

Learning to See Double

New Life by the Gospel of Grace

Many things in the spiritual life come in matched pairs, or mis-matched pairs if you count the ones that are on opposite sides like the new you and the old you, or the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. Sometimes it can make your eyes cross and your head swim, but we've laid them out in a way that should help you steer clear of confusion.

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Deuteronomy 30:19 ESV

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Two Invisible Kingdoms

It's time to gain eyes to see what science is blind to. Two invisible kingdoms are at war all around you. Sometimes you even feel the “tug of war” going on within you. It really helps to know what you are up against.

Two Realms of Habitation

It is hard enough learning how to live in one world, this one. Yet, our calling is to learn to live in two realms at once. It's no good saying you can't—God knows you can with His help. In fact, you have already been “seated with Christ” in the heavenlies!

Two Powerful Motivations

When the going gets tough, what can you do? Reach for one or the other of these two powerful motivations. They will power you up to reign in the flesh and unleash your heart for God. Either one will help you cling to the Lord.



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Two Passionate Purposes

What a difference a wholesome sense of real purpose brings into any life! As believers in Jesus we have not one, but two magnificent purposes. Learn how to strap them on, my friend, and you need never be empty, bored, or lonely ever again.

Two Monumental Tasks

Out of the world's seemingly endless problems emerge our twin tasks: the Great Commission which is aimed at the spiritual needs of individuals and the "Great Compassion" which is aimed at creating freer, nobler societies.

Two Competing Covenants

Only one of the Old Testament covenants was ever superseded by another. The "Old Covenant" refers to God's covenant through Moses with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai which gave way to the new and "better" one that Jesus made with all of us.

Two True Testaments

We have been given, not one, but two Testaments of scripture in the Bible. Obviously, we need them both and it would be a mistake to neglect either one. But it would also be a mistake to think that they can be read the same way.

Two Avenues of Grace

These two "avenues of grace" are the Lord's way of bringing invisible divine life into events of the material world. We make contact with Him through tangible means which are not only aids to our faith, but are pathways for transformation.



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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](http://www.healingstreamsusa.org) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

There Are Two Sides to Everything

Just as there is good and evil, heaven and hell, angels and demons, there is an inner life and an outer life, an invisible realm and a material realm, a life in time and a life in eternity. This can get very confusing! No wonder that many people throughout history have played favorites, choosing to favor one way of looking at life while ruling other ways out.

Some think the inner life of the soul is better than the outer life of the body (aesthetes) and vice versa (hedonists). Some live only for this world (the godless); others live only for the next (the hyper-religious). Some live only for today; others plan for tomorrow. Some love justice; others love mercy. Some prefer to live for Satan; others for the Lord. That's a lot of conflicting opinions.



God said that everything He created was good. Living under His leadership, we don't get to take sides: We have to learn how to live as a people fully immersed in two worlds. Walking with Jesus on earth, we are seated with Him in the heavenlies. Attending to the needs of our bodies, we never lose sight of the Spirit. Living with our King today, we also pray and press into His kingdom that is coming.

Why Double Vision Is Necessary

Never in any of this are we meant to take sides with the enemy. Whether it is our flesh, the fallen world, or the evil ones, we must hold the line. Part of our learning to see double is due to the way that we have to choose between opposites everywhere we turn. Anything in all creation can be used for good or for evil, for advancing life or death, blessing or cursing. Take heart: Jesus is with us in every moment to help us with every decision.

Another reason for learning to see double is mystery. God is a vast mystery; the realms He created lie beyond our ability to fathom. Truth, it seems, must come in matched pairs in order to teach us how to walk a fine line through mystery while remaining in balance: predestination and free will; grace and accountability; the fear of God and the love of God—these are not easily reconciled. Yet, in Jesus love and truth, mercy and justice, flesh and spirit, time and eternity, God and man are not only reconciled, they are fused into One. It gets even better: He is in us and we are in Him.

How's that for seeing double? Good thing we have two eyes! Or rather, two sets of eyes, both natural and spiritual. Oh, oh, there we go again. Why not practice your focus with these matched pairs?



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CHAPTER TWO

Two Warring Natures

Take a good look in the “mirror”—the mirror of God’s Word. What you will see is that there is now the new you and the old you. The old you may seem more real than the new you, but don’t fall for its disguise. You are no longer who you once knew yourself to be—you have two warring natures! You are a new creation. However, your true self—your real life—is a mystery “hidden with Christ.” It can only be revealed as you walk with Him in trusting obedience into the new life He has planned for you. Get used to not being in charge!

For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Romans 7:22-23 ESV

Bouncing Back and Forth

There will be times when you know that you have a good heart and can rejoice in it. You are a new creation! At other times you will search in vain for a single redeeming thing about yourself and not be able to find it. You are totally corrupted by self-will and selfishness.

What’s going on? Martin Luther called this puzzling phenomenon being “simul justus et peccator,” being simultaneously sinful, yet justified. No wonder our head is spinning—there is a war going on inside us!

When you asked Jesus into your life to be your Savior, our Father did many things for you which may have escaped your notice at the time. These were going on behind the scenes while the revelation of Jesus, the forgiveness of your sins and the incoming hope of heaven were taking center stage. Don’t feel like you were inattentive: We only know what Father was up to due to the Bible’s explanations. (See [What Just Happened to Me?](#))



Supernaturally Separated!

Before conversion you and your sinful fallen nature were seamlessly joined together. Not only did your sins still cling to you, there was no escaping the inevitable centering of your life upon yourself. When you repented and turned from sin and self to Jesus, God not only forgave you your sins, He separated you from them, giving you a whole new status as a highly favored child in Christ. This is called [justification](#). Then by revealing Jesus to you through faith and the new birth, God separated you from your old life which was centered on yourself and has given you a



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new life centered on Christ with a new heart and a new nature. This is called being a [New Creation](#).

These transformations are so radical that the language of the New Testament makes it seem that everything old has passed away to such a degree that the new creation you will never again 1) sin, 2) be centered on self, 3) give way to the fallen nature, or 4) be overtaken by the “old man.” That’s not the way it goes! God has not eliminated these former nemeses, but He has given us whole new possibilities of overcoming them. Let’s take them one at a time.

1) Sin

Thanks to the Blood of Jesus God has [separated us from our sins](#) to such a degree that He always sees that we are not our sins, even at those times when (God forbid) we may be deeply sinful in thought, word or deed. This doesn’t mean that He doesn’t see the sin, but that He sees it the way we see dirt on our bodies. We may be covered in mud and muck, but that’s still not who we are! Before conversion we and “the dirt” of sin were one and the same. Now, because the Blood of atonement covers us, God is able to always look past the filth of sin to see us as He has always intended for us to be. One day—in heaven—we will fully be the person God has His eyes on now!

2) Centered on Self

This is a direct outcome of Adam’s sin: we are born spiritually dead, completely disconnected from our God, and, therefore, no longer able to carry His image within our hearts. We are “image bearers” bereft of an Image to bear--and we don't even know it! Into this vacuum enters the sin nature, but notice what it is feeding upon. Without the Image of God to provide the only correct center for our lives, we have been thrown down into centering our lives upon ourselves. We have no other option than to put self, or family, or the enemy (in one form or another) upon the “throne” of our hearts. Thankfully, now that Jesus has been revealed to us, we can choose daily to center our lives upon Him and live by keeping our “eyes” on Him: We are Image bearers once again!

3) The Sin Nature

We inherited the sinful nature from Adam. Often referred to as “the flesh” or the “carnal nature”, it is the nature of the enemy within us. As such there is nothing good about it; nothing that can possibly be redeemed. Constantly at war with the new nature, it can only be “put to death” by dying to self and living for Christ. Like the enemy’s own self-focused rebellion, it feeds on self-will and self-love. Thanks to our separation from God, the sinful nature was able to attack, subvert and eventually overthrow the created goodness of childhood which the Holy Spirit shepherds.

That sense of innocence lost, the deep commitment to self-preservation, the inescapable self-centering, the inability to live with joyful, yet pure abandonment—all these are signs in every adult of what got lost along the way. Recovering the grace of childhood with the wisdom of faith is one of our assignments, now that we have been made new.

4) The Old Man

This phrase indicates something akin to but distinctly different from the fallen nature, like “kissing cousins” in the same family line. The old man, or “old self” is used to describe the person we were when the sin nature had us centered on self and we were at one with our sins. That old you or former version of you no longer exists! You now know who Jesus is! That is the essence of the new you. But you can slip back into the old ways of looking at things whenever you get your eyes off Jesus. That former version of our self developed its own unique mindset and world view, patterns of reaction and ways of living, all of which were “contaminated” by a perspective that lacked [the revelation of Jesus Christ](#).

Paul came to the conclusion that he didn’t consider anything of his former self of any value compared to knowing Jesus. Now that conversion has opened our eyes, the old man is only a shadow of his former self. No matter how effective the sin nature may be at putting that straw man back in charge, that game is forever spoiled because we now know that **J**esus, not self, is the true Master of our universe.

The new creation you lives by placing its entire trust in Jesus. We literally fight the good fight of faith in order to keep yielding ourselves to the leadership of our new-found Lord and Master. This is the tug of war over who is going to rule from “the center” of our life—Jesus or self? That battle can only be won by getting [our eyes back on Jesus](#)! When we yield to Christ, the fallen nature is crucified (by us) and the old man is laid back into the shadows. This only happens whenever we trust Jesus with everything going on in our lives and become willing to follow each step He shows us. In this way we walk in the Spirit and we “grow up” into Christ. May you learn the way of walking closely with Him!



CHAPTER THREE

Two Invisible Kingdoms

You won't find this in your science books. They don't even have it on their radar. What science reveals to us, however, is the presence of invisible realities we never knew existed. Things like bacteria, viruses, cancer cells, and radioactive emissions threaten our lives even though we cannot see them. It's time to gain eyes to see what science is blind to. Two invisible kingdoms are at war all around you; sometimes you even feel the "tug of war" going on within you. It really helps to know what you are up against.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14 ESV

What We Didn't Know

Before the revelation of Jesus opened our spiritually blinded eyes, there were many things that we didn't know because we absolutely couldn't get a confirming sense for them through our go-to gateway to external realities: taste, touch, smell, hearing or sight. This "common sense" dependence blocks out the immense spiritual realities surrounding us which can only be revealed to us by God. That doesn't make them less real. In fact, they are far more real than this world—more real in the sense of being everlasting, not passing; more real also in the sense of having far greater power to affect our lives than the material realm.



Prior to conversion, we didn't know that Jesus lives and that He is the Creator of the universe and Redeemer of our world. We didn't know that we were born in an "unnatural" condition—that we should have been born knowing exactly who our God is through a visible fellowship with Him just as Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall. We didn't know, therefore, that we were spiritually dead from birth.

We may have been told, but prior to being born again, we didn't know how absolutely real are heaven and hell, the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of God, angels and demons, and the Enemy of our souls—to say nothing of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. No wonder so much of life failed to "make sense." We were out of touch with huge chunks of reality!



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The Kingdom of God

Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God more than anything else He taught. It is the subject of the majority of His parables and a major theme of His preaching. Clearly, He wanted to “open our eyes” to see something that is all around us, within us, coming in greater power, a primary thing for us to seek, and a reality already fully enjoyed by little children. That’s just for starters. See the Scripture section to explore more, but even that list is only a partial collection of His teaching. Ironically, however, it was Paul who gives us the most practical insight into the present reality of God’s kingdom on earth:

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17 ESV

With this description of Paul’s we can begin to identify our own penetration of God’s kingdom in daily life. If we are following the leading of the Spirit in doing “the next right thing” and if we are trusting our God with what He is allowing and asking of us, then the Kingdom’s righteousness, peace and joy become a river of life for us, sustained by the Holy Spirit. That’s our inheritance in Christ and it is a way of living worth seeking at all costs. Just as Jesus taught, however, we will have to seek first the King and His kingdom to experience life on this plane. But it is worth it! As we “press in” to the Kingdom we not only enter the river of peace, we become far more fruit-filled from within and fruitful in outward work and ministry. Everything goes better under the Lord’s [leadership](#) and the Holy Spirit’s [guidance](#).

Advancing this Kingdom with Power

There is yet another dimension of life in the Kingdom: empowerment for the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit. The “re-birth” of this dimension of the Kingdom, so much a part of the Early Church’s experience came about through the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements of the 20th Century with the re-introduction of the [baptism of the Spirit](#). Healings, miracles and demonic deliverance are genuine Biblical signs that the Kingdom has come with power.

Advancing into the Kingdom of God might be difficult enough—it is unfamiliar and invisible “territory” to us, especially in the beginning—but our task is rendered far more difficult by the invisible opposition that surrounds us. The Kingdom of Light isn’t the only kingdom out there—there are two invisible kingdoms! There is that other realm filled with creatures who hate God and us. They work in relentless opposition to any attempt to advance of God’s kingdom into our world.

The Kingdom of Darkness

Before we pull the lid back on this can of worms, let’s think for a moment about what it means to live in a world with germs. For a long time, we didn’t know that they were there and that often proved fatal, especially since we didn’t have the medical arsenal to combat them. Now we all know they exist and are “on guard” when someone who is sniffing and sneezing gets too close.

Would it really help to see the germs? Suppose you had that kind of vision and you could see the mites on the sofa, the germs on your spoon, or the surface bacteria on your body. That could easily make you either paranoid or obsessed. Such vision would also completely spoil

your ability to enjoy this world's beauty, because these infernal microbes would be forever cropping up. Instead of seeing how lovely a flower looks or a child's smile, you would be distracted by the germs crawling around on the surface.

Resisting this Kingdom with Knowledge

It does help to *know* that germs exist. With knowledge you can take appropriate precautions to cleanse yourself of them, especially in caring for wounds or in preparing food. Notice the spiritual parallel. Our [emotional wounds](#) can be easily "infected" by the kingdom of darkness; so can what we choose to "feed" our minds by way of education or entertainment. Like germs the devil and his demons are always nearby it seems, looking for opportunities to "infect" us with doubts or fears, blame or shame, anger or hatred, wrong desires or false ideas.

Fortunately, just as our bodies have immune systems to fend off infections, we, too, have a protective covering in the Lord. We need to understand that the Lord's protection, as good as it is, is limited. Some things will still get past the "hedge of protection" despite our best efforts to stay united to Him. But that is nothing compared to what jumps on us when we stray away! He is a rewarder of those who seek Him and a shield to those who make being close to Him their great Reward.

There Is More to This Story

We have much more on these two invisible realms at our sister site, healingstreamsusa.org.

- 1) [Kingdoms in Conflict](#) describes the infernal kingdom in greater detail.
- 2) [Keys to the Kingdom](#) reveals the keys that Jesus has give us for overcoming the enemy and advancing into the Kingdom's peace and joy.
- 3) [Spiritual Warfare 101](#) outlines the most essential elements of our daily warfare.
- 4) [Exposing the Darkness](#) unmask the most dangerous and deceptive ways that spiritual darkness works to destroy lives.
- 4) [Exploring the Spiritual Landscape](#) lays out all of the Bible dimensions of reality left out of our science books and shows their interactions.
- 5) [Discerning Between Flesh and Spirit](#) gives a "heads up" for how to recognize when you may be wrestling with the enemy, not just your own emotional strongholds.



CHAPTER FOUR

Two Realms of Habitation

It is hard enough learning how to live in one world, this one. Yet, our calling is to learn to live in two realms at once. It's no good saying you can't—God knows you can with His help. In fact, you have already been “seated with Christ” in the heavenlies. You are in this world, but not of it: Like our spiritual forefather Abraham, we are on pilgrimage through this life looking for the “city not made with hands” which God is building with the new creations He is raising up.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-6 ESV

Flying with Two Wings

A common complaint against “hyper-religious” people is that they can be so heavenly minded that they are of little earthly good. We certainly want to avoid that pitfall, but it can be just as debilitating to be only earthly minded with none of heaven's freshness breezing through. Just as a bird needs both of its wings to fly, we need to learn the way of balance when faced with any set of “matched pairs”—especially since we are already living in two realms of habitation.



The truth is that eternal life is in us right now. We are seated with Christ in the heavenlies right now. We have already been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We have already come to the city of God. This is surely meant to give some advantages to our life on earth. Why would the Lord tell us these things if it was meant to be nothing more than a pretty thought buried in the pages of a Book?

The truth is stranger and stronger than an ordinary common-sense view of earth would have us suppose. We are eternal beings—entirely new creations—living temporarily in physical bodies. No matter how badly we may have it in the moment, we will outlast the Grand Canyon and our best years have only just begun. Our future is glorious! Now, that's a heavenly thought guaranteed to lift anyone's feelings. Reach through to heaven and grab it; see what it does to your heart when you connect with it. We have been given a stake in heaven to keep our hearts encouraged and to give us victories in the battles.



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A. Encouragement: A Change of Perspective

Everything on earth looks different and better from heaven's perspective. The perfect natural analogy for this is the way things appear as you rise in an airplane above the earth's surface. The jumbled dwellings, crowded thoroughfares and inevitable eyesores of natural decay and human neglect slowly take on a different aspect. Soon the sprawling surface looks more lovely, more orderly, and more intelligently designed than when it was thrust in your face. Or think of how stunningly beautiful the earth appears in those photos taken from outer space. Jesus lives with that perspective always before Him. He sees things down here differently from us.

The Lord God has issued a standing invitation for us to "come up higher," get our eyes back on Jesus, and see things from heaven's perspective. When should we take Him up on the offer?

Anytime we become troubled by gazing too deeply at earth's woes or our own. Hannah Whitall Smith once wrote that for every "one look at self" we should take ten looks at Jesus. His perspective is truth—unchanging eternal truth—and it is always liberating, if you gain eyes to see it and have a heart to believe it. God's perspective is so good that He is even laughing at His enemies!

Here are two methods for enhancing your vision:

1) See Earth by "Looking Through" the Eternal Promises

Use the promises of God to open your eyes to see present trouble in the right light. We are promised that our sins are forgiven and not held against us, that all things are being made to work for our good, and that God is loving us every step of the way (no matter how badly we may be doing). The final outcome is always going to be worth the pain of the passage. If God the Father and Jesus see me as someone They always want to love, forgive and make good plans for, then what do I have to complain about? In fact, I want to rise up higher and see not only myself and my life, but everything and everyone from heaven's perspective.

2) See People by "Looking Through" to Heaven

This is especially helpful for those who have lost a loved one or are afflicted by someone's stubborn ways. The ultimate cure for grief is to "see" that your departed loved one is truly in heaven, is deliriously happy to be there, has no complaints about how they got there, and actually want you to be happy for them while you wait your turn to come up. This also works incredible well when someone close to you is bound up in ways that are painful to you as well as to them. You can't see how they will ever change. "Look through" that earth-bound blindness to heaven. See that one Day they will be there, they will be completely set free, and your relationship with them will be fully restored. So relax and thank God that He has good plans for transforming them. Amazingly, in the letting go of our cares by "looking through" to heaven, God often works wonders down here.

B. Battle: Displacing the Enemy

As residents of two realms we have been given authority to affect both earth and heaven.

1) First the Earth Realm

When the New Testament mentions “the flesh” or “the body” in a negative way it is ALWAYS referring to the fallen nature and its effects, such the body’s mortality and subjection to “decay.” Likewise, when the world is described negatively it is that which is fallen about humanity and controlled by the kingdom of darkness, not people themselves or the earth. Bring the Lord in, get the enemy out, and watch both human beings and the earth respond with beauty and fruitful growth. Don’t lose your vision!

2) Now the Heavenlies

The kingdom of darkness has apparently set up operational headquarters above us, not in hell where popular imagination has them. No doubt some are there tormenting the damned, but that is probably not their preferred assignment. They are spread out like weeds all over the earth and, surprisingly, in the heavens. Not the highest heaven—that’s God’s heaven. Scriptures shows Satan making appearances there, barging in to demand that someone be “sifted” and hurling accusations. Nevertheless, the evil ones are in “heavenly places” according to Paul. Since Paul told us that he was lifted up to the third heaven, the common short-hand for Satan’s domain is the “second heavens.”

Under the leadership of Jesus, we are equipped to wage a war of displacement against these “second heaven overlords” in two ways. By prayer Daniel evidently assisted an angel fighting his way past second heaven resistance. Something of the enemy’s power over Persia was displaced as Daniel fasted and prayed. Additionally, by repentance and righteous living, the enemy loses his ability to set up shop over whole territories in order to curse them with oppression. When true liberty in Christ is restored even the land recovers.

Solomon’s great prayer of dedication for the Temple brought a divine response, indicating that with prayer and true repentance the land would be healed. This necessarily means that an accompanying victory would have been won in the heavenlies against the powers and principalities enforcing that curse upon the land which had begun due to the people’s disobedience. Our disobedience builds the enemy’s empire; our return to righteousness topples it. Jesus said that whatever we would bind on earth would be bound in heaven. Does this have a second heavens counterpart? This is not meant to be a definitive answer, but a goad to get you seeking and praying for your part in the battle.

CHAPTER FIVE

Two Powerful Motivations

Walking with Jesus is child's play—as long as He is leading us in a direction we want to go, or as long as we are not being assaulted by the enemy. Then the going can get tough! What can you do? Reach for one or the other of these two powerful motivations. They will power you up to reign in the flesh and unleash your heart for God. Either one will help you cling to the Lord, but you have to keep them in easy reach, so know what they are and be prepared to use them.

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. 2 Corinthians 6:17
ESV

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15
ESV



How Law and Grace Empower You

Our good intentions and the promises we make don't carry anyone very far towards their goals. The feelings that prompt such resolutions can dissolve as quickly as they appear. Simply wanting to do the right thing or desiring to be good are nice thoughts, but they don't have a spiritual backbone to them, unless they are backed up by something far more powerful than the warm feelings of the moment.

Fortunately for us, God supplies two powerful motivations—one positive, the other negative: the love of God and the fear of God. With these at the ready we can stay motivated to live right, reject sin and keep pursuing the Lord. One works by the Law, the other by the Gospel.

1) The Law cultivates the fear of God.

This reveals sin and helps us restrain sin. The fear of God can powerfully keep us from doing things that will wreck our life, but it cannot get out the pressure of wrong desires that are in us. It cannot save us for heaven or heal our brokenness. For that we need [the gospel of grace](#).



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2) The Gospel cultivates the love of God.

Faith activates it. Only the gospel can do this by revealing the grace that we need to see in God and by supplying the faith for us to respond. As we yield in faith the Spirit lifts us into the higher life of trust, freedom and love. Whenever your love for God wanes, re-embrace the liberating truths of the gospel of grace!

Motivation #1: The Fear of God

The most elementary form of the fear of God is knowing that you cannot escape or avoid the unpleasant consequences of breaking God's laws. The law of sowing and reaping is the "granddaddy" of all the laws in the Bible. It covers all the other laws, because it shows us that there are consequences whenever we break them. This has not been set aside by the New Covenant. In dying on the cross, Jesus removed sin's spiritual punishment (death and eternal separation from God), but not [sin's natural consequences](#).

God's laws are as impossible to "break" as gravity. Just as you can jump off a tall building and feel really "free" for a short while, so, too, you can do the wrong thing morally and feel like you are getting away with it—for a while. But watch out. Such pride always goes before a fall! There is an old proverb: "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small."

The fear of God is, therefore, the beginning of wisdom because it marks the wholesome change that comes into anyone's life once they realize that God is God and they are not. They don't get to write the rules and they won't be able to get away with breaking them. Take this to heart: Every sin that you allow will carry you captive to consequences you don't want. You are literally fighting for your life and your freedom. Being convinced of this will motivate you to cling to Jesus and call on Him for help every time. Calling on the Lord is our key to victory for He has guaranteed His help will arrive, rescuing everyone who perseveres in calling on Him.

Consequences Work Both Ways

We might be easily tempted to think of the law of consequences as the law of "sowing and weeping", because the focus is usually on sowing the wrong thing (sin) and weeping as we reap its grievous consequences. The truth is, however, that this law works for us every bit as much as it can work against us. Our God rewards those who seek Him. Every step in the right direction finds a positive reward, just as every misstep reaps a negative one. That puts a divine incentive on both sides of the equation!

This motivation operates by enlightened self-interest regarding the laws of God: "I do it for love of me." If we are wise we will fight to do the right thing and cling to Jesus for all we are worth, simply because we don't want to wreck our lives by sin and its consequences. Not only that, we will actually press in to do what He wants because we *know* that "there's something in it for us." The positive consequences—peace and other blessings—are worth hanging in there to receive. You don't have to be a Christian to operate in this motivation and experience its tremendous benefits, because it is not primarily based on loving God. It is based upon an enlightened love of self.



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Motivation #2: The Love of God

Fortunately, not all of our moments are embattled by trouble or temptation. During those times the love of God has unhindered opportunities to lift our hearts and lead us out into the many positive things that rightly inspire our action or give us pleasure. Nothing grows the love of God better than a grateful heart, so try to keep His goodness in remembrance. Warm your heart by thanking Him for the many ways He has blessed you in the past and ask the Holy Spirit to help you see fresh blessing in previously overlooked things that God does for you. With that in mind, seek to learn how to thank God in all things and for all things. This carries genuine praise and gratitude into whole new dimensions. (For more on this see the [Pick Ax of Praise](#) and the [Bring the Hammer Down](#).)

There are two sides to the love of God as a motivation: one is soft and tender; the other is tough as nails. The soft and tender side is primarily a feeling. We love Him because He first loves us—this is a natural response of our hearts. We also love Him because He gives us a love to love Him with—this is supernatural assistance. Scripture says that God sheds His love “abroad in our hearts.” However little we may actually feel His love, this is the deep wellspring of an unending desire in us to love and please him.

Consider how deep [the love of God](#) really is: His feeling of love for us is an ocean compared to ours; His passionate affection a torrent like Niagara Falls. Not only is His love in us as a love for us; it is in us as a love for God and for others. This river wants to flow! Because it can easily be blocked by unforgiveness, doubts and fears, our job is to keep our hearts cleared of these obstacles. (See our lesson on [Spiritual Strongholds](#).) By “un-damming” our hearts of anything that obstructs the love of God, we not only allow feelings of peace and love to resurface; we are actually fulfilling our Number One assignment—to love God first and foremost! Paul gives us a sparkling vision of what that can be like.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:17-19 ESV

A Love as Strong as Death

Since not everything in life is “sweetness and light,” true love has to grow a tougher dimension than simple feelings of affection. This “tough as nails” side of love is best described as loyalty. We want to be loyal to the One who took that beating and died that death for us! We want to show Him how much His sacrifice means to us by being willing to lay our lives down for Him. Above all, we don’t want to disgrace the One who brought such saving grace to us. This is a fierce loyalty that would rather [die to self](#), or even die in this life, than turn against or stray away from the Greatest Friend we have ever known. Hear the heart cry of the beloved in the Song of Solomon and make it your own.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man

offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. Song of Solomon 8:6-7 ESV

This motivation operates by a higher desire than the fear of God which is inevitably attached to our own self-interest, no matter how enlightened it may be. The love of God in us wants to become as self-forgetting, self-giving and self-sacrificing as that love that we see in Jesus. Because we love Him, we want to live under His leadership and stay intimately united to His Presence. Since we love Him because He first loves us, it is essential that we keep putting our spiritual eyes back on Jesus and the grace He supplies.



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CHAPTER SIX

Two Passionate Purposes

The unbelieving world, plagued with emptiness, loneliness and boredom, ever seeks distraction through selfish pursuit of pleasure or ambition. What a difference a wholesome sense of real purpose brings into any life! Suddenly, one has reasons to live for, a passion to live by, and a destined purpose worthy of great and noble sacrifices. As believers in Jesus we have not one, but two magnificent purposes. Learn how to strap them on, my friend, and you need never be empty, bored, or lonely ever again.

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40 ESV

Our Number One Purpose

Winston Churchill led England through its darkest hour to victory over the Nazis during World War II. He was one of the greatest statesmen in history; moreover, he himself believed even as a young man that he was destined to lead England during a time of great nation peril. England desperately needed him—there was no one else of his stature to be found, no one else who saw the danger and could rally the nation. Did he find his true calling? Did he fulfill his ultimate purpose?

No one can say! No one can judge it. Your true calling and your ultimate purpose are not to be found out there in the world of people, things and events. It lies within the hidden, invisible dimension of your relationship with God, a dimension only the Lord can judge accurately.



What can be said is that Churchill discovered and vigorously pursued his *secondary* calling and purpose which involves our relationship with others. You, too, have the potential of an incredible destiny "out there" in the world of people, but that is not your primary purpose either. You have two purposes, not one, and the primary one is by far the greater one.

Your Purpose According to Jesus

Jesus says that the number one command on everyone's life is to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength. There is not a moment in anyone's life when this command can be set aside. It is all encompassing, all demanding. Seeking to fulfill whatever it is that this command requires is, therefore, our most important assignment and our highest purpose.



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But this isn't the way we usually think about purpose is it? Of the hundreds of people who have talked with me about their purpose in life, I can think of few, if any, who mentioned this. Most are seeking to discover their gifts and calling so that they can be of service to others. If they know the Lord, it is to be of service to Him. Yet, nothing could be clearer in scripture than that our primary purpose is learning how to love God above all else. It is as if this were hidden in plain sight!

I think that our number one assignment seems so big and so daunting (How do you get a handle on it?) that we set it aside in favor of going after things that are easier to understand. That at least was my strategy as a young Christian. I primarily thought of love as a feeling, but it is extraordinarily difficult to try to sustain any feeling, let alone love. In addition, trying to focus on feeling love for God also got in the way of giving proper focus to all the other things that needing doing. So I switched over to something far easier to understand and measure: trusting and obeying Jesus.

The Big Discovery

Years later I made the Big Discovery: Trusting and obeying Jesus *is* loving God! Not only that, but, boy oh boy, does it require all your heart, soul, mind and strength to keep that on track each moment of the day—*just as Jesus said it would!* Once I realized this, another, even greater understanding came to me: God is giving out a “Report Card” on how well we are doing fulfilling our primary purpose each and every moment of the day! It is the Peace of Christ.

The peace of Christ is always available to us, but you and I only get to experience it if we are trusting God sufficiently with all He allows and are actually following His lead in what we are doing. There is a peace that comes to us when we trust; there is also a peace that comes to us as we obey. The quality of the peace that we receive is our “score”! By this highly intimate and subtle means of feedback, the Lord is able to lead us into “loving” Him through training us to guard the peace of Christ.

The beautiful thing is how our number one purpose is also our number one passion. Nothing in the entire universe compares with what gets ignited inside of us whenever we have a close encounter with our God. Even so simple a thing as the peace of Christ, so readily available to those who put Him first, ushers us into the joy and freedom of His presence: His peace is a manifestation of His presence; His presence conveys His peace. Jesus lives and rules in our hearts by His peace!

Purpose Number Two

Our number two purpose—loving and serving others—grows out of and is sustained by the quality of our primary assignment. In learning to love God by growing in our ability to trust Him, we come into so much grace that we cannot help but want to see the blessing passed on to others. In putting Him first, Jesus satisfies our heart with deeper measures of healing, love and mercy. Inevitably, we want to “satisfy” His Heart by following His lead in serving those who are still lost, hurting, or in need. See more about that secondary purpose at [Ministry to Others](#).

You will positively love moving in your number two purpose, once you discover it, become equipped to pursue it, and the Lord positions you for maximum effectiveness. Much more could easily be said about all of this, but for now note the order: put trusting and obeying Jesus first.

Then you will grow into loving others through serving them for His sake. In this way the passion you will have for your secondary purpose will be fired up and kept on track by your submission to God and your willingness to let the Lord lead you in all things.



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CHAPTER SEVEN

Two Monumental Tasks

When it comes to our problems down here, God has His Hands full. Every individual person needs saving from sin and restoration to the life they were created to live in full fellowship with the Lord. Every world system needs saving from injustice and oppression and restoration to the Lord's way of running things. Out of this emerges our twin tasks: the Great Commission which is aimed at the spiritual needs of individuals and the "Great Compassion" which is aimed at creating freer, nobler societies.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 ESV

Double Duties

Of the two great tasks assigned to us by Jesus right before His departure, one is primarily outward, the other inward. You can focus on one or the other in pursuit of your calling, but the truth is that they are necessarily interdependent, just as bodies and souls are. We need an eye and a heart for both. We will all be called at times to share the faith or to help someone in distressing circumstances. Get ready! Fortunately, Jesus now lives in us by His Holy Spirit and can supply us with His vision, passion and abilities to work in both these areas of tremendous need.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission was given to us by Jesus right before His ascension. It looks inward to the soul of every individual and sees their absolute need to hear, receive and believe the Gospel which alone can bring them to new birth and the full hope of eternal salvation. Unless genuine spiritual transformation takes place in the hidden depths of the heart, no outward changes will be of lasting value in anyone's life. The lost have no sense of priorities: Winding up in hell obliterates any previous feeling of well-being. They should know this, but they pay it no mind.

The salvation of souls is the Father's top priority. He knows what is at stake in their lives, even if they don't! Let us *never* forget that the eternal destiny of every individual we meet is of immense concern to the Father who loves them, Jesus who died for them and the Holy Spirit who is working with them. This doesn't mean that preaching has to come first or that it is the best way to reach everyone, but it does give the Great Commission a greater priority. If you want to join in fishing for people, consider these proven ways of "baiting the hook":



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1) The Glorious Liberty

Learn to live with such joy and freedom that people will seek what you have. John Wesley is credited with saying, “Set yourself on fire and people will come for miles to watch you burn.” This is good Biblical advice. We are told to live in such a way that people will come to us, asking us to give them the reason for the hope that upholds us. Paul wants us to display such joy in our relationship with the God of Israel that even Jews will be jealous and want it for themselves.

2) Signs and Wonders

Nothing opens hearts and creates faith like supernatural manifestations of God’s power. The Early Church spread like wildfire, but it wasn’t due to good preaching alone. Signs and wonders stirred up interest and ignited seeking hearts. People will run past all their obstacles to reach the God who proves that He can heal them or their loved ones. This has been called “Power Evangelism” and it really works. It worked for Jesus; it worked for the first apostles; and it is at work all over the Third World today.

3) The “Seven Mountains”

This is primarily a strategy for changing organizations and cultures through advancing the kingdom of God “by stealth.” Jesus said that we were to make disciples of all nations, not simply converts. This implies that if you can effectively demonstrate to people the superior principles by which God’s kingdom works, then they will see results that the corrupted ways of the world cannot match. This prepares them to want to know the Source of our wisdom: convinced disciples become willing (and lasting) converts. The Seven Mountains strategy carries this even further, calling for Christians to “invade” the culture shaping “mountains” of power as the best means for transforming nations and preparing them for spiritual harvest.

The Great Compassion

The outward focus of our call to action looks to the physical realm of bodies and societies. It is concerned with temporal justice, not eternal salvation. One would expect that a converted individual or society would have a fully alive compassion and an impartial sense of justice—that the inward grace of conversion would overflow in all of our outward ways. Sadly, it doesn’t always happen like that. Perhaps that’s why the Lord made compassion and justice a command of the New Covenant.

Ultimately, we will be judged as nations by how well we acted according to this divine mandate, not by the number of converts we made. James warns us that faith without “works” is dead. The love that we are shown by God through Christ is meant to carry us forth into transformed ways of loving our neighbors. Of necessity our own conversion has to come first—we need to be saved! However, once faith come to us and the “love of God is shed abroad in our hearts,” then faith will wither and die if we don’t let it carry us out into the world of pain around us, seeking to be part of God’s answer in other lives. Consider these ways of serving:

1) Compassion Ministries

Between private charities, church outreach, and Christian ministries there never has been a time when so many avenues have been opened for working with the poor and afflicted. Matthew 25 clearly shows how important it is to the Lord that we learn to love others by attending to their physical needs. Even so, the poor are not our top priority—the gospel is. Everyone, both rich and poor, powerful and powerless, is in desperate need of the gospel and of genuine and lasting conversion. God has no favorites; He sees everyone's needs, both spiritual and physical with equal compassion.

2) Everyday Work

Any legitimate form of employment is also a way of serving others. When we do what we do as “unto the Lord,” He floods us with a sense of purpose and contentment. Why? Because He wants to work through us and we are letting Him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. At the very least this means He loves to help us learn to do things the right way. He loves a job well done! This pursuit of just and proper ways of working is the easily the most extensive work of God in the world, since it affects all of us who labor in any worthwhile endeavor.

3) The Seven Mountains Strategy

Lance Wallnau points out that Joseph was sent to Pharaoh's court and Paul was sent to kings. The best way to change “the mountains of power” is to get to the top of them. Unless we take seriously our calling to penetrate all the spheres of influence in our cultures, we can hardly expect to see real change come to the poor and oppressed. Naturally, the enemy knows this and has ruthlessly taken the higher ground wherever he can, even boasting to Jesus that he controls the “kingdoms of the world” and promotes whoever he wishes (i.e. those who sell out to corrupt and unethical ways in order to gain advancement).

4) Signs and Wonders

Jesus went at it this way. He evidently lived for God in such a way that the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit went with Him everywhere. The poor not only had “the good news preached to them,” they also were set free from physical illness and demonic oppression. Whenever this compassion way of reaching out is pursued successfully, there is often an explosion of converts. A thrilling blend of our two great tasks.



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CHAPTER EIGHT

Two Competing Covenants

The two Testaments of the Bible include many covenants. By one count there are four with the nation of Israel and three with humanity in general. Why so many? Perhaps, we need a lot of examples to prove to us that God keeps His part of the bargain. Why highlight just two? Only one of the Old Testament covenants was ever superseded by another. The “Old Covenant” refers to God’s covenant through Moses with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai which gave way to the new and “better” one that Jesus made with all of us.

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. Hebrews 8:13 ESV

In with the New, Out with the Old

The main thing to know about covenants in the Bible is that—thanks to Jesus—we now live under a “new” and “better” covenant, commonly called the covenant of Grace, in contrast to the covenant of Law, given at Mount Sinai through Moses in the Old Testament. This is definitely something to celebrate, but it helps to understand what it is, why it is so much better, and what that means for us. It also begs the questions: “Newer and better than what?”, “What was wrong with the old one?”, and “Did God make a mistake?”



To take those last two questions first, the problem with the old one (aside from its limitations discussed below) was us. We couldn’t keep it! And no, God wasn’t taken by surprise. His purpose in giving the covenant of Law at Sinai was not to make us righteous by it, but to demonstrate to all of us that we are unrighteous through and through. We desperately need a Savior from sin. In this way the Law prepares us for the gospel and leads us to Christ. Now let’s move on to the three things we need to know so that we can raise the roof with a shout of joy.

Why the New Is Better

1) What It Is

A covenant is a formal agreement between two parties in which duties, rights and obligations are spelled out and promises are made. In the Bible such covenants are usually “signed” or ratified by the blood of a sacrifice. With the Old Covenant made at Sinai Israel agreed that their responsibility was to keep the Law.



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What makes the New Covenant so radically different is that in it God is the one taking on all the responsibilities and making all the promises. He made it without expecting anything of us. That's why it is of grace! All that God promises to do through this covenant is sheer gift to us, and He promises to keep on giving us the gift. The only "catch" is that it is still necessary for us to receive the gift by faith. It's a free will issue.

2) Why It Is So Much Better

Many reasons are given in scripture for why the New is better, the primary one being that this is a covenant of unlimited mercy and instantaneous forgiveness. The Sinai Covenant was limited in what it covered; it was also limited by how forgiveness was conveyed; worst of all, the onus was on us to summon up the obedience required. There were many sins that could not be atoned for by any sacrifice. For those select sins that were covered, each sin required a fresh sacrifice to be offered, another journey to temple or tabernacle and no real "taking away" of the sin. How much better it is that we can go boldly to the throne of grace at any moment and "obtain mercy" for anything we need to confess.

You might think that total forgiveness would be gift enough, but God didn't stop there. With the New Covenant He took the Law carved on tablets of stone and wrote it upon our hearts instead, giving us hearts like His. Under the terms of this covenant everyone has the opportunity to know the Lord as intimately as prophets and priests once did. Where the Old Covenant put Israel in bondage to the Law, this one sets its children free, upholding them by the "ministry" of the Holy Spirit (see the Scripture section). Additionally, Jesus is a better Mediator between God and us, because He able to bring us into "perfection" and shower us with an eternal inheritance! For more see [What Just Happened to Me?](#).

3) What It Means for Us

Under the generous terms of our far better covenant, God is doing or supplying everything to us that would ever be necessary for us to experience true life and right living. All that is except one thing: He cannot receive it for us. That's our part. In a sense we "ratify" or give our approval to the covenant whenever we choose to trust God for all that He says He has done and will be doing to "save us to the uttermost." You can take this to the bank: We are [saved by grace through faith](#), not by our own efforts. But that one word "through", however, defines our key role.

The One Thing for Us to Do

The one and only thing that we have to "work" at is finding a way to trust God and Jesus *enough* for two things to happen: a) we enter into the deep peace of His rest, and b) we become willing to do the next right thing as the Holy Spirit leads us. Keep in mind that you are being "wooed" by two competing covenants, each seeking your allegiance. Will you live this day under Law or under Grace?

Unlike the Israelites under the Old Covenant, we don't have to work hard at keeping the Law, we work at entrusting our life to Jesus. As we do our part the Holy Spirit is able to fulfill the Law through us by lifting and leading us into a new life of grace. Trust, trust, trust and obey. How hard is that? OK, some days it's really hard. For help with it see [How do I live now that I am saved?](#)



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What Parts of the Old Still Apply?

The New Covenant rendered the covenant made at Sinai “obsolete,” but that doesn’t mean everything in the Old Testament has been rendered obsolete. For instance, the other five covenants are still on active status. Nevertheless, the Law’s punishments for sin have indeed been set aside. Our own civil laws may or may not mirror the Old Covenant’s laws and sin carries natural consequences, but God’s justice has been satisfied through the death of His Son. If we are in Christ through faith, we can rest assured that our God is not angry with us over our sins, nor does He have any desire to punish us for them. That no longer applies to us!

The dietary laws have also been set aside by New Testament revelation (thank God). The ceremonial laws touching on ritual cleanliness, the offering of sacrifices, the prescribed festivals, etc. have all been set aside now that the Temple is within us and the one Sacrifice towards which they all pointed has been made. Likewise, the civil laws of Israel do not apply to New Covenant believers, whose King and Kingdom are not of this world as the kingdom of Israel and her kings were. Even the Sabbath has been transformed through Christ from being one day of rest each week, to an endless rest of faith.

These sections of the Law continue to be deeply instructive of the inward life with Christ, but the outward form is only still required (by the scriptures themselves) of Jewish believers who have not embraced the New Covenant. Much of what Israel experienced was a “shadow” or “type” of the new reality that has come through Christ and faith. What was outward and material for them is now inward and spiritual for us. What does this leave us to obey out of all the commands of the Old Testament? The moral law. Yet, even here there is transformation: in trusting and obeying Jesus, the moral law is fulfilled through us as we walk in the Spirit. Our primary focus is not the Law, but the Lord of the Law, our Grace Giving Savior, Jesus Christ!

CHAPTER NINE

Two True Testaments

We have been given, not one, but two Testaments of scripture in the Bible. Obviously, we need them both and it would be a mistake to neglect either one. But it would also be a mistake to think that they can be read the same way. We who believe in Jesus have been brought into the new and “better” covenant which the New Testament contains. We read the Old Testament as believers in the New. Put your gospel glasses on, if you want to keep your understanding grounded with a proper perspective.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."
Matthew 5:17-19 ESV

A Pause to Clarify

You may be new to Christ, but you’ve probably been around long enough to see that the Bible is divided into two major sections. These are called either the Old and New Testament or the Old and New Covenants. This can get confusing for two reasons. The first problem is that there are at least seven covenants in the Bible—not two—which automatically spreads confusion whenever “Covenant” is used to describe the division.

The other problem is the use of “New” and “Old,” because this seems to give the first and largest section of the Bible an inferior, obsolete status. That “Old” section was the entire Bible for Jesus! He had nothing but great things to say about it (as in the quote above). Even the authors of our New Testament never thought of the Hebrew Scriptures as “old” in any sense other than ancient. For the sake of simplicity, I will use those terms here, if you promise not to think of the Hebrew Scriptures as old in the “out of date” or “no longer applies” sense of the word.



Gospel Glasses

The Great Reformer, [Martin Luther](#), said that we really shouldn’t read any part of the Bible without putting “gospel glasses” on first. We, who believe in Jesus, have received an enhanced revelation of God’s love and mercy which comes through faith and the New Birth. This revelation shines brightest wherever the core gospel message is the main element of a Biblical passage. But the Bible is a BIG book!



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There are vastly more passages in the Bible where the gospel is “hidden” than where it is blazingly revealed. Some of those passages can be downright scary; others are notoriously difficult to interpret. Luther’s point is that the gospel is the main message, the “good news” that God wants us to hear. It is the unchanging and highest revelation of God’s love for us, as well as being His plan for saving us. Nothing else in the Bible—*properly understood*—can contradict this ultimate revelation of God.

Without looking through those gospel glasses it would be easy to think that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures was a God of wrath, or that the New Testament is all about grace and the Old was only about law. Many people throughout Church history have drawn those wrong conclusions. In fact grace and law are suffused throughout both Testaments, just as God’s mercy is fully revealed in both.

The Dividing Line

The dividing line is Jesus. His birth inaugurates the division between the two Testaments, but it is more than a break in the time line. In a very real sense, the gospel glasses are a way of reading the scriptures through His eyes. Picture this: The One who spoke the Word (of the Old Testament) to Israel through the prophets has now come (through the New Testament) to give the definitive interpretation of that same Word.

Due to being born fully human, Jesus set His divine attributes aside and emerged into life on earth with an infant’s understanding. He even had to be taught Hebrew! However, He was raised on the Hebrew Scriptures with the “head start” of having the Holy Spirit inside Him from conception, enlightening His understanding (and no sin nature darkening it). By the time He was twelve He amazed Jewish leaders in Jerusalem with His wisdom and breadth of knowledge.

The Best Commentary on Scripture

His entire life is an audio-visual commentary on the scriptures. He lived by the Old Testament scriptures and He taught the Old Testament scriptures. Both His actions and His teachings, however, eventually brought Him into conflict with the Jewish people most dedicated to the Hebrew scriptures: the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees. As we “listen” in to their discussions with Him, we “see” how Jesus read the Bible differently than many of the people around Him. This helps us gain eyes to see and ears to hear God’s Word from His perspective. Perhaps Martin Luther should have told us to read the Bible through “Jesus’ glasses”!

We see the Old through the apostle’s eyes too. Not only does the New Testament give us a commentary on scripture by the Word of God Himself, it also gives us fresh perspectives on, or re-interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures by the apostles. The upheaval of their mental/spiritual world caused by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection had them going over all that they once thought they knew about God and the scriptures. They had to bring the Word of God to the Light of Christ. Therefore, their writings also provide a New Testament commentary on the Old Testament: scriptures that interpret scripture!

An Invisible Shift

Something else happened which makes it imperative that we learn to “see” the truths of the Old Testament through a different set of eyes than those of people schooled only by the Hebrew

Scriptures and God's covenant with Israel. First of all, we are under a ["new and better" covenant](#) and need to know the terms of it. But more than that, a radical, life-transforming shift has happened for us who through faith-conversion have been re-born with the Holy Spirit living inside us. We now live a spiritual life that was outlined for us by physical Israel, but which they could neither imagine nor experience. This is huge! See [Two Realms of Habitation](#).

Israel lived in a natural reality that included a spiritual dimension. We live in a spiritual dimension that manifests at times through the natural reality. That is almost too big a thought to process or to believe, but let's give it shot.

1) Inheritance

The nation of Israel had a visible inheritance in the land and a future inheritance in God's coming kingdom. We have an immediate and real inheritance in Christ which includes access to the kingdom of God on earth and a position of being "seated with Christ" in the heavenlies.

2) Warfare

Israel fought visible enemies to claim their land, campaigning against the strongholds of fortified cities. Our battles are not with "flesh and blood," but with the invisible powers and principalities of the kingdom of darkness and strongholds they control which block the advance of God's kingdom.

3) Sacrifice

Israel had a visible religious system of priesthood, sacrifice, altar and temple. We are a royal priesthood, Jesus is the one and only sacrifice, our hearts hold both throne and altar, and our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

4) Righteousness

Israel could "see" the righteous and the wicked. In the Hebrew scriptures people were considered as being either wicked or righteous, based on their keeping or failing to keep the Law of God. We have been given eyes to see that the fallen nature is in everyone and that the Spirit of Christ can also be in anyone. The "wicked" for us to deal with are evil spirits: Any living person can convert and be restored to their true potential through faith-surrender to Christ.

These four glimpses of the transcendent "new reality" that characterizes our life in the Spirit are not meant to be final or complete. Put your gospel glasses on, read the Old Testament from the New Testament perspective, and see what you can see. Let the Holy Spirit open your eyes to behold [the spiritual landscape](#).



CHAPTER TEN

Two Avenues of Grace

The Lord knows how difficult it is at times for us to believe in Him; how hard it can seem to only live by faith in His Word. We yearn for a “touch” from God; we want to see Him in the flesh. And He wants to meet with us! These two “avenues of grace” are His way of bringing invisible divine life into events of the material world. We make contact with Him through tangible means which are not only aids to our faith, but actually pathways for His life to enter and transform ours.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Acts 2:37-38 ESV

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26 ESV

Two for the Journey

Tragically, the two activities that Jesus gave as tangible means of being united to Him have caused some of the most intense divisions between His followers. Let's don't let that happen for us. Keep in mind that they are sacred mysteries and stay humble. Participate in them with grateful wonder, press in to understand them, but always be willing to bow before mysteries that no one fully understands. Above all, be on guard against insisting on only one way of seeing them or doing them—your own. That has been the downfall of multitudes!

These two avenues of grace are called sacraments to indicate that they “make sacred” two ordinary things: in baptism, the water; with Holy Communion, the bread and wine. How that happens, exactly what it is that happens, and what has to be done for “it” to happen, I will happily leave to the scholars and theologians to debate among themselves. A good rule for walking gently with the Lord is, “Don't make anything harder than it has to be.” The hard part of the sacraments is understanding them with perfect knowledge. Good luck with that one! The easy part is doing them.



1) Baptism: Initiation

Baptism can be called the new convert's first step of obedience. It is a universal command of the gospel given by no less an authority than Jesus' hand-picked leader for the new movement. On the day of Pentecost when thousands cried out to be saved after hearing Peter preach his



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first sermon, he told them to “repent and be baptized.” In saying this Peter was being absolutely faithful to what Jesus commanded His disciples to do—make disciples and baptize them, beginning in Jerusalem. So, if we want to keep this simple, we need only ask two questions:

- 1) Do you want to be saved? Then, repent (be converted to faith in Christ) and be baptized.
- 2) Do you want to obey Jesus? Then, become a disciple and be baptized. I don’t want to leave it there, but let’s at least agree to begin there!

If you have become a Christian, then you are a convert and a disciple. A convert is one who has transferred allegiance; a disciple is one who is seeking to be trained in the ways of a master. Have you been baptized? That’s your first step. Make no mistake about it, Jesus is the One putting it before you. Why? Don’t insist on a definitive answer. Obedience isn’t about you always knowing exactly why you are being led a certain way. That is not Jesus being in charge; that would still be your intellect and your will in command. It is amazing how many people buck at this. Don’t let that be you!

Fortunately, most new converts are eager to be baptized. That is a true sign of the Holy Spirit working on the inside causing us to “will and to work for His good pleasure.” In the Bible all it took was some water, a convert and someone willing to do the baptizing. Philip baptized a fresh convert by the side of a desert road. Paul baptized a whole family at night after being let out of jail. This was in the early days before churches organized formal ways of doing the sacraments. At the very least it demonstrates that “in a pinch” any way is better than no way. If you are in more ordinary circumstances, simply present yourself to be baptized at the local church you attend.

Explaining the Sign

Now, at last, for some explanations. Peter told the crowd to repent and be baptized “for the forgiveness of sins.” Water baptism is an unmistakable sign of being washed or cleansed. Do we do it as a witness that we have already been washed by the Blood of Jesus (through our faith-conversion) or do we do it in order to be cleansed of sin? The texts are suggestive of both interpretations.

Paul gives us another image, that of being baptized into the death of Christ. His thought is characteristically deep. Baptism is “burial” of the old life that enables us to be raised into new life with Jesus. Is he speaking figuratively or literally? Are Paul’s baptismal death and Peter’s baptismal cleansing primarily a) genuine spiritual occurrences in their own right, b) outward signs of something faith accomplishes, c) witnesses to others? This is why it really helps to “embrace the Mystery” and live by simple faith!

2) Communion: Connection

Staying well connected to Jesus is practically the whole walk in a nutshell. Jesus is the Source and ultimate goal of our new life; He *is* the Way we follow, the Truth we believe, and the Life that we enjoy. He is the One rescuing us from the ocean of sin and self that ever seeks to drown us; He is also leading us to heaven and into a more heavenly life on earth. Of course, we want

to stay closely connected to Him! Many things aid us in this, especially what we call [the "Big Five" Connectors](#): Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship and service.

One of the greatest connectors of all is Holy Communion. If baptism is the sacrament of initiation, communion is the sacrament for continuation. Through communion a grace is available to more intimately connect us with our Risen Lord. ("How is it available?" There you go with those questions again!) What could be more intimate than somehow taking Jesus into our bodies? This already happened during the New Birth of course: Jesus now lives inside us through His indwelling Spirit. However, lest we forget, or become doubtful, here is a way given by the Lord of "proving" to us all over again—and again and again, as often as we may receive it—how willing He is to love us, forgive us, and live within us.

Divergence in Belief and Practice

Taking in the wide scope of present day church practice communion services range from being intimate gatherings to immense congregations; from brief moments of devotion to elaborate and lengthy ceremonies; from informal, spontaneous prayers to the recitation of ancient and prescribed liturgies. Speaking solely out of my own experience, I have met and missed the Lord in every kind of setting, but I have been met by Him far more often than not. Just as He says in His Word, He truly is present to commune with us. That leaves the door wide open for us to find the best way to commune with Him.

Just how Jesus is present with us through communion is a subject of tremendous curiosity. As is well known the Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine of communion become the real Presence of Christ—His actual Body and Blood. Jesus own words encourage this interpretation: "Take, eat; this is my body."

Most Protestant and Pentecostal denominations tend to see the bread and wine as mere symbols of Christ's presence, taken "in remembrance" of what He has done for us—a "memorial" service. Jesus' own words encourage this interpretation as well. Anglicans take a middle road, believing in a "real" Presence of Christ, but not a literal changing of the bread and wine into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus. For them the real Presence is primarily to be found in the changed lives of those who receive Him.

What All Hold in Common

The common element in all these different practices and beliefs is that the "elements" of communion—the bread and wine—become a graced means for the participants to draw closer to Jesus, be cleansed of sin, be reassured of acceptance, and experience the peace of His presence.

Much, much more can be said and experienced, but this is simply a primer to set you off on your journey of discovery with (let's hope) a balanced overview of the rich territory that lies before you. We are intended to feed on Christ, to drink Him in, to taste and see that He is good. Enjoy the Paschal feast!