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## HOLINESS TODAY

**GOD**  
SAVES

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**38** A MERCIFUL SAVIOR



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# UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

Special moments can change the course of our lives. Looking back across the years of my spiritual journey with Christ, my most unforgettable moment happened when I was eight years old, on the second Sunday morning in November. I was at church where my parents always took the entire family on Sundays and any other night of the week that featured worship services.

That November Sunday morning was the last day of revival services. I no longer remember the name of the evangelist or his message. I will never forget, however, the invitation to accept Christ as my personal Savior at the end of the message. Suddenly, I had a deep sense of urgency as I felt the Holy Spirit inviting me to pray at the altar. My mother's keen spiritual sensitivity alerted her to my situation. She leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Would you like for me to go with you and pray?" I nodded yes, and we went forward and knelt together at the altar.

I confessed my sins and invited Jesus into my heart. Then, something happened to me. I suddenly sensed the unmistakable presence of the living God. I felt clean inside, free from the bondage of my past sins. That unforgettable moment is as real to me today as it was the morning it happened. My life changed right then and there, and I am who I am today as a result of that encounter with God.

The world often discounts spiritual experiences. I have friends who have laughed off my special moment with God as a childhood myth. They only acknowledge two forms of reality: mathematic "truths," such as  $6 + 1 = 7$ , and tangible evidence, such as the physical book sitting on my desk. Everything else in life, for them, is meaningless. I gained a new insight with which to answer my friends when I took a phenomenology course in graduate school. I learned in that class that we experience many realities in life that conform to neither mathematic formulas nor tangible evidence. They are, however, quite real.

My childhood encounter with God is one such experience. I was too young and immature in my relationship with Christ to carefully articulate what God did in me that November Sunday morning. Even today, I identify with the testimony of the blind man questioned about Jesus healing him. He said, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25).

I began to understand a bit about God's work in my life when I read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" That is precisely what Christ did for me; He made me a new creation. His work continues to this day and will continue until we meet face-to-face.

This issue of *Holiness Today* explores God's saving grace from various perspectives. I hope readers gain new insights into God's incredible plan of salvation for humanity. We will never fully grasp in our time on earth God's indescribable provision for us.

We can continue to learn more about it, nonetheless. When you finish reading the last article of this issue, take time to thank God for the unforgettable moments you have had with Him along your spiritual journey. If you have yet to accept Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can ask Him into your heart right now and experience an unforgettable moment this day. You, too, can say with the healed man, "I was blind but now I see!"

**Frank Moore** is editor in chief of *Holiness Today*.

# REDEMPTION

I grew up poor in North Carolina. My mom married my dad when she was 16; I was born a year and a half later. We moved around a lot, often living in places with no air conditioning or phone service. My parents were both addicts. My mom was a blackout alcoholic, and my dad's drug choice was heroin. They divorced when I was just three years old.

Opioids became my father's obsession. He was in and out of prison for several years—robbing banks and burglary became the means of financing his drug habit. During some of his longer stints in jail, my father and I became pen-pals. Through these interactions, I realized how intelligent he was. I have a drawer full of his letters, some written in Latin and other languages. As crazy as it sounds, these exchanges are some of my best memories of him.

I never gave up on my father, even after he seemed to have given up on himself. As an adult, I spent many years trying to rescue him, to no avail. Finally, in 2006, he was found dead from a drug overdose in a parked car at the church my husband had pastored a few years prior. I was heartbroken, but despite it all, I loved him. I know he loved me too although heroin was always the most precious thing in his life.

To this day, my mom is still an alcoholic. My childhood years through high school were painful. In her drunken blackout states, I frequently became the object of her rage, both emotionally and physically. It was as if she blamed me for her misfortunes and bad decisions. What made it even worse was that she wouldn't remember the violent episodes the next day.

My mom remarried when I was five, and unfortunately, my stepdad only added to the abuse. It was apparent that he was interested in me in inappropriate ways. Entering

my room and touching me when he thought I was asleep became his routine. From the time I was six or seven until I was 12, I slept fully clothed. In my mind, this provided a layer of protection between his hands and my body.


During my junior year in high school, I remember sitting on our front porch, thinking, "This is not your future." At that point in my life, I had endured more than my share of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Part of me felt worthless, yet I was determined not to become a statistic. By the grace of God, I went on to graduate high school with honors and got accepted into nursing school. At that point, I felt like I had escaped the pit in which I'd been living since I was a child; however, I didn't realize how much healing I had yet to experience.

Looking back, I know that it was God speaking to me that day on the front porch. Over the years, the Lord kept whispering, "For I know the plans I have for you..." (Jeremiah 29:11). While I spent many years blaming God for my plight, I eventually realized that He was working in ways beyond my ability to see.

After a long, agonizing journey, I surrendered my life to Jesus at age 24. I wish I could tell you that the past never comes back to haunt me, but that wouldn't be true. The enemy continues to use my pain to try and make me feel worthless. However, what I have discovered is that God allowed my brokenness to become part of a much larger narrative, holding my place in the story of God's redemption. Through it all, Jesus gives me the strength to carry on and uses my story to provide hope for others. Thanks be to God!

**Heather Powell** is a risk management consultant in St. Charles, Illinois. She is married to Brian, district superintendent for the Kentucky district. Together they have four children and one grandchild.

# A SON OF ABRAHAM



AND GOD SAID TO ABRAHAM, “AS FOR YOU, YOU SHALL KEEP MY COVENANT, YOU AND YOUR OFFSPRING AFTER YOU THROUGHOUT THEIR GENERATIONS.”

GENESIS 17:9

**MANY COLLECTIONS OF BIBLE STORIES FOR** children that I have seen and used include the story of the short man of Jericho (Luke 19:1-9). We even sang a song that emphasized the man’s shortness. When I taught Sunday school children, their interest in Zacchaeus’ promptness to give back to others captured me.

I did not know it then, but scientists tell us that nurturing children’s interest in small things, small animals, and small people is good pedagogy because it develops caregiving instinct in them. To this end, I do not know how well I did with the story. What I do know is that caregiving is a byproduct at the core of the beautiful Gospel account.

It is critical that we not miss the fact that the center of the story is Jesus and not the intriguing short man. In the minds of Zacchaeus’ fellow citizens, he might have represented their hope for balance in their political system, and this might have made him tolerable. In Luke’s story, the visibility of the prosperous man cannot even be attributed to his undeniable competence and entrepreneurship.

Generally, Zacchaeus was known as a sinner. Jesus called him “son of Abraham,” not to insinuate that he suddenly became perfect but that God’s salvation included him, too. Under God’s covenant with Israel, sons of Abraham were those born into the nation of Israel to whom He promised salvation and deliverance.

Before Jesus called Zacchaeus a son of Abraham, John the Baptist used this name with a special meaning. “He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Luke 3:7-8).

Jesus gave John’s words immense significance when, in response to Zacchaeus’ confession and repentance, He said, “salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9). The identity that John and Jesus talked about—being sons of Abraham—does not come by means of blood or flesh, lineage or history, personal or collective efforts, nor anything we can conceive of ourselves.

Israel’s unwillingness to deliver what God promised through Abraham did not put an end to the plan of salvation because God accomplished His mission through Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection. The fact that not only the Gospels but also the prophets called Jesus a son of Abraham makes Zacchaeus’

story even more powerful. Here is what Jeremiah said: “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days, Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: The Lord is our righteousness” (Jeremiah 33:15-16).

The name “son of Abraham” expresses the character of Abraham. Paul refers to him as a model of faith. He says, “The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised” (Romans 4:11-12).

We do not know the full script of the conversation that Jesus and Zacchaeus had after the “joyful” reception. However, its summary—“Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9)—tells us that the sinner must have “gotten it” after being moved by the grace of God into “seeking to see who Jesus was,” (Luke 19:3) and that faith moved him to respond positively to Jesus’ directive and offer. Such faith did not go unattended. Like that of Abraham, Zacchaeus’ faith was counted as righteousness because “to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Romans 4:5).

This son of Abraham did not keep the joy of salvation to himself. Serious about it and realizing its incalculable value, he was ready to act spiritually, morally, and ethically by giving away almost everything to make a difference in the lives of those he had sinned against. The power of Zacchaeus’ response to Jesus is evident in the way he obeyed Jesus, both by welcoming Him into his life and in his resolve to bear the fruit of repentance.

Even before we begin to experience the scope of salvation, we can act as children of Abraham. Richard E. Howard, in his book *Newness of Life*, made a simple but powerful comment on Romans 5:10 by saying “It is man as a sinner who can, by faith in the Cross, stand before God reconciled... (he) does not remain a sinner. The grace of God makes a change within him. But the order must not be reversed.”<sup>1</sup>

The truth is that we are saved to become agents of God’s love. It is not enough to testify only to our church community about the freedom of salvation. No doubt, our righteousness is in Jesus, by faith, but it must be lived out fully by reaching out to the world with acts of restoration and fruit of repentance and transformation.

**Eugénio Duarte** is a general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene.

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1. Richard E. Howard, *Newness of Life: A Study in the Thought of Paul*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 94.



# THE INITIATIVE OF GOD

PREVENIENT

GRACE


AND

JUSTIFICATION

FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL  
SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD, AND  
ALL ARE JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS  
GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION  
THAT CAME BY CHRIST JESUS.

ROMANS 3:23-24





by T.A. NOBLE

**FOR MANY OF US, THE WORD “JUSTIFICATION” MEANS** much the same as the word “conversion.” It is that moment in the life of a Christian when he or she believes in Christ. Particularly, it is that moment when, after confession of sin, the new Christian accepts forgiveness and becomes a child of God. That is right as far as it goes. However, the truth of justification is so much greater than that!

#### JUSTIFICATION AND CHRIST

First of all, we have to ask: “What does this have to do with Christ?” Is this only a matter within my own private life-story between me and God, or does Christ play a crucial role in my justification? How does Christ embody the *initiative* of God?

Martin Luther struggled to understand this. In his Latin Bible, the key word was *iustitia*, which in English may be translated as both “righteousness” and “justice.” Luther’s problem was in understanding how God could be *just* and yet *justify* the sinner. Surely that was unjust—the justice or righteousness of God must mean to punish the sinner! But then, as Luther pondered the newly recovered version of the Greek New Testament, he realized that the Greek word for justification, *dikaiosune*, should be understood to mean that God declares us righteous for Christ’s sake. We are justified by faith alone—not just any old faith—specifically, by faith *in Christ*. *He* was God’s prevenient initiative.

Luther wrote: “Faith...unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom... By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride’s. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own and as if he himself had sinned. He suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all... Thus the believing soul by means of the pledge of its faith is free in Christ the Bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with the eternal righteousness, life and salvation of Christ, its bridegroom.”<sup>1</sup>

Christ shares in our condemnation and death in order that we might share in His righteousness and life. The Reformers called this “the wondrous exchange.” Back in the second century AD, Irenaeus put it like this: “Our Lord Jesus Christ became what we are, that we might become what he is.”<sup>2</sup>

It was when listening to a reading from Luther that John Wesley had assurance of the forgiveness of his sins and testified: “My heart was strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”<sup>3</sup>

We must affirm therefore that justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins. But that is only because we are united by faith to Christ who, in God’s *initiative*,

took our sin, suffering, and death in order that we may share in His righteousness and life.

But there is more.

## CORPORATE JUSTIFICATION

We might understand all that and still think of justification as merely a moment or episode within our private, individual life-stories. But the way in which Luther links justification with Christ, and specifically with His death on the cross, prompts the further question: “What happened there on Golgotha to make it possible for me to know my sins are forgiven today?” We are talking about two different events—the event of the death of Christ two thousand years ago and the event of justification in the life of the Christian today. So how are they linked? What happened at the cross? How can that event be the basis for my justification today? How is “Christ crucified” God’s initiative?

Two key words here can help us to gain a larger and more biblical understanding of justification. The first is *relationship*. The Hebrew word for “just” or “righteous” in the Old Testament is *sadiq*. It is not only about legal, courtroom justice. Righteous behavior is behavior that is *faithful*. God was said to be righteous because He was *faithful* to His *covenant relationship* with Israel. Christ is the fulfilment of that covenant because in Christ, the *covenant relationship* was established between God and all humankind. As we saw in the last article in this series, that is the meaning of “at-

one-ment.”<sup>4</sup> In Christ, God and humanity are “at one” in the God-man. As a human being, Christ was *faithful* to God, even to death on the cross. We are saved therefore “through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:22). That is why He is fitted to be the new Head of the race. In the new relationship established *in Him*, humanity as such is set right with God in the *relationship of the new covenant*.

The second word is *corporate*. Modern Westerners can be so individualistic that they fail to see that the biblical writers are so *corporate* in their thinking. In Christ’s Incarnation, all “flesh” (the human race) is *corporately* united to God. *All* are included in the new covenant, which means that in His death and resurrection, *corporate justification* has taken place for all humankind. Paul wrote: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...” (Romans 3:23-24).

The word “they” (“they are now justified”) refers back to the word “all” (“all have sinned”). Now let us be clear. This does not mean that all have *received* justification through faith. But in order for them to have faith, there must be a preceding act of God in which to place their faith! That is the corporate salvation, including the *corporate justification*, provided in the death and resurrection of the Son of God. And that corporate act of justification was (according to Paul) “by his grace.” Here is *prevenient grace*—God acting for us *preveniently*.

1. Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*. Translated by Mark Tranvik. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 63.

2. A shortened version of his statement in the Preface to *Against Heresies*, Book 5 (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, 526).

3. Wesley’s Journal entry for 24th May, 1738, *Works*, Vol. 18, (Abingdon Press, 1988), 250.

4. T.A. Noble, “The Initiative of God: Prevenient Grace and the Atonement.” *Holiness Today*, September/October, 2020.

*Justification* of the human race *corporately* has taken place already in Christ.

But we cannot stop there.

## BE RECONCILED!

Paul was clear that although the at-one-ment or reconciliation in Christ has already taken place for all, that is not the end of the story. “All this is from God,” he wrote to the Corinthians, “who reconciled us to himself through Christ.” That is an established fact: God has reconciled humanity corporately to Himself. But God has also “given us the ministry of reconciliation.” That is why Paul goes on to plead paradoxically as an “ambassador for Christ”: “Be reconciled to God!” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). It is necessary for each of us to respond in faith. That is how we each come to share personally in this corporate justification of humankind. We must come in faith to share in what is already ours in Christ. God thus shows “that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one *who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26).

But this is where we must speak once again about *prevenient grace*. Prevenient grace is not some kind of force, substance, influence, or entity that God sends into the human soul—the Platonist way of expressing it. His *prevenient grace* is rather His *generosity* in giving us the gift of His Holy Spirit. God does not send some “substance” into our hearts. He comes Himself!

He comes *personally*. He comes as God the Holy Spirit, the divine *Person* who works within us *preveniently*.

By ourselves, we would never see the truth, for we are spiritually blind. By ourselves, we could never believe, for we are full of doubts. By ourselves, we could never trust God, for we are full of self-importance and self-reliance.

But God goes before us. His grace is His *prevenient generosity*. He takes the initiative in giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, God is in Himself the gift of the Holy Spirit. And as we hear the gospel of His reconciling, justifying action in Christ, we are enabled (but not compelled) to respond in faith. As the Spirit unites us to Christ, incorporates us in His body, so we believe. We respond to “the Son of God who loved *me* and gave himself *for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of faith. Thank you, Father, that Jesus died *for me*. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that, as I am in you, my sins are forgiven! Thank you that I am now “justified by your grace as a gift” (Romans 3:24). Thank you for your *prevenient and saving grace*.

**T. A. Noble** is research professor of theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, and senior research fellow in theology at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester.

GOD DOES NOT

SEND SOME

“SUBSTANCE” INTO

OUR HEARTS.

HE COMES

HIMSELF!



# PELAGIUS, AND ARMINIUS

**THE REFORMED CHURCH OF THE NETHERLANDS (RCN)** has been the official denomination of the Republics of the United Provinces of the Netherlands since 1571. On the occasion of the Synod of Endem, they established the Belgian Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism (for the Dutch-speaking provinces) or the Catechism of Geneva (for French-speaking provinces) as the confessional documents and indispensable requirements for the ordination of their ministers. After the Abjuration Act in 1581, Catholic churches were purified by removing images and symbols that were then confiscated as property of the RCN. Other non-Calvinist Protestant groups were tolerated but with austere conditions and limitations on their freedom of worship and religion. Since RCN is a Protestant and, above all, Calvinist denomination, the motif “justification by grace through faith” was vital. For this reason, any proximity to the appearance of works-righteousness was viewed negatively and accused of adhering to the heresy of Pelagianism.

THE TEACHING OF THE WISE IS A  
FOUNTAIN OF LIFE, THAT ONE MAY TURN  
AWAY FROM THE SNARES OF DEATH.

PROVERBS 13:14

# AUGUSTINE,

*by* VINICIUS COUTO

SALVATION  
OCCURS NOT BY  
HUMAN ACTION  
BUT BY DIVINE  
ACTION.

James Arminius (1560-1609) was pastor of the Reformed Church in Holland (between 1588 and 1603) and professor of theology at the University of Leiden (between 1603 and 1609). He lived in the heyday of the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), losing his mother and brothers in the Oudewater massacre of 1575. Among the tragedies of life, an abundance of God's grace illuminated his youth so that he was not forsaken. A Catholic, Theodore Emilio (? - 1574), took care of his basic education and gave opportunities for Arminius to discover his calling. It was in this university environment that the young academic realized his intellectual capacity. With the support of the Amsterdam's *classis* (church governing body), he pursued his academic studies on the condition that he would return the scholarship by pastoring. His ordination took place in 1588.

Thus far in his life, many challenges had been overcome, but many more would yet come. The following challenges revolved around a doctrinal tripod of human beings, sin, and salvation. Based on his perspectives on anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology, Arminius was accused of being Pelagian or semi-Pelagian. However, this is a mistake—Arminius' articulation of human salvation was clearly not Pelagian.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For Arminius' biographical information, see: Nathan Bangs, *The Life of James Arminius, D.D., Formerly Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1843; and John Guthrie, *The Life of James Arminius*. Nashville: E. Stevenson & FA Owen, 1857. See also: Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985. For his works, see *James Arminius, The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vols. Auburn and Buffalo: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853; and James Arminius, *The Missing Public Disputations of Jacobus Arminius: Introduction, Text, and Notes*, Ed. Keigh Stanglin, Boston: Brill, 2010.

Pelagius (350-423) was a British monk who denied "Original Sin," believing that human nature was neutral and that people learned to sin through socialization. The only action of God's grace for Pelagius was the communication of His law to people's hearts, a kind of natural and general revelation common to all people of the human race. Since humanity was aware of these precepts, then it would be up to individuals to follow each commandment. Pelagius taught that each human being was completely responsible for his/her own salvation, without any external intervention nor any operation of grace. The Pelagian theology, therefore, taught that the image of God in humankind was neither lost nor corrupted, but it was intact, because Adam's sin affected only himself and not his posterity. Further, it taught that free will was also intact, and it is this agent that at the same time blames and empowers human beings to be saved and to live in absolute perfection.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that Pelagius' position is not grounded in Scripture nor experience. For this reason, Augustine (354-430) undertook a major attack on his doctrines, denouncing errors and their logical consequences.<sup>3</sup> Augustine said, unlike Pelagius, that Adam's sin brought serious consequences for himself and his descendants. The first of these was linked to the *imago Dei*, because the warning that disobedience to the divine command would bring "death" included both a spiritual

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2. For more information on Pelagius' ideas, see B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters*. Rochester: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1998.

3. Augustine's main works dealing with Pelagius are: *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians; On the Grace of Christ, and on Original Sin; On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins; and On the Proceedings of Pelagius*.

and a physical death. Spiritually, Adam died in relational terms with God; he lost the ability to seek the Creator, becoming alienated, dead in his crime and sin. Physically, Adam's days were numbered, his longevity was counting down, and neither he nor any of his descendants would be physically immortal. As a result, the image of God was corrupted in its entirety. Any descendant of Adam was born already spiritually "dead." This fall extended to all beings collectively so that "there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God" (Romans 3:10-11). Because free will had been lost with the fall of Adam, salvation occurs not by human action but by divine action. God is the one who begins, continues, and ends the salvation of people. Augustine called all these effects of the fall "Original Sin."

For Arminius, the image of God was not lost but completely corrupted. This is in line with Augustinian thinking, with Calvin's ideas, and with the RCN's confessional documents at that time (Belgian Confession and Heidelberg Catechism).<sup>4</sup> Arminius articulated two dimensions of the image of God—one called *essential* and the other *accidental*.<sup>5</sup> The *essential image* contains the *natural free will*, which, despite not having been lost, has been corrupted in the human being so that decisions are not the wisest nor the most correct. The *accidental*

*image*, however, concerns *spiritual free will*, something that was lost with the fall of Adam.<sup>6</sup>

Arminius was very emphatic about what has happened to *spiritual free will* since the fall of Adam. According to him, "about grace and free will, this is what I teach, about Scripture and orthodox consensus: the free will is unable to initiate or perfect any true and spiritual good without grace."<sup>7</sup> He also said that "in that [fallen] state, man's free will for what is good is not only hurt, crippled, sick, distorted and weakened; it is also imprisoned, destroyed and lost."<sup>8</sup> Arminius agreed with the Augustinian proposal that the unregenerate human being is "dead" and is therefore spiritually incapable.<sup>9</sup> The solution to this, then, must come from outside the individual. It must come from God.<sup>10</sup> Based on this, Arminius distanced himself from Pelagianism.<sup>11</sup>

Arminius also distanced himself from the church in Holland on its understanding of salvation. Arminius and his contemporaries understood grace to be the way in which the will is made free. They disagreed, however, on

human response. The Calvinism that Arminius disagreed with taught that the whole experience of salvation for the elect, from preventing to sanctifying grace, did not encompass a human response. Arminius agreed that it was only because of the grace of God that the human will was made free but that this took place through an enabling grace that allowed humans to respond to God in faith.

Arminius' contributions were very important for European evangelicalism in the 18th century. Although many of his ideas were not entirely new, they influenced important movements such as Wesleyan Methodism (18th century) and the Holiness Movement (19th century). The Church of the Nazarene is indebted to his legacy.

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4. After the Synod of Dort (1618-19), the canons of Dort were added as the confessional tripod of the RCN, called "forms of unity."

5. James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1 (Auburn and Buffalo: Derby, Miller and Orton, 1853), 123-125; James Arminius, *The Missing Public Disputations of Jacobus Arminius: Introduction, Text, and Notes*, Ed. Keigh Stanglin, (Boston: Brill, 2010), 219-232.

6. John Wesley thought in the same terms as Arminius with regard to the essential and the accidental image. However, he added the idea of political image (based on Isaac Waats), giving the *imago Dei* a three-dimensional character.

7. Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, 473.

8. Ibid.

9. Arminius, *The Missing Public Disputations of Jacobus Arminius: Introduction, Text, and Notes*, Ed. Keigh Stanglin, (Boston: Brill, 2010), 213-216.

10. Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, 231.

11. He even explicitly called Pelagianism "heretical" (Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1, p. 235. For more explicit criticism of Pelagius' doctrines by Arminius, see p. 198, 201-2, 275, 290, 294-5, 299, 332-6, 348; see also Arminius, *The Missing Public Disputations of Jacobus Arminius*, 281-296, 333-346, 406; Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 3, 281, 342, 354, 484).





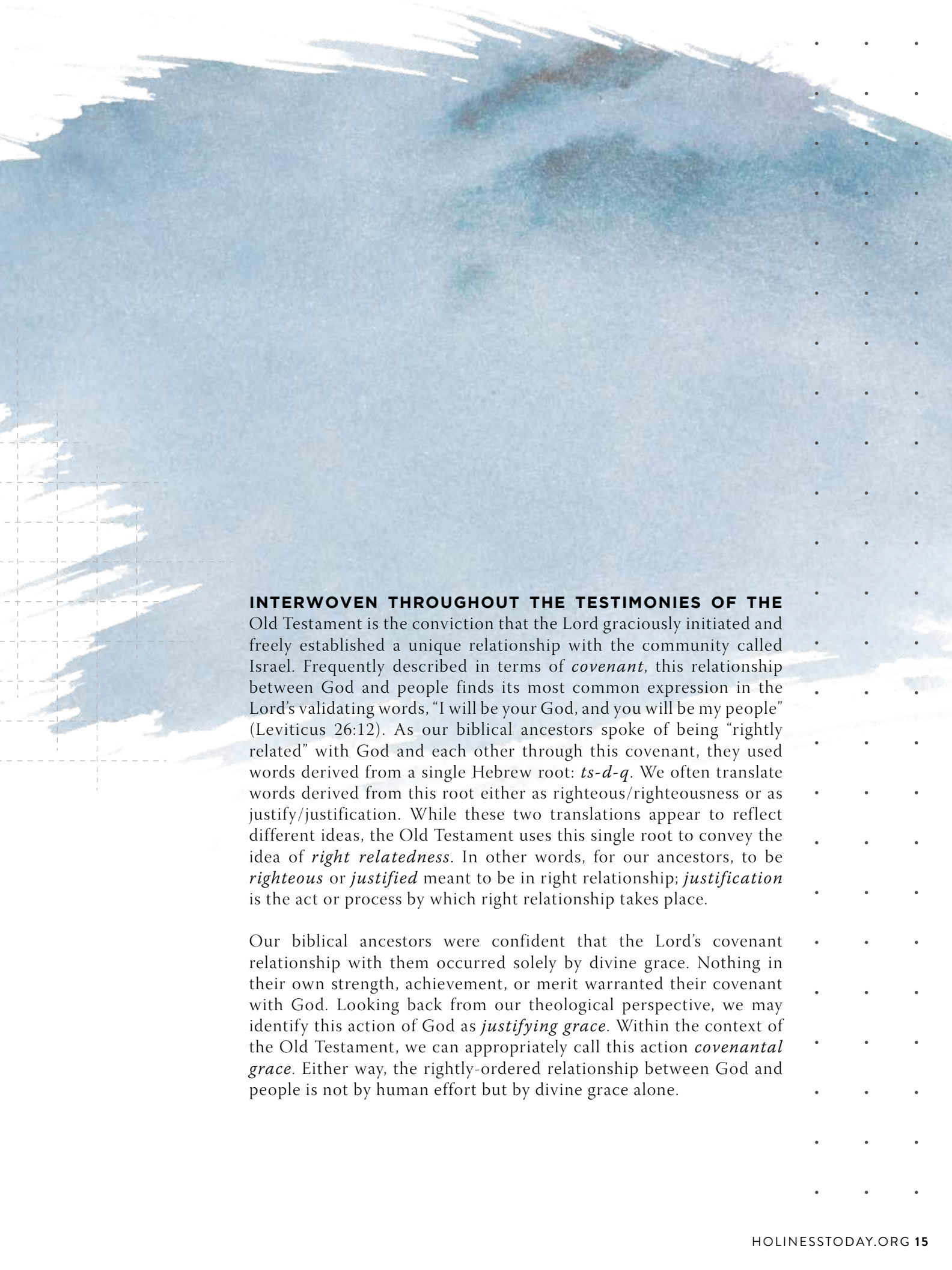
A  
COMMUNITY  
BORN  
BY  
GRACE

*by* TIMOTHY GREEN

BUT REMEMBER THE LORD YOUR  
GOD, FOR IT IS HE WHO GIVES  
YOU THE ABILITY TO PRODUCE  
WEALTH, AND SO CONFIRMS HIS  
COVENANT, WHICH HE SWORE TO  
YOUR ANCESTORS, AS IT IS TODAY.

DEUTERONOMY 8:18





**INTERWOVEN THROUGHOUT THE TESTIMONIES OF THE** Old Testament is the conviction that the Lord graciously initiated and freely established a unique relationship with the community called Israel. Frequently described in terms of *covenant*, this relationship between God and people finds its most common expression in the Lord's validating words, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). As our biblical ancestors spoke of being "rightly related" with God and each other through this covenant, they used words derived from a single Hebrew root: *ts-d-q*. We often translate words derived from this root either as righteous/righteousness or as justify/justification. While these two translations appear to reflect different ideas, the Old Testament uses this single root to convey the idea of *right relatedness*. In other words, for our ancestors, to be *righteous* or *justified* meant to be in right relationship; *justification* is the act or process by which right relationship takes place.

Our biblical ancestors were confident that the Lord's covenant relationship with them occurred solely by divine grace. Nothing in their own strength, achievement, or merit warranted their covenant with God. Looking back from our theological perspective, we may identify this action of God as *justifying grace*. Within the context of the Old Testament, we can appropriately call this action *covenantal grace*. Either way, the rightly-ordered relationship between God and people is not by human effort but by divine grace alone.

## COVENANTAL GRACE EXTENDED TO ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

In the overall biblical narrative and well before the defining moment of the covenant at Sinai, the story of Abraham and Sarah echoed into the lives of later generations. Witnessing God's grace that had called, promised, and guided this landless and childless couple, subsequent generations caught a glimpse of God's gracious activity that established *right relatedness* through covenant. In their nomadic journey into an unknown future, Abraham and Sarah struggled to trust the Lord, who had promised them descendants. In the midst of Abraham's struggle in Genesis 15, this childless nomad questioned God regarding an heir: "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless?" (v. 2). As far as Abraham knew, the only possibility would be his servant Eliezer. In response to Abraham's inquiry, the Lord invited him to gaze into the dark, star-filled sky, saying "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your offspring be" (v. 5). In response to the Lord's gracious activity and promise in his life, Abraham simply believed. His trust in the God who had spoken these words of promise was reckoned or calculated as *right relationship* with God.

In the concluding scene of this encounter between God and Abraham in Genesis 15, the Lord solely initiated and established covenantal relationship with Abraham and his descendants. *Covenantal grace* took center stage as God's presence,

represented by fire and smoke, passed between the pieces of the sacrificial animals. The Lord took the full responsibility of initiating and committing to the covenantal relationship between the Lord and Abraham. This rightly-related covenant was established by divine grace alone. Generations later, the apostle Paul recalled this moment as the standard for right relationship with God (Romans 4:1-3).

## THE DEFINING MOMENT OF GOD'S COVENANTAL GRACE AT SINAI

Centuries after Abraham and Sarah, echoes of this story of God's covenant with Abraham, Sarah, and their descendants reverberated into the lives of the Hebrew slaves as they hurriedly made their mass exodus out of Egypt and arrived at the banks of the Red Sea. With Pharaoh's armies behind them and the life-threatening sea ahead of them, the situation appeared hopeless. Suddenly, out of the east came a mighty wind that divided the chaotic sea in half. Coming up out of their birthing waters as a newborn people, these former slaves became a community of emancipated human beings. In response, Miriam took her tambourine and led the women in song and dance: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exodus 15:21). With that testimony of God's gracious deliverance, the community of faith was born.

In the days that followed this defining moment, the newborn community ate God-given bread

and drank divinely-provided water. As the people arrived at the foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord incorporated them into a covenant family, a community rightly related with God and each other. The once-orphaned slaves who were not a people were adopted into the Lord's household as a treasured possession out of all the families on earth (Exodus 19:3-6). Indeed, the Lord became their God, and they became the Lord's people.

Conceived by God's preceding grace through God's call of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12:1-3), the community now burst forth out of the waters as a delivered people who entered into covenant with the Lord and each other—not by their own ingenuity, strength, or merit, but by God's delivering, covenantal grace alone. In their captivity, these people could not deliver themselves; however, the Lord graciously rescued them. In their hunger and thirst, they could not bake their own bread or dig wells deep enough to find water; however, the Lord graciously nourished them. As orphans without a god and wanderers without a king, they could persuade neither gods nor kings to welcome them; however, the Lord graciously adopted them as children of the divine covenant. Their own efforts had not brought them into this covenantal relationship—only God's commitment to and love for this community could carry out such a miraculous act (see Moses' words to the people in Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Indeed, the Lord came to them before they ever came to the Lord. By grace, they were delivered; by grace, they were nourished;

and by grace, they entered into covenant relationship with God and each other.

## THE GRACIOUS GIFT OF LAW AND FORGIVENESS

Our biblical ancestors testified to another divine gift that was directly related to the covenant. This gift of the Lord's law was not an alternative to covenantal grace; it was an integral part of covenantal grace. Having been adopted as the Lord's covenant family, how would this community ever know the ways in which it was to practice and embody its covenant identity? The Lord had not left the people helpless. They fervently believed that God had graciously given them words and statutes, ordinances and commands, practices and disciplines by which they might both embody and nourish their covenant identity. They unequivocally believed that God's gracious deliverance and covenant preceded the giving of law. They were deeply aware that they were born into the covenant community by grace alone and not by their obedience to law. To believe otherwise would be to pervert both grace and law. However, understanding the divine law also as God's gift to the covenant community, our biblical ancestors were committed to the belief that their grace-based covenant relationship with God and each other carried with it the responsibility to practice obediently the ways of covenant faithfulness.

Like their father Abraham and their mother Sarah, the people of the Lord struggled to trust

their covenant God with all their hearts. By turning to other gods, constructing idols, establishing rulers, making alliances with nations, and engaging in oppression, injustice, and violence, their rightly-ordered covenant relationship with God and neighbor became distorted and broken (i.e., *unrighteous*). Although the people broke covenant with the Lord, the Lord refused to walk away from the covenant community. The divine grace that had established covenant in the first place continued to be active and to call upon the people to repent, to seek forgiveness, and to pursue right-relatedness. In the context of the community's infidelity and rebellion, divine forgiveness became an integral part of the Lord's restoration of covenantal right-relationship.

As testified throughout the generations of God's people, the Lord is merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love . . . *forgiving* iniquity and transgression and sin (Exodus 34:6-7). The very character of God is embodied in the divine grace that not only *establishes* right relationship but also restores right relationship with Him.


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IN RESPONSE TO THE  
LORD'S GRACIOUS  
ACTIVITY AND  
PROMISE IN HIS LIFE,  
ABRAHAM SIMPLY  
BELIEVED.



THE  
RIGHTEOUS  
JUDGE

*by* SVETLANA KHOBNYA



CLEARLY NO ONE WHO RELIES ON THE  
LAW IS JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD, BECAUSE  
“THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH.”

GALATIANS 2:11

**THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION ENCOMPASSES MORE** nuances than just the word itself. The Greek word “δικαιοσύνη” used for “justification” extends to a range of meanings in English, including justification, justice, truthfulness, and righteousness. In order to explain the concept of justification, we must capture multiple links between these various words in the δικαιο-family. Justification concerns the means by which human relationship to God is established and, as such, requires a broad analysis of the New Testament as a story and not just a narrow analysis of certain passages where “justification” appears.

## JUSTIFICATION OF GOD IN CHRIST

First of all, God Himself is described as just and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 11:7; Matthew 6:33). But God's righteousness (justice) is not simply an attribute of His character. Primarily, it is God's activity of grace and kindness to His covenant people and to the entire human race (Deuteronomy 32; Jeremiah 31:11; Romans 3:21; 1 Peter 1:10). Further, it testifies to God's faithfulness in His covenant relationship with the people of Israel (Romans 9:1-10:1) who are supposed to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6). While people in the past kept disobeying God, allowing sin to rule their lives, God in His righteousness remained faithful to His relationship with Israel. God promised to act in a powerful way, to redeem them from oppression and sin, to lead them into obedience, and eventually to fulfill His bigger purposes of drawing all the nations back to Himself (Isaiah 52:10; Jeremiah 31:10; Zechariah 14:1-21; Acts 2:16-21).

The New Testament writers testify that God's righteousness has been revealed in Christ (Romans 1:17; 3:21). What Adam, Abraham, Israel, or the Law—weakened by flesh—could not do, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3). Moreover, the New Testament writers emphasize the significance of Christ being in human flesh from Davidic or Jewish descent (Math 1:1; Luke 3:23-37; Acts 2:23-36; Romans 1:3). In this sense, Christ was representing not only humanity but also Israel. While in the flesh, Christ remained faithful to God, even to death on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8). His life of obedience defeated sin (Hebrews

4:15), and all who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God are now justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23-24). Jesus is the Jewish Messiah and the Savior of the world. In that, God remained faithful to His promise to Abraham to bless the nations through Israel and to heal the world.

The New Testament draws a close parallel between God's righteousness or His justice and that of Christ. God's righteousness has been fulfilled through Christ's own righteousness and faithfulness (Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:16). 1 Peter describes the act of Christ as the death of the righteous One for the unrighteous in order to restore humanity to the relationship with God (1 Peter 3:18). Literally, Christ's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all (Romans 5:18). Christ was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification (Romans 4:25). He is the sacrifice of our atonement (Romans 3:25). In Christ, a new era has begun—the era of cosmic restoration—putting the whole world right in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).<sup>1</sup>

### OUR JUSTIFICATION

What about our justification now? How does God's work in Christ affect us? Paul discussed the issue of *corporate* justification in his letters, extensively pointing to the fact that in Christ the power of sin has been broken (Romans 6:6-8). Now, all nations are called into obedience of faith (Romans

1:5; 6:18) and are welcome to be adopted into God's family by the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:12-17). We all, as the human race *corporately*, are invited to participate in a new solidarity with Christ and in His obedience. The verb "justify" is always used in a passive sense in relation to humanity—"to be justified." This implies that something is happening to people and points to God's initiative in Christ as the basis for your justification and mine. To be justified is to be transferred from one realm to another, namely from being sin-slaves to obedience, from death to life, and from being under law to being under grace. This is Paul's language in Romans 6 and 7 in particular. He who is just, justifies all those who have faith in Him (Romans 3:24-26). It means that God in Christ declares us righteous by faith and invites us into His embrace.

On the one hand, justification is God's act of redemption of the whole creation in Christ. God acted for us *preveniently* in Christ, and justification has already taken place for all. We are now free to respond to God's grace and be fully accepted as righteous in relation to God through faith in Christ apart from the righteousness of works. But on the other hand, there is more to our justification. Justification is also about relationship and restoration, because restoring relationships and transformation are the goals of God's redeeming and righteous activity.

God, who took the initiative to reveal His righteousness in Christ, is always at work and will enable His people to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). In 2 Corinthians, Paul explicitly

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1. N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections." Pages 395-770 in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. X. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 399.



JUSTIFICATION

IS GOD'S ACT OF

REDEMPTION OF THE

WHOLE CREATION

IN CHRIST.

says that God's righteousness can be ours: "For our sake he made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). If Christ is the source of "righteousness" (1 Corinthians 1:30), then His people should also embody His righteousness. The Spirit of Christ is poured out upon God's people to accompany them in this endeavor so that they become in reality what they already are by God's declaration (Galatians 4:4-7).

The picture of justification in the New Testament is not complete without mentioning God's promise of final justification in Christ that awaits future glory of the whole created order (Romans 8:18-27; 1 Corinthians 4:5). God, in His righteousness and faithfulness, will judge the secrets of all hearts through Christ and will restore all things to their right relationship at the end time. In the meantime, those who are justified are called to be reconciled and to be ambassadors of reconciliation for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). This is an "appeal to receive what God has already given, to appropriate what God has already done" and "to embody and manifest within their individual and corporative life the reality of their reconciliation to God."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "The Ministry of Reconciliation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4 (1977): 212.



SACRAMENTS  
AND  
SALVATION

*by* CARL LETH





GO, EAT YOUR BREAD WITH JOY,  
AND DRINK YOUR WINE WITH  
A MERRY HEART, FOR GOD HAS  
ALREADY APPROVED WHAT YOU DO.

ECCLESIASTES 9:7

**HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND (AND PRACTICE)**

the relationship of the sacraments with God's work of saving grace? We should remember that "saving grace" is not a different kind of grace than "prevenient grace." Both refer to God's redemptive work in us but reference different stages in the journey of faith. They are not two different "things" but rather are different ways of speaking about the work of the Holy Spirit. So how do the sacraments connect with God's gracious work when we come to faith in Christ?

## BAPTISM

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. It marks us as followers of Jesus, a part of His community (the Church), recipients of God's justifying work who are committed to pursuing Christ and His life (holiness). There is distinction between the sacramental celebration itself and the inward work that takes place during baptism. Wesley uses the language of "baptism in water" and "new spiritual birth." While the sacrament of baptism points to and celebrates being born again, the two are not necessarily conjoined. Baptism is the *sign*; new birth is the reality that it signifies. Water baptism does not have the inherent power to effect being born again—we are not saved by being baptized.

In the baptismal liturgy, the candidates make confessions and commitments, suggesting that they have experienced "spiritual baptism" or new birth in Christ prior to the sacramental celebration. It may be the case that some undergo believer's baptism prematurely, coming to the experience of being born again at a later point. In this instance, baptism functions as a means of prevenient grace, a sign leading to new birth as the realization of saving grace.

This raises the question of re-baptism. If we have been baptized (with water) but experience new birth at a later time, should we be re-baptized? In such (and all) cases, re-baptism is not needed nor technically appropriate. Many choose to be rebaptized and may feel this is an important statement of their faith. However, an alternative service—one that includes public confirmation/affirmation of their personal

faith (even utilizing the baptismal liturgy), a prayer of blessing, and anointing (as the sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit)—would allow those who seek re-baptism to publicly affirm/reaffirm their faith in a personally meaningful way without running the risk of confusing or trivializing the sacrament of baptism. If I had been re-baptized every time I needed to reaffirm my faith, I would have been in the water regularly!

## BAPTISM AND CHILDREN OF THE CHURCH

Baptism is particularly important in helping young believers confirm their faith and commitment to follow Christ. This is especially true for children who have grown up in the church, often attending Sunday school, children's church, children's camp, etc. who have come to a settled faith but lack a clear personal narrative. Perhaps they are clearly committed followers of Jesus but can't necessarily say, "On this date, in this place, I abandoned my life of sin and gave my heart to Jesus." This lack may actually be a measure of the success of the spiritually nurturing work with children in communities of faith; it is certainly ideal to raise children in a Christian environment, though such children may feel confused without a definite moment of faith they can point to. Baptism offers them an opportunity for a public declaration of their faith, an intention to follow Christ, and their identification with the community of faith. Baptism provides public declaration that places an experiential "stake in the ground."

BAPTISM IS

PARTICULARLY

IMPORTANT IN

HELPING YOUNG

BELIEVERS CONFIRM

THEIR FAITH.

## CELEBRATION OF GOD'S REDEEMING WORK

It should be noted that, while personal confession and commitment are an integral part of baptism, the primary focus should always be on Christ. He is the ultimate “means of grace.” While our participation is essential, it is the work of God in Christ that makes new birth possible. God enables us to respond to His offer of forgiveness and restoration that only He can give. If we turn a baptism celebration into a celebration of personal stories, we risk forgetting that such stories only matter because they are enfolded, by grace, into *God's* great story of redemption and restoration.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER (EUCCHARIST)

In the early church, the non-baptized would be required to leave the worship service prior to celebration of the Lord's Supper. In fact, even baptized disciples under some form of discipline would also be excluded. While the practice of exclusions fell away fairly quickly, the principle of restriction has persisted. I had a professor who remembered when congregants would need to visit the pastor before a communion service for a spiritual conversation and to receive a token that would be required to receive the sacrament in the service! Wesley declared that the Supper may serve as a “converting ordinance.” That is, the celebration of communion may serve as an invitation to faith, not just to the faithful. While affirming the traditional role and function of the Lord's Supper, we may explore creative

thinking about its use. Could we intentionally use an invitation to the Lord's Supper as an “altar invitation?” Wesley certainly seemed to think so.

More broadly, we should understand the celebration of Communion, in every instance, as a proclamation of the gospel, which is the heart and meaning of our faith. Everything must connect back to the central message of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection that offers us salvation.

## SACRAMENTS AND SAVING GRACE

The sacraments—both Baptism and the Lord's Supper—are rich in meaning and in practice as means of grace. If they are seen as lacking meaning or left to perfunctory practice, it is not the fault of the sacraments. Let us attend to these means of grace and the rich resources they offer to us for the work of saving the lost. Thanks be to God!

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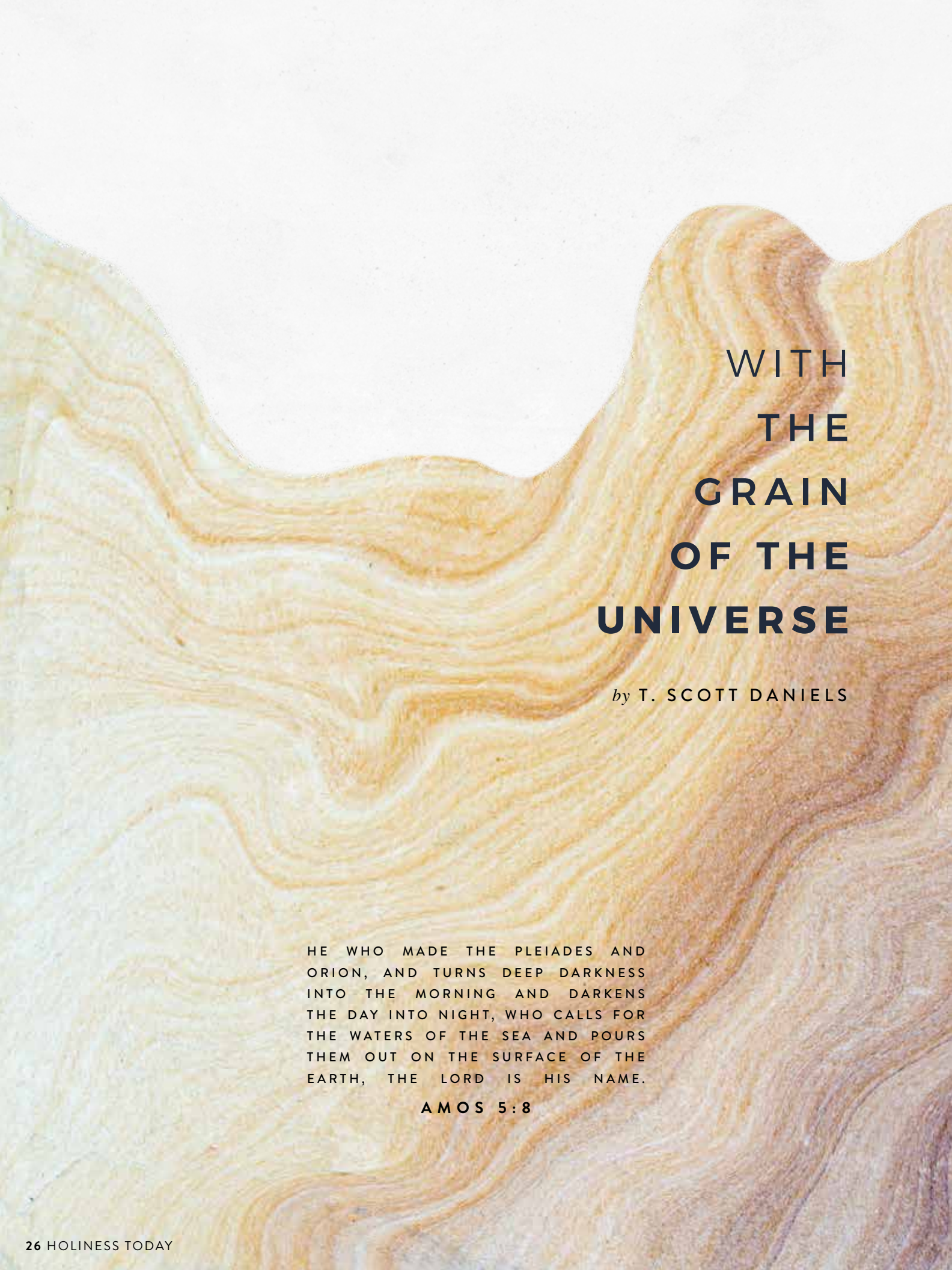
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WITH  
THE  
GRAIN  
OF THE  
UNIVERSE

*by* T. SCOTT DANIELS

HE WHO MADE THE PLEIADES AND  
ORION, AND TURNS DEEP DARKNESS  
INTO THE MORNING AND DARKENS  
THE DAY INTO NIGHT, WHO CALLS FOR  
THE WATERS OF THE SEA AND POURS  
THEM OUT ON THE SURFACE OF THE  
EARTH, THE LORD IS HIS NAME.

**AMOS 5:8**



**THE LOUD SOBBING WAS  
COMING FROM SOMEWHERE IN**

the blackness of the sanctuary. In the darkness, I found a dear friend laying across the seats crying uncontrollably, pleading with the Lord for mercy.

For many years now, I have led the congregations I have pastored in a Tenebrae service on Good Friday. *Tenebrae* is a Latin word that means “shadows.” The service is usually set around a table of candles (most often either seven or 40). Any reflective surfaces, and even the cross itself, are draped in black cloth. Usually, the liturgy for the service begins by telling the story of creation and continues through the various high moments of God’s activity in the biblical story of redemption.

As the story of salvation is recounted, the candles are lit one by one. Of course, the story reaches its climax when the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14) and the final light—the Christ light—is lit.

At that point, however, the service shifts to focus on the ultimate rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. As that part of the story is recounted, often using the seven last words Jesus spoke, the candles are extinguished one by one. In the final act of the worship service, a globe is placed over the Christ-candle, eliminating its oxygen, and eventually leading to the smothering out of the world’s true light.

The congregation is invited to stay in the darkness for as long as they want or need. However, they are asked to leave in silence and shadows so that they might return on Sunday in the joy of the new creation life of the risen King.

Despite its simplicity, I have always found *Tenebrae* to be a moving and meaningful practice and service. It is not unusual to hear sniffing and faint tears being wiped away at its conclusion. I did not, however, expect the echoes of wailing that led me, many Good Fridays ago now, to get up and try to discover their source.

When my friend sensed my presence in the darkness, he sat up, invited me to sit beside him, and then he leaned on my shoulder and continued to cry. After several minutes, he was ready to talk. He began to share how the lit candles in the service had served as a reminder of all the ways God had demonstrated grace, love, and mercy to him across the years. However, as the candles were extinguished,

the many sins in his own life—most of which he was working diligently to keep hidden in the shadows—came bursting in and were overwhelming him with grief. When the flame of the Christ light went out, he knew in that moment that the Spirit of God was bringing him to a moment of crisis and decision. Was he going to allow the sin and brokenness to extinguish all the good and beautiful things God was trying to accomplish in his life? Or was he going to lay all his brokenness aside and put on the new life offered to him in Christ? His tears, he explained, were the consequence of honestly confessing and taking off the weightiness of sin and, in contrast, experiencing the overwhelming relief of putting on the life of the new creation.

What my friend was experiencing that night was the reality of God’s justifying grace. And he encountered that grace through authentic worship.

God will not stop until our relationship is set right with Him, and as a consequence, our relationships with one another (including our enemies) are restored, our right relationship as caretakers (and not dominators) of creation is renewed, and even our proper sense of valuing who we are as people made uniquely in God’s image is made whole. So an important aspect of worship is to recognize the tenacious justifying grace of God continually at work in the world and in our lives.

One way this justifying grace was realized in more traditional forms of worship was through the reading of the law or Torah. More often than not, the Old Testament reading serves as a reminder of the unique and holy

HE KNEW IN THAT  
MOMENT THAT THE  
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AND DECISION.

life God intends for His people. The Torah is a reminder that we are not autonomous individuals who get to make up the rules for our lives. In fact, when we go our own way, we do more damage to our relationship with God and to God's design. As James K. A. Smith writes, "The announcement of the law reminds us that we inhabit not 'nature,' but *creation*, fashioned by a Creator, and that there is a certain grain of the universe – grooves and tracks and norms that are part of the fabric of the world. And all of creation flourishes best when our communities and relationships run with the grain of those grooves."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in traditional liturgies, the reading of the law is usually followed by congregational prayers of confession of sin, followed by prayers of assurance and forgiveness. It is as though the reading of the law, as in the time of Ezra, brings God's people to a tearful awareness of how far we have gone astray and how much we have lived against the grain of God's universe. But it also serves as an invitation to receive the gift of divine reconciliation and forgiveness. This practice assures us again and again of God's unwillingness to let sin win.

Not just in the hearing of the law but also in the preaching and proclamation of the gospel, worship reminds us of God's ultimate work of reconciliation

in and through the person of Jesus. So often in the practice of preaching, the members of the congregation are invited to look at Jesus, look at ourselves, and then confess the great difference. In Christ, that huge difference is not a reason for despair but a reason to rejoice and to receive the justifying grace of God that makes all things new.

Two days after praying with my friend in the darkness of Good Friday, we greeted one another with a hug in the light and glory of Easter morning. The tears of sorrow and the shadows of sin were receding in the light and love of and the hope of the new creation. May our worship, week after week, remind the faithful of the divine love that will not let us go.


The scriptural story reveals that things in the world are not as they are supposed to be. One has to read just the first 11 chapters of the Bible to understand that humans have broken their relationships with God, and as a consequence, their relationships with one another, with creation, and even with themselves.

God's creation is still good, but it is marred, cracked, shattered, and askew. But God refuses to give that brokenness the final word. Darkness does not get the last word—light does. Evil does not get the last word—good does. Death does not get the last word—life does. Sin does not get the last word—God's justifying grace does.

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1. James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 176.



THE TIME IS FULFILLED, AND THE  
KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND;  
REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.

MARK 1:15





# REPENTANCE FROM OUR UNBELIEF

*by* DICK EUGENIO

**REPENTANCE HAS A SIGNIFICANT PLACE AND SHOULD** not be underestimated in the life of a Christian. The ministry of John the Baptist was characterized by “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). When Jesus began His earthly prophetic ministry, His message was simple: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mark 1:15; Matthew 3:2). The question, therefore, that we must ask is this: “What does it mean to repent, and why is it important?”

## CHANGE OF MIND

The Evangelical tradition, with its emphases on instantaneous conversion and the transformed lifestyle, defines repentance primarily from a moralistic perspective. We have often heard preachers use the analogy of turning around 180 degrees from our life of sin to a life in God. Paul's admonition against using our bodies as instruments of wickedness easily comes to mind (Romans 6:13). As people who have been freed from sin, we are called to become "slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18). However, the change of lifestyle expected of us may properly be referred to as "fruit of repentance" (Matthew 3:8) but not actual repentance itself.

The Nazarene *Manual* defines repentance as "a sincere and thorough change of mind in regard to sin."<sup>1</sup> This definition is accurate to the Greek term used for repentance—*metanoia*—which literally means "change of mind." To understand this, we need to look at the New Testament, particularly the messages and teachings of Jesus within the first century Jewish contexts.

For some first century Jews, Kingdom and political aspirations went together. These people, who had been oppressed for several centuries already, developed a longing for political freedom so that they might experience what it meant to be the people of God in the land promised to them. Unfortunately, their means toward achieving this freedom included legalistic separationism and violent militarism on the

two ends of the spectrum. N. T. Wright argues that Jesus' message of repentance was a call "to give up their whole way of life, their national and social agendas, and to trust Him for a different agenda, a different set of goals."<sup>2</sup>

This means that Jesus' call to repentance was a call for His followers to change their minds about their assumed identity, rights, and calling. They also needed to change their thinking about what true salvation meant and how it might be achieved.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly said, "You have heard it said..., but I tell you..." This is also a message of repentance. Jesus was telling them that their understanding of what Yahweh demands from them, based on their interpretation of the law, was wrong. Their interpretation of the law led to legalism. Jesus was calling them to a new way of life characterized by truth instead of falseness, forgiveness instead of retribution, love instead of callousness, and righteousness instead of self-righteousness.

## SIN AND PERSONAL GUILT

Jesus' message of repentance was definitely hard for some of the Jews to swallow. Their ways of life had been forged by countless years of indoctrination. Their social and religious laws emerged out of their desire not to repeat the sins of their ancestors that led to the Babylonian exile. Jesus faced resistance, especially from the ruling classes, because He was challenging them head on. How could an ordinary man from

Nazareth, a worthless town, have the audacity to challenge the practiced Jewish way of faith and life?

Those who did not follow Jesus after hearing His word struggled with unbelief. This was displayed in the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees in John 8:12-59. The dichotomy of self-assurance and belief in Jesus is important in our discussion of repentance.

First, repentance requires our acknowledgement that we are sinners fallen short of the glory of God. This was one of the things that the Hebrew people, at times, refused to do. What is intriguing is that John the Baptist's call to repentance was directed to the Jews, the people of God!

If baptism was primarily for proselyte Gentiles who wished to join the Jewish faith, then John the Baptist was essentially saying that the people of God must repent in order to become the true people of God!<sup>3</sup> They had to realize who they were in their sin and change their minds about their identity. The implication for us is clear: unless there is personal sense of guilt about our sin, repentance will not follow. Repentance means changing our minds about ourselves. Paul taught this, too: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment" (Romans 12:3).

Second, repentance requires a confession: "I believe in Jesus Christ as God's instituted means of salvation." It is to believe

1. Church of the Nazarene *Manual* 2017-2021, ¶8.

2. Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 27.

3. Thomas F. Torrance, "The Origins of Baptism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958), 158-171.

in Him as the only mediator between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5) and to accept Him as the Lord and Savior. In the words of Karl Barth, it involves trust, which is “the act in which a man may rely on the faithfulness of Another, that His promise holds and that what He demands He demands with necessity.”<sup>4</sup> It entails not only an admittance of our incapability to save ourselves but also our complete reliance on Jesus to redeem us from our present abject condition and uncertain future.

To sin, therefore, is to be faithless. On the one hand, sin is unbelief that one is a sinner. On the other hand, and as a consequence of the former, sin is unbelief in the necessity of God and His power to forgive sins. To sin is to not feel personal guilt due to lack of awareness of wrongdoings, or it is the conscious rejection of the conviction that one is engaged in wrongdoings. Barth may be right in saying that the root of sin is essentially unbelief. He writes, “Man sins in that he rejects the confidence that God is the source of all goodness and good to man, that the right which God demands from him is that which alone is right for himself.”<sup>5</sup>

## GLORIOUS FREEDOM

Repentance requires the enabling work of the Holy Spirit in persons. Jesus spelled this clearly in John 16:8-11. When the Spirit comes, Jesus said, “he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I

am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” Notice that the conviction about sin is again related to people’s unbelief in Jesus. The role of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus in the world (John 16:14) by convicting people about His identity as the Son sent into the world and who has returned to the Father. To believe this truth is righteousness. Moreover, the role of the Spirit is to convict the world about judgment.

Repentance does not only entail a change of mind about ourselves and about Jesus Christ; it also entails a change of mind about sin and its effect on humanity. Repentance entails the assurance that upon putting our faith in Jesus Christ, not only is our personal guilt removed and our sins washed, but we have also received a new spiritual life of freedom from bondage and victory over temptations.

Repentance, therefore, has a prospective importance. It involves a change of mind about how we should act in the world as people who have been forgiven, who trust in Jesus Christ, and who are free from the bondage of evil.

When Pharisees and Sadducees went to where Jesus was baptizing, He addressed them harshly, saying: “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’” (Matthew 3:8-9). True repentance effects change in both our beliefs *and* actions. Transformation happens in the renewal of our minds, enabling us to no longer conform to the patterns of this world but to obey God’s pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

**Dick Eugenio** is academic dean at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary and discipleship coordinator for the Philippine-Micronesia Field.



AS PEOPLE WHO HAVE  
BEEN FREED FROM SIN,  
WE ARE CALLED TO  
BECOME SLAVES OF  
RIGHTEOUSNESS.

4. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 18.

5. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.1, 414.



# JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION, AND ADOPTION

by STÉPHANE TIBI

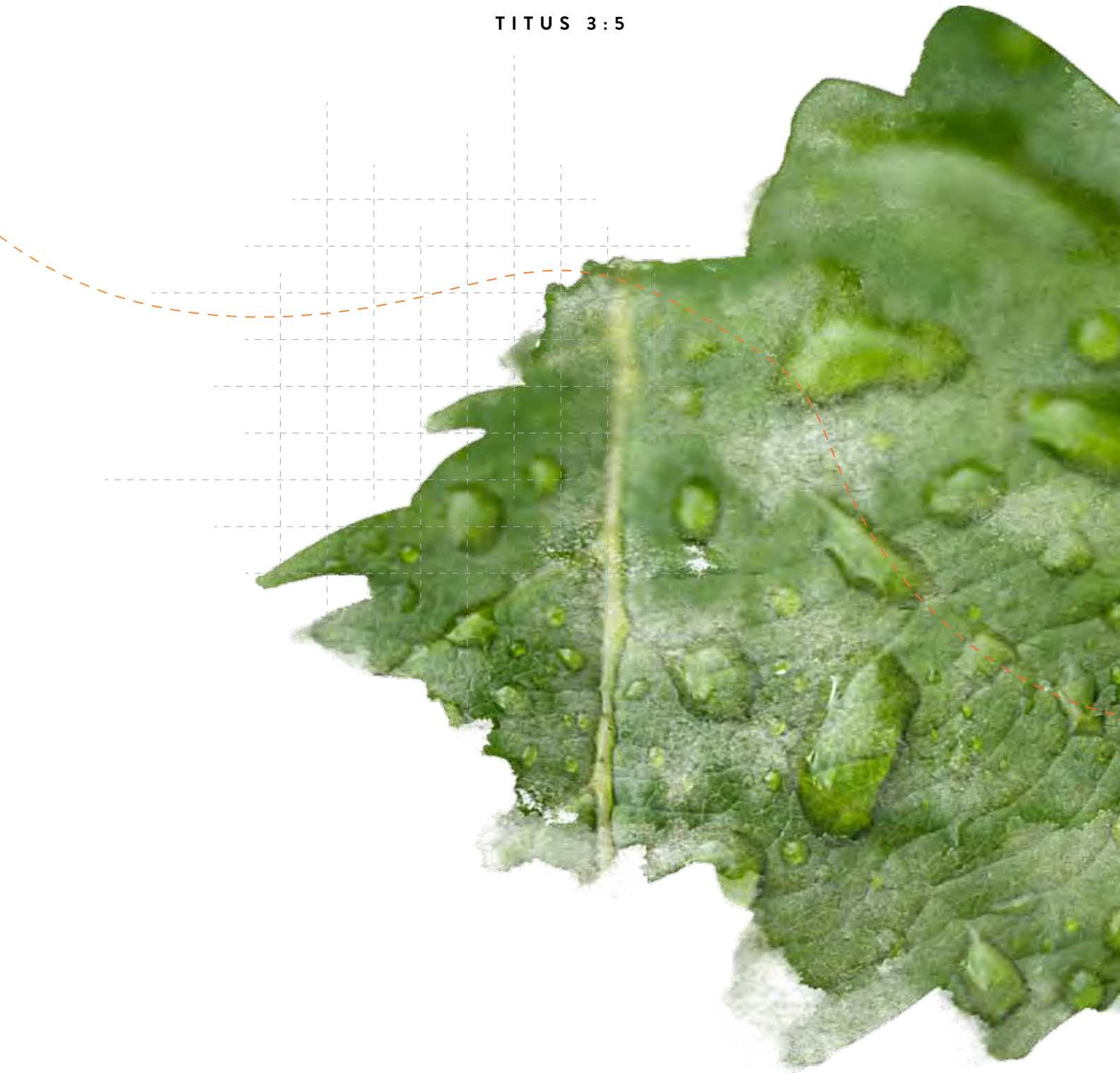
**THE ARTICLES OF FAITH OF THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE** are statements of how we as Wesleyan-Holiness people understand God's revelation to humanity through His Holy Word. Articles V to X describe the journey of humanity from sin to holiness.

Article V, "Sin, Original and Personal," describes how humanity, in Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, lost the living union with God, and reaped the curse of death. In Article VI, "Atonement," we learn how Jesus' own journey on earth reconciled humanity to God. The Word of God became flesh in Jesus, who is fully man and fully God. In and through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God and humanity were reconciled.

Articles V and VI form the foundation for Articles VII – X: Sin and death are the problem, and Christ's atonement is the solution for humanity. Articles VII to X show us how to welcome this divine solution into our lives.

HE SAVED US, NOT BECAUSE OF WORKS  
DONE BY US IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT  
ACCORDING TO HIS OWN MERCY, BY  
THE WASHING OF REGENERATION  
AND RENEWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

**TITUS 3:5**



JUSTIFICATION IS  
ABOUT LISTENING  
TO GOD, WHO  
DECLARES THROUGH  
JESUS' OBEDIENT  
FAITH THAT WE ARE  
FORGIVEN.

The solution begins by acknowledging that we are not the center—we are not the ones who have come up with the idea to be reconciled with God through our own strength. We need God to break sin's power and the curse of death over us. Article VII, "Prevenient Grace," shows our dependence on God and the grace that He offers apart from anything we do to merit it. This amazingly generous grace enables and invites us to respond. The first part of this response is presented in Article VIII, "Repentance."<sup>1</sup>

Repentance requires God's grace to make us aware of our sins and their consequences; we are then enabled to turn away from sin and begin doing the right things before God. Article VIII leads us logically to Article IX, "Justification, Regeneration, and Adoption," because the right thing after we repent is to put our trust in Jesus and in His sacrifice for us, thus entering into a life with God.

Article IX encompasses a part of our faith that is so important and profound such that a simple word or concept could not adequately describe it. Hence, the Article uses three words: justification, regeneration, and adoption.

## JUSTIFICATION

When we think of the word "justification," we may picture a judge, lawyers, or a trial. In a courtroom, the judge presides over the guilt or innocence of the accused person. Such imagery helps us understand that when we repent of our sins and put our obedient faith in God, He forgives us and judges us as not guilty. Our faith and God's grace allow us to

move from the condemnation of death to the blessing of life with God. This faith is a saving (justifying) faith, welcoming God's saving grace.

The apostle Paul, wanting to explain that faith is not a concept but also an action, highlighted that his ministry was to bring people to the *obedience of faith* (Romans 1:5; 16:26). This *justifying faith* is not only about hearing but also about obeying. We must remember that Paul was a Jew, and he was simply helping his Greek audience understand a Hebrew word, *Shamah*. From Hebrew, *Shamah* can be translated as "to hear" or "to listen" or "obey." These three ideas are embedded in *Shamah*.

To illustrate this point, we can think of a mother saying to her child, "listen!" This mother is not expecting her child to simply listen and then do whatever he/she wants but rather to listen and then respond in obedience. Justification is about listening to God, who declares through Jesus' obedient faith that we are forgiven. We receive this gift of forgiveness when we believe in Jesus. Faith in Christ means that we not only call Jesus Lord but we also respond to what He tells us. Jesus deplored the separation of what we say and what we do as we read in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

## REGENERATION

To more fully understand what happens with justification, the second word for Article IX is "regeneration." First, we were dead in sin and now we are alive in God. This is another mind-blowing part of God's amazing grace. In the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus found in the gospel of John, Jesus starts by

1. The second part of the response will be articles IX and X.

saying: “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The term used in the original text in Greek, *anōthen*, can mean either “again” or “from above.” So the translation could also be: “unless one is born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God.” When we are justified, when our sins are forgiven, life with God is again made possible—we are regenerated. This is exactly what Jesus is trying to explain to Nicodemus—the need to be “born again” or “born from above.” Regeneration is a new life, a life from above. It is not something we do out of our own strength but something that God gives out of His sheer love.

We often struggle like Nicodemus, who tried to figure out what he had to do when he replied to Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). Regeneration is a gift of grace as is justification. We receive the forgiveness of God, and we receive new life in Him and through Him.

## ADOPTION

In order to better grasp regeneration, a new life in God and with God, we come to the word “adoption.” An image that we may think of for adoption is God as a father and Christians as His children. Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew that “... unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3). The emphasis of adoption is not so much on a legal declaration—something more related to justification—but rather on the *type* of new life that now becomes possible.

If we are justified and we receive new life, it is not just any new life but new life with God as our Father. In the same way that Jesus called God “Father,” we are invited to cry out in joyful gratitude, “Abba, Father,” just as we read Jesus speaking in Mark 14:36 and as Paul encourages us to say in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

Adoption means that we are invited to live our life as children of God. We learn to listen to God and to walk with Him in all areas of our lives. Jesus said to His disciples, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Later, Jesus’ disciples were sometimes described as “belonging to the Way” in the book of Acts (9:2; 22:4).

Justification and adoption represent an entrance point into a new reality. Regeneration is the way by which we are prepared to exist in this reality. The ongoing work of regeneration continues in the lives of believers as they exist as sons or daughters of God. This relationship with God is the means by which we continue to grow. Justification is what is declared for us because of what Jesus did on the cross. Because of the work of Christ, if we believe, we are then adopted into the family of God. Once reconciled with God, we are invited to walk in obedient faith with Jesus, our Savior and our Lord.

**Stéphane Tibi** is a missionary serving as regional education coordinator in Eurasia.



TO THE LORD OUR GOD BELONG  
MERCY AND FORGIVENESS, FOR  
WE HAVE REBELLED AGAINST HIM.

DANIEL 9:9

**EVERY HUMAN IS GUILTY BEFORE GOD BECAUSE OF**

his/her sin and cannot run away from this guilt and condemnation. Each of us is destined to death, but through our faith in the gracious intervention of the Son of God who took our sins on Him, we can be saved. On the cross, we were rescued and redeemed, freed from the slavery of sin.

One of the most difficult aspects of being a human is to confront our own faults. The inborn tendency to hide our sin started with our first parents. In Paradise, Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves among the trees after their fall. They were hiding while God was calling them: "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Being naked, they tried to cover their bodies with leaves from the fig tree. Thereafter, they tried to blame each other for their sin. The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." The woman answered, "the serpent deceived me, and I ate."



A large, irregularly shaped graphic with a torn-paper edge, containing a blue-tinted image of a person's profile and a landscape. The profile is on the left, and the landscape, which appears to be a body of water, is on the right. The text is overlaid on the profile and landscape.

# A MERCIFUL SAVIOR

*by* FLAVIO VALVASSOURA

The attitude of not assuming one's own guilt is very common and evident in each human being, even in early childhood. Children frequently hide their faults when they are caught. The sin inside the human heart is a difficult stain to accept. It is easy to see someone else's mistakes while being complacent about our own. How can we get rid of this burden? As much as we may try to hide our own sin, we will never be able to get rid of our guilt.

Self-justification leads some people to attempt to escape responsibility for their own mistakes through many lines of reasoning. While some hide their sins for a period of time, Christians understand that there will be a day that all our sins will be totally exposed before God's throne. Only God can provide the solution and the cure for sin, which is forgiveness through Christ's justification on the cross.

According to the Bible, justification (in Greek: *dikaiosis*) is the act of absolving, forgiving, or declaring just. It is a forensic term used in courts that illustrates God as the judge of all. Through justification, God completely forgives sin and washes away guilt.

The base of justification is the work Christ did on the cross, which was perfect, meeting the requirements that God Himself established in His holiness. The price was "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

Beyond just erasing our guilt and forgiving our sin, the work done by Christ also brings us back to the Father. According to William Barclay, "to be justified is

to enter into a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and confidence and friendship, instead of one of distance and enmity and fear."<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to deny that everyone needs God's forgiveness. This is why Jesus Christ came to this world, to save the sinners. In His earthly ministry, Jesus performed many miracles: He cured the blind, lepers, paralytics, and people stricken with various diseases. Not only did He physically cure many people, but He also made statements such as "your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50) and "your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). Statements like these reveal an authority that belongs to God alone. Justification is a legal act that only He can conceive. It is God's gracious and sovereign act offered to the sinner, who is unworthy and undeserving of such divine favor.

One of the most glorious passages of the Gospel is the scene on the cross—the complete act of redemption that changes the human spiritual condition. On either side of Jesus, two thieves were also crucified. Jesus was innocent and did not deserve to be on the cross, but these men beside Him seemingly did. There are no references about their specific crimes, but death by crucifixion was not used for light infringements. Certainly, they had committed serious offences. Initially, both evildoers joined with the crowd in insulting Jesus. However, as time passed and they saw His reactions, one of those evildoers recognized the justice present in the Lord

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1. William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*, Revised Edition, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975), 27.

ON THE CROSS,

WE WERE

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FREED FROM THE

SLAVERY OF SIN.



**THOSE THAT  
RECEIVE THE  
WORD OF GOD  
ARE AWAKENED  
BY THE HOLY  
SPIRIT.**

Jesus. He pleaded: “Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Convinced by the Holy Spirit, that man made the right decision in the last moments of his life.

There was no time for this man to be baptized, to go to the church, not even to do good works. The only thing he did was to turn to the right Person. He was suffering and bleeding beside the Savior when he raised his voice, pleading, “Lord, remember me.” Jesus answered, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

What happened to that evildoer in the final moments of his life? He was justified by the Son of God! He received forgiveness for his sins, and suddenly, his condition was changed. He was dead in his sin, on a path toward hell, and then, through Christ’s word, his destiny was turned toward heaven. Only God can justify our sin—Jesus alone has this authority. His forgiveness to the sinner on the cross clearly displayed His role as Redeemer, “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and His role as the “judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; John 5:27).

The life of the man hanging on the cross next to Jesus was radically changed. Still today, those that receive the Word of God are awakened by the Holy Spirit. This is an amazing mystery. Any person who listens to the Word of God can experience this conviction of the Holy Spirit and can turn toward the Lord.

As a pastor, I’ve heard many expressions of faith from those who desire to be baptized: “I’ve decided to completely give my life

to God”; “I am tired of doing harm to people who love me. From now on I want to serve God”; “I would like to take a step forward in my spiritual life. God is talking to me in many ways. After hearing the Word of God, I made my decision to follow Jesus Christ.”

Through God’s gracious action, every person has the opportunity to receive this great gift and begin a new life in Christ.

**Flavio Valvassoura** is senior pastor at Igreja do Nazareno Central de Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil.

### **Background Texts**

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## KEEP IN STEP WITH JESUS

I have never lived on a farm—never milked a cow, never plowed a field, never waited for the harvest. I am a city boy. This puts me at a disadvantage, at times, when I read the parables and illustrations of Jesus in the New Testament. Many of His images in preaching came from a context of farming—ancient Israel was an agrarian society. The people not only understood but lived their lives around the planting and harvesting seasons.

One such farming image in the New Testament is Jesus as our “Yokefellow.” In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Still today, farmers in different parts of the world use oxen to plow their fields. When farmers have a new ox, they will put the young, untrained ox in a yoke with an experienced, well-trained ox. The young ox learns to be a draft animal by simply keeping in step with the older ox.

Recently, I was reflecting on the church’s challenge of evangelism in 2020 and beyond. Honestly,

evangelism seems so difficult today. Many in the world seem uninterested in a committed relationship with a sovereign God. Even many Christians pull away when we speak about evangelism and reaching the lost. Pastors often feel weary and burdened when they think about sharing the Gospel message and helping their church grow. What do Jesus’ words in Matthew 11 teach us about making disciples?

One important lesson to learn is that seeking the lost is Jesus’ mission. We are to be yoked to Jesus, not the other way around. We are not intended to go out into the world and ask Jesus to follow us. “Jesus, I have to grow this church,” says the anxious pastor. “Please come along with me and bless me.” Being yoked to Jesus looks much different than that.

The rest that Jesus offers comes when His disciples are yoked with Him as they begin each new day. We recognize that we learn from Jesus. We follow Him. We go where He goes. Jesus leads us. Evangelism, then, takes on a new dimension. It is evangelism led by the Spirit of God. He brings us into conversations with the right people at the right time. Living in step with Christ’s

Spirit, we find ourselves in the midst of what Christ’s saving grace is doing in this world. Jesus invites us along His journey with someone who needs Him.

We are called to live moment by moment in tune with Jesus, yoked to Him, listening to His voice. When we do this, evangelism brings peace in place of anxiety because we are walking with the Prince of Peace. It is a place of excitement because we are walking with the One who makes all things new. It is a place of deliverance because we are walking with the Almighty God. It is a place of goodness because we are walking with the One who is called Wonderful!

The next time you feel fear around the activity of evangelism, remember to take up His yoke. Learn from Him. Find rest. Go where He goes, and be fruitful as you keep in step with Jesus!

**Scott Rainey** is global director of Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries International.

A close-up photograph of a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark blue top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a bright light source, possibly the sun, creating a warm, golden glow.

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