

THE ANTI-FRAGILE CHRISTIAN

A STUDY ON HOW GOD USES HARDSHIPS TO DEVELOP VIRTUE

PART 1

ETHICS UNDER THE CROSS

THE WRONG AND THE RIGHT REASON

Our study is about how God uses suffering to improve our character and virtue. But the first question we need to answer is: What *is* a good person in God's eyes? What does it take to *do good*?

Acts 5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.² With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

³ Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? ⁴ Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God."

⁵ When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. ⁶ Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.⁸ Peter asked her, "Tell me, Is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

⁹ Peter said to her, "How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

¹⁰ At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Q: Why was what Ananias and Sapphira did immoral? Their *actions* certainly *looked moral*.

Genesis 4 Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering,⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

Q: Why was Abel's sacrifice morally acceptable, but not Cain's? Both *actions* certainly *looked moral*.

WHAT IS GOOD IN GOD'S SITE?

The account of Ananias and Sapphira show us that a person's motivation is important to God. And the account of Cain and Abel show us clearly that faith is necessary for an action to be considered righteous in God's eyes. Scripture teaches this clearly:

Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean."

Romans 4 [selected]³ What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness..." [Genesis 15:6] ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them." [Psalm 32:1,2]

Based on the passages above, we can draw the following conclusions and principles:

- Both the _____ as well as the _____ itself makes an act moral or immoral.
- The right motivation is entirely beyond us because of sin. The action might _____ moral, but a perfect motivation is _____.
- In God's eyes, only an action prompted by _____ is a moral act. And this is because it is _____ as righteous, not _____ righteous.
- The Christian's goal, then, is to not only _____ the right action, but act from the right _____: a faith which sees our actions as worthless apart from grace, and as valuable to God only as thanksgiving, *not* as merit. The goal of the Christian is the cultivation of a completely _____ on God's grace.
- Anything God _____ that makes us _____ dependent on God's grace and mercy, then, is good. Sometimes this *looks* evil, but from God's perspective, it becomes good for us. (For example, consider Job)

THE UGLY CROSS IS BEAUTIFUL

God does not exclude himself from this: On the cross he suffered the sins of all mankind, experiencing hell. But God underwent this for our eternal good, turning the cross from something ugly and evil to behold into something beautiful and good. This is why the cross is a *stumbling block*.

1 Corinthians 1 ²⁰ Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

PART 2

THE LAW UNDER THE CROSS

REVIEW: MOTIVATION AND TRUST

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul...

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.
"Invictus," William Ernest Henley

"Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so..."

"Self Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.

Jeremiah 17

⁵ This is what the Lord says:
"Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who draws strength from mere flesh
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.
⁶ That person will be like a bush in the wastelands;
they will not see prosperity when it comes...
⁷ "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream...
⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?

Q: Compare the two columns above and the wisdom of the two philosophies presented. In the left column, what do the poets bid us to put our trust in? How is this different than the right column? What is a major difference between a worldly approach to ethics and character development compared to the Bible's approach?

We are all in favor of healthy self-esteem, but improving and nurturing it seems to be surprisingly tough. Of all the judgments we make in life, none is more important than the judgments we make about ourselves. The need for positive self-esteem comes with psychological growth and the desire to trust ourselves.

"The Importance of Positive Self-Esteem,"
Marbella International University Centre Blog

Q: Compare the two columns above and wisdom of the two psychologies presented. How important is the idea of self-esteem in our culture today, the idea of thinking highly of oneself? Compare that to the right column: What might Paul have to say about self-esteem?

1 Corinthians 4

³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

WHAT GOOD IS THE LAW?

Romans 2:14-15 ...when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.

All humans have access to God's law through the _____ of God in our _____.
And so some aspects of morality are available to all people.

Q: If God has placed a conscience that testifies to his law in all people's hearts, why, then, are there so many differences when it comes to laws and moral practices across culture?

Romans 9:30-32 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness by faith;³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Romans 5:20 The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase.

This shared access to God's law only produces _____ of sin, not righteousness before God, because a truly righteous act involves both the right action and the right motivation in the one true God.

Q: If faith is required for an action to be righteous before God, should Christians not care whether or not governments have laws that reflect God's law? After all, a knowledge of the law doesn't lead to true moral change.

CAN WE LEARN ETHICS FROM UNBELIEVERS?

"It is a result of God's providence that the writings of Cato and Aesop have remained in the schools, for both are significant books. Cato contains the most useful sayings and precepts. Aesop contains the most delightful stories and descriptions. Moral teachings, if offered to young people, will contribute much to their edification. In short, next to the Bible, the writings of Cato and Aesop are in my opinion the best..."

Martin Luther¹

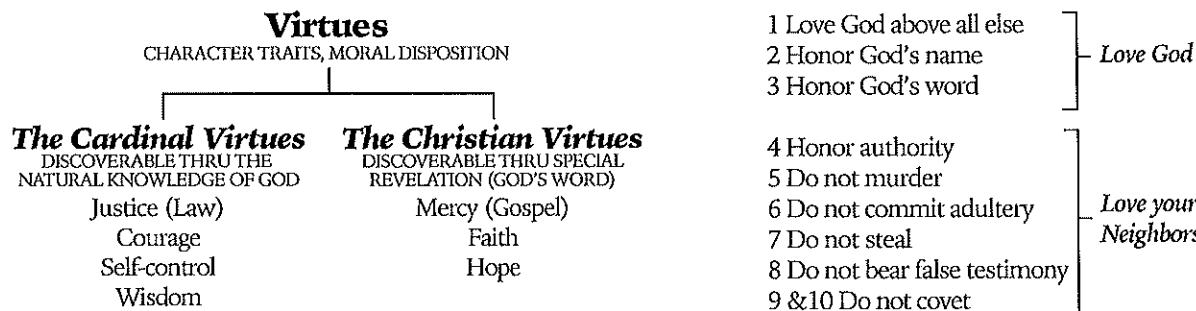
Q: If unbelievers are unable to be righteous before God, why would Luther find the ethical works of unbelievers, like Aesop (Greek) and Cato (Roman), useful for moral education?

¹ "Table Talk" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 210–211.

Unbelievers, through the natural knowledge of God, know something of God's law, including (in a limited sense) right motivation. Further, unbelievers can use God's law as a curb for civic righteousness (but not spiritual moral righteousness before God).

For example, Aristotle's study of ethics and systematizing ethical behaviour as four virtues—**justice, courage, self-control, and wisdom**—has been found extremely useful by the Christian church. These four virtues flow out of the natural knowledge of God's law through conscience.

But since Aristotle was an unbeliever and had no access to special revelation, his system is incomplete. Christians have supplemented his system with three Christian virtues—**faith, hope, and mercy** (see 1 Corinthians 13:13)—which flow out of the special knowledge of the gospel through the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit.



Q: Compare the virtues (left) to the Ten Commandments (right). What are the differences? What do the virtues stress which the Ten Commandments do not, and vice versa? How does knowing one set help in understanding the other?

SUFFERING AND VIRTUE

Romans 5:1-4 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Now put together the virtues with what we learned last week. What is the relationship between virtues and suffering? God uses suffering to grow us in character/virtue. For example, you grow in:

- gospel-motivated _____ though hardships to _____ through.
- gospel-motivated _____ through withstanding _____.
- gospel-motivated _____ with people in _____ of mercy.

PART 3

JUSTICE UNDER THE CROSS

REVIEW: MORAL AND CIVIC RIGHTEOUSNESS

Moral righteousness: The status of just and morally perfect in the sight of the holy and morally perfect God. No human is morally righteous based on his own merit. Through faith, God attributes moral righteousness to sinners on behalf of Jesus' death.

Civic Righteousness: Humans, in a limited capacity, are able to perform just actions in adherence to God's law, but never with perfect motivation. These actions are beneficial for society and civilization, and so admirable. But their goodness is ultimately 'apparent' and cannot provide moral righteousness before God.

WHAT IS JUSTICE? PLATO, GLAUCON, AND THE RING OF GYGES

Glaucon: Tell me, do you think there is a sort of good we welcome, not because we desire its consequences, but because we welcome it for its own sake—enjoying, for example, and all the harmless pleasures from which nothing results afterward beyond enjoying having them?

Socrates: Certainly, I think there is such a thing.

Glaucon: And is there a sort of good we love for its own sake, and also for the sake of its consequences—knowing, for example, and seeing, and being healthy? For we welcome such things, I imagine, on both counts.

Socrates: Yes.

Glaucon: And do you also recognize a third kind of good, such as physical training, medical treatment when sick, medicine itself, or ways of making money generally? We would say that these are burdensome but beneficial to us, and we would not choose them for their own sake, but for the sake of their rewards and other consequences.

Socrates: Yes, certainly, there is also this third kind. But what of it?

Glaucon: In which of them do you place justice?

Socrates: I myself put it in the finest one—the one that anyone who is going to be blessed with happiness must love both because of itself and because of its consequences.

Glaucon: That is not what the masses think. On the contrary, they think it is of the burdensome kind; the one that must be practiced for the sake of the rewards and the popularity that are the consequences of a good reputation, but that is to be avoided as intrinsically burdensome.

Plato, The Republic (On Justice), 357-358

Socrates and Glaucon are trying to understand what justice is. And they note that people view justice in three ways: (1) it's good for its own sake, (2) it's good for its own sake *and* its beneficial consequences, or (3) it's a burden to do but it brings about beneficial consequences. Which one is the right view of justice?

To help explore this, Glaucon tells the parable of the Ring of Gyges to argue (as a devil's advocate) that people only do the just thing so they won't get punished. *But*, if they could escape punishment, they'd do the unjust thing. How might a Christian reflect on this conversation? What does the parable of the Ring of Gyges illustrate, and how do Christians think of justice?

- The Ring of Gyges demonstrates that the **sinful nature desires to do what is unjust**, and is sorely tempted when there are no known consequences.
- Whether there are **eternal consequences** is of the utmost importance. (Plato himself will later admit that there are always consequences because there are gods.)
- Regardless of how people would act if they had the Ring of Gyges, we still intuitively (via conscience) know that it is always good to do the right thing, even if the consequences aren't evidently beneficial.

THE PRIMACY OF JUSTICE

³I will proclaim the name of the Lord.
Oh, praise the greatness of our God!
⁴He is the Rock, his works are perfect,
and all his ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
upright and just is he.

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

Q: In "The Song of Moses," God basically says his name is Justice. What does that tell us about the relationship between God and the idea of justice? What, then, *is* justice?

- **Natural theology teaches us that God is just.** God has embodied his nature of justice in his law. And so God's justice corresponds with the doctrine of God's law. (When we ask, "What does the conscience tell us about God?" We respond, it tells us that God is a just God desiring we act just.)
- **Justice is the only cardinal virtue that is good in-and-of-itself.** The other virtues are good only insofar as they are in the service of just ends.
- **Justice overrides all other considerations.** There is no price high enough to do something unjust. No matter how much good for how many people is done, it would still be wrong to condemn an innocent person.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT IS JUST AND UNJUST?

"Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does any one know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

What Rawl's **veil of ignorance** experiment demonstrates most isn't so much how to discover what is just, but rather that we're by nature *unjust*, and we can only talk about what would be just if we imagined we *were not ourselves*. On the topic of deciding what is just, we can make the following observations:

- The idea that some things are right and some wrong presuppose a **standard** to judge things right and wrong, and so presuppose **laws**, that is, statements regarding what you should or shouldn't do.
- In order to say that one government's laws are just and another are unjust is to invoke an overarching **objective justice**, what philosophers call **natural justice**. Theologians call this natural law, based on the natural knowledge of God and conscience. (See Romans 2:14-15)
- **The only sure guide** of what is just is **God's revealed law**, and its application will be imperfect since it is sinful humans applying it. But this does not stop God's law from functioning as a **curb**.
- **Reducing justice to a typical political position is dangerous.** To reduce justice to either equality or democracy creates enormous problems. On the one hand, is it just for everyone to be treated equally when everyone is clearly not identical, especially in merit (e.g., a teacher handing out the same grade to every student)? On the other hand, the majority opinion can clearly be unjust.

JUSTICE UNDER THE CROSS

Matthew 16:21-24 ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

1 Peter 2:19-20 ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord."

Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Based on the passages above (and there are dozens more in Scripture on the same subjects), we can make the following observations about the Christian's relationship to justice:

- The Christian is willing to undergo _____ in this world, just as Christ did, knowing _____ will ultimately reign.
- God will use the _____ of this world for the sake of building a Christian's _____ and _____.
- The Christian will _____ to injustice, and work patiently and peacefully towards justice, acting respectfully towards governments as God's agents, knowing that _____ can be perfectly just.
- The Christian, motivated by gospel love and Christ's selflessness, is more concerned with _____ receiving justice than _____ receiving justice.

JUSTICE AND JUSTIFICATION

The idea of *being* just, for the Christian, is being found righteous before God, that is, being found in the right. And so the virtue of justice is bound closely with the doctrine of justification: We are declared innocent, we have been found right or just, by God. This act of **justification** through Christ's atonement reflects both God's **justice** (that sin is punished) and his **loving mercy** (that our sins are forgiven). Knowing we are justified before God, we are now freed from the judgment of others. (1 Corinthians 4:3-4)

PART 4

COURAGE UNDER THE CROSS

BRAVERY AT THE HOT GATES

"One of the Trachinians told [Dieneces], 'Such was the number of the barbarians, that when they shot forth their arrows the sun would be darkened by their multitude.' Dieneces, not at all frightened at these words, but making light of the Median numbers, answered, 'Our Trachinian friend brings us excellent tidings. If the Medes darken the sun, we shall have our fight in the shade.'"

Herodotus, 226

In the history of the West, the battle of Thermopylae is the quintessential story of bravery. Xerxes believed that the stand of the 300 Spartans (plus a couple other thousand Greeks) before his massive army "was mere impudence and recklessness." But the self-sacrifice of Leonidas and the other brave soldiers at Thermopylae caused a long enough delay in the Persian invasion to give the rest of the Greeks enough time to rally and plan their next stand, as well as inspire the Greeks to fight.

Q: What about the *Stand of the 300* at Thermopylae makes it such a powerful example of bravery for people all over the world, regardless of culture?

ARISTOTLE AND THE COURAGEOUS MEAN

"Among the excessive, the person who exceeds in fearlessness has no name (we said before that many do not have a name), but if he feared nothing—not even an earthquake or rough seas, as people say of the Celts—he would be a sort of madman or insensible. The person who exceeds in confidence about fearful things is rash. But the rash person also seems to be a boaster and a pretender to courage... Rash people are impetuous, eager for danger before it arrives, but shrinking from it when it does; the courageous, however, are keen when the time for acting comes, but cool beforehand..."

"The person who exceeds in fear is the coward, since he fears the wrong things, in the wrong way, and so on. He is also deficient in confidence, but he reveals himself more in his excessive pain. So, because he fears everything, he is a despondent sort. The contrary is true of the courageous person, because confidence is characteristic of a person of hope."

The coward, the rash person, and the courageous, then, are all concerned with the same things, but are in different states in relation to them; the first two exceed and fall short, while the state of the courageous person is intermediate and right."

Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, 1115a-1116a

Aristotle's study of courage points out that courage often requires reason: knowing why and to what extent something ought to be feared. And when we think this way about a situation that requires courage, we notice that there's usually two extreme ways we can react wrongly, whereas in between those two extremes is the courageous way to respond. What are the two extremes?

LUTHER, THE PLAGUE, AND THE COURAGEOUS MEAN

If you do not wish or care to serve your neighbor you can be sure that if it were Christ laying there instead you would not help him either and would just let him lie there. ... If we did that, we would be disregarding God's command in how we treat our neighbor and, in doing so, we would fall off "the narrow way" on the left side (Matthew 7:14). There are other sins we can fall into on the right side. These would be acting much too rashly and recklessly, tempting God and disregarding everything which might prevent death and the plague. This would mean not using medicines; not avoiding places and persons infected by the disease; joking about it and wishing to show that one is not afraid of it. They also say that it is God's punishment; if God wants to protect people, he can do it without medicines or our carefulness. This is not trusting God but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of our bodies so that we can live in good health. Use medicine; take treatments which can help you; fumigate your house, yard, and street; keep away from persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence or has recovered, and act like a man who wants to help put out the burning city. What else is the epidemic but a fire which instead of consuming wood and straw devours life and body?

Martin Luther, "Should a Christian Flee the Plague?"

In the 1300s, a deadly plague wiped out half the European population. Around 200 years later, in 1527, another plague re-emerged in the midst of the Reformation. And Luther was asked whether it was okay to run away and flee from the plague. He wrote an amazing letter. And in it, he advocates for a **middle way** which sounds a lot like Aristotle's middle between two extremes.

Q: When it comes to the plague, what's the mean between apathy (and cowardice) and recklessness?

THE CHRISTIAN SOURCE OF COURAGE

Matthew 10²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Mark 4³⁵ That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." ³⁶ Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.³⁷ A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped.³⁸ Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

³⁹ He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

⁴⁰ He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

⁴¹ They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Q: List all the qualities of God and promises he's given us so that we don't need to be afraid. How does this help the Christian stand firm in what might look to others like insurmountable odds?

THE RECKLESS CHRISTIAN

Matthew 4 ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."
⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Q: In what ways is recklessness putting the Lord your God to the test?

Proverbs 14:16 (ESV)

One who is wise is cautious and turns away from evil,
But a fool is reckless and careless.

Q: How can Christians be reckless and not cautious enough when it comes to sin?

THE COURAGE OF SELF-SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Matthew 5:44 "I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Matthew 5:38-40 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Q: Often we think of courage as simply standing up to tyrants, or acts of bravery. Within what contexts does Christian bravery take place more often than not?

FORGIVENESS FOR THE COWARDLY AND RECKLESS

John 21 ¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Q: The disciple Peter had moments of great recklessness and cowardice. Can you think of examples of both? And yet how does Jesus treat Peter after his resurrection? What future does Jesus have planned?

PART 5

SELF-CONTROL UNDER THE CROSS

CRASSUS

The two sons of Eleanor [of Woodstock, daughter of Edward II of England] began to quarrel violently and perhaps it was inevitable that they should each lead one of the two factions. The younger son, Edward, was the more warlike and aggressive, and he not only succeeded in defeating his brother in open conflict but managed to take him prisoner. Raynald, the elder, had of course become duke on his father's death, but he was so corpulent that the people had been somewhat scornful of him and had nicknamed him *Crassus* (the Fat). Edward, who seemed to have an ingenious turn for cruelty, in which he took after his great-grandfather of that name, put poor Crassus in a cell in the castle of Nieuwkerk in which the doors and windows were always open; but such was the girth of the older brother that he could not squeeze his way through any of them.

This provided Duke Edward with a ready answer when he was charged with a lack of proper feeling. "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills."

"But, Your Grace, he is too broad to get through the doors!" "Am I to blame, then, that my brother is a gormandizer?"

In the meantime Edward enjoyed ten years of turbulent rule. He was finally killed in battle with his neighbors, the Brabançons. Raynald had been well fed in his cell which bore out the truth that "stone walls do not a prison make," not, at least, when narrow doors will suffice. On the death of Edward he was released and restored to his dukedom. But alas, poor Crassus! He was now huge and a far from inspiring sight; and he had lost all capacity to cope with administrative troubles. Perhaps it was just as well, for the good of the realm, that he died within a year.

Thomas B. Costain, *The Three Edwards*

Q: This true story is often used as an illustration of how someone can become a prisoner of his intemperance (that is, inability to control oneself). How so?

LORD OF THE FEAST

John 2:1-11 ¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."⁷ ...Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so,⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Luke 7:34 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"

Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

Q: It's clear God created humans to experience pleasure and enjoyment, and that Jesus himself was a source of pleasure and enjoyment. Why did God create us this way? What do the pleasures of this life point to?

Q: If pleasure is in-and-of-itself a *good* thing, why do we need to control ourselves with them? Why not throw ourselves into the pleasures of this life?

EXTREMES AND IDOLATRY

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11:

I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my labor,
and this was the reward for all my toil.
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

Q: We had read earlier that Solomon said there was nothing better than to eat and drink and be glad, to experience the pleasures of this world. But in the passage just above he says it's all meaningless. What's the difference? Why the change of heart?

What's the danger of letting go of self-control and indulging in temporal pleasures? A couple thoughts:

- Not having self-control—and not caring about it—is tantamount to idolatry.
- Repeatedly gorging on pleasure leads to shaping one's meaning and identity in that thing or activity.
- Our hearts were designed for eternity: a personal relationship with Jesus. Returning to something else for pleasure over and over again is like trying to find the eternal in something finite. It cannot deliver, and only let-downs and depression wait.

THE EXTREME OF ASCETICISM

Now it is quite evident the monks have taught and preached that their contrived spiritual status makes satisfaction for sin and obtains God's grace and righteousness... No one can deny that the monks also taught and preached that they become righteous and earn forgiveness of sins through their vows and monastic life... Besides all this, they persuaded the people that these

humanly contrived spiritual orders were states of Christian perfection... Now it is no small offense in the Christian church to present to the people a service of God, which human beings have contrived without God's command, teaching that such service of God makes people innocent and righteous before God. For righteousness of faith, which ought to be emphasized most, is obscured when people are bedazzled with this strange angelic spirituality and false pretense of poverty, humility, and chastity.

The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVII, 37-48

Q: Regardless of what a person's motivation might be to practice asceticism or monasticism (forms of renouncing 'worldly pleasures'), or for that matter to seek any religious value from complete self-denial, what are the dangers pointed out in the confession above?

THE MEDIAN OF SELF-DISCIPLINE

2 Timothy 1:6-7 I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love, and self-discipline.

Proverbs 25:28 Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.

Titus 1:8 [An elder] must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

God has given us a rich world with an endless number of sources of enjoyment. As we mentioned earlier, pleasure, our bodies, and life together is a gift from God. Many activities can be enjoyed in a good way, if we resist the extremes of gorging on pleasures or withholding those pleasures for the sake of doing meritorious works. It's in this context that the Bible talks about self-discipline and moderation. How can self-discipline be applied to many of the commandments? Below are some possibilities:

- 5th Commandment: Control over Sexual Passions
- 6th Commandment: Moderation and Bodily Health
- 7th Commandment: Indulging in Possessions
- 8th Commandment: Restraining and Loosing the Tongue (Including anger)

TEMPERANCE, EDIFICATION, AND ADIAPHORA

1 Corinthians 10:23-24 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Q: The Lord has given us considerable Christian freedom in many areas in life and many practices and activities. Why does the Lord give us so much freedom?

PART 6

WISDOM UNDER THE CROSS

WHICH WISDOM?

When we use the word *wisdom*, we usually mean it in two different ways: *transcendent wisdom* and *practical wisdom*.

- **Transcendent Wisdom** deals with the ultimate questions of reality and how they bear on our view of the world and each other.
- **Practical wisdom** deals with prudence, that is, a combination of experience and reason (which is distinct from the brute accumulation of facts or information).

For example, when we talk about seeking out sages and gurus, it is often not for *practical wisdom*, but instead for *transcendent wisdom*: What's the meaning of life? Is there a God? Is there such a thing as destiny, and what is mine? What's the ultimate nature of the universe? But when we talk about seeking the wisdom of an elder co-worker, it is often not for *transcendent wisdom*, but *practical wisdom*: What are the best principles for success in this business? How can I best interact with the CEO? What skills am I lacking for closing a deal?

PRUDENCE

The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.

Respect yourself and others will respect you.

Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.

Not to discuss with a man worthy of conversation is to waste the man. To discuss with a man not worthy of conversation is to waste words. The wise waste neither men nor words.

Confucius, *The Analects*

Q: Above are a sampling of proverbs of Confucius. At least based on the quotes above, is Confucius a guide for transcendent wisdom or practical wisdom?

Unlike science which can achieve a certain amount of certainty, *prudence* is more of an art form: the drawing of experience and knowledge to reason out a possibly beneficial approach to a problem. In that light, creativity is associated with prudence. Brilliant, creative solutions are often described as the product of a practically wise person. For an example: Consider Solomon's wisdom as a judge:

1 Kings 3:16-28 ²³The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'" ²⁴Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. ²⁵He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other." ²⁶The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"

²⁷Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." ²⁸When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

BIBLICAL PRUDENCE

Proverbs 1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
 ²for gaining wisdom and instruction;
 for understanding words of insight;
 ³for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
 doing what is right and just and fair;
 ⁴for giving prudence to those who are simple,
 knowledge and discretion to the young—
 ⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning,
 and let the discerning get guidance—
 ⁶for understanding proverbs and parables,
 the sayings and riddles of the wise.
 ⁷The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,
 but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Q: According to the author, what's the purpose of the book of Proverbs? To provide primarily what kind of wisdom?

Q: How is *the fear of the Lord* the beginning of practical wisdom (prudence)? (If you're thinking it's also the beginning to *transcendent wisdom*, you're right, too! We'll get to that in a moment.)

TRANSCENDENT WISDOM

"Education can help us only if it produces "whole men." The truly educated man is not a man who knows a bit of everything, not even the man who knows all the details of all subjects (if such a thing were possible): the "whole man," in fact, may have very little detailed knowledge of facts & theories...but he will be truly in touch with the centre. He will not be in doubt about his basic convictions, about his view on the meaning and purpose of his life. He may not be able to explain these matters in words, but the conduct of his life will show a certain sureness of touch which stems from his inner clarity."

EF SCHUMACHER

Q: Here Schumacher's educated man is his way of describing a person of transcendent wisdom. How is it possible for a person to be *wise* (or in Schumacher's language, *educated*) but know very little about the subjects we study in school and university?

[Note, then, that someone who might be a guide in transcendent wisdom may not be a good source of practical wisdom in a specific area of expertise (or *any* area of expertise). For example, your pastor may have *lots* of transcendent wisdom to teach (such as: the doctrine of vocation makes all work meaningful), but may not be a good source of practical wisdom (such as: whether or not you should take a specific job).]

BIBLICAL TRANSCENDENT WISDOM

Solomon demonstrates *transcendent* wisdom in *Ecclesiastes*.

Ecclesiastes 3:19b-20 Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet* no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

* NIV translator's footnote: Or also placed *ignorance* in the human heart, so that

Q: Compare the NIV's chosen translation of Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 with the possible variant pointed out by the translators. What difference does the translation make? What difference does it make in the *transcendent wisdom* Solomon is imparting? How does Ecclesiastes 3:19b-20 help understand Solomon's point? (Consider what life looks like *under the sun* with what we know about this universe from the rest of the Bible.)

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the Lord disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.

Q: Does this passage teach transcendent or practical wisdom?

FOOLISH WISDOM AND THE GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 1 ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

²⁰Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

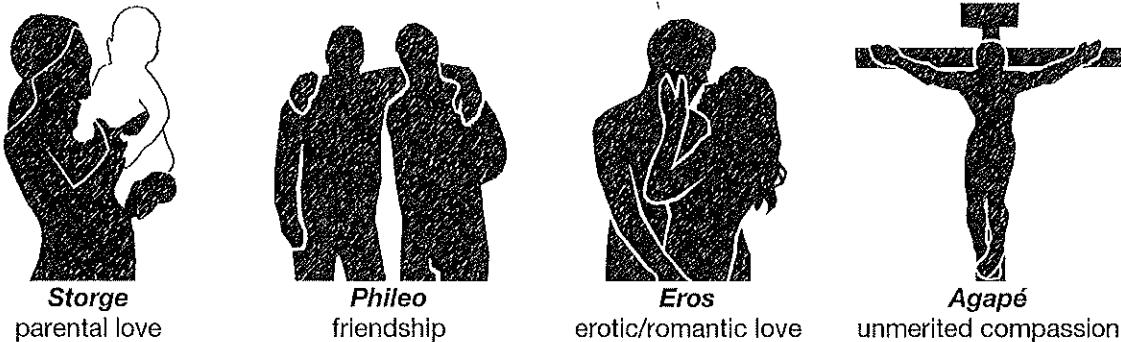
Q: Paul writes in Romans that the wisdom of the Gospel doesn't look like wisdom to the world. In what way? Is the Bible primarily a book of *transcendent* wisdom or *practical* wisdom? How does it stack up to the rest of the world's books of transcendent wisdom and practical wisdom? If you're looking for practical wisdom, Are you limited to just the Bible? If you're looking for transcendent wisdom, are you limited to just the Bible? Compare the *wisdom for salvation* with other philosophical first principles.

PART 7

AGAPÉ MERCY UNDER THE CROSS

QUALITY-DIRECTED AND CHRIST-LIKE LOVE

Ancient Greek has several words to describe different concepts for which we use only one word in English: *love*. C.S. Lewis once focused on four of those Greek words to express what's so unique about Jesus. Note that the first three are based on self-interested (sometimes reciprocal) relationships. What are they? How is this different from the fourth word?



Storge love is built often on a biological relationship. We recognize that the (*storge*) love a parent has for his/her own child is unique compared to that parent's love for other children not his/her own. So the parent's child has a quality that is of special value to the parent, the *quality* of shared familial ties.

Phileo love is built on common interests of some sort. We recognize that friendship need not exist if there are not shared interests, entertainment or complimentary personalities. Thus, one friend finds desirous *qualities* in his/her other friends, the qualities of shared interest, etc.

Eros love is built on erotic attraction. We recognize people have different levels of sexual attraction based on the qualities one finds sexually attractive in another. If those qualities aren't present in an individual, erotic love is not present. Thus, erotic love is based on *qualities* found in the other person: attraction, etc.

Agapé love is the love Christ has for us. In his perfect justice, God finds no qualities within us to love us (lack of perfection), but only qualities to repel us (presence of sin). Yet, he chooses to love us anyway, demonstrated most vividly in his death for us on the cross. Thus, this love is *not driven by qualities*, but is entirely selfless (takes no account of the self's attraction to qualities or merit within the other individual).

Agapé love is understood first and foremost as Jesus' love for us. Note how these passages describe and demonstrate this agapé love, and then see how an ethic of agapé love flows into the lives of Christians.

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

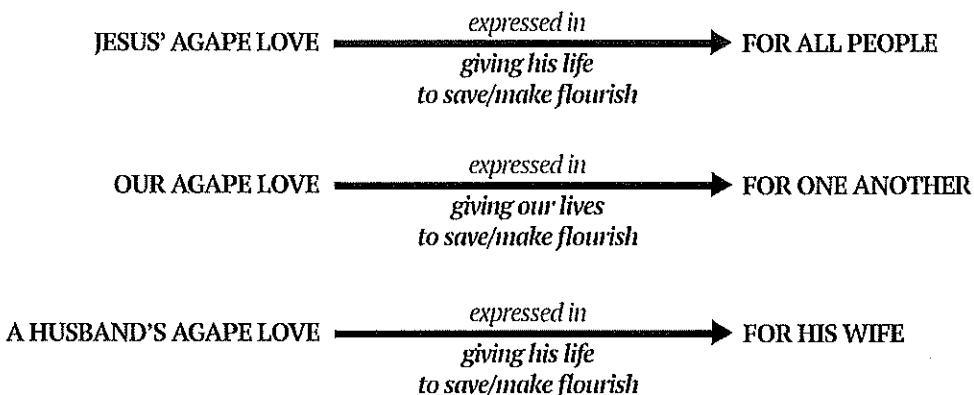
Romans 8:37-39 ³⁷In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John 4:9-12 ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved

us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Ephesians 5:25-33 ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—³⁰for we are members of his body.³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

This *agapé* love Jesus has for all people becomes the model and heart the Holy Spirit creates within Christians, and so it's no surprise that this *agapé* love re-appears over and over again. Consider:



MERCY AND GRACE

- *חַנָּן ḥannan* [to show grace, mercy, favour] **Psalm 51:1** Have mercy [ḥannan] on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
- *ἔλεεω* verb: eleéow; noun: éleos [To have compassion, mercy]

Matthew 9:27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy [eleéow] on us, Son of David!”

1 Peter 2:10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy [eleéow], but now you have received mercy [eleéow].

- *χάρις charis* [grace, favour] **Romans 11:5,6** ...at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Q: Above is a small sampling of some of the biblical words we translate into *grace* and *mercy*. What is the biblical idea of grace/mercy? And what's its connection with *agapé* love?

MERCY, GRACE AND FORGIVENESS AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Q: Why can we say that mercy, grace and forgiveness is practically the foundation of a Christian's life?

Q: How does growing in mercy affect your ability to *love* in the other forms of love? How does mercy affect *romantic* love, especially marriages? How does mercy affect *phileo* love, especially the most needful people in your community? How does mercy affect *parenting*?

Philippians 2:1-4 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Q: What's the connection between mercy and humility?

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Q: What's the connection between mercy and wisdom?

PART 8

FAITH UNDER THE CROSS

REVIEW: MOTIVATED BY FAITH

Matthew 23:27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean."

Romans 4 [selected]³ What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness..." [Genesis 15:6] ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷"Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

⁸Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them." [Psalm 32:1,2]

Remember when we began, we said what separates Christian ethics from ethics in general is that, for the Christian:

- In God's eyes, only an action prompted by _____ is a moral act. And this is because it is as righteous, not _____.
- The Christian's goal is to not only _____ the right action, but act from the right _____: a faith which sees our actions as worthless apart from grace, and as valuable to God only as thanksgiving, *not* as merit. The goal of the Christian is the cultivation of a completely _____ on God's grace.

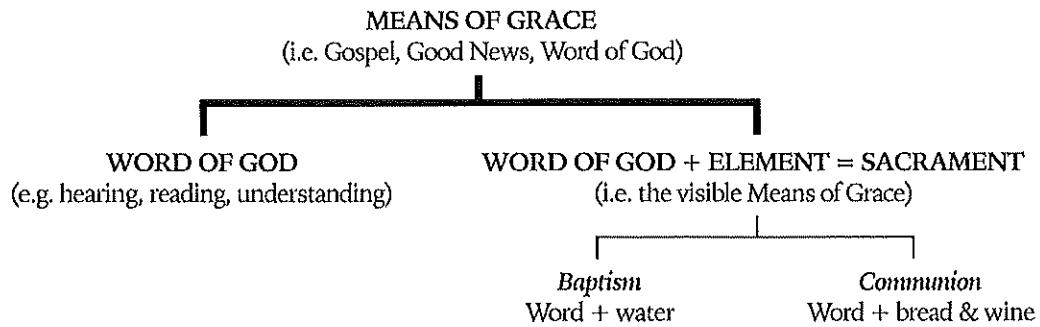
FAITH COMES ONLY THROUGH THE MEANS OF GRACE

2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 2:8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

Q: "In his pride the wicked man does not seek God." (Ps 10:4) If by nature we're rebels against God, how does a person get this change of heart? And what is the **means** used?

The *means* through which this *grace* becomes yours we call the **means of grace**. Being connected to God's Word is necessary for faith. God's Word will always be present when faith is created or strengthened. That is how the Holy Spirit works. But God delivers his Word and the Spirit in a few ways. Take a look at the following chart to review God's **means of grace**.



What do all of the *Means of Grace* have in common?

FAITH ISN'T A FEELING

Acts 16²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

Witnessing the miraculous release of Paul and Silas from prison, their jailer becomes a Christian. Based on the above account, what are the steps to becoming a Christian?

How did the jailer know he was saved? Did it have anything to do with him **feeling** a certain way? What was his salvation based on?

There's a tremendous danger in believing that you must *feel* a certain way (like *feel* saved or *feel* Holy or *feel* like a child of God) to know you have faith. What's the danger?

FAITH LOOKS BACK

1 John 2:2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:30-31 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Faith looks to the _____ . It is _____ that Jesus entered into _____ to die for our sins on the cross. It is based on the _____ of witnesses that Jesus rose from the dead. Only based on this _____ in God's activity in the _____ can a Christian look with _____ into the _____ .

FAITH LEADS TO ACTION

Psalm 56:4 In God I trust; I will not be afraid.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Galatians 5:22 The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

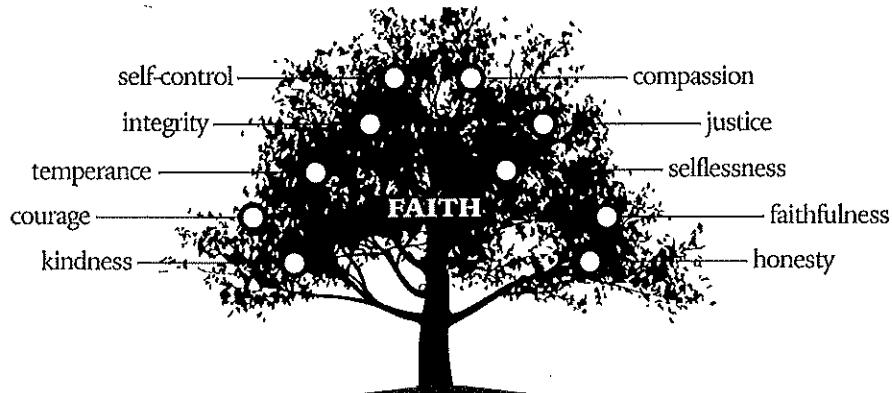
Why, then, do we strive to do good deeds and develop virtues like wisdom and self-control (or, as the bible calls them, **good works**)? We don't do them because we're afraid God will punish us if we don't. God has forgiven us of every sin! Instead, we do good works because our faith in Jesus produces good works naturally, like a tree producing the right kind of fruit. A work is only good if it has the right motivation, love for Jesus, and God gives us that motivation.

Philippians 2:13 It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Where does our ability to do good works come from?

If we were spiritually dead in our sins, then God through his grace gives us new life with the ability to do good works. And the bible is our ultimate guide. In his grace, God gives us salvation through Jesus, faith in Jesus, and the ability to thank Jesus.



PART 9

HOPE UNDER THE CROSS

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH AND HOPE?

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Psalm 130

⁵I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.
⁶I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning...

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Faith (often πίστις, or *pistis*, in the Greek) is going to focus on the *object of our faith*, looking back and trusting in Jesus for forgiveness. **Hope** (often ἐλπίς, or *elpis* in the Greek) is oriented towards the future.

Q: What is Christian hope like? Often when we use the word **hope** we're talking about a future we're not too sure of. Do Christians talk about hope, such as hope in heaven, in a similar way?

HOPE IN THE MIDDLE

Take a look at the passages below. Like some of the other virtues, we can think of hope as the mean on a spectrum of two extremes. Based on the passages below, what are those two extremes?

Luke 18:9-14 ⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Psalm 38:4-6 My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. ⁵My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. ⁶I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning.

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 19:25-26 ²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.



One way of thinking about hope: On one end of the spectrum is **hypocrisy**, an attitude of "I've spiritually made it!" "I have no more work of sanctification to do." "I'm fine just the way I am." The other end of the spectrum is **despair**, a spirit of, "I'm too sinful to be saved!" "There's no way the Spirit can change me!"

WHAT DO CHRISTIANS HOPE FOR?

Look at the passages below. What are the sorts of things Christians put their hope in? And what object of faith is that hope based on?

Job 19:25-27

²⁵I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.
²⁶And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh I will see God;
²⁷I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

OBJECT OF OUR FAITH

WHAT HOPE DOES GOD GIVE US

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

OBJECT OF OUR FAITH

WHAT HOPE DOES GOD GIVE US

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

OBJECT OF OUR FAITH	WHAT HOPE DOES GOD GIVE US

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

OBJECT OF OUR FAITH	WHAT HOPE DOES GOD GIVE US

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

OBJECT OF OUR FAITH	WHAT HOPE DOES GOD GIVE US

These passages are extremely powerful ones to have memorized. After all, hope only grows in proportion to your connection with the means of grace. In what situations in life would it be useful to know these passages? Examine each one again.

HOPE AND PEACE

Luke 12:22-23 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

Q: Hope especially manifests itself in being at peace with the present and the future. Is being at peace mean you won't be (1) mournful and sorrowful about the suffering of this world, or (2) passionate about the future?

HOPE WHILE SUFFERING

Look at the important passages below that give us a glimpse into the mind of God and how he at times works through the pain and suffering in this world. Where is the object of our faith in each passage, and what Christian hope can we find in each passage?

Hebrews 12:6-11 "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

WHAT WE HOPE GOD GIVES US IN SUFFERING

Romans 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

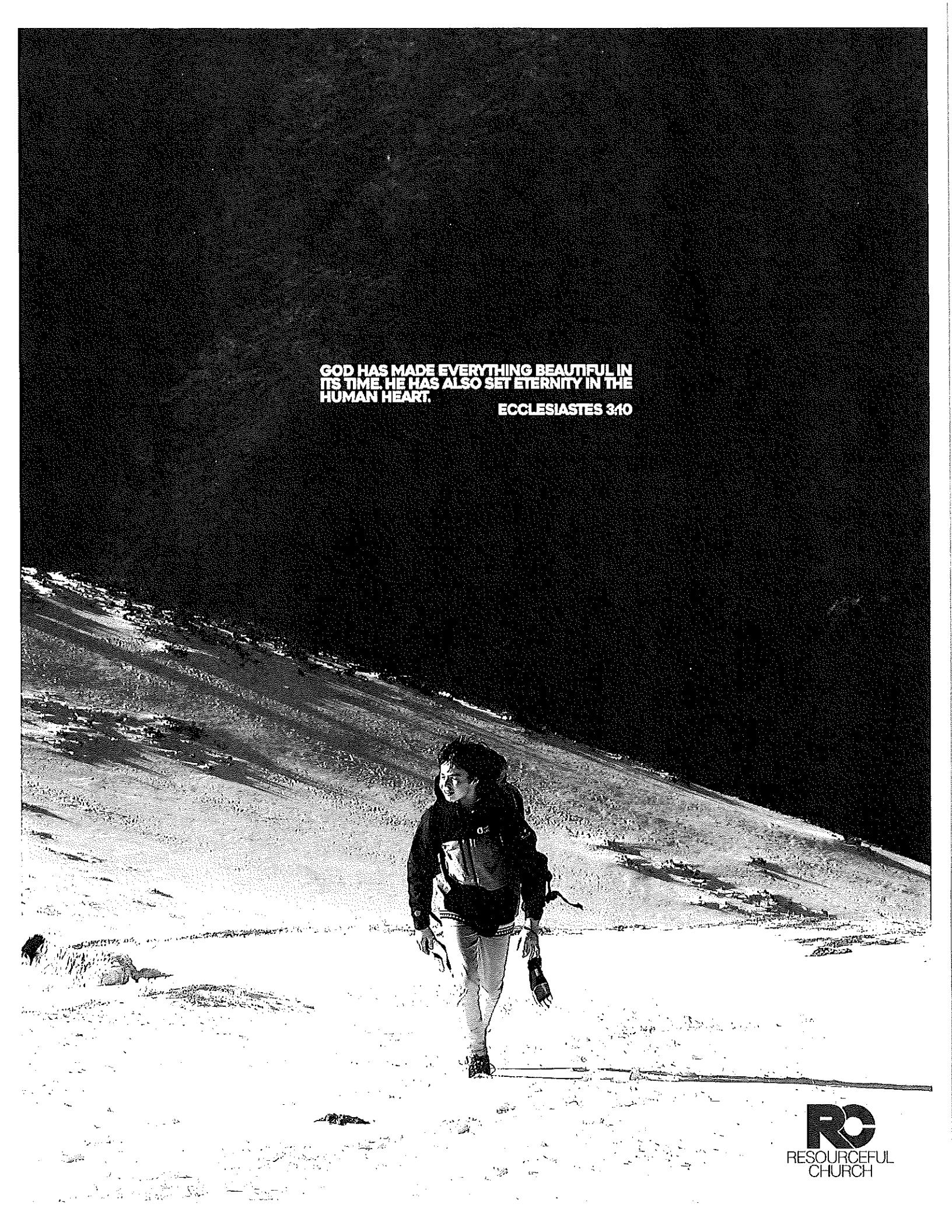
WHAT WE HOPE GOD GIVES US IN SUFFERING

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

WHAT WE HOPE GOD GIVES US IN SUFFERING

2 Corinthians 7:9,10 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

WHAT WE HOPE GOD GIVES US IN SUFFERING



**GOD HAS MADE EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN
ITS TIME. HE HAS ALSO SET ETERNITY IN THE
HUMAN HEART.**

ECCLESIASTES 3:10