Paul emphasizes this in Philippians 3:12–14, using the example of a strenuous race to the finish line for a prize:

Not that I have already attained or have already been perfected, but I follow after it so that I may lay hold of that for which I was seized by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not count myself to have attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (MEV)

Why would Paul say he has not already attained, if he were there talking about salvation? He has taught elsewhere that salvation is a gift by grace through faith. It happens the moment we confess Christ as our Savior. We cannot merit it by self effort or law keeping. It is fully of grace, not works. See Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9; and Titus 3:5–7, as just a few Scriptures regarding this.

So, Paul, in Philippians, is talking about something beyond salvation. He's referring to the race of which he spoke metaphorically in 1 Corinthians 9:24–27:

Do you not know that all those who run in a race run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may obtain it. Everyone who strives for the prize exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, be we an incorruptible one. So, therefore, I run, not with uncertainty. So I fight, not as one who beats the air. But I bring and keep my body under subjection, lest when preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (MEV)

He's talking about a spiritual race, one he is serious about winning. He does not want to be disqualified by sins. Keeping his body under subjection is another way of saying counting the old creation dead and the new creation alive in Christ. Or putting off the old man and putting on the new. Or mortifying the deeds of the flesh and walking in the Spirit.

Prize

So, what is the incorruptible prize? That which we see in Philippians 3:14: “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (MEV). In verse 8, he expresses it like this: “that I may win Christ” (KJV). This is worded “that I may gain Christ” in the *Modern English Version*. Again, he's not talking about winning Christ as Savior or gaining salvation. He's talking about winning a special relationship with Christ, about gaining a special place. A special position reserved for those who truly love Christ and are willing to live and die for him.

Many teach that all believers will be in Christ's bride. If so, then why would Paul be concerned that some would be deceived away from that honor, as he expresses in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3? They cannot lose salvation, but they can lose God's best—that highest place of being in the company of believers who will be the bride of Christ. See what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:1–3:

I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me! I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (RSV)

A “sincere and pure devotion to Christ” is required of those who will be in his bride. Do we not all know believers whose growth has been stunted by lack of knowledge and by misdirection and wrong teaching? Or by rebellion and carnal living? How many true believers have fallen prey to a social gospel that focuses more on environmentalism than eternity? More on the government feeding and clothing the world than on individuals being used of God to change lives now and for eternity? More on speaking affirmation to sin than on lovingly correcting the sinner?

If we look at Revelation 19:6–9, we see the announcement about the Bride making herself ready. We also see the mention of ones who are blessed to be invited to the marriage supper. Is a bride invited to her own marriage celebration? Or does she, with the bridegroom, do the inviting?

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” (ESV)

The reason this point is important to the gospel is that it reinforces the truth that once we are born-again, we are eternally secure in Christ. If we choose to live in the flesh, we will lose that prize of the high calling of God—that best place as one in the bride of the Lamb. But we will not lose salvation.

Think about the followers of Jesus while he lived and walked on earth. Among the twelve disciples, we can see differences in their closeness to Jesus. Peter, James, and John were called

aside several times. Once they went with Jesus up the Mount of Transfiguration. They seemed to have a special place with him. Others were sent out in the seventy, but were not counted in the twelve disciples who were closest. Yet others were not sent out at all, but were with Jesus many times (Lazarus, Mary, and Martha).

Moreover, others followed from a distance, some seeking healings, deliverances, or free food. The repentant thief on the cross had no time to perform good works or witness to his family or just grow up in Christ; yet he was saved, nonetheless. So it makes sense that among the whole church, there would be those who have different levels of association with Christ, based on their maturity and dedication to him.

This idea also explains the different groups seen in Revelation at different times and in different circumstances or activities. A group is seen in chapters 4 and 5, described as twenty-four elders and four living creatures, symbolic of those who fully reflect the character of Christ and rule in life by him. They extol the Lord as Creator (Rev. 4:11) and as Redeemer (Rev. 5:9). That they are justified humans is clear in the words of their song: “for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9 MEV).

Another group is seen in Revelation 7:9–17, “a great multitude which no one could count, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues” (v. 9 MEV). Notice that the first group, in Revelation 4 and 5, are seen before the tribulation events begin to unfold. After the tribulation starts (Rev. 6), there are a number of Israelite believers sealed (Rev. 7:1–8), and then after that, this second group is seen in heaven (Rev. 7:9).

Verse 14 identifies that second group as “those who came out of great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (MEV). They were translated to heaven after the beginning of the tribulation. They are saved and have white robes of faith, but lack the lustrously bright robes fit for the bridal gown. Additionally, a special group of Jewish believers is seen arriving in heaven in Revelation 14, at the mid-point of the tribulation.

Seeing the different groups in heaven at different times clarifies the old problem of pre-trib, mid-trib, or post-trib rapture. It’s actually all—each in his own rank or order, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:22–23: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order” (MEV). The Greek word translated “order” means “something orderly in arrangement, such as a troop in its ranks; a series or succession.”

We already know that the unbelieving dead will be raised for judgement some one thousand years after the last believer is raised. So is it a stretch to see different groups of believers being raised in a series or succession? When we believe this, our worldview has a cohesion that is missing if we fail to account for these verses that show different groups of believers and diverse time frames.

This also ties in with the dissimilar rewards spoken of in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. I offer a study of those in the Free Resources on my website, “Letters to Seven Churches.” Though we can view those churches in light of church history, we can also see elements of each in operation today. Some have commendations and criticisms; two have no criticisms or words of correction. They have promises of varying rewards for overcoming the faults (if any) attributed to them.

For now, let’s look at the basic difference between salvation and rewards.

Rewards

It’s important to know that getting into heaven is a gift. Romans 6:23 declares plainly, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” See the parable of the workers in Matthew 20:1–15. The ones who were hired near the end of day received the same pay as the ones who worked all day. This doesn’t mean that we have to work for salvation, but the analogy is that regardless of length of service for the Lord, every believer receives the gift of eternal life.

So why even try to do good? Well, hopefully that isn’t our attitude.

When we obey the Lord and the Word, walk in the Spirit, and live the new creation life, we have a happier life here AND we lay up treasures in heaven. We will enjoy the “reward of the inheritance” (Col. 3:24).

Jesus promised rewards to his people: “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. 16:27). We see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Revelation 22:12: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

There is much more we could say about rewards. We could even look at various types of crowns promised in the Word. But the important thing to know is that salvation is a gift, and our

rewards are according to how we live this life— do we live the old creation life of sin, wasting our opportunities, or do we let our new creation life shine through?

Let's speak the truth in love, suffer with the Lord, and rejoice in the rewards, as Jesus describes in Luke 6:22–23:

“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they separate you from their company and insult you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for indeed, your reward is great in heaven. For in like manner their fathers treated the prophets.”

Summary

Can we witness before we understand all these points? Yes. But we may not be prepared for trick questions meant to confuse us. Having this solid foundation is like building on the rock, not on the sand (Luke 6:47–49). When we can proclaim the depth of truth, our voice will be victorious. We may not lead everyone to Christ, but our words will testify of the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ. A sound knowledge will bring assurance to our voice.

We don't need to cover all these points every time we witness. We need to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit who knows what the person we're talking to needs. Maybe it's just to share our personal testimony of how Jesus has set us free and brought joy and peace to our lives. Maybe it's just to share the basic good news of John 3:16. Sometimes it's to answer questions the person has about things they've been told or about their experiences. The Lord will give us the words to speak.

And his Word will not return void (Isa. 55:11). When we speak truth to the culture with our voice and our life, fruit will follow, though it might come in the form of persecution. We must be prepared for this. If we stand for the truth, our victory through voice might not be realized until we're in heaven. Then our voice will praise our Creator and Redeemer for eternity.

In summary, the ten points that we need to know for a solid worldview are these:

1. The Triune God created all that is.
2. Sin entered the world by man's disobedience.
3. God sovereignly provided for mankind throughout the ages.
4. Christ came and lived among us as a man.
5. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified and buried.

6. Christ was raised from the dead.
7. Christ ascended into heaven and will come again.
8. The Holy Spirit—third person of the Trinity—teaches truth.
9. The believer has two natures.
10. Believers have security, a racecourse, a prize to win, and rewards promised.

As I mentioned, we can witness even if we don't fully understand all these points or are not able to articulate them. But a biblical understanding is necessary for a comprehensive worldview. Eve didn't fully understand God's nature or his purpose, so she was easily fooled by Satan, who appeared as a talking snake (Gen. 3:1–6). Thus, if we understand the nature and purpose of God, the fullness of the gospel and the Word, and the main points of sound doctrine, we will not be fooled by the enemy, in whatever form he appears to us.

Instead, we will be able to share Christ with a hurting world. We will bear spiritual fruit and show love to one another. We will live and speak truth even when the culture demands silence.

Endnotes

Point 5: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Was Crucified and Buried

1. Rev. C. I. Scofield, D.D., Notes, *The Scofield Reference Bible, The Holy Bible, King James Version*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1945, pp. 956–957. Used by permission.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1098–1099.

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Review and Reflect

1. Read Psalm 19:1; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17; and Job 38:3–11. Can you find other verses which speak of God as Creator? If he did not create the world, does he have a responsibility to care for it, or a right to establish moral principles in it?
2. Do you see the importance of believing in creation? Do you understand how serious is the deception of naturalistic evolution, which is taught as fact in public schools?
3. Read Romans 1:20–23; Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10–18, 23; Isaiah 64:6–7; and Psalm 5:9. How do you answer people who talk about “following their heart” or speak of the innate goodness of all humans? And what about the kindness of some unbelievers? Are their hearts really wicked?
4. Are we being hateful when we admit that the old creation heart is wicked and sinful, like the Word says, and that we need to be born again to have any real “goodness” at all?
5. Read Isaiah 1:18. Do you see that Jesus was the planned Savior even under the law—that the law and the patriarchal promises foreshadowed him? Could human writers living centuries apart plan such a scheme as this? Do you see the truth of 2 Peter 1:21—“holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”?
6. Read Romans 3:24–26; Galatians 4:4–5; John 1:14–17, 25–27; and Genesis 22:7–14. Does Jesus’ position as Son of God require him to also be the Lamb of God? Explain. Was that provision foreshadowed in the event of Abraham and Isaac on the mountain?
7. Read John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38–40; 8:28–29; Acts 10:38; Luke 4:18–19; and Isaiah 61:1–2. Jesus credited his Father for the good works he did, even the cross. If we are living the new

creation life—Christ in us—should we credit the Lord for the good that we may do? Can we be assured that what we do is God’s will?

8. Can anything negative be said about the way Jesus lived his life among us? List some of the miraculous things he did in general. List some of the miracles he did in particular. It’s a long list, isn’t it? And John says there were more—John 21:25.
9. Read Isaiah 53:1–12; Psalm 22:1, 6–8, and 14–20; 69:1–4, 14–21; Matthew 27:26–66; Mark 15:15–47; Luke 23:24–56; and John 19:16–42. How could David and Isaiah know about crucifixion when it wasn’t even a known form of execution in their days? Since all the gospels include a lengthy report of the crucifixion, may we conclude that it is the pivotal point of history and of the gospel? Explain.
10. Read Hebrews 7:27; 9:1, 11–14, 22–28; Leviticus 17:11; and Hebrews 12:1–2. What do you say to unbelievers who claim that sacrificial death is “too bloody” for them? Why was Christ’s blood required, as symbolized in the Old Testament by the blood of animals?
11. Jesus, being the Son of God, knew that his Father would raise him from the dead. Since he knew that, why did he pray for the cup to pass from him, if possible? Since he is alive now, what did he give up by dying for us?
12. Though Jesus died and was buried, was there hope for him and in him? Does this give you hope? What would your life be if he was not raised from the dead?
13. Read Psalm 16:10; 49:9; Luke 24:1–8; Acts 2:27, 31; 13:34–37; and Revelation 5:6–14. Why was it impossible for the body of Jesus to decay? If his body couldn’t decay, what happened to it?

14. Read Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–20; Luke 24:9–36; and John 20:1–30. What recorded events demonstrate that a glorified body has substance but can do things the natural body cannot? List those things.
15. Read Matthew 28:11–15. This Scripture discloses the lie of the Pharisees. Would the disciples—and millions since—be willing to die for a lie, if indeed it were a lie? Does persecution and martyrdom for this truth establish it as truth? How does martyrdom for this precious truth differ from martyrdom in other religions?
16. Read Matthew 28:16–20; Luke 24:49; and Acts 1:1–11. Do we now have to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus told the disciples? Or was that fulfilled on the day of Pentecost for all time? See Peter’s words in Acts 2:38–39.
17. Read Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 67; 2:25–26; 3:22; and 4:1; Mark 12:36; John 7:39; Acts 1:16; 11:16; and 28:25; John 1:33–34; Acts 1:5; and 2 Peter 1:21. Was the Holy Spirit present on earth before the day of Pentecost? What was different about his appearances and work before and after Pentecost, when the church was baptized with the Holy Spirit? Did the Holy Spirit inspire the writing of both the Old and New Testaments?
18. Read Matthew 12:31–32; Mark 3:29; and Luke 12:10. Describe what is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Do you think it includes rejection of the Holy Spirit’s witness concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Savior and Lord?
19. Read Mark 13:11; and Luke 12:12. When we come under persecution for our faith, can we rely on the Holy Spirit to give us words to speak, strength to stand, and boldness to witness?
20. Read 1 Corinthians 2:12–14; Acts 10:38; and Romans 5:5. When we are not under direct persecution, does the Holy Spirit enable us to do good, to speak truth, and to show love?

21. Read Acts 13:52; Romans 14:17; 15:13; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Titus 3:5; and Matthew 9:16–17. Consider the attitudes and actions we are to have as redeemed saints and members of Christ’s body the church. Does the Holy Spirit have an important and integral role in our new creation life? Do we do God a disservice if we attempt to live righteously apart from the Holy Spirit? Can we patch up our old nature or just add the new into the old?
22. Read Hebrews 9:12–14; 1 John 1:7; Romans 3:20–24; Philippians 3:9; and Romans 8:3–10. Is our enemy sin or our old creation nature? Or both? Do you see that the old creation nature is sin—even when it may appear lovely? There is no true righteousness apart from God, and, hence, our only righteousness is that “righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7).
23. Read Judges 13:1–14, 24–25; and all of 14; 15; and 16 (highlights of Samson’s life); Judges 6:7–40; all of chapter 7; and 8:22–28 (highlights of Gideon’s life); and Hebrews 11:32–34. Though Samson’s first fling with a Philistine woman was of the Lord (Judg. 14:4), does it seem that he kept choosing what pleased his flesh over what would please the Lord? It took defeat, captivity, and loss of sight for him to finally learn that the enemies of God were truly his enemies also. But was he even then dedicated to God’s righteousness, or was it revenge he sought?
24. Samson yielded to the flesh even though God called him to be an instrument of deliverance and victory for his people Israel. Gideon was also called to that purpose. What can we say of Gideon’s testimony? Though he erred in making the ephod as a physical reminder of God’s faithfulness, was Gideon an example of living the new creation life? Why or why not? Count the number of times Gideon seeks the Lord for direction and orders. Would you rather be a

meeek Gideon or a mighty Samson? Does it surprise you that Gideon and Samson are both mentioned in the *hall of faith*—Hebrews 11?

25. Read Genesis 8:20–22; 15:6; Jeremiah 17:9–10, 14; 31:35–36; and 33:20–21. Faith in Christ brings salvation. Jeremiah declared, “save me, and I shall be saved” (Jer. 17:14). Upon whom does he place the responsibility for keeping us saved—God or self?
26. Read Isaiah 54:7–10; John 3:16; Psalm 89:34; and Romans 11:1–6, 25–27. If we could get ourselves “unsaved” or remove ourselves from God’s hands, what would that say about the power of God? If he would “un-save” us, what does that say of his faithfulness? Do you see that his very nature guarantees our security?
27. Read Matthew 6:19–21; and Colossians 3:1–4. God created and redeemed us to do good works by faith, in the will of God and in the power of the new creation life. If we do these works, will we receive a heavenly reward?
28. Read Song 7:13; and Ephesians 2:10. Should our attitude be to gain the praise of God and heap up rewards in heaven or should it be simply to do the will of God as the Spirit leads and works in us?
29. Read 1 Corinthians 3:8, 10–15. What do you think gold, silver, and precious stones represent? Is it divine nature, redemption, and spiritual gifts and callings, all of which are eternal things?
30. What does wood, hay, and stubble (straw) represent? Is it human constructions, feed for livestock, and bedding for farm animals—or “things that are seen,” which are temporal?
31. Read 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; Matthew 25:25, 34; Mark 13:33; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; and 1 Samuel 25:13; 30:22–25. Must one be a minister or missionary to earn rewards? Or do we earn them by being and doing what God assigns for us, even if that

task is “staying by the stuff” (i.e., watching, waiting, praying, and supporting those on the mission field and in ministry)? The last line of a poem by John Milton says, “They also serve who only stand and wait.” That line has been used with slight changes in wording by different people in different circumstances. However, his line is based on Scripture and is true. Do you agree?

32. Read Ruth 2:12; Psalm 19:7–11; Proverbs 11:18; Matthew 5:11–12; 16:27; 2 John 1:8; Colossians 3:23–24; and Revelation 22:12. Do the phrases “reward of the inheritance” and “full reward” suggest that there are different levels of rewards, depending on closeness of relationship or excellence of service? If there is a “full reward,” can there also be a “small reward”? Can a person inherit some, but not all, the riches of the inheritance, just as in the natural? Do you think that rewards are based on our “performance” or on the degree to which we allow Christ in us to work righteousness and love through us as we yield to him and walk in the Spirit? What else can you say about rewards from these verses?
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