



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)

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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 2

The Legacy of Adam

This section considers the biblical-theological themes in the story of Adam that directly impact the larger study of justification. The beginning, however, is read from the standpoint of the end. So while this section focuses on Adam, what follows is based on the whole scope of the Bible. We could wall off later revelation found in the Bible, but that is not, in my opinion, the typical way that Christians should read the Old Testament. We should read the Old Testament

as those who are members of the new covenant established by the second Adam. We are bound to read the entire Bible in its specific canonical, historical, and redemptive contexts, including our own new covenant context.

Here are the focal points.

- **Creator and Creature**
- **God and Man**
- **The End and the Beginning**

Creator and Creature

Genesis 1:26-28 (NASB)

²⁶ “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

²⁸ God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:26–28 answers many of life’s ultimate questions. **How did I get here? Who am I? What am I? What am I supposed to do?** There may be more to the answers than what is in these verses, but not less. Most importantly, this text tells us what we need to know fundamentally about ourselves and our

relationship with God. It can be narrowed down to one word found in [verse 27](#): “created.”

[Genesis 1:27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁷ “God **created** man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

That may not seem like a groundbreaking observation, but we have a long track record of **forgetting, denying, and militating** against this most basic thing about our being. Consider this: *our collective habit of forgetting* or **ignoring** this basic truth lies at the root of every problem from Adam on down. It is no exaggeration to say that *every* sin begins with a refusal to accept this truth about ourselves. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are *creatures* and not the Creator. Contrary to what we so often seem to want to believe, we are not independent, autonomous beings. We are creatures, created in the image of God. In other words, our life is, from the beginning, **not strictly our own**.

Dependence and Purpose

Beginning with a solid grasp of the fact that we are creatures, not the Creator, brings our lives into focus. We are created beings made to be absolutely dependent on God. This is how we were designed. Our dependence on God is further evidenced when we consider that God also designed our purpose in life. All human creativity, gifts, and abilities were given to us to fulfill our appointed task.

In other words, we received the **gift of life and the gift of work** (cf. [Genesis 2:15](#)).

[Genesis 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ “Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”

Typically, discussion of the commands in the garden is limited to the negative command (“**you will not**”) concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil ([Genesis 2:17](#)), but this misses an important part of the picture.

[Genesis 2:17 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁷ “But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

The responsibilities that God gives Adam in [Genesis 1:28](#) are commands.

[Genesis 1:28 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁸ “God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,

and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

In his created innocence, Adam has positive commands to fulfill, and even though the entire creation was “good,” it is not static. There is movement and purpose built into it. The creation, with humanity at the center, is going somewhere. God says to his creatures, “**Have children, tame the earth, and rule over it.**” There is work to be done in this good creation. It appears from the outset that there is a goal to reach. Presumably the earth could reach a state of being filled, tamed, and ruled. A divinely appointed goal is woven into creation.

A Goal from the Beginning.

We tend to think of eschatology as only the “**end times**” that wind up when Christ returns, but that is not all there is to it. **Gerhardus Vos** was right to refer to “**pre-redemptive Eschatology.**”¹ Before the fall of Adam and the subsequent unfolding of redemption, there was an end for which God created the world. We need to be crystal clear on this—it is not the case that God had one plan before the fall and then a backup plan afterward. “**God forbid,**” as Paul would say. There is, and I am not the first person to say it, no “**plan B**” in the Bible. There was and continues to be one end goal woven into the fabric of creation. Of course, at this precise point in the biblical narrative we do not yet see that the planned end point of creation will be summed up in another Adam (see [Ephesians 1:10](#)).

[Ephesians 1:10 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁰ “With a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him”

The goal we see at this point in the narrative is life. This goal is symbolized in the Tree of Life ([Genesis 2:9](#)) and, together with the outward trajectory of subduing and reigning over the world, the narrative implies that *life eternal* is the ultimate goal.

[Genesis 2:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ “Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Later we will find that the goal and promise of life is attached to obedience in the Mosaic law, will be announced by the prophets, and will be attained finally in the second Adam.

God and Man

A special kind of history begins in [Genesis 2](#). What I mean is that [Genesis 2](#) refocuses the historical narrative on the creation of humanity, the particular place we have in the created order, and especially the special relationship that exists between us and God. [Genesis 2:4](#) picks up and expands the story that began in [Genesis 1:1](#) and then unfolds through the rest of Scripture and beyond. Unlike anything in the rest of creation, the text places special emphasis on God's creation of mankind: **"Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature"** ([Genesis 2:7](#)).

What jumps off the page of Scripture is the sovereignty of God the Creator and the dependence of man his creature upon him. The ways and means of the creation of man should get our attention. Adam is formed from the dirt and given life by God himself. God creates a special place for Adam to live, a garden from which he is to fulfill the creation mandate of [Genesis 1:28](#) ([Genesis 2:8](#)).

[Genesis 1:28 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁸ **"God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"**

[Genesis 2:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ **"The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed."**

This is also a place where Adam enjoys unique fellowship with God (*see* [Genesis 3:8](#)).

[Genesis 3:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ **"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden."**

Adam the creature dwells in the creation in fellowship with the Creator. This will not be the last time in Scripture when people, land, and God are linked together. God provides everything that Adam needs for life and happiness. Not only do the trees around him provide fruit, they are also **"pleasant to the sight"** ([Genesis 2:9](#)). Then we are told of two special trees—the **Tree of Life** and the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**. So God sculpts Ad-

am into form, breathes him into existence, and sets him to work ([v. 15](#)).

[Genesis 2:15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁵ **"Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it."**

The Covenant God

In [chapter 2](#), a change takes place that has repercussions for how we read this narrative. In [chapter 1](#) the Hebrew word **"God"** (*Elohim*) is typically used, but after the initial account of God's creative work comes to an end in [Genesis 2:3](#), his special covenant name **"LORD"** (*Yahweh*) is also used. Bearing in mind that the first hearers/readers of this text were Israelites under the Mosaic covenant, it is striking that when the text of [Genesis](#) turns to focus particularly on the creation of man and his relationship with God, the name of God is precisely that covenant name later revealed to Moses on Sinai ([Exodus 34:6](#)). [Genesis 2](#) spells out God's care for Adam in more detail, including the planting of Eden where Adam would enjoy special communion with God and the provision of food to sustain Adam's life. All the good gifts come specifically from **"the LORD God"** (*Yahweh Elohim*). The God of creation, the God who created Adam, is the God with whom Israel has a covenantal relationship.

Setting the Boundaries

In the midst of paradise there is one thing forbidden, and it is mentioned along with a threat that seems out of place in the pastoral scene of Eden. ² Adam may eat from any tree except one, and God warns Adam that if he eats of the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**, he will die ([Genesis 2:17](#)). The story is about creation, life, and abundance, but a foreign and future enemy appears, and with it a challenge confronts Adam. In paradise, in his created innocence, Adam is given a command, and a curse is attached to it in the case of disobedience. Death is God's condemnation for disobedience. Adam must obey perfectly or he will die.

Adam's "Probation."

Sometimes Adam's situation in Eden is referred to as *probation*. That is, Adam was put in Eden for a period during which he needed to prove himself through obedience and maintain his innocence until he reached or was granted a perfected, glorified state of being. For nearly everyone living in the twenty-first century, the word *probation* has negative associations. Probation is typically something one is put on after committing a

crime. Someone charged with a crime may be given probation, or a prisoner may be granted probation to see if he can make it on the outside.

Innocent citizens are not on probation. About the only time we speak of a probationary period apart from the idea of guilt or offense is when we are offered a trial period to sample a product, although we do not call that probation. Theologians of earlier generations could use *probation* and expect readers to understand their meaning, but English usage has changed, and with it the word *probation* has a narrower use. Someone might object that technical language in any field, not least in theology, must always be explained.

However, the word *probation* itself was the explanation used to describe Adam's situation in Eden. This is simply not true today. Modern people might hear the word *probation* and easily think that Adam was somehow created guilty, or at least think him suspect. But Adam was innocent, and that is a vital part of the story. Is there a word that better captures Adam's situation in the garden? There is, but to prove it we have to expand our biblical vision past [Genesis](#) and note a particular pattern that arises and helps us to understand Adam's circumstances in the garden.

Testing—a Biblical Pattern.

The better alternative to *probation* is *test*. Granted, the word does not appear in the text, but there is a pattern here that can be seen throughout Scripture. In the Bible, obedience to God is not taken for granted. God gives commands and then tests the obedience of those who receive the commands. At pinnacle points in Scripture, obedience is tested because obedience, which means submitting to God and acting on his command (including not eating fruit), *displays one's trust in and loyalty to God*. Testing may also reveal **distrust** and **disloyalty**. In three crucial eras in the biblical revelation of God's salvation, he tests his servants. God tests **Abraham**, **Israel**, and finally his own **Son, Jesus**. Although the tests have varying results, they are all tests for obedience.

“Now I Know You Fear God.”

Abraham is associated with many things, but in the discussion of justification, he is best known for his faith: **“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness”** ([Genesis](#)

[15:6](#)). There is also a well-known time in Abraham's life when God tested him. In [Genesis 22](#), God tells Abraham to take his only beloved son, the son of the promise, to Mount Moriah and to sacrifice him as a burnt offering ([vv. 1–2](#)).

Genesis 22:1-2 (NASB)

¹ **“Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”**

² **He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”**

Far and away the emphasis in the text is on Abraham's obedience. We will return to this scene later, but for now it is enough to note that Abraham's inner struggle as he trudged up the mountain to sacrifice his son is not on display, but his obedience to God. We are told that Abraham woke up the next day, made preparations, and set out on his journey. Of course, his faith is on display too when he tells his servants that he and Isaac will return ([v. 5](#)) and when he tells Isaac that God will give them a lamb for the offering ([v. 8](#)).

Genesis 22:5 (NASB)

⁵ **“Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.”**

Genesis 22:8 (NASB)

⁸ **“Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.”**

The interconnection of faith and obedience is clear. But again, it is obedience that is on display. As the knife is about to fall, Abraham hears the angel of the Lord telling him to stop: **“Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him”** ([v. 12](#)). Then we hear the reason for the intervention and, I believe, the reason for the entire episode: **“for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”** Abraham passed the test. Then the promises of [chapters 12, 15, and 17](#) are repeated ([vv. 16–18](#)).

Genesis 22:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ **“And said, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son,**

¹⁷ **indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.”**

¹⁸ **“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”**

The declaration of Abraham's righteousness by faith was no empty proclamation ([Genesis 15:6](#)). Abraham's obedience on Moriah displays his faith and also proves that what God declared is true.

[Genesis 15:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶“Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

“That I May Test Them.”

The story of Israel is marked by testing. In the wilderness and in the land, God tests them to see what is in their hearts. He tests them with the manna: “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” ([Exodus 16:4 ESV](#)). Of course, this is again a test of faith—the Israelites must believe that God will daily provide for them. If they gather more than a day's manna, they imply that God cannot be trusted. Disobedience flows from a lack of faith. However, the *explicit* emphasis in the text is on obedience, for it is by their actions that their hearts are revealed.

Their whole experience in the wilderness is a test: “And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, *testing you*, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” ([Deuteronomy 8:2 NASB](#)). Later, after entering the Promised Land and continuing in the disobedience that marked their forty years of wandering, God becomes angry with them and says, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, *in order to test Israel* by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not” ([Judges 2:20–22 NASB](#)). This pattern of testing is well documented in Israel's history, as is the fact that they failed the majority of the time.³

“If You Are the Son of God.”

Outside paradise, in the wilderness, God tested the obedience of his Son, Jesus Christ. It is true that he was tempted by Satan, but Matthew and Luke make it clear that the Devil didn't prompt the testing: “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” ([Matthew 4:1](#); cf. [Luke 4:1–2](#)). Like Israel, Christ's test takes

place in the wilderness. Unlike Adam and Israel, Christ is tested and passes.

The close connection of Jesus with the tests of Adam and Israel is evident in the New Testament. [Luke](#) draws the line from Christ back to Adam by ending his genealogy with “Adam, the son of God” ([Luke 3:38](#)). Then, immediately after the genealogy, with Adam fresh in the readers' minds, the temptation narrative begins. [Matthew](#) begins his gospel by tracing Jesus' lineage back to Abraham and spends three chapters showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. After establishing that Jesus is the Messiah, the one to whom the prophets pointed, the narrative of Jesus' adult life and ministry begins. He is baptized by John, affirmed by the Father (“this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”—[Matthew 3:17](#)), and ushered out to be tested in the wilderness.⁴

Adam was put in the garden with a command placed upon him, and soon after the command was given, Adam's obedience to that command was tested. This sets a pattern that extends through Scripture: God tests his children to see whether they will obey him. There are tests connected to every major chapter of the history of redemption, culminating with the accepted and beloved Son of God ([Matthew 3:17](#); [Mark 1:11](#); [Luke 3:22](#)). So, the idea behind the concept of *probation* is affirmed, but better explained today with the simple word *test*, or if we want to be a little more exacting, *test period*.

The Question of “What If?”

Talk of a test period often raises a question about the length of time that Adam was to be tested before he officially passed. It is important to address this question before proceeding. *The answer to the question “What if Adam had obeyed?” usually goes something like this: he would have been granted that state of perfection due his perfect performance of God's standard. The idea is that Adam and his descendants would have reached that place of glorification that now will come to those who have faith in Christ.*

The “if Adam had obeyed” question is driven by the recognition that a goal is built into creation. It is also a hypothetical question meant to help us think through and understand the implications of the larger biblical teaching in regard to what Christ, the second Adam, accomplished. But however much the inference is a fair one, it is important that we remember that the *real goal* was never for the human race to be perfected in Adam (no plan B!).

The question may have some theological benefit,

but we have to be careful of the unbiblical implication that if Adam had obeyed, he and his children would have been perfected in and through him—apart from Christ. As far as Scripture goes, the theological hypothetical does not play much of a role in the unfolding of redemption in Christ—except that Adam’s failure to obey sets the necessary scene for the obedience of the one for whom Adam serves as a type ([Romans 5:14](#)). *Perhaps the question of Adam’s obedience can be addressed in this way: “He didn’t obey, and that is precisely the point. God’s goal was not in Adam but in another through whom the people of God would truly be perfected and reach their appointed goal.”*

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. As Vos says, “It is not biblical to hold that eschatology is a sort of appendix to soteriology.... The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment.” Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Denison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 73.
2. James Montgomery Boice’s description of chapter 2’s casting “shadows over Eden” is fitting. He points out that in the midst of all the good things—relationship with God, a garden in which to live and work, and a wife—“there are forebodings.” *Genesis, Volume 1: Creation and Fall* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 113.
3. Other texts with explicit references to testing are [Ex. 20:20](#); [Deut. 8:16](#); [13:3](#); [2 Chron. 32:31](#). There are also references to God’s testing people in general: [Ps. 11:4](#); [Jer. 20:12](#). There is a similar mention of testing obedience in the New Testament as well. Paul tells the Corinthians that he wrote to them so “**that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything**” ([2 Cor. 2:9](#)).
4. [Luke](#) bookends his genealogy with the affirmation from heaven ([3:22](#)) and the temptation narrative ([4:1–13](#)). In this way Jesus’ role as an obedient, acceptable son is emphasized, [3:22](#) ending with “**you are my beloved son**” and [3:38](#) ending with “**Adam, the son of God.**” As the new Adam, Jesus obeys when tested and thus affirms the acceptance proclaimed by the Father.

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.

A Messianic Anticipation

HIS PROPHECY

Called by God to be a prophet, Hosea was given a message to preach and a people to whom he would preach it. What he preached, both symbolically by his life and directly through his sermons, is the principal concern of the theological survey in Parts 2 and 3. My intention now is simply to identify his congregation, the overall scheme of his prophecy, and its place in the canon.

HIS PARISH

Hosea is unique among the writing prophets in regard to his nationality and parish. He was a citizen of the northern kingdom, and he directed his message principally to the northern kingdom. He was a northerner preaching to the north. In typical prophetic style, he introduced his prophecy by identifying the kings during whose administration he ministered ([Hosea 1:1](#)).

Hosea 1:1 (NASB)

¹“The word of the LORD which came to Hosea the son of Beerī, during the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”

His reference to Jeroboam, the king of Israel, hints at this northern heritage and concern. Interestingly, notwithstanding his northern connection, he lists all the kings of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah while ignoring the successors to Jeroboam whose reigns would have coincided with the Judah regents. Given the chaotic nature of the successions, marked by power struggles, political intrigue, assassinations, dynasty shifts, and brief tenures, it is of little wonder that Hosea disregarded naming the final kings of Israel. Jeroboam II had already put the nation on the slippery slope, and everything went quickly downhill after him.

On the other hand, Hosea's specific inclusion of the Judean kings may say something of his theological, if not political, allegiance to the Davidic dynasty in view of what had to be his prophetic understanding of the Davidic covenant, which set the course for the coming of the Ideal King, his Savior. He anticipated His coming when he predicted the day in which Israel would return to the Lord their God, even David their king ([Hosea 3:5](#)). We'll get to that later.

[Hosea 3:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ **“Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.”**

Hosea was not the only prophet that God ever raised for a northern ministry. Like Hosea, Amos preached to Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II ([Amos 1:1](#)), but he was a missionary from the south.

[Amos 1:1 \(NASB\)](#)

¹ **“The words of Amos, who was among the shepherders from Tekoa, which he envisioned in visions concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”**

Jonah was from the north and also preached during the days of Jeroboam II ([2 Kings 14:25](#)), but his prophecy is biographical, recounting his reluctant mission to Nineveh.

[2 Kings 14:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ **“He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.”**

Elijah and Elisha, perhaps the most famous of

the northern prophets, preached a century earlier, but were not counted as writing prophets. Hosea's uniqueness, then, is the fact that he was a northerner who not only preached in the north but also wrote his message that was primarily directed to the northern kingdom. Yet as the inspired Word of God, borders do not restrict its authority and relevance.

One thing stands out in the light of the prophetic activity in the northern kingdom: in times of crisis, God sent a man with a word. At the inauguration of the kingdom, God sent a bold, yet naively disobedient, unnamed prophet to deliver a word against Jeroboam I when he set up what was to become the state religion of Israel ([1 Kings 13](#)).

When Baal worship attained official status during the “co-regency” of Ahab and Jezebel, God raised up Elijah and then Elisha to affirm the one, true, and living God ([1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13](#)). At the beginning of the end when Jeroboam II ruled, God had His prophets—including Hosea—to sound the warning. Hosea's parish was ecumenical in the worst way: the state religion of Jeroboam I was entrenched and Baal worship lingered. Per the Lord's assurance to Elijah, it would be safe to assume that there was also a remnant according to grace ([1 Kings 19:18](#)).

[1 Kings 19:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸ **“Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”**

The very fact that God raised up Hosea to minister to a people living in such a day of “**religious mess**” should give us hope. It doesn't require much spiritual insight to recognize the religious mess of our day. Religious pluralism plagues society, and true Christianity, which necessarily is exclusive, is at odds with the majority. Let it be our prayer that God would raise up ministers today with a prophetic boldness to declare His Word. In His grace, God has given His Word as the answer to any crisis.



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Introduction to 1 John

Part 4

This study continues with the Introduction to the book of [1 John](#) and continues looking at some of the key words of the book. The last study looked at the words “love / loves” and “know”. This study will look at the word “sin / sins”, and then the following study will look at the words “world”, and “abide / abides”. Once again, **the intent and meaning of every passage is embedded in the words**, and especially doctrinal letters. That may seem like a minor observation, but it is absolutely critical to gaining an understanding of a passage. So, it is critical to pay very close attention to the key words and phrases.

The next words to study are “sin, or sins, sinned, sinning”. Those words are used 27 times in [1 John](#), and all of them come from the primary Greek word for “sin” which is “*hamartia*”. It is a very important theological word. The word “*hamartia*” comes from the root word “*hamartano*” which simply means to miss the mark and is used specifically of sinning against God. The meaning of the word came from someone who used a bow and arrow, and when they shot at the target they missed the target, or missed the mark. The word “*hamartia*” is the most comprehensive New Testament word for moral deviations, aberrations, and abnormalities. Sin is an inward element in someone’s being that produces

ungodly acts, actions, and attitudes. [Romans 6:6](#) describes it as a governing principle or a power that operates in the individual’s life when it calls it “**the body of sin**”.

Ro 6:6¹ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

It is an actual power that acts through the members of a believer’s body. Theologians say that the seat of sin is in the individual’s will.

Ultimately, “sin” is that which causes a person, either lost or saved, to fail to meet God’s revealed moral, ethical, and spiritual standards. It is a grave danger for anyone to fail to recognize the impact that sin in every form has on their life as well as on their future. It is not something that can be measured or quantified, but the evidence of its work in someone’s life can be clearly seen. Sin always has consequences associated with it, and normally those consequences do not become immediately evident in a person’s life. They are not only present consequences that can devastate a person’s life and have a lifelong impact, but they also represent an eternal loss that cannot be identified.

The general sense of sin is that of our primarily sinning against God. So, sin carries the idea of missing the true end and scope of a person’s life which is that of knowing God. [John 17:3](#) says it this way,

Jn 17:3¹ And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

Just imagine what it will be like for someone who wakes up on the other side of eternity without Christ and without ever having come to know the One who created them. At that very instance, the reality of what that person did with their life and how they honored their unbelief and rebellion more than the person of Christ will be the most tragic and horrifying reality that they ever discover – and there will be no reprieve whatsoever. Immediately they realize that they missed God, the only true God, and in that loss they forfeited both God and everything that He had planned for them in life and in eternity. The reality is that everyone lives forever – everyone. There are no exceptions. The only question is where.

Sin is an aberration from the truth. It is an aberration from God’s ordained laws and principles. Sin is an ab-

erration from what everyone knows innately – that there is a Creator God. There are all kinds of sins – willful sins, deliberate sins, unconscious sins, physical sins, moral sins, blasphemous sins, mental sins, character sins, demonic sins, habitual sins, involuntary sins, gross sins, sins of ignorance, sins of pride, and any other kind of sin that one can imagine. There is no shortage of how sinners can sin. The very worst of all sins is a person's unbelief and unwillingness to entrust their lives to Jesus Christ. That unbelief includes the rejection of His salvific work on their behalf and an unwillingness to commit their life to Him. Unbelief is the only sin for which someone will be condemned to eternal judgment – the only sin. A man outside of Jesus Christ is under the power of sin, and he is helpless to escape from it.

To make all of this even worse, the wickedness of sin is often dependent on the innate or acquired knowledge of God's expectations. There are things that men know about God innately, and there are things that they have learned about God, and the more that they know and still sin, then the greater the wickedness of that sin. It is one thing for someone to sin against God out of pure ignorance of God's expectations of their life, but it is quite another for someone to sin when they have fully known and understood God's revealed will. Church is a very dangerous place for those who are not willing to take their Christianity seriously. It is a dangerous place for the lost because God will hold them accountable as well for what they were unwilling to acknowledge regarding Christ. The only time when sin is unforgivable is when men and women clearly recognize the work of Christ on their behalf as revealed to them through the Holy Spirit, but they continue to both defy and resist it. [Matthew 12:31-32](#) says,

Mt 12:31 "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

The Bible is clear in [John 6:44, 65](#) that no one, absolutely no one, can come to Christ apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in their life.

Jn 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jn 6:65 "And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

If someone rejects the only means by which they can come to Christ, there will not be any other work of God on their behalf. If they are not willing to accept the wooing, convicting, and drawing of the Holy Spirit for them to come to Christ, there will be no other work of God on their behalf. That is why it is so foolish for people to think that they can come to God when they "get good and ready". The truth is that they cannot come when they are ready. They can only come when the Holy Spirit draws them, and in all likelihood, those times are limited and unknown as to when they may occur.

Sin is ungodly, universal, involves sins against others, and brings both guilt and separation from God. It was the very coming of Christ and the absolute depravity of sins against Him in hanging Him on a cross that clearly defined man's utter hatred for God and their unwillingness to commit their lives to Him. Those who reject Christ die in their sins, but those who receive Him and entrust their lives to Him find eternal forgiveness that can never be removed or diluted in any way. The bane of sin is a person's unwillingness to acknowledge God and the sacrifice of His Son. [Romans 1:21](#) states it this way and makes it clear that man is fully culpable for his sins against God.

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

The good news, the great news is that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ overcomes sin for all. What Jesus Christ did completely releases the believer from the penalty of sin and creates a new life within them. It is not just a judicial work, but it is a life-transforming work in the believer's life. It must be or it is not salvation. [Romans 6:6-8](#) describes this in a remarkable way when it says,

Ro 6:6 "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

Believers not only have complete forgiveness of all of their sins, but now they no longer need to continue in sin. Here is what men need to know and understand. Apart from the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, “*hamartia*” (or sin) results in spiritual death for the unbeliever. [Romans 6:23](#) says,

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our LORD”

All who die physically without entrusting their life to Christ also die a spiritual death that is beyond either imagination or understanding.

Regarding what happens after salvation in respect to sin, John writes in [1 John 3:9](#) the following,

1Jn 3:9 **Whoever has been born of God does not sin (does not continue to sin), for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin (cannot continue to sin), because he has been born of God.**

This is really a very important issue – how and what is understood about sin after someone is saved. This is critical to the church, critical to biblical discernment, and critical to how to address the issue of sin in a professing Christian’s life. The cultural tendency is to always give someone the benefit of the doubt, but in reality that may be the worst thing that they can do for them – to not allow God’s Word to simply say what it says. That a very important hermeneutical principle – to just let Scripture say what it says in its context. What John is saying in these verses is that sin simply cannot be the primary characteristic of a believer’s life. Anyone who is truly born again will increase in both holiness and godliness, and sin will become consistently and purposefully less. The good news is that if a believer does sin, [1 John 2:1](#) declares,

1Jn 2:1 **My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**

The NIV, ESV, and the AMP translate it this way - “**But if anyone sins...**” All believers will sin, but they have an Advocate. What Paul encourages Christians to do is found in [Romans 6:11-13](#),

Ro 6:11 **Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. ¹²Therefore do not let**

sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ¹³And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

That is how a believer deals with sin in their life – they simply “**do not present our members as instruments of unrighteousness**”. That is a choice that every believer has to make. That is their part in sanctification – making godly choices in their life. It is a spiritual mind-set that must be developed. [Romans 8:6](#) says,

Ro 8:6 **For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.**

The NIV says “**the mind controlled by the Spirit**”. The ESV says “**to set the mind on the Spirit**”. If believers do not learn what it means to have a spiritual mindset, then their Christian life will never rise above mediocre. This verse is a stark contrast between those who are genuinely devoted to God and those who are devoted to the world. The spiritual man is clearly distinguished by a spiritual mind. The spiritual mind has discernment because it has trained itself to have discernment. Discernment specifically comes from knowing the Word of God. It is not just some kind of subjective evaluation of things that are going on around them, but it has a very objective basis for making decisions. It knows the Word of God and is not willing to compromise. That is the person who has discernment. [Philippians 1:9](#) describes this connection between discernment and knowledge.

Php 1:9 **And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,**

We cannot have discernment apart from knowledge. Someone is going to ask, “*What does this have to do with sin?*” Well, it has everything to do with sin. The basic idea of “**discernment**” is to be able to discriminate between that which is good and that which is evil. The problem with sin is that it blunts the moral senses to do that and it constantly blurs a person’s spiritual vision. Sin causes the individual to lose spiritual sensitivity and awareness of what God really wants for their life and how they are to live out the Christian life. What could be more important than that? Discernment is regulated by knowledge. It all starts with knowing the Word of God, and the believer cannot have it apart from that.

Now, it must be understood that sin is not passive or neutral in a person's life. To the contrary, sin is an active force in their personal life and it is expressed by actions and behaviors directed against that which is godly. In fact, [Colossians 1:21](#) says that an unrepentant lost person is an enemy of God. That is why it is so critical to understand the impact of sin in people's lives. Obviously, there is much more that could be said about sin, but John will define it much more as he develops this letter. However, what is important is that being able to demonstrate the reality of the Christian confession and ultimately the reality of salvation is demonstrated by a righteous life. [1 John 1:7](#) says that it is equated with "walking in the light", or continually walking in the light.

1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

God's expectation of a believer's life is that they keep their life on a path that is in the sphere of His light and His revealed character. The believer can never forget that simple truth. Their life is to always be a reflection of that which is godly – always. It is the "light" of God's Word that is to completely govern and control their life no matter what the cost to them personally

ENDNOTES

¹Strong's, 935.

²Renn's, 907.

³Zodhiates, 130.

⁴Practical, Sin, electronic page.

⁵Zodhiates, 131.

⁶Kittel's, 49.

⁷Kittel's, 49.

⁸Mounce, Hamartia, electronic page.

⁹Mounce, Hamartia, electronic page.

¹⁰Kachelman, Mindset, electronic page.

¹¹Harris, Hamartia, electronic page.

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Notes

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