



CHURCH OF GOD
GENERAL CONFERENCE

THE RESTITUTION HERALD

PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS OF THE **KINGDOM OF GOD** | ACTS 3:21

... heaven must receive [Jesus] until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Salvation Requires Perseverance

By Sean Finnegan (NY)

Understanding how salvation works is extremely important. Sadly, there's much confusion and deception over this topic in Christianity today. I realize in an article of this length that I can't possibly cover everything, but I hope merely to provide a biblically faithful, logically persuasive, and easily understandable overview of how salvation works. I'd like to begin by affirming the classic Christian teaching that God saves us based on His grace, not our righteous deeds. It is not possible for you to earn salvation; rather, it is God's gift. To show you this, I'd like to begin by considering two important texts: Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 1:17.¹

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This passage teaches a couple of very important truths: (1) there is such a thing as salvation in the past tense and (2) salvation is God's gift (not the result of your works). Some Christians allege that salvation is solely in the future—as if no one is saved until Jesus comes back. They get this from the verses in the Bible that clearly point to a future salvation. (See Rom 5:9; 13:11-14; 1 Thes 5:8-9; Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 1:5). However, that does not negate the fact that salvation is also a past event for the believer. (See Rom 8:24; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5.)² Both are true. If you are a Christian, you can say, "I have been saved", and "I will be saved." Not to com-

plicate that matter, but you can also say, "I'm being saved". (See 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15; Phil 2:12-13). Anyhow, my main point for now is simply that we shouldn't deny that there is such a thing as past-tense salvation. You believed; God saved you. You were saved.

The second point I'd like to draw from this text is that past-tense salvation is not the result of good deeds. One simply believes in the gospel, and God graciously provides salvation as a gift. If salvation resulted from your accomplishments, then you could look down on others who lack the ability, willpower, or skill to achieve it for themselves. However, if salvation is a gift, then your good deeds are a response to the grace you've received. Your righteous works are "thank yous" to God for saving you. Tim Keller explained this so well when he contrasted the moral performance narrative with the grace narrative in a talk he gave at Google.

"There are two basic ways of thinking about your self-image. One is what I'm going to call a moral-performance narrative. A moral-performance narrative says, 'I'm ok; I'm a good person; I feel significant; and I have worth because I'm achieving something.' So if you are a liberal person, and you feel like, 'I'm a good person because I am working for the poor and working for human rights, and I'm open minded,' you can't help, in a moral performance narrative, where your self-image is based on your performance as a generous liberal ac-

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tivist person...you can't help but look down your nose at bigots; you can't but feel superior to bigots. On the other hand, what if you are a traditional, religious person and you go to church and you read your Bible, or you go to synagogue and read your Bible, or you go to the mosque and read the Quran? You're working hard to feel good and serve God, etc. Now, in that case, you have to look down your nose at people who don't believe in your religion. They're not being as good as you are. Maybe you're just a secular person, and you're a hardworking decent chap. You can't help it—if your self-image is based on the fact that you're a hardworking decent chap—you can't help but look down your nose at people who are lazy. But the gospel, the gospel is something different. The gospel says, 'Jesus Christ comes and saves you.' The gospel says, 'You're a sinner.' The gospel says, 'You don't live up to your own standards.' The gospel says, 'There is no way you are going to live up to your own standards.' The gospel says, 'You have failed; you're a moral failure, and salvation only belongs to people who admit they're moral failures.' Jesus came in weakness and died on the cross. He says that salvation is only for weak people. It is only for people who admit they're not better than anyone else and they just need mercy. If you have a grace narrative, if you say, 'The reason I can look myself in the mirror, the reason I know I have significance is because Jesus died for me. I am a sinner saved by grace.' If you say that, then you can't feel superior to anybody. I've got a Hindu neighbor in my apartment building, and I think he is wrong about many things, but he probably is a better father than me. He could be a much better man, why? 'Aren't you a Christian, and he's a Hindu? Don't you think you have the truth?' Yeah, but here's the truth! The truth is I'm a sinner, and I'm saved by grace... I'm not saved because I'm a better man. I'm saved because I'm a worse man, really."³

When you know for sure that you aren't good enough to save yourself, that you are only saved because of God's extravagant generosity, and that you now have a bright future because of his grace and his mercy, you carry yourself differently. You also look at others differently. Your reservoir of gratitude is full, so even when life beats you down with hardship and suffering, you still have a surplus of God's grace to get you through.

Now, let's consider a second scripture that will help us understand how salvation is by faith, rather than works.

Romans 1:16–17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

When the apostle Paul says that salvation is for "everyone who believes," that belief is the person's decision. There are some Christians called monergists who believe that God provides the faith one needs to become saved. The idea is that the individual does absolutely nothing. I don't see that here. Rather, it is the person who believes as Romans 1:16 says, not God who makes the person believe. People must decide for themselves whether or not to believe. We reach up in faith, and God reaches down in grace to pull us out of the quicksand of sin. Then once you believe, you live by faith. You embrace God's way rather than our world's way of life.

Now it is common in Christianity today to hold that once we are saved, we will always remain saved regardless of our actions. This idea is called "eternal security." I agree that salvation is by faith alone; however, once you are saved, you must persevere in that salvation. Once you believe in Jesus, you must follow him. Once you get rescued from sin, you should not return to that life.

I'd like to present four major problems with eternal security before offering a concluding synthesis. They are: (1) analogies, (2) conditional statements, (3) warnings, and (4) bad examples. The first three are drawn straight from scripture, and the fourth concerns modern examples of people who illustrate the danger of this belief.

1. Analogies

We begin by considering two analogies: one from Jesus and one from Paul. Both teach about perseverance and warn about the fate of those who quit.

John 15:4–6

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

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This illustration is as profound as it is simple to understand. Believers must abide in Christ or else they will not be able to produce fruit. Thus, even the good deeds in our lives are not our own, but the result of our connection to the vine. Without him, we cannot do anything. But, if we fail to abide in him, we wither. This is not an instantaneous process, resulting from a mistake, but a slow turning away from Christ over time. Someone once asked me if Billy Graham, a world-famous evangelist, would lose his salvation if he accidentally drove off a cliff and just before hitting the ground, blurted out a curse word. This is a silly scenario, but it gets to a common misunderstanding. I am not advocating for perfectionism or saying that one sin causes individuals to lose their salvation. However, like a branch on a vine whose leaves are brown and withered from a slow steady process, there is a point at which “the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 14:6). This is a terrifying prospect, but it’s also easily avoidable. Probably the greatest danger to perseverance is believing that perseverance is unnecessary. Otherwise, why wouldn’t you just remain connected to the vine?

Let’s take a look at Paul’s analogy of the two olive trees.

Romans 11:16–23

16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. 23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

Once again, the idea of grace is front and center. He portrays the Jewish people as a nicely cultivated olive tree, whereas the Gentiles are random shoots from a wild olive tree. God graciously grafts individuals into the cultivated olive tree (saving them). Then Paul admonishes his readers, “Do not be arrogant...it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18). You didn’t earn your salvation; you

couldn’t have grafted yourself into the tree. God had to do it for you. Still, you must remain connected. Others (the Jewish people who rejected Jesus) were cut off because of their unbelief. If they change their minds and come to faith in Christ, they will rejoin the tree. So it is with Gentiles. “You stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear” (Rom 11:20). This analogy well captures the importance of grace in the initial process of salvation, grace as we continue in our salvation, and the warning that those who discontinue will not remain saved. Although we won’t cover it here, another analogy that helpfully shows perseverance is required is the sower and the seed parable (Mat 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-20; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15).

2. Conditional Statements

A second grouping of texts urges perseverance more directly, using conditional statements.⁴ When parents tell their children, “If you do your homework, you can have a treat,” that is a conditional statement. The condition is doing the homework, and the reward is the treat. If the children meet the condition, then they will receive the promise. With that in mind, consider these two texts that employ conditional statements regarding salvation.

1 Corinthians 15:1–2

*1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, **if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.***

Colossians 1:22–23

*22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 **if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.***

1 Corinthians 15:2 tells us that it’s possible to believe in vain. This means that people can genuinely believe for a time, but the end result is futile because they did not hold fast to the word. They had received the gospel; they had stood; they were being saved; but it could still all be in vain if they don’t also persevere. Likewise, Colossians 1:23 encourages us to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel.” This is the condition we must meet if we will be reconciled by his death and presented blameless before him. Once again, scripture is not asking us to be flawless in our stand. But it tells us to persevere.

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We know that when we fail, we have a way back to forgiveness and cleansing through confession. (See 1 John 1:9.) God has built in a mechanism so that we can get back up when we fall. That's not the issue. The issue is persevering, holding fast to the word, and continuing in faith.

3. Warnings

In addition to tree analogies and conditional statements, the New Testament contains several warnings about the possibility of falling away. We'll look at only two here, but there are plenty of others.

Galatians 5:19–21

*19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, **that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.***

Ephesians 5:5–6

*5 Be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), **has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.** 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience*

What's amazing about these two texts is that they are both found in church epistles—letters written to communities of believers or saints. Paul is not talking to sinful unbelievers here. He warns Christians that indulging in sinful lifestyles will disinherit them from the kingdom of God. (The kingdom of God refers to the age after Christ returns and resurrects the saved to eternal life. Thus, getting excluded from the kingdom is the same as getting excluded from eternal life.) Furthermore, he warns of deception on this subject. Is it any wonder that most of Protestant Christianity wrongly believes that they can have sexual immorality, impurity, or covetousness in their lives, and it doesn't affect their salvation? Any time you see a warning about deception in scripture, take it seriously. Chances are there will be widespread deception on that very point today.

4. Bad Examples

Now that we've considered some of what the Bible says on the subject of perseverance, let's briefly examine two modern individuals who held to the doctrine of eternal security. Our first specimen is George Sodini. He gave the following explanation:

“Be ye holy, even as I have been holy! Thus saith the Lord thy God!” as pastor would proclaim. This guy teaches (and convinced me) you can commit mass murder then still go to heaven. Ask him. Maybe soon, I will see God and Jesus. At least that is what I was told. Eternal life does NOT depend on works. If it did, we will all be in hell. Christ paid for EVERY sin, so how can I or you be judged BY GOD for a sin when the penalty was ALREADY paid. People judge, but that does not matter. I was reading the Bible and the integrity of God beginning yesterday, because soon I will see them.”

In 2009, this man brought three handguns into a women's aerobics class, shooting thirty-six times, hitting thirteen people, and killing three. Then he shot himself. Sodini had attended a non-denominational church. We know from the online diary he left behind that he took his faith seriously and thought through his doctrine of salvation (soteriology). Sodini was dead wrong about his interpretation. Scripture states plainly, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). Sodini will not inherit eternal life. He did not continue in his salvation; rather, he gave in to bitterness, jealousy, and hatred.

A second example comes from John Earnest, who held a strong belief in predestination. He wrote the following:

“I did not choose to be a Christian. The Father chose me. The Son saved me. And the Spirit keeps me. Why me? I do not know. ... To my brothers in Christ of all races. Be strong... Turn away from your sin. Not because it is required for your salvation—for nobody save Christ can merit heaven based on his own works—but rather out of gratitude for the gift of salvation that your God has given you. Always remember that it is God that is keeping you alive and in faith. ...Know that you are saved in Christ and nothing—not death, nor torture, nor sin—can steal your soul away from God.”

In 2017, Earnest entered a synagogue in California looking for Jewish people to murder. He killed one and injured three others, including an eight-year-old girl, before his gun jammed, and he ran away. Earnest believed that death, torture, and sin could not take away his salvation. I agree with him about death and torture, but scripture repeatedly and explicitly teaches that continuing in sin does endanger one's salvation. The analogies, conditional statements, and plain warnings all

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demonstrate that sinfulness like Earnest's prejudice, racism, and hatred are incompatible with salvation.

I'm so enraged when people take the beautiful grace-filled truths of scripture and twist them to justify murder. Such disgusting and despicable actions should not be laid at the feet of our Lord, who taught us to love our enemies and then paid the ultimate price with his own blood. As a pastor, I feel a weight of responsibility seeing Sodini and Earnest. They both went to church. They both listened to a pastor like me teach. They both murdered others. But the worst part of all is that their confidence in the doctrine of eternal security provided them comfort just before their murderous rampages. This makes me want to shout from the rooftops, "Eternal security is heresy! You must persevere in salvation. You can't just believe once and then live in sin."

I want to be careful here. I'm not saying that everyone who believes in eternal security is a murderer. I know many wonderful, godly people who believe they cannot lose their salvation. Furthermore, in many cases, such people do persevere in their salvation, and I fully expect to see them in the kingdom of God. What I am saying is that there's a danger here. The doctrine can lead to self-destruction, as well as the harm of others.

Conclusion

After preaching this message on a recent Sunday, I received a couple of criticisms. One person accused me of contradicting myself. He thought I was saying that you are not saved by works and that you are saved by works at the same time. I can see why he thought that. For many, this is a new way of thinking about salvation, and it takes time to fully grasp it. As I mentioned in the introduction, there is such a thing as past-tense salvation, present-tense salvation, and future-tense salvation. They are not the same, but they are interconnected. Salvation in the past is when you are initially forgiven of your sins and made a child of God. Present-tense salvation refers to the ongoing forgiveness and sanctification process that happens as you continue in your salvation. Lastly, salvation in the future tense is resurrection into eternal life in the kingdom of God. Naturally, salvation in the past tense is necessary to be saved in the future tense as well, but it does not guarantee it. You must continue in your salvation (present tense) day by day until the end of your life. Now, God has stacked the deck in your favor. His grace saved you initially and remains available to keep you in the present if you are willing. However, that grace is not irresistible,

nor does it remove your free will.

Another criticism was that I was preaching a version of lordship salvation. I'm willing to own that one. I must admit that I've never heard of "lordship salvation" before, but that's probably a good phrase to describe what I believe. One must confess Jesus as Lord to be saved (Rom 10:9). If I confess Jesus as Lord, then I'm bound to do what he says. In fact, Jesus himself said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46). To call Jesus Lord means you are committing to obeying him. Now, I don't believe obeying Jesus earns you salvation, but I do think that disobeying Jesus can, over time, cause you to lose your salvation. In fact, Jesus predicted that many would come to him on the last day, calling him Lord and pointing to their miraculous deeds that they accomplished in his name. He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mat 7:21). Doing God's will is not optional.

Still, I'm absolutely convinced that following Jesus does not earn salvation. Salvation is simply not earnable. Doing good deeds doesn't make our sins go away. How does justice work in a courtroom? Imagine the scene where a defendant says to the judge, "Yeah, I robbed that bank, but I also gave blood and worked at the soup kitchen." Would that work? Good deeds are wonderful, but they don't erase our crimes against God. We need forgiveness for that. We need God's un-

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THE RESTITUTION HERALD
VOLUME 114 NUMBER 1 — Jan-Apr 2025 ©2025

Proofreader: Robert Jones

Address editorial correspondence to: RESTITUTION HERALD,
2020 Avalon Parkway, Suite 400, McDonough, GA 30253

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merited grace. Only by Him deciding to forgive can we be forgiven. Then, once we are forgiven, how insane would it be to return to a life of crime? Once again, I'm not arguing you have to be perfect. You will probably fall many times between when you were first saved and when you take your last breath. But, God is there the whole time with an unlimited supply of His grace and forgiveness if you seek it. Still, if you turn away and don't come back, you should not be surprised that you forfeited your salvation.

In fact, most relationships in life work the same way. Say, for example, you have a mortgage. You're supposed to make payments every month. In exchange, the bank agrees to let you live in its house. What would happen if one month you decided to make your payment to a different bank or just not pay at all? The bank wouldn't immediately foreclose on the house. They'd probably send you warning letters, tack on fees, and wait to see if you'll continue paying. It would take time for them to lose faith in you. But eventually, if you continue with non-payment long enough, they'll take the house away from you. The faithfulness of the bank to their end of the deal does not ensure you will keep the house. Only when both parties are faithful to the agreement will both enjoy the benefits.

In conclusion, you can't save yourself. Salvation is a gift God graciously gives you when you first believe in the gospel. Once you've received the gift, you must steward it by God's continuing grace. You persevere in your salvation by obeying the teachings of Christ and requesting forgiveness when you fail. Then, when you come to die, you die in faith, looking forward to the day of resurrection. On that last day, God's grace will pour into your remains, healing you and bringing you back to life in resurrection. From beginning to end, it's all by grace. You were saved by God's grace; you are being saved by God's grace; and you will be saved by God's grace.

Questions:

1. Have you known someone who sincerely believed and then fell away from the faith?
2. What would you say is a major reason that so many Christians fight against the idea of perseverance?
3. What are some benefits to recognizing the need for perseverance?

END NOTES:

¹See also Tit 3:3-7 and Rom 3:20-28, which similarly recognize that salvation is an unearned gift.

²In addition to having been saved, the New Testament employs a variety of other verbs to describe salvation in the past tense, including "justified" (Rom 2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 8:30; 10:10; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 2:16-17, 3:11; 3:24; 5:4; Tit 3:7), "reconciled" (Rom 5:10-11; 1 Cor 7:11; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22), "adopted" (Rom 8:15, 23; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), "sanctified" (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Eph 5:26), redeemed (Gal 3:13; 4:5; Tit 2:14), and regenerated (Tit 3:5).

³"The Reason for God," Authors @ Google Talk, March 5, 2008.

⁴Beyond the two listed below, see also Gal 6:8-9; 2 Tim 2:11-13; Heb 3:14.

⁵For scriptures that warn of the possibility of falling away, see 1 Cor 6:9-10; Heb 6:4-8; 10:26-29; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Revelation 3:1-5.

⁶"Full Text of Gym Killer's Blog," *New York Post*, Aug 5, 2009, <https://nypost.com/2009/08/05/full-text-of-gym-killers-blog/>, accessed Dec 5, 2023.

⁷John Earnest, "An Open Letter" April 27, 2019, <https://bcsh.bard.edu/files/2019/06/Earnest-Manifesto-042719.pdf>, accessed Dec 5, 2023.

⁸This teaching is available as audio or video at <https://lhim.org/weekly-teachings/salvation-requires-perseverance/>

About the Author: *Sean Finnegan serves as the lead pastor of Living Hope Community Church in Latham, NY. He's also the host of the Restitutio weekly podcast, an adjunct professor at Atlanta Bible College, and a licensed pastor of the Church of God General Conference. He's married to Ruth, and they have four sons. Reach him at sean@lhim.org.*



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God At Work From the Beginning

By Aaron Winner (SC)

Genesis 1-3

In case we have forgotten, we serve the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. By His word alone, He spoke the universe into existence, forming the earth and filling it with life. From eternity to today, His hands continue to hold the world as a loving Father to humanity, created in His image—the climax of His creative acts. As part of this creation, it is a powerful reminder that we are not the owners, but stewards in our Heavenly Father's domain. Yet, we can draw from the strength and power present from the very beginning. The same power that called light into darkness, parted the Red Sea, called fire from heaven, and raised Jesus from the dead is also available to us. We simply need to stop wandering aimlessly in the garden, worrying about what we will eat next, and turn to Him.

Ultimately, it is God who gave us free will—the freedom to wander or to follow. This choice is most simply expressed in whether we choose to worship and honor Him or to worship and honor something else, including ourselves. There are countless opportunities to follow our own flawed prerogatives that lead to peril because choosing sin over God is inherent in our nature. Genesis 3 presents the moment of humanity's fall—a moment that could have marked the end of hope. Yet, even in judgment, God extends consolation. He seeks Adam and Eve in their hiding, clothes their shame with garments of grace, and promises a future Redeemer who will crush the serpent's head. This promise is repeated time and again to Israel, God's chosen people (Isa 9:7; Gen 49:10, Deut 18:18-19), and now to us, His new nation (Rom 11:17,18, 1 Peter 2:9,10). This act of mercy reveals God's goodness—His justice tempered with overwhelming compassion.

In our own failings, we find consolation in knowing that God pursues us in the same manner. He offers to cover our shame with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. This has been God's plan from the beginning—that we would be redeemed and restored from our falls. In Christ, we are made a new creation. Yes, there is judgment and the penalty of death, but there is also the far greater promise of eternal life. Ultimately, we have a sustaining consolation like no other. God has given His Holy Spirit to us—not only as our Comforter as we await the fulfillment of His promises, but also as a source of strength. Through the Spirit, we are empowered to reflect the fruits of our Creator and Father.

Genesis 4-7

Just a few months ago, my family and I found ourselves in the path of Hurricane Helene. While the storm left widespread devastation, we were fortunate to remain safe, experiencing minimal damage, and counting our blessings. However, like millions of others in our region, we

found ourselves without power. Looking back now, I can't remember exactly how many days we spent unplugged (although I most certainly knew the number at that time with every passing day). As I witnessed the unprecedented number of power trucks traveling in every direction, I most assuredly knew the power would be restored. It was just a matter of time.

You better believe that Noah had hash marks on the side of the ark. Noah knew beforehand how many days it would rain, but he didn't know how long he would be making his home with a boatload of animals. On day 41, he saw with his own eyes the Word of God fulfilled, for He had completed an unprecedented thing. So Noah waited, holding onto hope that God would provide a way to get off the ark.

Noah's enduring faith, to build the boat, to endure the storm, and to hang onto the promise, show the beautiful exchange of God's grace and protection when we trust and hold onto hope. Noah found favor in God's sight, but we can declare this to the world: through Christ, we too can experience the fullness of God's grace. As we look to our Savior for this hope, we can emerge from the storms of life victorious. Through the flooding waters of baptism, we are cleansed. But now, emerged from the flood, we wait.

There is still plenty of work to do. We do not twiddle our thumbs until the return of Jesus. Noah continued his calling to give life and care for his flocks, herds, and packs while awaiting the return of a dove. Like Noah, we have been given charge to continue the work of Jesus, giving hope to every nation. If we are awaiting the return of Christ, we are approaching two thousand years into our tally, but we are sustained, knowing the promise of God is not fleeting or pending. It is fulfilled in its perfect time through Christ Jesus.

We would be crazy not to look to the horizon. The fact that we do shows that we have a founded longing and are aware of the signs. We see the birth pains that lead to the return of Jesus with resurrection power, so let us declare and defend to every nation that He is the reason for the hope we have.

About the Author: *Aaron Winner is a gifted leader and educator who has served on staff at summer camps, FUEL, and other events. He regularly leads worship and has written multiple worship songs. He is also an adjunct instructor for Atlanta Bible College. He and his wife, Jennifer, have three children. Connect with him at aaronwinner@gmail.com.*

NOTE: This originally appeared on SeekGrowLove.com on Jan. 1-2, 2025. It is reprinted with permission.

Following the Lord's Plan As Revealed in His Word

By Kent Ross

As we too often see, many churches today are suffering from declining attendance and financial strength. Pastors often have to take a second job, which inevitably diminishes their effectiveness in the church and ministry. In nearly all cases, their spouses, and in common with their other church families, see spouses going to work, even full-time, to make home budgets and then church budgets.

While this is true in most churches, it could have less effect on churches if churches and their leaders and pastors looked carefully at what the Lord did through his church in the book of Acts. That plan is based on his plan, not some elaborate, more modern plans for church growth.

It is a simple three-step strategy:

1) God Himself is not willing for any to perish. "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This remains true. John 3:16-18 reads, "16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

2) Jesus then added that he would build his church. Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." The book of Acts is filled with the almost exponential growth of the newly-formed called-out ones.

3) Jesus, through his Father's Holy Spirit, empowers his family for success. But, if this is not understood clearly and well applied, then success often is lost to his church — the one he intended to build, not shrink!

Understanding the basics of his plan are further specified and made clear in 1 Corinthians 12.

Let's try to break it into separate parts.

1 Cor. 12:1-3 - No Excuse for Ignorance

"1 Now, about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other, you

were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3 Therefore, I want you to know that no one who speaks by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit."

Here was a church that appeared to be uninformed or ignorant about spiritual gifts. I don't recall ever hearing one sermon or one lesson about this subject as I was growing up. I don't recall a lecture about it while I was in training at Oregon Bible College. Now, admittedly, that could have been due to my inattention to the lectures, but I was years into my ministry before coming to my first understanding regarding this subject.

The first time I taught on this, my own mother, who, along with dad, led me to faith, said, "Kent, you mean I haven't been serving the Lord correctly all these years?" Now that was not true. She had been a follower of Christ since her girlhood and had led my dad to faith, but about this, she said she was ignorant or unlearned about these gifts.

But now that the Corinthians were no longer pagans, as they proved by their confession that Jesus is Lord, it was evident that they were possessors of the Holy Spirit of God.

1 Cor. 12:4-6 - From Whence Do They Come

"4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone, it is the same God at work."

Notice these points. It appears spiritual gifts, while showing themselves in different manifestations, come to us through the same Holy Spirit of God, which is the method of their distribution.

The service may appear in different workings (see Ephesians 4:11-12), and they are through Jesus, who today, and in his church, is Lord (see Philippians 2:11).

While there may be different kinds of gifts, of service, and of working, they all ultimately originated in God the Father. As glorious as Jesus is, and as every knee bows before him and every tongue confesses that he is Lord, it is all to the glory of God, the Father.

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Following the Lord's Plan (cont.)

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1 Cor. 12:7 - To Whom and Why

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

It is important to note three things in this verse. First, "each one" who can say "Jesus is Lord" is a recipient. Not a few of some elite, but all who can say "Jesus is Lord." While appearing simplistic, it is God who knows the heart of every woman or man who says this phrase. It is the intent of the heart and mind of the one who says it that the Father judges and knows.

Secondly, to each one the Spirit of God is manifest or made evident in different ways. This was described in the verses 4-6 of this chapter and will be further enumerated in later this chapter.

But third, and this is vital as we enter into more of this study, these manifestations are all for the common good, or for the good of the church. Some might be tempted to suggest that some of these would not result in the "common good," but according to the apostle Paul, writing under inspiration, he says that they are, and so we must accept that validity.

1 Cor. 12:8-11 - Listing of Gifts and Source

"To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."

There are nine manifestations named here: 1) wisdom, 2) knowledge, 3) faith, 4) healing, 5) miraculous powers, 6) prophecy, 7) distinguishing between spirits, 8) tongues, and 9) interpretation of tongues.

For many, perhaps most of us, while we may be somewhat at ease with some of these, others are way outside our comfort zones. One, two, and three are easy for most, but, beginning with four, our unease may begin. We need to remind ourselves that they are from God, via His Spirit, for each and all of us who call Jesus Lord, and all of them (1-9) are for the common good!

Author C. Peter Wagner once defined spiritual gifts as, "A special attribute given by God through His Holy Spirit to every member of the body according to God's grace for use, primarily, within the context of the body."

- A. "A special attribute" — above and beyond the ordinary;
- B. "Given by God" — not something the individual member selects;
- C. "To every member" — each member has at least one;
- D. "According to God's grace" — as He decides to use the individual;
- E. "For use within the context of the body" — with a couple of exceptions."

Even those we feel are most easily defined take on their own nuances. For now, knowledge, wisdom, and faith, all reasonably defined, may be something far richer and deeper than simplistic definitions.

What, then, is the "common good," and why do we need to know about spiritual gifts? There are three practical reasons beyond what the "Bible tells us so." Consider:

1. You need and want to discover your own spiritual gift or gifts,
2. Then you will want to develop your spiritual gift or gifts, and
3. You will feel good using your own spiritual gift or gifts.

As a result, then, you will find how:

1. They will benefit you spiritually in a personal way, and you'll be more fruitful.
2. They will benefit the whole church, and you will have a better church.
3. They will help you know God's will for your life.

About the Author: *Kent Ross (1941-2016) was a licensed pastor of the Church of God for over 50 years. He taught at Oregon Bible College and later Atlanta Bible College from 1981-2000. He also served on the Ministerial Licensing Board for the Church of God.*

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THEY STILL SPEAK

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." Hebrews 11:4

The Power of Paul

By R. H. Judd (1924)

YOU will remember that some time ago we considered a few of the sources of Paul's consecration and power in service. We saw then that it was his continual thirst after knowledge, and a keen desire to use that knowledge in the service of God that made him a man of power. He was a living illustration of the saying that, "Knowledge is power." Knowledge may be, and often is, used as a power for evil, but Paul made it the vehicle of an endless source of blessing to men. Men of his own time, by hundreds and by thousands, in city, town, and village, were moved and stirred by the mighty power of his message, and right down through recurring decades, the message has never ceased to stir the hearts of men and women who seek after God.

We may each one have different opinions as to what the real source of Paul's penetrating personality, and the continued freshness and vividness of his deliverances, because we each have realized that in some point they were specially adapted to our individual needs. But the question may be asked, "How is it that one man such as Paul, and he a Jew, was able to wield such an influence over the men of his time, over men who have lived since, and over men who are living now? How was it? How is it, that Paul stood and stands supreme in those things which relate to that which we know as "the gospel of God," "the gospel of Christ," and which Paul calls his "gospel?" Is not the answer found in his instruction to Timothy when he tells him that "the holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation?" Paul's power truly was in the word of the living God.

Few, indeed, can read his writings and fail to notice the outstanding fact that he had an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures of truth. Take, for instance, his exhortation to the Ephesians and those grand injunctions regarding "the whole armor of God." If the passage is carefully studied,

you will find that Paul got much of his inspiration from the 59th chapter of Isaiah, where the breast-plate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are specifically mentioned. Then again, notice the various references that the apostle makes to the scriptures. Twelve or thirteen times, at least, does he speak of them as "the Word of God," then, as his need, or the need of those to whom he writes, requires it, he calls attention to the fact that it is:

- "The Word of Grace" Acts 20:20
- "The Word of Promise" Rom. 9:9
- "The Word of Faith" Rom. 10:8
- "The Word of Reconciliation" 2 Cor. 5:19
- "The Word of Life" Phil. 2:16
- "The Word of Truth" Col. 1:5
- "The faithful Word" Titus 1:9
- "The Word of the Oath" Heb. 7:28.

After many years of faithful service, in some of which he underwent considerable persecution and trial, he made the above testimonies to the word of the living God. Indeed, some of them were made while he was actually experiencing bitter antagonism to the gospel he preached. But such testimonies to the "scriptures of truth" have gone hand in hand with opposition, persecution, and even the sacrifice of life itself, both before the time of Paul and during the centuries that have succeeded him.

What other book besides the Bible, 2000 or 3000 years old, to put a moderate estimate on its age, has vitality enough today to be the basis of the serious discussions which are affecting the life of mankind at the present time?

No one need be the least disturbed by any of the reports that seem to threaten annihilation to belief in the gospel. The Bible has come through that sort of thing scores of times, and after each ordeal, comes forth more firmly established as more

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Does It Make Any Difference?

By William Wachtel (1952)

We are living in a day and age when there are a multitude of different churches and religions, all claiming to be right, and all trying to gain followers. This condition has caused some people to renounce all church affiliation and has weakened the faith of others. Still others have adopted a liberal, broad, or "tolerant viewpoint, declaring that "It doesn't make any difference what you believe, as long as you are sincere." "We are all trying to go to the same place," they often say.

On the surface, and at first glance, this "tolerant," easy-going attitude seems highly commendable and intelligent. It seems to show a respect and love for other people. Let us examine it a little more closely, however!

Christ is our great example in all things, so let us take a look at his attitude with regard to the various religious groups of his day. Was he "broadminded" as to the ability of those groups to bring eternal life to their followers? Did he compromise his own distinctive teachings in the interest of overall harmony? Anyone with a little knowledge of the scriptures knows that the answer to these questions is "No!"

Jesus knew that he, and he alone, was "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and that no man could come to God except through him. He also knew that if people did not believe that he was the promised Messiah and Saviour, they would die in their sins and be lost (John 8:24). Thus, his very position and knowledge as to these things caused him to be what some thoughtless people of today call "narrow."

There could be no compromise with those whom he knew were leading people astray and to perdition. Some of these groups of his day were noble appearing. They seemed elevated by high principles, and they were composed of apparently sincere, idealistic, and zealous men. Yet, to one of the best of these groups, Jesus said on one occasion: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 25:15).

Jesus showed real love for these people by declaring frankly their errors and spiritual condition. If he had said nothing or had tried to "smooth over" the differences in the interest of tolerance and goodwill, he would not have been the true friend that he was and is. So, it must be with us today, when we face a very similar condition of things. If we know and teach that which will lead men to everlasting life, there can be no compromise with what we must consider to be false teaching. True friendship toward people of other beliefs is really by pointing out to them, in kindness, humility, and love, the errors which are misleading them and the truth which can and will save them.

THE RESTITUTION HERALD. Vol. 42, Oct. 7, 1952, p. 13.

About the Author: *William Wachtel pastored several Churches of God and served as president of Oregon Bible College from 1963-1968. He was very involved in mission work in Peru for many years.*

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than human in origin, superhuman in the maintenance of its life, and irrefutable in its claim to be necessary to the needs of mankind. Many wonder that "difficulties" occur in the word of God.

Friends, were there no "difficulties," were all the hills and valleys as level as the plain, you would

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be among the first to deny that God inspired it; for then there could not have been a Paul or an Apollos. There could not have been the diversities that appeal to the Peters, the Johns, and the James of today, that so touch the cord that helps in the humanity that pertains to us each individually.

A glory gilds the sacred page.
Majestic like the sun:
It gives a light to every age.
It gives, but borrows none.

THE RESTITUTION HERALD. Vol. 14, Oct. 7, 1924, p. 1.

About the Author: *R. H. Judd was born in China to missionary parents and lived as an adult in England and Canada. He was a noted author, theologian, and missionary. He learned of conditional immortality around 1894 while he was at Moody Bible Institute. He became a member of the Church of God in 1922 and wrote profusely for The Restitution and The Restitution Herald.*

