



**Talmid תלמיד** a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 6

JUNE 1, 2013

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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## The Doctrines of Grace

### Christ's Purposeful Atonement (Part-6)

*(Continuation from last month)*

The primary axiom of all Reformed theology is this: “Salvation is of the Lord.” Salvation is a divine work. It is designed and ordained by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are in eternal agreement on the plan of redemption and its execution.

**On the distinction between Reformed and Arminian theology, J. I. Packer has**

written:

“The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself. One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly. The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, those who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man’s salvation is secured by any of them. The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man....”

### GOD’S OMNISCIENCE

God’s omniscience refers to God’s total knowledge of all things actual and potential. God knows not only all that is, but everything that possibly could be. The expert chess player exemplifies a kind of omniscience, though it is limited to the options of chess play. He knows that his opponent can make move A, B, C, or D, and so forth. Each possible move opens up certain counter-moves.

The more moves ahead the expert can consider, the more he can control his chess-game destiny. The more options and counter-options one considers, the more complex and difficult the reasoning.

In reality no chess player is omniscient. God knows not only all available options, but also which option will be exercised. **He knows the end before the beginning.** God's omniscience *excludes both ignorance and learning.* If there is ignorance in the mind of God, then divine omniscience is a hollow, indeed fraudulent, phrase. Learning always presupposes a certain level of ignorance. One simply cannot learn what one already knows. There is no learning curve for God. Since no gaps exist in his knowledge, there is nothing for him to learn.

For us to know what will happen tomorrow, we must guess concerning things that are contingent. If I say to a friend, "What are you going to do tomorrow?" he might reply, "That depends." Those two words acknowledge that there are contingencies ahead and that what happens to us depends on these contingencies.

**It is said that God knows all contingencies, but none of them contingently.** God never says to himself, "That depends." Nothing is contingent to him. He knows all things that will happen because he ordains everything that does happen. This is crucial to our understanding of God's omniscience. He does not know what will happen by virtue of exceedingly good guesswork about future events. **He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it.**

**The Westminster Confession** avers: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...."

This statement refers to God's **eternal and immutable decretive will.** It applies to everything that happens. Does this mean that *everything* that happens is the will of God? Yes. Augustine qualified this answer by adding the words, "**in a certain sense.**" That is, God ordains "**in some sense**" everything that happens.

Nothing that takes place is beyond the scope of his sovereign will. The movement of every molecule, the actions of every plant, the falling of every

star, the choices of every volitional creature, all of these are subject to his sovereign will.

No maverick molecules run loose in the universe, beyond the control of the Creator. If one such molecule existed, it could be the critical fly in the eternal ointment. As one grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the course of English history, so one maverick molecule could destroy every promise God has ever made about the outcome of history.

The "**certain sense**" of which Augustine spoke has often been articulated by a distinction between **God's decretive will** and his **permissive will.** This distinction is valid if used properly, but it is fraught with peril. It hints at a false dichotomy. The distinction is not absolute: **what God permits, he decrees to permit.**

For example, at any given moment of my life, God has the power and authority to intrude providentially and to restrain my actions. In a word he can *prevent* me from sinning if he so chooses. If he chooses not to prevent me, he has clearly chosen to "permit" me to sin. This permission is not a divine sanction on my behavior. That he permits me to sin merely means that he chooses to allow it to happen rather than to intrude and prevent it. Because he chooses to let it happen, in some sense he ordains or intends that it should happen.

This reflects **God's passive decree,** which is **active** with respect **to his intention,** but **passive** with respect to his action. We see this in the **doctrine of providential concurrence:** the intentions of two parties, God and man, flow together in a single event. The clearest biblical example of this can be found in the narrative about Joseph and his brothers. The treachery of his brothers did not fall outside of God's sovereign ordination. Joseph said to his brothers: "**... you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive**" (**Genesis 50:20**).

**Genesis 50:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

After the **Westminster Confession** speaks of God's ordaining whatever comes to pass, it adds: "**yet so, as**

thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.”

“Second causes” are secondary, and as such are dependent on a primary cause for their potency. God, and God alone, is the sole primary cause in the universe. He is not merely the first cause in the Aristotelian sense of the first in a long chain of causes. He is the ground of all causal power.

Scripture declares that in God “we live and move and have our being” ([Acts 17:28](#)).

[Acts 17:28 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

**God is the ground of all being, all life, and all motion.** Apart from his power to create and sustain life, no life is possible. Apart from his power of being, nothing else would be or could be. Apart from his power of motion (primary causality), nothing can move, change, act, or bring about effects. **God is not like Aristotle's unmoved mover.** Will Durant once likened Aristotle's god to the King of England: he reigns but does not rule. **God not only reigns, but also rules, and he rules sovereignly.**

Secondary causes are not, however, imaginary or impotent. They exert real causal power. We make real choices. Yet a secondary cause is always dependent on the primary cause, God himself, for its efficacy.

God brings to pass his sovereign will through or by means of secondary causes. “By means of” is another way of saying that God ordains not only the ends, but also the means to these ends.

The doctrine of limited atonement hinges on the specific design or end for which Christ went to the cross. John Owen remarks: “By the end of the death of Christ, we mean in general, both ... that which his Father and himself intended *in it*; and ... that which was effectually fulfilled and accomplished *by it*.”

The goal of the atonement was to save the lost. Christ loved his church and gave himself for it. He

died in order to save his sheep. His purpose was to effect reconciliation and redemption for his people.

**The Father's ultimate purpose was to save the elect.** He designed the Son's atonement to accomplish the goal or end of redemption. *Every Arminian would agree with that.* The issue is this: **Was God's purpose to make salvation for all possible, or to make salvation for the elect certain?** The ultimate aim of God's plan of redemption was to redeem his elect. To accomplish this end he ordained the means. One was the atonement made by his Son. Another was the Holy Spirit's application of this atonement to the elect. God provides for his elect all that is necessary for their salvation, including the gift of faith.

Once we grasp the doctrine of total depravity, we know that no person will incline himself to faith in the atoning work of Christ. If God does not supply the means of appropriating the atonement's benefits, namely faith, then the potential redemption of all would result in the actual redemption of none.

## THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST

The atonement is Christ's chief work as our great High Priest, but it is not his only priestly task. He also lives as our intercessor with the Father. **His intercession is another means to the end or purpose of the elect's redemption.** Christ not only dies for his sheep, but also prays for them. His special work of intercession is definite in its design.

In his high priestly prayer Jesus says:

[John 17:6-12 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

<sup>7</sup> "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You;

<sup>8</sup> for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received *them* and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.

<sup>9</sup> "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours;

<sup>10</sup> and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in

them.

<sup>11</sup> "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.*

<sup>12</sup> "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

Jesus intercedes here in behalf of those whom the Father has given him. It is abundantly clear that this does not include all mankind. The Father gave to Christ a limited number of people. They are the ones for whom Christ prays. They are also the ones for whom Christ died. Jesus does not pray for the whole world. He says that directly and clearly. He prays specifically for the ones given to him, the elect.

Earlier in John's Gospel Jesus says:

[John 6:37-39 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>37</sup> "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

<sup>38</sup> "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

<sup>39</sup> "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.

There is no uncertainty here. The work of redemption accomplished by Christ as our surety is no mere possibility or potentiality. It is a certainty.

That Christ does not pray for the whole world and does not die for the whole world is disputed by semi-Pelagians of all sorts. The most important text to which they appeal is found in the [First Epistle of John](#):

[1 John 2:1-2 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

<sup>2</sup> and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those*

*of the whole world.*

On the surface this text seems to demolish limited atonement, saying explicitly that Christ is the propitiation of the sins for the "**whole world.**" The whole world is set in contrast with "our." We must ask, What does our mean here, and what does whole world mean here?

Our could refer to Christians as distinguished from non-Christians, believers as opposed to nonbelievers. If this interpretation is correct, then Christ is a propitiation not only for Christian believers, but for everybody in the whole world.

On the other hand our could refer specifically to Jewish believers. One of the central questions of the church's earliest formative period was this: Who is to be included in the New Covenant community? The New Testament labors the point that the body of Christ includes not only ethnic Jews, but also Samaritans and Gentiles. The church is composed of people from every tribe and nation, from people drawn out of the whole world, not merely the world of Israel.

Ample evidence indicates that the term world in the New Testament often refers to neither the entire globe nor to all persons living on earth.

For example, we read this in [Luke](#): "... it came to pass in those days *that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered*" ([Luke 2:1](#)).

[Luke 2:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup> Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.

We know this census did not include the inhabitants of China or South America, so "**all the world**" does not refer to all people in the entire world. The usage of world in this manner is widespread in Scripture.

Semi-Pelagians also appeal to [2 Corinthians](#), where Paul says that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" ([2 Corinthians 5:19](#)).

[2 Corinthians 5:19 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses

against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

**2 Corinthians 5:19 (KJV)**

<sup>19</sup> To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Paul speaks of Christ's "reconciling the world" to God in the indicative mood. Moments later he switches from the indicative to the imperative: "**Be reconciled to God**" (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Is this a command simply to be what we already are?

**2 Corinthians 5:20 (NASB)**

<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

**2 Corinthians 5:20 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

To be sure, Christ's propitiation on the cross is unlimited in its sufficiency or value. In this sense Christ makes an atonement for the whole world. But the efficacy of this atonement does not apply to the whole world, nor does its ultimate design.

**CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)**

## Integrity, *Coram Deo*

We live in a world of compromise—in a society that has abandoned moral standards and Christian principles in favor of expediency or pragmatism. The underlying philosophy is based on accomplishing goals by whatever means are necessary. This self-centered perspective should have as its motto: "**If it works for you, do it**"—a notion that inevitably leads to compromise of conscience and convictions. Because compromise is so prevalent in our society, you could say we no longer have a national conscience; guilt and remorse are nonfactors in determining behavior.

Politicians, who should be upholding the high ideals of our country, instead are leading the way in

compromise. They promote their lofty standards and high ideals prior to their elections but compromise them once they are in office. The same holds true in business, from corporate executives down to salespeople; in the courts, from judges to attorneys; in sports, from owners to athletes; and in all walks of life. As a result, people learn to lie, cheat, steal, and shade the truth—to do whatever is necessary to get what they want. **Thus compromise becomes a way of life.**

Unfortunately, the philosophy and practice of compromise has even invaded the church. Because tolerance is the operative ideology in our society, the church adopts a similar perspective to reach the unsaved. **Many churches now look for ways to give the Gospel to people without offending them.** Yet the very nature of the Gospel is offensive because it confronts sinners with their sin. Ignoring that, many churches willingly compromise God's Word instead of standing firm on the Gospel, and they give the world a watered-down version that can't effect any change.

On an individual basis, the spirit of compromise hits closer to home in your personal interactions. You may have had opportunities to proclaim Christ to unbelievers, yet out of intimidation or lack of confidence, you have kept silent. Perhaps you've found yourself compromising God's Word on some ethical issue at work or in your neighborhood and convinced yourself that such compromise was necessary to maintain your credibility as an employee or neighbor. Yet your Christian testimony is predicated on your complete devotion to God's Word as the highest authority—no matter what the consequences may be. **God draws the elect into the kingdom through Christians who prove to be different from the world**—who reveal their true allegiance by their commitment and obedience to God's standards.

Our difficulty in living like that is the opposition we encounter from the world. **R.C. Sproul**, in his book *Pleasing God*, describes the pull the world has on us: "The world is a seducer. It seeks to attract our attention and our devotion. It remains so close at hand, so visible, so enticing. It eclipses our view of heaven. What is seen vies for our attention. It entices our eyes lest we look up for a better country whose builder and maker is God. It pleases us—much of the time, anyway—and, alas, we often live our lives to please it. And that is where conflict ensues, for pleasing the world

so seldom overlaps with pleasing God.”

“The divine call we receive is this: “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). But the world wants us to be partners with it. We are urged to participate in the fullness of it. It presses upon us with the ultimate peer pressure.” ([Wheaton, Ill.: Tyn-dale House, 1988], 59)

**The church is now so adept at compromising with the world that it has forgotten how to be uncompromising.** That’s because we readily accept the world’s value systems and indulge ourselves in them to the point that we personalize them and they become our desires. **In essence our standards replace God’s.**

**Scripture calls us to the opposite of compromise. From one end of the Bible to the other, God clearly commands his people to live apart from the world.**

When God established the nation Israel, He built into the Israelites’ daily living the principle of separation from the world. Their religious observances throughout the year served as safeguards to prevent them, as a unique people ([Deuteronomy 14:2](#)), from intermingling with pagans.

[Deuteronomy 14:2 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”

Likewise, God calls all His people to be separate from the world ([1 Peter 2:9](#)).

[1 Peter 2:1 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>1</sup>“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”

Whenever we are tempted to compromise, we need only remind ourselves that God never compromises His absolute truths and principles for expediency. He always lives according to His Word. [Psalm 138:2\(NASB\)](#) says, “I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.” God is committed to His Word, and

as His children, we are to be also.

When you view God’s Word as the ultimate authority, that opens the way for developing integrity instead of compromise. *The American Heritage Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin, 1992)* defines integrity as “steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code,” “the state of being unimpaired; soundness,” or “the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness.” It comes from the word *integer*, which means “whole” or “complete.” (You do remember your math classes in school?) Integrity essentially means being true to one’s ethical standards, in our case, God’s standards. Its synonyms are honesty, sincerity, incorruptibility. It describes someone without hypocrisy or duplicity—someone who is completely consistent with his or her stated convictions. A person who lacks integrity—someone who says one thing and does another—is a hypocrite.

**Nowhere is integrity more critical than in the leadership of the church, because the spiritual leader must maintain integrity to set a credible example for all to follow. Yet there are many in leadership who lack integrity and thus by definition are hypocrites.**

Our Lord has no patience for such people. The scribes and Pharisees were frequent subjects of Christ’s blistering attacks on their hypocrisy. Of them He said, ““Therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for They say things, and do not do them” ([Matthew 23:3 \(NASB\)](#)). That is a lack of integrity—they lived by one set of ethics while commanding others to live by another. After pronouncing several woes on them, Jesus offered this final rebuke: “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?” [Matthew 23:33 \(NASB\)](#)

But to the man of integrity, God promises blessing. When Solomon finished building the house of the Lord, the Lord appeared to him and said:

[1 Kings 9:3-5 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>3</sup>The LORD said to him, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

<sup>4</sup>"As for you, if you will walk before Me as your

**father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you *and* will keep My statutes and My ordinances,**

**<sup>5</sup> then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'**

**The conclusion is simple: those who maintain a life of integrity will be blessed by God; those who don't will be cursed, especially those in spiritual leadership.**

Integrity is essential if any believer is to represent God and Christ in this world. Anything less than total devotion to our Lord in both character and conduct amounts to compromise with the world. A mistake often made by well-meaning Christians is to go too far in the other direction—to adhere to the biblical code of conduct without the proper internal motivation. That, too, is hypocrisy.

## **TRUE EVANGELISM**

**FALSE FORCES IN EVANGELISM**  
(Continuation from last edition)

## **SALVATION, THE OBJECTIVE IN EVANGELISM**

### **SALVATION, THE OBJECTIVE IN EVANGELISM**

All evangelism finds its consummation in one phase of the great Scriptural word, **“Salvation.”** A word which covers more than the objective of evangelism, in that it includes, beyond the deliverance from the penalty and condemnation of sin both the deliverance from the present power of sin and the final unfolding and development of the saved one into the image of Christ. The word, then, includes a whole series of other great doctrines and revelations in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are seen working toward the transformation of the individual, body, soul, and spirit, into a celestial being and a partaker with Christ of the heavenly glory. This is the mighty working of the Triune God toward the heavenly perfection of every one for whom Christ died. Blessed indeed are they who learn to yield themselves wholly to His saving power!

Because of the universal satanic blindness upon the minds of unregenerate people ([2 Corinthians 4:3-4](#)) the scope of the transforming work of salvation is not always understood, even where such knowledge is boldly assumed, and many religious leaders, through this blindness, have ignorantly turned away from the real Gospel and have sincerely espoused **“another gospel”** of social reform, ethical culture, humanitarianism or morality. In turning to these good but subordinate things they have revealed, both by their careless rejection of the one Gospel of Grace and by their unbounded enthusiasm for these unworthy substitutes, that the riches of the **“glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, has not dawned on them.”**

This unconscious ignorance of the central truth of the Word of God is one of the mightiest hindrances to evangelism today; for not only are the blinded unable to take a part in real soul-saving work, but they have pleaded for, and to some extent secured, an attitude of tolerance toward their doctrines from many who should be resisting them in defense of the truth.

The spirit of tolerance toward the preaching of **“another gospel,”** instead of the Gospel of Christ, is usually justified by the assuring statement that the Word of God needs no defense, and therefore any controversy with these promoters of the truth would be a needless and aimless warfare. To this it may be replied: No defense of the whole truth is ever made from a fear that man will destroy the eternal Word itself, but that defense is made from a God-given compassion for the multitude who are being beguiled away from all hope by the sophistries of these teachings; for any true burden for the lost will extend to the misguided as much as to the unguided.

With the many pious substitutes for the one Gospel of Grace today, and the ecclesiastical influence and blind enthusiasm of their promoters, evangelism has new enemies to face, and her glorious work can never be accomplished by waving the white flag of tolerance before these foes.

Since much depends, in true evangelism, on a clear understanding of all that is included in **“the power of God unto salvation,”** it is important to dwell at some length on the various aspects of that great word. This is undertaken with a deep consciousness that the heart-comprehension of the glorious riches of salvation must

depend upon a Divine illumination, or, as it is stated in the Scriptures: **“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”** ([Ephesians 1:17-18 \(NASB\)](#))

In [1 Corinthians 1:30](#), Christ is set forth as having been made unto the believer, **“Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.”** These three words, to some extent, suggest the three tenses—past, present, and future—of salvation; for the believer *was* saved from condemnation into righteousness and life when he believed; he is *being* saved from the habit and power of sin through sanctification; and he *will* be saved from the presence of sin when he, with his glorious body, is wholly redeemed and complete in the presence of his Lord at His Coming.

The present and future tenses of salvation, though in no way a part of evangelism, should be carefully distinguished from the past tense, which is its true objective.

To the believer who has come into the first great tense of salvation, the body of truth mentioned above which sets forth **“Sanctification,”** and **“the second tense of salvation”** is of greatest import; for it presents to him the only solution of all the problems gathering about his responsibility to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith he is called, and to show forth the virtues of Him Who hath called him from darkness into His marvelous light. The believer’s high position of sonship with God, co-partnership with Christ, and communion and fellowship with the Spirit of Holiness Who indwells him, demands nothing short of a God-wrought salvation from the habit and power of sin, which is independent of all human energy and strength; for human nature, at its best, has no capacity to produce the smallest part of a true God-honoring life.

It may further be stated in this connection that no intelligent Christian can contemplate the three-fold fact of his own high calling in Christ Jesus, his

sinful nature, and the overpowering strength of his adversary Satan, and not welcome the God-provided victory and salvation by the Spirit from the control and domination of evil. It is, however, often difficult for the child of God to abandon his own resources and tendency to self-help as a means to victory, and to rest in faith and expectation toward God that He will work in him both to will and to do of His good pleasure; yet the victory over evil is never gained by any other plan than a complete dependence upon the saving power of God through Jesus Christ. **“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** ([Philippians 1:6 \(NASB\)](#))

So it is revealed that the last tense of salvation, even that faultless presentation before the presence of His glory, is a work that is accomplished independent of all human energy and strength.

In each revealed purpose of God for man in the ages past some responsibility has fallen upon the faithfulness of man; but in this age of grace, wherein God is calling out a heavenly people, it is as though He would not allow the glorious result to be marred by one human touch, so perfectly has He reserved to Himself every necessary step in the great work of man’s salvation.







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## **Hebrews 4 - Overview**

### **Part 1**

*Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise.*

The key word in [Hebrews 4](#) is the word “**rest**”. It is used or referred to on eleven different occasions and not mentioned in the remainder of the letter after v11. In fact, [Hebrews 3 and 4](#) are the only two chapters in the New Testament where this particular word for “**rest**” is actually used except in [Acts 7:49](#) which is a quote from the Old Testament. So this is the only place in the New Testament where the subject of entering into God’s rest is addressed. In essence this is the New Testament doctrinal statement on spiritual rest. The word “**rest**” is the Greek word “*katapausis*”. “*Pauo*” means to cease or desist, and “*kata*” means down and speaks of that which is permanent. So, the compound meaning refers to a permanent ceasing of activity or what could be called a permanent kind of rest. It is a spiritual rest that is only available to God’s people. It is His permanent rest and is always available for those who are willing to enter into it.

One very interesting point about how many of the different commentators interpret the use of the word “**rest**” in Hebrews is how they relate it back to the

Old Testament and the story of Joshua (v8). They make a comparison and say that the earthly rest granted to God’s people in the promised land of Canaan anticipated the heavenly rest that was eventually to be granted to those who belong to God. Certainly that final and eternal heavenly rest is a reality for everyone who does belong to God, but to come to that conclusion as the main emphasis of the understanding of “**rest**” in [Hebrews 4](#) misses the whole point of the chapter. The Promised Land was not somewhere in the sweet by and by without conflict or struggle. To the contrary, it was a place that involved a God-ordained conflict where the Israelites were instructed to go into the land, to fight for their promised possession, and then to conquer it so that they could actually enjoy their God-promised possession. There were many physical battles and spiritual conflicts that were ahead of them.

Canaan was an actual place that God wanted His people to enter into, but even though it was God-ordained, still it was not a place without conflict. It was a place that God had prepared for His people to live abundantly, but only after they had actually entered and conquered the land. It was never a picture about heaven, but about a place that God had prepared for them in the present. It was about their everyday lives and whether or not they would trust God, but unfortunately the initial generation of Israelites never entered into Canaan. They continued to disobey God, to doubt God, and to disbelieve His Word – and they never entered into what God had both ordained and prepared for them. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the entire generation that came out of Egypt unnecessarily died in the wilderness.

Obviously there was a specific reason why they never entered into God’s rest. It was what the writer of Hebrews identifies as the “**disobedience**” and the “**unbelief**” of the people that kept them out of Canaan. The land was there, the blessings of God were there, the promise of entering victoriously was there, the grace to enter was there, but an entire generation failed to enter in because of disobedience and unbelief. They had all of the opportunities, all of the evidence needed to believe, and yet they refused to trust God. They absolutely denied the miraculous evidence of the Exodus and in the process missed all that God had planned for them. [Hebrews 3:18-19](#) gives the two specific reasons as to why God’s people never entered in,

<sup>18</sup>And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? <sup>19</sup>So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

[Hebrews 4:3a](#) says,

<sup>3</sup>For we who have believed do enter that rest....

[Hebrews 4:6](#) says,

“Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience,

[Hebrews 4:11](#) reiterates,

<sup>11</sup>Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

So, when speaking of this rest, it is not referring to “heaven” for a Christian, but rather the kind of earthly life that God has promised His people if they will just obey Him and believe Him. It should be the norm for every Christian. However, and this must be understood, it is not without some level of purposeful effort on the believer’s part to be able to enter into God’s rest. It is not something that is automatic just because someone is a Christian. To emphasize this point a little more, what logic would there be in the author exhorting believers in [Hebrews 4:11](#) to “**be diligent to enter**” God’s rest if it was not something that they were to enter into now? Certainly the meaning is not to “**be diligent to enter**” into heaven. The author wants God’s people to enter into God’s rest and to enter into it now! If the passage was referring to heaven, then for all practical purposes it would be telling believers to enter into it by their works, by being “**diligent**”. Heaven is not something that is “earned”, but it is a gift of God for the believer. So, spiritual “**rest**” is something that God wants every believer to experience and enjoy right now, not later.

In [Hebrews 4](#) there are some obvious assertions made about this “**rest**”. For instance, the first “**therefore**” in [Hebrews 4:1](#) points the reader back to the simple fact that a God-given rest remains for the people of God. In fact, he actually calls it a “**promise**”. The

fourth “**therefore**” in [Hebrews 4:11](#) defines that this “**rest**” is something that the believer is to be “**be diligent to enter**” into. So, when those two principles are put together, what it means is that God has made His children a promise, but it is a conditional promise – one that they have a part to play in fulfilling. Often times I make a promise to my grandchildren that if they will have a good week at school and do all of their homework that on Friday after school I will take them out to eat at a kid’s restaurant. They just love it. They can hardly wait for me to pick them up after school on Friday if they know that is what I am going to do for them. The point, however, is that even though the promise is valid, it still depends on them fulfilling the condition of having been good in school all week and having done all of their homework. Likewise, there are specific conditions involved for every believer if they really want to enter into God’s rest.

So what does this “**rest**” actually represent for the believer in a practical sense? What is this “**rest**” and exactly how does a believer “**enter**” into it? Just the word “**rest**” itself implies something that restores and rejuvenates a person’s strength, something that helps them to relax, and something that has great overall personal benefit. Apart from Christ, no lost person can have this rest. It is something supernatural that is solely reserved for Christians. Everyone will be “restless” until they finally come to rest in Christ – everyone. Now, in the context of Hebrews it is important to always keep in mind what these Hebrews were enduring. For them everything was the exact opposite of rest. They were in a state of turmoil and terrible unrest! They were people who had forsaken all to follow Christ and the cost for them to do so had become very high. What they were having to endure was monumental to say the least. And for that very reason, it is essential to keep in mind that what happened to these Hebrews may very well happen to any believer in some form at some time. It is the cost of being a Christian. There is no such thing as a no-cost Christianity. It simply does not exist. It is not a biblical concept. That erroneous concept cannot be found

in the Bible. The prevailing testimony of Christians all over the world is that of suffering, persecution, and great hatred towards them. The great fallacy and ultimate deception of the American Christian culture is that it has portrayed the Christian life as something that is supposed to make believers comfortable and give them a life of ease – not trials and struggles. The liberal church at large has so advanced the false teaching that Christianity is some kind of spiritual “cure-all” for what ails a person that it is almost dumbfounding! The charismatic movement’s infatuation with their “health and wealth” and “name it and claim it” gospel has reached a level of spiritual absurdity and error that is so staggering that it is difficult to even comprehend how they could glean any of what they teach from the Bible.

The key to understanding the concept of spiritual rest begins in [Hebrews 4:2](#). In the context the author is not initially talking about the Hebrews that he is writing to, but rather he is referring to the Israelites in the wilderness that were spoken of in Hebrews 3. That is who he is referring to, and so he explains what the problem was for the Israelites in the wilderness in v2.

**For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.**

What this verse states is that these Hebrews did not “mix” what they **both heard and knew** with “faith”, and so what they heard and knew did not benefit or “profit” them. They had this amazing display of some of the most spectacular of all events that have ever taken place in the world since the beginning of time. What they witnessed was so supernatural that apart from God it just defies explanation – the plagues, the Red Sea, Mt. Sinai, the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, manna each morning. It was indescribable, a God thing to say the least. And yet it seemed to benefit them nothing at all. All they did was complain!

Now, here is the question. Did these Hebrews in the wilderness “believe” in God? Sure they did. However, did they trust Him? Absolutely not! Only two took God at His Word – Joshua and Caleb. That was it – just two, two out of at least two million! So, what is important is to understand the distinction between “belief” and “trust”. It is one thing to believe in God, but quite another to actually trust Him. However, it is the trusting that produces the rest. It is the issue of how much is a believer really willing to trust God with their life. It could be occasionally, sporadically, conditionally, or maybe wholeheartedly. If this could be in a formula it might read like this: belief + trust = rest. When someone believes something it means that they have mentally accepted what they know as being true. However, just that alone has no power to bring about spiritual rest for the believer. How many Christians are there who actually believe God, but never have had any real, meaningful spiritual rest in their lives? Just because someone acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Saviour does not mean that they will ever experience His spiritual rest. It is when the believer takes that step of trusting God with their life, with their decisions, and with their lifestyle that actually allows them to enter into His rest.

There are two specific kinds of trust that are being addressed here, and they need to be clarified. The first is that moment when someone genuinely and sincerely puts their trust in the sacrificial death of Christ. They see Him on the cross, and they understand that He was taking their place and dying for their sin. They understand that without Him they will die in their sins and spend eternity in hell, and so they cry out for His salvation and He answers. They trust Him for salvation at that moment and that has to happen in a person’s life. There are no exceptions. The individual believes it intellectually, and so emotionally and volitionally they put their trust in the redemptive work of Christ on their behalf. However, the second area of trust, and the one that most affects every believer right now is when they are willing to trust in the character of their heavenly Father and simply place their burdens and their concerns and their needs in His hands. When our children were growing up, at night before going to sleep they would want us to come snuggle up with them in the bed. One of our granddaughters still wants my wife to do that

every time she spends the night at our home. The children found genuine rest in our arms and in our presence. The principle is simple: **the more trust, the more rest**. Notice that the issue is not “the more belief, the more rest”. Obviously, any believer must first believe God in order to trust Him, but belief and trust are two distinct things. Trusting God is putting what is believed into actual practice. Every believer needs to reach a place in their life where they are willing to actually trust God with their life, and when they do they will begin to enter into God’s rest – but not before.

So, the ultimate issue regarding this “**rest**” is whether or not a believer will or will not actually “**enter**” into it. The words “**enter**”, “**entering**”, or “**entered**” are used 8 different times in [Hebrews 4](#). In other words, God’s spiritual rest will do a believer no good if they never enter into it. What is important to understand about the word “**enter**” is that it is a verb – an action word. It means “to come into”. This spiritual rest is something that the believer has to consciously endeavor to have in their life. It is not automatic – far from it. As seen in [Hebrews 4:11](#), it is something that actually requires the believer being “**diligent**” to enter into it. It is the Greek word “*spoudazo*” from where the English word “speed” is derived. In essence, it simply means to use speed, to make effort, to be earnest about what someone is doing, thus, be “**diligent**”. It signifies to hasten to do something, to actually exert oneself, to endeavor. It is a word that requires earnest effort on the believer’s part. Just a casual, occasional, nonchalant, unconcerned, cavalier approach to this simply will not grant the believer access into God’s rest. This is something that has to be consciously entered into, and it requires a conscious level of effort on the believer’s part to do so. Trusting God is something that will test every believer. It is something that has to be focused on and something that a believer has to strive to comprehend what it is and how it works. One cannot be “mentally” lazy when it comes to entering God’s rest. However, the second part, and probably the most important aspect of “how” the believer actually enters into God’s rest has to do with the Word of God. Once the author speaks about this rest in [Hebrews 4:1-10](#), his final exhortation in [Hebrews 4:11](#) is to be “**diligent**” to actually enter into it. And then immediately he goes into a kind of doctrinal discourse related to the Word

of God and how it is “**living**” and “**powerful**”. There is no break in the flow of the text. It goes directly from being diligent to enter the rest to the Word of God being “**living**” and “**powerful**”. The obvious connection is that the author relates “entering” in v11 with the Word of God in v12. Christians have been called on to believe and trust in an all-powerful and all-knowing God. So the question is whether or not they truly believe in Him as such, and if so, are they able to really trust Him. Every genuine follower of Christ does not doubt the existence and reality of God, but are they really willing to trust Him with their life is the real question. The issue of salvation has been clearly resolved, but **not** the issue of following Christ and trusting Him with our lives. That is the issue in [Hebrews 4](#) – not just believing God, but trusting God so that the believer can actually enter into His rest. Those believers who have truly learned to trust God are just not afraid of life or what it might bring their way. That is not in any way to diminish the fact that as Christians we can and will have some very difficult trials and struggles in our lives. For these Hebrew believers in the midst of their very difficult circumstances, they found themselves struggling with trusting God. That is exactly why every believer needs to be fully anchored in the Word of God. If a believer’s life is not fully anchored in the Word of God, then when the trials of life come, they will find themselves no different than those individuals in [Hebrews 3](#) – doubting God, complaining against God’s ways, and ultimately finding themselves unable to enter into His rest. Life and its struggles is one of God’s primary ways of helping His children learn how to trust Him. We must be diligent to enter into God’s rest. Why? It is because of [Hebrews 4:14-16](#) where Scripture identifies that every believer has a great High Priest.

**<sup>14</sup>Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Wuest, 76.  
<sup>2</sup> Renn, 816.  
<sup>3</sup> Hughes, 107-109.  
<sup>4</sup> Vine's, 364.  
<sup>4</sup> Strong's, 1376.  
<sup>5</sup> Hughes, 113

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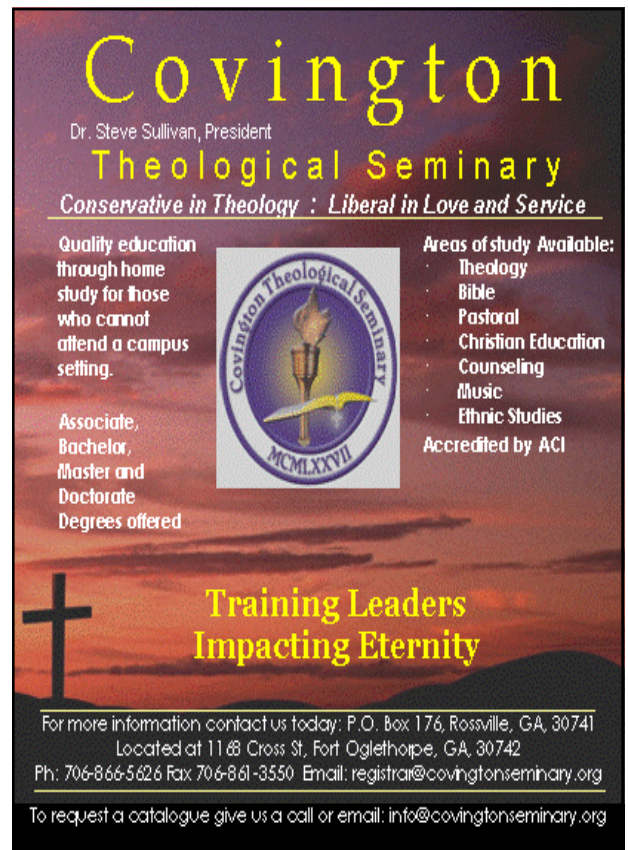
***The Talmid is published by:***



***West Los Angeles  
Living Word Christian Center***

6520 Arizona Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA  
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