



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 8, ISSUE 9

SEPTEMBER 1, 2016

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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Justification by Grace through Faith Part 1

Introduction

“Look to Me, and be saved”

Isaiah 45:22 (NASB)

²² “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other.”

Isaiah 45:22 (NKJV)

²² “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”

One evening in the nineteenth century, a young C. H. Spurgeon visited a small church where a man was preaching from

Isaiah 45:22: “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” When Spurgeon left that church that evening, he was not the same man who had walked in earlier. His gaze, his heart, and his faith had been directed outside himself toward God.

Here is his account of what he heard and experienced that night:

“He [the preacher] began, “ ‘Look,’ that is not hard work. You need not lift your hand; you do not want to lift your finger. Look, a fool can do that. It does not need a wise man to look. A child can do that. It don’t need to be a full-grown to use your eyes. Look, a poor man may do that, no need of riches to look. Look, how simple; how simple.” Then he went on, “ ‘look unto me.’ Do not look to yourselves, but ‘look to me, that is Christ.... Look unto Jesus Christ;’ ” and then he went on in his own simple way to put it thus: “ ‘Look unto me; I am sweating great drops of blood for you; look unto me, I am scourged and spit upon; I am nailed to the cross, I die, I am buried, I rise and ascend, I am pleading before the Father’s throne, and all this is for you.’ ”

Spurgeon was led away from himself and his own efforts, means, and works to Christ alone. He was converted, saved through faith in Christ. There are many ways to describe salvation through Christ, but no description is complete unless it stresses this one thing: **that help and hope, forgiveness and righteous-**

ness, and freedom and assurance are found only by turning away from ourselves to believe in Christ's all-sufficient work.

In the context of the sermon text that **C. H. Spurgeon** heard that night ([Isaiah 45:22](#)), God the Judge calls the people, hopelessly lost in idolatry (the heart of works righteousness), to stand before him and present their case. Of course, they have no case to make; their only plea is *guilty*. God is the Creator ([v. 18](#)) who reveals himself and who speaks “**the truth**” and proclaims “**what is right**” ([v. 19](#)), and their sole hope is in him, the only God and Savior ([v. 21](#)).

Isaiah 45:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ “**For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited), “I am the LORD, and there is none else.”**

¹⁹ “**I have not spoken in secret, In some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in a waste place’; I, the LORD, speak righteousness, Declaring things that are upright.”**

²⁰ “**Gather yourselves and come; Draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; They have no knowledge, Who carry about their wooden idol And pray to a god who cannot save.”**

²¹ “**Declare and set forth your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me.”**

He knows their sin, their idolatry, their hard-heartedness, but he does not tell them to try to do a better job, or to reform themselves, or to meet him halfway. God the merciful judge simply calls them to look to him. That is the background for the great gospel call: “**Turn to me and be saved.**” That is the offer to everyone, to “**all the ends of the earth.**” In New Testament terms, we might say to “**both Jews and Gentiles.**” Salvation for everyone comes only one way: through faith in God.

Justification, foundational for salvation, is the legal declaration from God that a person stands before him forgiven and as one who lives up to the entirety of God's will. It absolutely depends on turning, by faith, away from our own works to receive God's verdict of “**righteous**” in Christ as a pure

gift.

In justification by faith in Christ alone, God speaks the truth and proclaims what is right in his eyes. Justification is not the whole of salvation or of the gospel, but it provides what is necessary to make us right with God and reorients us toward God's ultimate goal in creation and salvation of having a people who trust him and, as a result of that trust, obey him from the heart. The goal for which God created us is reached only through sinners' being justified, forgiven, and counted righteous in Christ—all by grace through faith. Justification by faith is not the whole of the gospel, but there is no gospel without justification by faith.

Justification: Not in Ourselves but in Christ Alone

Compare the perspective in [Isaiah 45](#) to this statement: “We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.” Consider that last clause again: “We deplore efforts ... to look outside nature for salvation.” I take it that “nature” includes not just the outside physical world but the nature within as well—the individual human being.

As Christians, we read that and shake our heads at how entirely wrong and hopeless that statement really is. It should not, however, surprise us all that much that ordinary people, apart from the “supernatural” work of God, would say and believe such a thing. Too often we engage people as though we expect them to see things in ways we know on biblical grounds to be impossible apart from God's revelation. Of course, the lack of special revelation excuses no one; just the opposite is the case: the general revelation comprehended by all is enough to hold everyone accountable (see [Romans 1:18–23](#)).

Romans 1:18-23 (NASB)

¹⁸ “**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**
¹⁹ **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

²⁰ **For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

²¹ **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.**

²² **Professing to be wise, they became fools,**
²³ **and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”**

Nevertheless, what should concern us more than the fact that secular humanists want to rely on nothing outside themselves for salvation (whatever that means to them) is the shocking reality that people who call themselves *Christians* rely on practically everything for salvation except what lies outside themselves. It is one thing for secular humanists to trust in themselves; it is an altogether different matter for Christians who claim salvation in Christ alone to cling to **self-reliance** and **self-justification**.

Before our mental list of “**those Christians**” who do such things grows longer, we should turn the mirror around and say “**we Christians**.” Inside each of us lurks the same tendency shared by our father Adam, namely, that in spite of knowing what God says, what he expects, and what he promises, we want to turn from him to ourselves and our own better plans. We do this in many ways, often cloaked in words, actions, and slogans that are all quite religious, orthodox, conservative, and pious—but we do it nonetheless. This is why we need to turn continually to the subject of justification.

God’s justifying work in Christ is the best and most effective remedy against the idolatry of relying on ourselves and falling into the trap of believing that it is what we *do* that identifies and establishes us before God. Justification rightly understood points us to the One through whom we are counted righteous by God, not on the basis of anything *we* do, whether past, present, or future, but on the basis of *His* perfect life, death, and resurrection for us.

Ultimately, justification is not about us but about Christ. It is about what he endured and accomplished on our behalf so that we might be made right with God. To be right with God, we must turn from ourselves and by faith lay hold of him who was raised for our justification.

The Aim of This Teaching

1. **The Legacy of Adam**
2. **The Obedient Second and Last Adam**
3. **Not by Sight: Abraham and the Righteousness of Faith**
4. **Abraham: Our Father according to the Faith**
5. **The Law: Things by Which You Cannot Be**

Justified

6. **God’s Righteousness and Ours**
7. **Faith Works: The Life of the Justified**
8. **Freedom: Justification Applied**

The goal throughout this teaching is to trace the basic contours of justification in the Bible from Adam to Abraham, through Israel, and into the New Testament. However, as a glance at the outline will show, this does not mean following justification in a straight line through the main eras of redemptive history. While the individual sections do move forward from Adam, they do so, particularly in the first half of the teaching, in a cyclical way. So, for instance, the section on Adam is followed by a section on Christ as the second Adam.

In this way, the events in the garden, particularly Adam’s disobedience, are followed directly by a study of Christ, with particular focus on his obedience. So the two primary covenantal heads, one the head of the human race and the other the head of the new covenant, are considered side by side without recounting the entire Old Testament history that lies between them. Similarly, the section on Abraham in the Old Testament is followed by a section on Abraham and justification in the New Testament. The section on the righteousness required but not provided in the Mosaic law is followed by a section that explores some of the central New Testament texts that speak to how God’s gift of righteousness in Christ becomes ours by faith.

The benefit of such an approach is that we may study how particular concepts flow together from both the Old Testament and the New Testament without leaving large gaps in the basic narrative of the biblical book. The idea for such an approach is not particularly novel, but over the course of a few years of teaching justification in seminary classes, in Sunday school, and overseas with pastors and students, following this outline has proved helpful for tying together the various biblical strands related to justification.

The Motivations behind This Teaching

Besides my students, nothing has influenced the writing of this teaching more than my experience of teaching the Bible to pastors and students living in South and East Asia and engaging people in those regions, and here at home, who represent other major world religions. I spend time every year on short-term mission trips and have found that justification is not just a Western concern. Emphases may differ, cultural and historical factors may to a degree shape the way that justification is cast, and the doctrine may need contextu-

alizing apart from the various figures associated with the justification debates swirling within the Western church since Luther, but the core issues remain front and center.

This includes, by the way, the issues that lie perpetually at the heart of justification debates. For instance, I have found that questions about the grounds upon which God accepts people, whether the work of Christ is all-sufficient for our justification, what role our works play in our standing before God, and how justification fits into a larger understanding of salvation are not particularly Western or Eastern questions. I am more than aware of and sensitive to the differences that exist between Christians north and south of the equator, or between Christians east and west, *but the basic question of how sinful human beings can stand before God without fear of judgment is neither culturally nor historically bound.* The question may be clothed in different terms and circumstances, and a whole host of various cultural, social, and religious factors may influence how the question is framed, **but it is the question that needs to be answered in every corner of the world in every generation.**

The question is universal and transcends culture and history because the basic human condition is universal and transcends culture and history. Whoever we are, wherever we come from, whoever our ancestors may have been, we are by nature (fallen human nature) apt to rely on our works and accomplishments for our ultimate, even eschatological, well-being. That is who we are; we all inherited that from our common father, Adam.

Whether people are rich or poor, democratic or theocratic, religious or secular, pleasant neighbors or suicide bombers only changes the ways and means by which ultimate ends are pursued. Similarly, whether from Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist backgrounds, all share the same mortal illness found among Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and, for that matter, atheists and secular humanists: a universal love of idolatry in some form or another. Ultimately all idolatry is a matter of works and self-reliance, and everyone without exception is an idolater. You do not need a statue or a talisman (is an object which is believed to contain certain magical or sacramental properties which would provide good luck for the possessor or possibly offer protection from evil or harm) to be an idolater; all you need is to be a child of Adam, and it will come naturally. That realization shaped and motivated the writing and teaching of this course.

Second, I have heard numerous pastors and students express a desire for a teaching that can help serve as an entryway into the larger discussion of justification in the Bible. In seminary classes and in churches, I am often asked to recommend books that present basic, biblical teaching on justification. There are several such works that are excellent, but it seemed to me that a teaching that takes a biblical-theological approach to justification and that takes little for granted in terms of background study, theological tradition, or knowledge of controversies would make a contribution to the larger discussion.

This teaching is written with an eye fixed on where the topic is most vital: in pulpits and churches. I sincerely hope that pastors preaching through biblical books and texts associated with justification, preaching justification topically, or preaching their way through the big picture of the Bible will find the material in these pages helpful for their own study, reflection, and preparation. I also hope that Bible students interested in studying justification—whether they are in formal classroom settings or not—will find that this teaching helps them get their foot in the door of studying the doctrine upon which the church, it is often said, stands or falls. This is a broad and potentially presumptuous goal, but it is what I set out to accomplish. It remains up to the reader to judge to what degree the goal is met.

Writing in a Climate of Debate

Controversy is nothing new to the doctrine of justification. Although Paul's doctrine of justification is certainly not limited to letters written in the midst of controversy, it is in those early controversies that he goes into the most detail. In Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, beset by Judaizers seeking to add aspects of the law to requirements for salvation in Christ, justification is central. Likewise, writing to the Romans in a context in which there was some confusion or tension over the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, Paul again emphasizes justification. We should also note that Romans is not just a letter about Jew and Gentile relations; it also introduces Paul and much of his core theology to people who had not yet met him. It should get our attention that in such a letter Paul has much to say about what it means to be righteous before God.

Justification has remained a hot-button topic for much of church history, including today. Whether engaging the New Perspective on Paul in general, or focusing on individual writers who deny the traditional view of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and/or present a formidable recasting of the biblical story of justification, much of the literature published in the last several years by writers from a Reformational back-

ground aims to defend traditional views of justification.

Just as important, several works have been published that carefully distinguish the differences between views associated broadly with traditional Reformed and Lutheran traditions and views that are either modified forms of those traditions or, in a few cases, stand outside Protestantism altogether (from people loosely in the “Protestant” tradition).

When I began writing and preparing this teaching some years ago, I also set out to write primarily in response to others with whom I disagree. Ironically, I never had a strong desire to write a response teaching and was not personally very interested in doing so, but I felt as if that approach was required if I were going to write a teaching on justification.

Just to be clear: I am not saying that this teaching is written in a vacuum, outside time and space and apart from the debates—it is just not primarily *in* the debates. To be sure, many of the emphases found here are clearly influenced from the context and climate in which they are written, and the debates are undoubtedly beneath the surface of this teaching in several places, but that is not the focus.

Readers familiar with the controversies will hear their echoing, at times loudly, in various places. For instance, when I assert that it is impossible to deny the concept of works righteousness in Paul’s description of himself as a zealous persecutor of the church and as one who had his own “righteousness” apart from Christ in [Philippians 3](#), I do so in part as a response to contemporary claims to the contrary. There are also, of course, times when I address specific issues and individuals, but for the most part the driving idea behind this teaching is to set forth the foundational truths of justification from an unapologetically traditional Reformational perspective as they arise from Scripture. It is my prayer that I have accomplished something of what I set out to do between the covers of this teaching.

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

*The New Testament is in the Old concealed;
the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*

—Augustine

(Continuation from last edition)

Please remember that in this study I am concerned with the big picture of Hosea, not the minute details. Our interest is in why and how the parts fit together to advance the revelation of the Christ and the gospel, rather than a technical exegesis to interpret all the specific parts. There are commentaries for that. So while I acknowledge that all the problems of interpretation may not be resolved, it is my prayer that throughout this study the Lord Jesus Christ will be evidently set forth and that the Holy Spirit will lead into truth by showing Christ and glorifying Him.

HOSEA: A MESSIANIC MAN

HIS PROFESSION

An Appointed Position.

An Authoritative Position.

An Energized Position.

Third, a messiah was an *empowered* individual. When the Lord anointed one for some sphere of service, He did not abandon that individual to his own abilities or ingenuity. The Lord always supplied the power for that service, with the ultimate agent of power being the Holy Spirit. This empowering for service would have been the most vivid element in the anointing ceremony. As the olive oil was poured and smeared on the head of the appointed “**messiah**,” so the Holy Spirit came upon him to enable him to perform the ministry for which he was being consecrated, as the passages below illustrate.

Although there is no direct statement of Hosea’s empowerment or inspiration by the Holy Spirit, fulfilling his office responsibilities required it. What we read of this experience in the ministry of some prophets illustrates the common experience of all.

Immediately after his call to the prophetic office, Ezekiel witnessed a mysterious and magnificent vision of God’s absolute glory and fell on his face in worship and recognition of self-insufficiency. Then the Lord commanded him to stand, and the Spirit entered him

and caused him to stand ([Ezekiel 1:28–2:2](#)).

Contrasting his ministry with that of false prophets, Micah testified, **“On the other hand I am filled with power— With the Spirit of the LORD— And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin”** ([Micah 3:8 NASB](#)). The Lord assured Isaiah in connection with a profound prophecy of the Redeemer coming to Zion, **“...My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring's offspring,”** says the LORD, **“from now and forever.”** ([Isaiah 59:21 NASB](#)). So the Spirit's empowering prophets enabled them to fulfill their duty of obeying God's commands, to preach with boldness regardless of opposition, and to do so with the confidence of the ultimate success of the word they preached.

Because he was a true prophet representing the one true and living God, Hosea shared these marks with every other of his messianic colleagues. The certainty of his divine call, his God-given authority, and his Spirit-enabled ministry added weight to what he preached and what he practiced. Hosea, like all his divinely called and inspired counterparts, was a preacher and reformer whose agenda was to motivate the people to repentance and to direct them to obedience to God's covenant demands. Israel, then, was to look, to hear, and to heed. We, now, are to do the same, since his message is the Word of God that abides forever.

A Messianic Anticipation

A picture is worth a thousand words—so they say. I'm not sure that we can make such a precise equation, but there is no question that pictures effectively communicate ideas and that illustrations can effectively aid our understanding. Just consider how many toys or appliances have been assembled by the owner's looking at the pictures rather than reading the instructions. Instructors often use visual aids to grasp or hold their students' attention as well as actually to impart the desired information. Sunday school teachers have for years used flannelgraph stories, object lessons, and wordless books with colored pages to teach youngsters about the gospel. Graphs, charts, and more sophisticated analogies aid even adults, with their greater attention spans and more advanced knowledge, to learn more easily.

From the beginning of His revelation, God has communicated in comprehensible ways. It is not surprising, therefore, that God, the most effective teacher ever, would communicate His truth with analogies, pictures, illustrations, and object lessons to clarify the profound and vitally important revelation He was graciously giving, not the least of which was the revelation of the Messiah. The Lord Jesus Himself, the Master Teacher, often pointed to something in the real world—whether a fig tree or a temple stone—to make a spiritual point. Similarly, the apostle John in the book of Revelation relies heavily on symbols to convey his message. So pictures are not just an Old Testament method of revelation.

When those pictures are also predictive, we call them types. It is beyond the scope of this study to review the nature and the hermeneutics of typology except to emphasize that typology is not an interpretation technique arbitrarily imposed on the Old Testament in an effort to rescue it for Christian relevance. Rather, it is a method of divine revelation. Let me put it simply in terms of “X” and “Y.” If X is the picture and Y is the truth, God was saying to look at X in order to understand something about Y. Much of what we read in the Old Testament is God's using X's to teach ultimate truths about Y. The principal thing to remember is that X does not equal Y. So X is the type, the object lesson that foreshadows or predicts the actual, future realization of the pictured truth. Y is the antitype, the future realization to which the type points. The type represents and resembles the antitype. This does not mean that X loses its significance or usefulness in communicating the truth. We can still look at the picture and learn about the reality. The key point is that Christ is the ultimate reality: He is the Ideal behind—or perhaps I should say above—all the visible impressions.

These Old Testament picture prophecies, or types, fall into three categories: people, things, and events. For now, our interest is the people. Certain people were types of Christ not because of their personalities or character traits, but by virtue of their office. All prophets, priests, and kings were lesser messiahs and types of the Ideal Messiah. All the features that mark them for their offices are perfectly and ideally true of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was chosen in the covenant of redemption to be the only redeemer of God's elect. He was accredited with heaven's approval and authority to perform all the duties of the anointed Mediator. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit for His work as the Savior.

The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes well the evidence of Scripture:

“It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King. ... The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure ... to the end that ... He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator and surety. Which office He took not unto Himself, but was thereunto called by His Father, who put all power and judgment into His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.” (8.1, 3)

A prophet, a priest, and a king are essential needs for the human race, whose sin necessarily separates its members from God and precludes them from approaching God on their own. Before the fall, Adam, the head of the human race, enjoyed a perfect communion and fellowship with God, his Creator. But with the fall came a tragic and drastic change in human nature and the loss of any relationship with the Lord. Iniquity separated mankind from God, and sin hid God’s face ([Isaiah 59:2](#)).

When Adam fell, he and all his posterity lost the knowledge of God that must be renewed if there is to be salvation from sin ([Colossians 3:10](#)). **Humanity needed a prophet to reveal God.** When Adam fell, he and all his descendants lost the righteousness and true holiness enjoyed at creation ([Ephesians 4:24](#)). Mankind needed a *priest* to reconcile it to God. When Adam fell, he and all his seed became prey to the enemy of the soul who had power to hold them subject to bondage ([Hebrews 2:14–15](#)).

Mankind needed a king to reign, to subdue every enemy of the soul. What was needed, God in His wondrous and amazing grace provided in the person of His own dear Son, His and our Messiah. As the ultimate and ideal Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ brought together in His single person all the common features shared by the lesser messiahs and all the specific duties and responsibilities of each of the three distinct offices. The Lord Jesus Christ did it all.

Our focus here is specifically on the prophetic office. The Lord Himself initiated this messianic anticipation with His promise to Moses that He would raise up “a Prophet” ([Deuteronomy 18:18](#)), and statements in the New Testament testify to the expectant arrival of that ideal prophet (see, for instance, [Matthew 21:11, 46](#); [Luke 7:16](#); [John](#)

[7:40](#)).

Every passing prophet increased the anticipation for the Prophet: When will He come? In one sense, every prophet shared the mission of John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets before *the* Prophet, to prepare the way for His coming. As the fullness of time approached, the expectancy intensified. Remember that John was conducting such a remarkable ministry that some wondered and questioned if he was the promised Prophet ([John 1:21](#)). He set the record straight by identifying himself as the voice of one crying to prepare the way of the Lord; he made it clear that he was a pointer to Christ ([John 1:23](#)). That is the mission of every prophet, and by the very fact of his being a prophet he achieved that mission.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism succinctly defines how Christ carries out the prophetic office: “**Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation**” (question 24). Put simply, a prophet is God’s representative to man. Who better than the very Son of God, Himself God, could represent God to man? Speaking of the Lord Jesus in prophetic terms, Hebrews declares that God spoke in various ways through the prophets but has now revealed His final word to man by His Son ([Hebrews 1:1–2](#)).

Although all the Old Testament prophets, including Hosea, were spokesmen for God and men of God, how imperfectly they represented God when compared to the Lord Jesus, who was “...the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...” ([Hebrews 1:3 NASB](#)).

Similarly, Paul said of Christ that He is “**the image of the invisible God**” and that “**in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily**” ([Colossians 1:15](#); [Colossians 2:9](#)). The bottom line, then, is this: Jesus Christ is the Ideal Prophet because Jesus Christ is God. The proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the Ideal Prophet was and is overwhelming. Christ’s preaching, teaching, and working during His earthly mission constituted what we call His *immediate* or direct prophetic work. He consistently claimed the divine source of His message, predicted the future accurately, and performed the necessary signs and wonders to confirm His election, authority, and ability as *the* Prophet with the last and final Word from God. To Him, all the prophets bore witness.

Every lesser messiah was a type—a picture prophecy—of the ideal Messiah. It was said of Joshua and his attendants that they were “a wondrous

sign” ([Zechariah 3:8 NKJV](#)). As priests, they represented and pointed to the coming Christ. The same can be said of Hosea, the prophet. As one of the lesser messiahs, Hosea contributed to God’s revelation of the gospel by his status as a prophet as well as by the messages he preached.

The Lord says to look at a prophet and to learn something about Christ. In his messianic role, he signaled the coming Christ. His presence among the people heralded that One who was certain to come. Hosea was one of God’s installments on the prophetic line leading purposefully and unfailingly to the Ideal Messiah. Hosea was a contributor to messianic expectancy; therefore, we are to look at Hosea and learn of Christ. There is a sense in which every Christian is to be a sign of and to Christ. By our lives and words, we are to represent Christ and to point to Him. As a prophet, Hosea was a little messiah. As Christians, we are “**little christs.**”



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Introduction to 1 John Part 3

This portion of the introduction to the book of [1 John](#) will look at some of the key words of the book. Key words and phrases are critical when studying a book or a passage. If a believer is ever going to learn how to read and study the Bible with conviction and purpose, then they have to pay attention to the words. The intent and meaning of every passage is embedded in the “words” – and readers have to understand that and approach their reading and study of the Bible from that perspective. If someone does not gain a good understanding of the words, then they will simply miss some of what God wants to teach them. Every doctrinal passage has key words and phrases – every passage. They are built around those key “words”. In [1 John](#) the word “**God**” is the most used noun, verb, or adjective in the letter, and when combined with the word “**Father**” it is used 76 times in 105 verses. The word “**Him**” referring specifically to Christ plus the word “**Christ**” is used 51 times. The third most used word is “**love**” or “**loves**” which is used 42 times. The fourth most used word is “**know**” which is used 32 times. The word “**sin**” or “**sins**” is used 24 times, and the word “**world**” is used 23 times. The word “**abide**” or “**abides**” is used 19 times. These are the key words of [1 John](#).

Now, the intent is not to bore someone with word studies, but it is very important to understand the “key words” simply because they set the tone for the letter. So, obviously John is going to talk about “**love**”, about Christians loving their brothers, about loving God, and about loving the world. He wants his readers to “**know**” certain things about God. In fact, he uses the phrase “**we know**” 17 different times. I.e., John writes with great confidence and assurance because he wants his readers to know what it is that he knows, and what he knows is very important for properly living out the Christian life. The men and women who make the most significant impact in their spiritual life are those individuals who know God deeply and who know the truths of the Word of God. Believers cannot live the Christian life in ignorance and spiritual illiteracy. Many Christians are almost oblivious to what is in God’s Word.

Then John talks a great deal about what prevents someone from knowing God – “**sin**”. Christians simply cannot ignore God’s work to help them overcome sin in their life. Sin will spiritually cripple anyone’s life. The Bible has one testimony after another of individuals who ignored God’s Word and who then consequently disobeyed God’s Word, and with disastrous results. It will be found that John deals mostly with persistent, continual, and habitual sin. John will warn his readers over and over about falling in love with the “**world**”. The word “**world**” represents ungodly systems, philosophies, and mind-sets that will quickly draw the believer away from God. Then John will talk about what it means to allow Christ to “**abide**” in the believer’s life. He will address various areas of this abiding, but the primary focus is on what it means to abide in Christ. Now, what will be done in this overview is to look at these key words – “**love, know, sin, world, abide**”. Obviously, there are other key words, but they are not used nearly as often as these five words.

The first word is the word “**love**”. The word “**love**” is used as a noun, as a verb, and as a participle, but those words come from the Greek word “*agape*”.

For instance, [1 John 2:5,10](#) and [1 John 3:10](#) say,

^{1Jn 2:5}**But whoever keeps His word, truly the love (noun) of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.**

^{1Jn 2:10}**He who loves (verb) his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.**

^{1Jn 3:10}**In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does**

not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love (participle) his brother.

This is really a very critical New Testament word. It is a word that speaks about a deep, deep affection that someone has for someone else. It is the word that is used in the New Testament to describe the love that God the Father has for God the Son. It is the strongest Greek word for “**love**”. Before Christ, this Greek word was a very weak word, but after Christ it took on a totally new meaning and was elevated as the highest measure of love possible. It is the word that speaks of the love that God has for believers. [Romans 5:8](#) says,

^{Ro 5:8}**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

God’s love is always demonstrated, not by what it says, but by what it does. This kind of love can only be known by the action that it prompts. It means to regard someone with very strong affection. For instance, [Ephesians 2:4](#) says,

^{Eph 2:4}**But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,**

So, any definition of “**love**” has to start with God, never with the individual. It is the character of God that gives the definition of this “*agape*” love – never the individual. [1 John 4:10](#) expresses it this way,

^{1Jn 4:10}**In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

This is a love that is born of choice. I.e., it is a love where the individual simply chooses to love regardless of their feelings or their circumstances. Someone may insult, injure, or even humiliate them, but God’s “*agape*” love chooses to seek only the highest good for that person. It is an incredibly sacrificial love and by its very nature it chooses to overlook those things that have harmed and hurt it. This is what God is after in every believer’s life. In the New Testament it expresses a love that chooses to show kindness and self-sacrifice regardless of whether the object of the love is worthy or even likable. Thus it is a love that does not depend on an emotional response. Rather, it is an expression of the nature and character of the one who loves. The word “*agape*” expresses God’s love for the world in [John 3:16](#) – “**For God so loved (*agapeo*) the world...**” [Galatians 2:20](#) says,

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

To know this love and believe in the redemption it purchased through Christ's death and resurrection is what the Bible terms "salvation". **1 John 4:16** says,

1Jn 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

This is one of the clearest definitions of what it means to be saved. It means that the believer has come to a place in their life where they have both personally known and believed in this amazing love that God has demonstrated for them through the death of Jesus Christ. They have seen that work of God on their behalf, and they have committed their life to Jesus Christ because of the great sacrifice that God has made for them.

The second word is the word "know" or "knows". There are actually two different Greek words used in **1 John** for "know". Of the 35 times that the word is used, the word "*ginosko*" is used 20 times and the word "*oida*" is used 15 times. The basic difference between the two words is that the word "*ginosko*" refers to a knowledge that is acquired or learned, whereas the word "*oida*" expresses more of an intuitive, instinctive, and inborn knowledge and perception. So, one is more learned, and the other is more untaught and natural.

The first word is "*ginosko*". **1 John 2:3** says, **1Jn 2:3** Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

The word "know" in both cases is "*ginosko*". In fact, the NKJV is a somewhat poor translation. The "perfect" tense of the second "**we know**" has more of the idea of coming to know something. Most of the other translations actually pick this up. For instance, the NIV says,

1Jn 2:3 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

The NASB and the ESV say,

1Jn 2:3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

The Amplified Bible says,

1Jn 2:3 And this is how we may discern [daily, by experience] that we are coming to know Him [to perceive, recognize, understand, and become better acquainted with Him]: if we keep (bear in mind, observe, practice) His teachings (precepts, commandments).

The point in this is simply that much of what someone knows spiritually has to be learned – "we...come to know" certain things about the Christian life. A believer cannot be spiritual without some level of acquired knowledge in their life. I.e., no one can just live the Christian life in ignorance. They have to be learning about God and about what it means to know God and to live out the Christian life. There are so many believers who never develop any kind of mindset to learn about God. Generally, their only learning comes when they come to church, but at a personal level they never really seek after God in a personal way. It is because of that kind of mindset that they never really make any substantial progress in their Christian life. Why? It is because spiritual growth requires continued spiritual learning. From a pastoral level, it is important to encourage people to have a journal, to use it at home, to bring it to church, and to constantly be taking notes. Most people will never do that. Why? It is because they do not have a mindset where they are either studying at a personal level or developing a mechanism where they are recording what God is teaching them. Why would God want to teach someone if they never have a way of remembering or recording what He says to them?

The Greek word "*ginosko*" means to know something by learning, observing, studying, and examining. It is a knowledge that the individual acquires. **John 10:14** speaks of this kind of knowing when it says,

Jn 10:14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.

The phrase "**am known**" implies that believers acquire knowledge about Christ. Obviously, there is what might be called a "superficial" knowledge. For instance, **Romans 1:21** says,

Ro 1:21 because, although they knew (*ginosko*) God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

This is referring to people who are willing to acknowledge God's existence, but certainly are not willing to commit their life to Him. This is very prevalent in the modern culture – superficial knowledge without meaningful commitment. In [Matthew 7:23](#), Jesus will speak these very frightening words to people who fall in this category.

Mt 7:23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew (*ginosko*) you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Now, one of the major elements of this knowing is that it moves beyond the realm of a mere intellectual knowledge or awareness of God and moves into the area of obedience. That is exactly what [1 John 2:3](#) says,

1Jn 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.

Someone who has a saving knowledge of God is someone who is responding to God. Why is that? It is because knowledge is indispensable to faith, but by itself it is totally inadequate. True biblical knowledge always expresses itself in obedience – always. No one can have a true knowledge of God apart from obedience to Him. [1 John 2:4-5](#) reinforces this,

1Jn 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

When speaking relative to relationships between people, the Greek word "*ginosko*" very often indicates a relationship between the person who is learning and the object known. I.e., what that person learns and eventually knows is of great importance and value to them, and it is that intimate knowledge that establishes the relationship between the two. I have a greater knowledge of my wife than anyone, and it is that greater knowledge that creates the intimate relationship that we have. In the context of [1 John](#), John is clearly saying that the greater a true knowledge of God which has been acquired through learning, observing, and having fellowship with Him, then the greater will be the individual's love for Him and the greater will be their obedience for Him. It is not what someone says that indicates the reality of their faith, but it is what they do that

matters. It is their obedience that matters. John will constantly remind his readers of this reality. [1 John 1:6, 8, and 10](#) and [1 John 2:4,6, and 9](#) use the phrases "**If we say**" and "**He who says**". I.e., John is not going to just let his audience get away with saying the right things. He is going to dogmatically insist that a believer's life must reflect their confession if they are going to contend that they have biblical salvation.

The next word for "**know**" is "*oida*". It is always in the Greek perfect tense. The perfect tense represents the progress of a state or an act to a point of culmination or completion, but always with finished results. I.e., if a person truly came to know Christ as their Savior, then the perfect tense states that what they know will produce certain finished results in that person's life. [1 John 2:29](#) says,

1Jn 2:29 If you know (*oida*) that He is righteous, you know (*ginosko*) that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

What the perfect tense of "*oida*" is saying in that verse is that if a person knows that Jesus Christ is righteous that it is something that the Holy Spirit has taught them in the past and that it is what they have learned in that process and genuinely know that allows them to perceive that all of those who "**practice righteousness**" as a way of life are born of God. Deep down in my spirit and my inner man, when I see someone just living in sin and habitually practicing sin as a way of life, it always gives me a reason to personally question their salvation. This is NOT talking about someone who is simply struggling with some sin. Every believer often struggles with sin, some more than others – but sin is always present in each believer's life. What John is talking about is a blatant, intentional, and habitual pattern of life that is in direct violation with God's Word. What the perfect tense is indicating is that deep within the believer's spirit that they simply know certain things because God has taught them certain things and brought them to a settled conclusion. For instance, believers know that there is a Lake of Fire, a Great White Throne Judgment, a heavenly city, a genuine salvation, a superficial salvation, a real devil, and a real God – **THEY KNOW THESE THINGS!** Believers know it and it greatly impacts and effects their life. That is the Christian life. The verb "*oida*" **strictly** means to have seen, perceived, and apprehended.

There was a time in my life where God brought me to salvation, and at that point in time I did not know things

in the way that I know them now, but still I knew them. I knew that I had been “**born again**” and I knew that the Holy Spirit indwelt my life. [1 John 4:13](#) describes it this way,

1Jn 4:13 By this we know (*ginosko*) that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

I knew that what had happened was genuine, and it is that knowledge that has sustained me for 44 years. It is now intuitive, instinctive, and innate. It has brought my life to a certain conclusion. That is exactly what this kind of knowledge does. There are certain critical things lost people cannot know intuitively about God UNTIL they become one of God’s children. This is where the subtle difference between “*ginosko*” and “*oida*” comes in. “*Ginosko*” refers more to the progress and process of learning and knowing, whereas “*oida*” speaks of a fullness of knowledge, or something that the believer simply has come to fully know.

The problem is that churches are filled with people who “**say**” that they know God, but the knowledge they say they possess has never brought their life to the proper conclusion of their confession. [2 Thessalonians 1:8-9](#) speaks of the ultimate result of just having a superficial knowledge of God when it says,

2Th 1:8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know (*oida*) God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

This verse clearly and distinctly speaks to this kind of knowledge. I.e., what these people know about God does not lead them to obedience. Rather, their life is characterized by disobedience. Willful, deliberate, and habitual disobedience to the Word of God is an almost certain indicator of a genuine lack of salvation. Someone is going to ask, “*How do we know where that actual point is where we know for certain that someone is not saved?*” Believers do not know and they cannot know. Only God knows. What is known, however, and this should be clear, is that continued, willful, deliberate, and habitual disobedience to the gospel message is certainly not characteristic of genuine salvation. That much is known, and it should never be compromised.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Vines, 693.
- ²Zodhiates, 64.
- ³Mounce, Love, electronic page.
- ⁴Practical, Love, electronic page.
- ⁵Harris, Greek, Agape, electronic page.
- ⁶Harris, Agape, electronic page.
- ⁷Mounce, Know, electronic page.
- ⁸Renn, 569.
- ⁹Harris, Greek, Know, electronic page.
- ¹⁰Vine’s, 628.
- ¹¹Dana, 200.
- ¹²Zodhiates, 508.
- ¹³Zodhiates, 509.


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The Talmid is published by:



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 Living Word Christian Center*

6520 Arizona Avenue
 Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA
 (310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

Email: admin@wlawcc.org
 Web Site: www.wlawcc.org