

THE BARRIER

R. B. THIEME, JR.



R. B. THIEME, JR., BIBLE MINISTRIES
HOUSTON, TEXAS

FINANCIAL POLICY

There is no charge for any material from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries. Anyone who desires Bible teaching can receive our publications, DVDs, and MP3 CDs without obligation. God provides Bible doctrine. We wish to reflect His grace.

R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries is a grace ministry and operates entirely on voluntary contributions. There is no price list for any of our materials. No money is requested. When gratitude for the Word of God motivates a believer to give, he has the privilege of contributing to the dissemination of Bible doctrine.

This book is edited from the lectures and unpublished notes of R. B. Thieme, Jr.

A catalogue of available DVDs, MP3 CDs, and publications will be provided upon request.

R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries
P. O. Box 460829, Houston, Texas 77056-8829
www.rbthieme.org

© 2003, 1993, 1974, 1972 by R. B. Thieme, Jr. All rights reserved.
First edition published 1972. Fourth edition published 2003.
Third impression 2018.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible,
© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 1-55764-032-7

Contents

Preface	v
God and His Plan	1
The Composition of the Barrier	3
Sin Removed by Redemption	4
Penalty of Sin Removed by Expiation	7
Physical Birth Resolved by Regeneration	8
The Regeneration of Nicodemus	10
Nicodemus the Pharisee	10
Nicodemus Meets Jesus	11
Nicodemus Interrupted	12
Water and the Spirit	13
From Whence Comes the Wind?	16
Nicodemus Baffled	16
Christ, the True Issue	17
How to Be Born Again	18
Man's Relative Righteousness Resolved	
by Imputation and Justification	19
The Dilemma of Good Works	20
Imputation of God's Righteousness	21
The Credit Side of the Ledger	21
The Vain Pursuit of Righteousness	22
Justification by Faith Alone	23
The Character of God is Satisfied	25
Propitiation	27

Position in Adam Resolved by Position in Christ	29
Position in Christ	29
Reconciliation	31
The Ministry of Reconciliation	32
Crossing the Line	34
Appendix A: The Doctrine of Imputation	37
Appendix B: The Doctrine of Justification	38
Appendix C: The Doctrine of Position in Christ	39
Appendix D: The Doctrine of Propitiation	41
Appendix E: The Doctrine of Reconciliation	43
Appendix F: The Doctrine of Regeneration	45
Scripture Index	47

Preface

Before you begin your Bible study, if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, be sure you have named your sins privately to God the Father.

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown or forgotten sins]. (1 John 1:9)

You will then be in fellowship with God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and ready to learn Bible doctrine from the Word of God.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in [the filling of the] spirit and [biblical] truth.” (John 4:24)

If you have never personally believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, the issue is not naming your sins. The issue is faith alone in Christ alone.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe in] the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36)

THE WORD OF GOD is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and the marrow, and is a critic of thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God might be mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Tim. 3:16–17)

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim. 2:15)

GOD AND HIS PLAN

MANKIND WAS CREATED TO ENJOY a personal relationship with God. God formed Adam and Eve perfect, without physical flaw or sin. He placed them in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden where they had direct, daily contact with Him (Gen. 3:8). God gave them volition, the free will to obey or disobey Him. As long as they continued to obey God, they would remain in fellowship with Him in a state of sinless perfection. But when they committed their sin of disobedience, immediately a barrier separated man from God. Mankind's relationship with God was completely severed.

From the fall of Adam until the end of time, no human being can conquer this barrier. It is impassable and insurmountable; no human effort can break through this obstruction. All mankind is born spiritually dead and exists on one side of the barrier and God exists on the other side—a hopeless separation.¹

1. Spiritual death is total separation from God, inability to have a relationship with God. See page 7.

But omniscient God always knew that man's volition would alienate him from his Creator. Consequently, in eternity past God the Father designed a perfect plan to remove the barrier through the salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This plan, an expression of God's grace to fallen Adam and his sinful progeny, the human race, is divided into three parts: phase one, salvation for the unbeliever; phase two, the believer in time; phase three, the believer in eternity.²

God's role in phase one of this plan began in eternity past. Anticipating man's failure, God resolved the barrier problem and its consequences. Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, was elected to accomplish the salvation phase of God's plan. The work of Jesus Christ began with His virgin birth and concluded with the cross, resurrection, ascension, and session.³ Christ's substitutionary spiritual death paid the penalty for our sins and removed the barrier so that salvation is freely given to anyone who believes in Him.

Man's role in phase one occurs in that instant of time when a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Phase two, the Christian way of life, begins immediately after salvation and is accomplished when the Holy Spirit works in and through the believer. Phase three commences at the moment of the believer's physical death or the Rapture, whichever occurs first (1 Thess. 4:13–17).⁴

The removal of the barrier is solely the work of Jesus Christ. Apart from this divine intervention, mankind would face eternal condemnation and separation from God (John 3:18, 36). Being condemned means spending eternity in the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41; cf. Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14–15). No matter what human abilities, talents, or other assets we possess, we are incapable of removing any of the components of the barrier separating us from God.

2. Grace is the policy of God in bestowing His unmerited favor on sinful mankind. Grace is all that God is free to do for mankind based on the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross (Isa. 30:18).

3. R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Trinity* (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2003), 29–33. Hereafter, cross-references to my books will cite only author, title, date of publication (in the first reference), and page(s).

4. The Rapture is the resurrection or removal of all Church Age believers, both the living and the dead, from the earth (1 Cor. 15:51–55; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 3:10). See Thieme, *The Divine Outline of History: Dispensations and the Church* (1999), 17–18, 134–35.

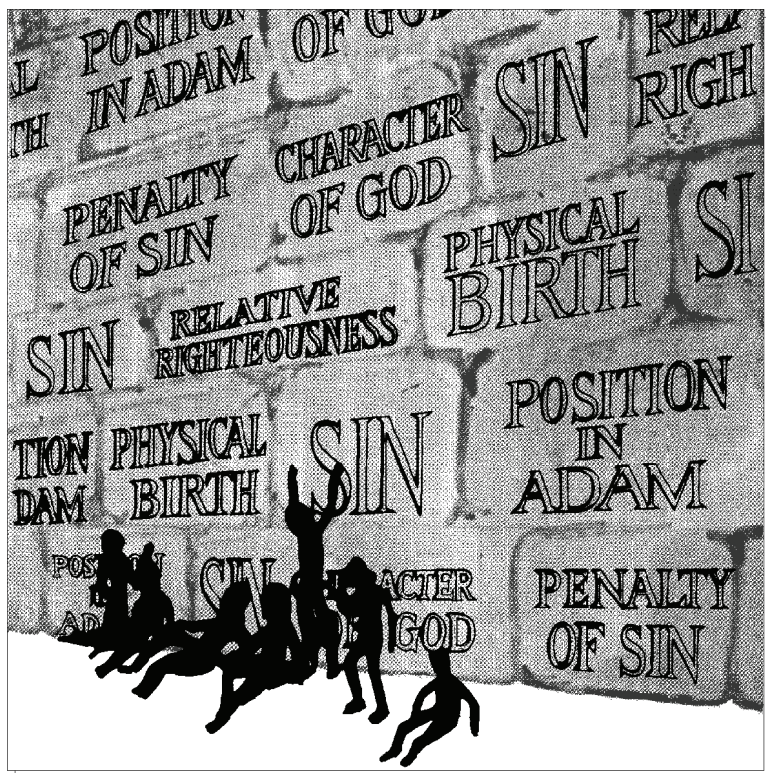
The Composition of the Barrier

For the sake of illustration, consider the barrier to be composed of bricks.

1. **The first brick is *sin*.** “For all have sinned and fall short [missed the mark] of the glory [essence] of God” (Rom. 3:23).⁵
2. **The second brick is *the penalty of sin*.** “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23a).
3. **The third brick is *physical birth*.** Man is born physically alive but spiritually dead, separated from and unable to have fellowship with God. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).
4. **The fourth brick is *man’s relative righteousness*.** No matter how good man may be, his human righteousness is completely unacceptable to God. “For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment” (Isa. 64:6a).⁶
5. **The fifth brick is *the character of God, His divine essence*.** Man can never measure up to the divine attributes of perfect God. No one is as good as God. “THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE” (Rom. 3:12b).
6. **The sixth brick is *man’s position in Adam*.** “For as in Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22a). Adam’s fall and subsequent spiritual death not only disqualified all humanity from fellowship with God, but also limited the physical life span of the human race.

5. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scriptures in this book are quoted from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). Those marked KJV are quoted from the King James Version. Bracketed commentary reflects amplification of the NASB translation taught in Bible class lectures (available on MP3 CD from R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, Houston, Texas).

6. Man’s righteousness is adequate only in comparison or relative to other humans, but it is totally inadequate when compared to God’s absolute or perfect righteousness.



THE INSURMOUNTABLE BARRIER

With these bricks stacked against us, the barrier is truly insurmountable. But through the saving work of Christ, God leveled the wall and crushed the bricks.

SIN REMOVED BY REDEMPTION

What *is* sin? Sin is anything contrary to the character of God or acting independently of God and His provision. Sin is coming short of God's righteousness (Rom. 3:23). The first sin in the human race was an act of disobedience to the will of God: "But from the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 2:17a).⁷ When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, the offense had all-encompassing repercussions for mankind. This first sin, Adam’s original sin, was imputed or officially charged to the entire human race.⁸ Since Adam represented the human race, we stand or fall with him. When he sinned, we all sinned because we were seminally present in Adam.⁹ “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19a). We are all condemned not because of our personal sins, but because of Adam’s original sin.

We also inherit Adam’s sinful nature.¹⁰ Adam *became* a sinner; we are *born* sinners. The sin nature he acquired is genetically passed down to his descendants, each and every one of us.¹¹ We all possess the same corrupt nature.

Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and [spiritual] death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [the moment Adam sinned]. (Rom. 5:12)

“Death spread to all men” because the condemnation of Adam’s sin is imputed to our genetically formed sin natures at birth resulting in

7. The first two bricks, sin and the penalty of sin, are covered in detail in Thieme, *Slave Market of Sin* (1994).

8. Adam’s original sin was disobedience to God’s mandate in the Garden of Eden. Adam ate the forbidden fruit resulting in spiritual death (Gen. 2:17). See Thieme, *The Angelic Conflict* (2012), 27–29, 40–41.

9. Seminal presence in Adam means we were all present with Adam because we are all derived from him; we are his seed.

10. The sin nature originated as a direct result of Adam’s first sin. The sin nature is the center of man’s rebellion toward God, the source of temptation, lust, and human good, but not the source of sin. Man’s volition is the source of sin. The sin nature resides in the cell structure of the body and is transmitted genetically (Rom. 6:6; 7:5, 18). Synonyms for the sin nature include the “old man” (Eph. 4:22, KJV) and the “flesh” (Rom. 8:3–4). See Thieme, *God the Holy Spirit vs. The Sin Nature* (2013), 1–4; *Rebound and Keep Moving!* (1993), 4–9; *Reversionism* (2000); *The Integrity of God* (2005), 63–85.

11. Since the humanity of Christ was conceived by means of the Holy Spirit, He was born *without* the genetically formed sin nature (Matt. 1:18). See Thieme, *The Integrity of God*, 65–68.

spiritual death.¹² Consequently, we are all born into the ‘slave market of sin’ and will remain slaves as long as we live unless we accept God’s solution for sin—*redemption*.

Two Greek words in the Bible, λυτρόω (*lutroo*) and ἀγοράζω (*agorazo*), are translated “redeem.” *Lutroo* and its compounds emphasize the idea of purchase or ransom by paying a price (Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14). *Agorazo* and its compounds mean “to redeem or purchase a slave’s freedom from a slave market” (Gal. 3:13). The price paid to redeem sinners from the slave market of sin was the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (1 Pet. 1:18–19). Redemption is the basis for the forgiveness by God of all sins (Isa. 44:22; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:22) and the basis for justification (Rom. 3:24).¹³

To redeem mankind from the slave market of sin, Christ was judged for every sin that has been committed or ever will be committed by the human race (2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Tim. 4:10). The removal of the sin problem for all humanity is called the doctrine of unlimited atonement.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins
[believers]; and not for ours only, but also for *those* of the
whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Because Christ bore the sins of the world on the cross, redemption is available to the entire human race (1 Pet. 2:24). But redemption is effective only for those who believe in Christ.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right
to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in
His name. (John 1:12)

12. Imputation is the action of the justice of God whereby condemnation or blessing is assigned, credited, or attributed to a human being. At birth, Adam’s original sin is imputed to each person resulting in condemnation. At the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, God’s eternal life is imputed to each person resulting in eternal salvation (John 10:28). See Thieme, *The Integrity of God*.

13. Justification is the judicial act of God whereby He imputes His perfect righteousness to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, declaring him righteous (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16–17). See page 23.

PENALTY OF SIN REMOVED BY EXPIATION

In the Garden only one tree was forbidden to Adam and the woman and the penalty imposed for disobedience to God's mandate was stated: "For in the day that you eat from it [the tree] you shall surely die [spiritual death]" (Gen. 2:17*b*). When Adam ate the fruit he did not die physically; he died spiritually.¹⁴ Because Adam used his volition to disobey God, he lost his relationship with Him. God's righteousness cannot have anything to do with sin except to condemn it—"For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23*a*).

The debt of spiritual death that the first man incurred was passed down to the entire human race with grievous consequences. Without the work of Christ on the cross, mankind would be doomed to eternal condemnation, eternal separation from God; yet, God never leaves us in a hopeless situation. The substitutionary spiritual death of Christ canceled the staggering debt of the penalty of sin against us and removed the second brick of the barrier between God and man. The canceling of this debt is called *expiation*.

"To expiate" means to atone for or to make amends for an offense. A criminal makes amends for his crime by serving a prescribed sentence. After serving his time, the prisoner has paid his debt to society. But we, as prisoners to sin, can never repay our debt to God; we cannot meet God's standard of perfect righteousness.¹⁵ The penalty of sin against us has placed us hopelessly in debt. Only God's *grace* can supply complete and perfect payment.¹⁶

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
(Col. 2:14)

14. As a result of spiritual death, Adam died physically many years later (Gen. 5:5). See Thieme, *The Blood of Christ* (2002), 8.

15. Thieme, *Slave Market of Sin*, 30–31.

16. Humanity can do nothing to gain the favor of God; He must do everything for us in grace. See Thieme, *The Plan of God* (2003), 25.

Acting as our substitute, Jesus Christ took upon Himself the punishment for our sins. God the Father judged those sins “in His [Christ’s] body on the cross” (1 Pet. 2:24). The penalty for all our sins was spiritual death; the payment for our sins was the substitutionary spiritual death of Christ on the cross (Isa. 53:6; Titus 2:14). Christ’s substitutionary spiritual death occurred when God the Father forsook Him while He was being judged for the sins of the world (Mark 15:34).¹⁷

Only the Lord Jesus Christ as the perfect man was qualified to pay our debt. As sinless humanity, Jesus Christ went to the cross and was judged for our sins. He was the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). No one else could accomplish salvation—only the impeccable humanity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When Jesus said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), His atoning work on the cross was concluded; the problem of the penalty of sin was removed forever.¹⁸ Then, after paying our debt in full, Jesus Christ died physically. He was resurrected so that we may follow Him in resurrection, attaining victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54–57).¹⁹

PHYSICAL BIRTH RESOLVED BY REGENERATION

Human birth carries certain restrictions, both physical and spiritual. Perfect Adam was originally created as a trichotomous being possessing a body, soul, and human spirit. The soul, the immaterial essence of a person, gives man rational, moral, and relational capacities. The soul consists of self-consciousness (awareness of your own self-existence), mentality (ability to think), volition (ability to choose), and conscience (norms and standards).²⁰ The human spirit provides the capability to understand, assimilate, and categorize spiritual phenomena, enabling

17. Thieme, *The Blood of Christ*, 23.

18. When Jesus said, “It is finished!” (τετέλεσται, *tetelestai*), He meant that His saving work on the cross was complete, *before* He died physically. The use of the perfect tense—*tetelestai*—means: “It is finished in the past with results that go on forever!” Nothing can be added to Christ’s work on the cross for salvation. *Ibid.*, 23.

19. Thieme, *Victory over Death* (1991).

20. Thieme, *The Plan of God*, 5–7; *The Origin of Human Life* (1994), 4–5.

the individual to have fellowship with God.²¹ When Adam sinned, he lost his human spirit and became dichotomous, possessing only a body and a soul.

Since Adam's fall, every human being is born without a human spirit. Not only that, we are all born physically alive but spiritually dead because of the imputation of Adam's original sin. Thus, we are born unable to understand spiritual things and are incapable of having a relationship with God.

But a natural man [unbeliever] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised [by the human spirit]. (1 Cor. 2:14)

Yet once again, God's grace provides the ability for sinful mankind to understand spiritual phenomena and have a relationship with Him. Only by means of the second birth—regeneration—can the human spirit be acquired.

“And that which is born of the [Holy] Spirit is [human] spirit.” (John 3:6b)

For to us God revealed *them* [doctrines] through the [Holy] Spirit; for the [Holy] Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Cor. 2:10)

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the [human] Spirit who [which] is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:12)

To have an eternal relationship with God, to be made alive unto Him, we must be regenerated—born spiritually. Regeneration, or being “born again,” is a supernatural work of God. When a person believes in Christ—expresses faith alone in Christ alone—God the Holy Spirit creates in him a human spirit and God the Father imputes to it eternal life so that he is born again or made spiritually alive.²²

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the

21. Thieme, *Giving: Gimmick or Grace?* (2003), 13–15.

22. See page 15.

washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.
(Titus 3:5)

Only through regeneration can the brick of physical death in the barrier be removed.

The Regeneration of Nicodemus

In His well-known dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus explains the necessity of spiritual rebirth.

NICODEMUS THE PHARISEE

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (John 3:1)

Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews comprised of scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.²³ The Pharisees were religious legalists who strove to earn a relationship with God by their own merit.²⁴ When holy days were observed, Pharisees meticulously performed the rituals. They publicly bestowed money on the poor with elaborate pomp and fanfare to create a magnanimous impression. Their faces bore the sanctimonious appearance of supreme holiness, and their pious deeds carried an aura of consecration. When attending temple ceremonies, the Pharisees were first in line, praising God the loudest, praying the longest, and performing sacred rituals in a manner calculated to attract the most attention. Erroneously, they believed their own righteousness rendered them acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6; Matt. 23:28).

As a diligent Pharisee, Nicodemus prayed seven times a day and assembled at the temple three times a day. He was a paragon of the Pharisees—self-righteous, moral, proud, vain, hypocritical, and legal-

23. The scribes were the guardians and the scholars of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Sadducees were aristocratic rationalists who denied all supernatural phenomena, such as the resurrection or the concept of eternal life.

24. Religion is a system whereby man by his own efforts and merits attempts to gain salvation or the approbation of God. Legalism is man's attempt to gain the approbation of God by conforming to a strict code of ethics and conduct. However, no human effort can bring man to God. Religion and legalism are antithetical to grace.

istic. Though extremely religious he was unsaved. Nicodemus was one of those unbelievers Jesus described in Matthew 23:27 as “white-washed tombs”—beautiful on the outside (two of the prerequisites to becoming a Pharisee were external perfection and good deeds), but on the inside he was “full of dead men’s bones.”

Religious unbelievers have great difficulty comprehending the message of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8–9). They are too enamored with their own system of good deeds. Blind to their own flaws, they view everyone else as inferior because few live up to their self-righteous standards.

To God the sins of religious people are as despicable as the sins of irreligious, immoral people. For example, the pitfall of pride is one of the seven most detestable sins to God (Prov. 6:16–19). Imagine trying to impress God by something *you* can do rather than being impressed with what *God* has done for you through Christ.

“Nicodemus” is a Greek word for “ruler of the people,” and in the human realm Nicodemus was truly an impressive person. Although his life was consumed with gaining personal power, performing superficial good deeds, and observing prescribed rituals, perhaps Nicodemus wondered if these efforts were adequate. When he became aware of the extraordinary power of Jesus, he desired to discover its source.

NICODEMUS MEETS JESUS

This man came to Him by night, and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with him.” (John 3:2)

There has been speculation that this night meeting with Jesus was clandestine. But Nicodemus was so preoccupied with his daily religious activities that he probably had little time to interview Jesus during the day.

By using the title “Rabbi,” Nicodemus intended to flatter the Lord. When he announced, “we know,” he wanted to emphasize his own lofty credentials as a Pharisee. Although Nicodemus had just acknowledged the Lord’s academic acumen, he was not interested in what Jesus *knew* but what He was *doing*. Whether he had heard of the

miracles or witnessed them personally, Nicodemus was more intrigued by the wonders performed by Jesus than by His words.

The true purpose of Jesus' miracles was to attract people to hear the Gospel message. Through His miracles Jesus focused attention on Himself—"the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4). Jesus Christ raised people from the dead (resuscitation), caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the demon-possessed to be free from demons, the lepers to be healed. Had Jesus intended miracles to simply alleviate suffering, He would have healed everyone He encountered. But, He did not.

From His miracles Nicodemus recognized Jesus had "come from God *as* a teacher." Nicodemus admitted, "No one can do [keep on doing] these signs that You do unless God is with him." Although Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus as a teacher from God, he still did not comprehend the Gospel message.

In effect, Nicodemus was saying that the Pharisees had tried to explain away these extraordinary events claiming the miracles were coincidental, or perhaps acts of nature. But when Jesus continually performed these supernatural deeds, they found the task increasingly difficult. The Pharisees' rationalizations were unconvincing. Nicodemus was forced to conclude: "You have come from God *as* a teacher."

NICODEMUS INTERRUPTED

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

Aware of the true motivation of Nicodemus, Jesus cut him short. Then, He forthrightly presented the Gospel proclaiming that Nicodemus would never enter the kingdom of God unless he was "born again." Jesus was speaking to a man with every religious accolade. Nicodemus had earned great approbation from men, yet Jesus stunned him by saying that he could never go to heaven unless he was born again.

For one so dedicated to living his life to be worthy of the kingdom of God, this news was shocking. Remember the principle: Physical birth is part of the barrier separating man from God. Nicodemus was born physically alive but spiritually dead. He possessed a body with a

sin nature and a human soul, but no human spirit. The condemnation of Adam's original sin had been imputed to Nicodemus by the justice of God at birth. All of his religious trappings and good works could not save him or give him spiritual life.

Jesus did not tell Nicodemus that the gates of heaven stood open because he had accumulated so many good deeds, public prayers, and temple attendance medals. To the contrary! Nicodemus was informed that he could not enter the kingdom of God unless he was born again!

Apart from God and His holy angels, heaven is inhabited only by those who possess eternal life through faith alone in Christ alone and have received the righteousness of God. Once a person is born again, then and only then can he *see* the kingdom of God (2 Cor. 4:18). Nicodemus, though an intensely moral and religious man, could not comprehend this spiritual information. His reaction was revealing:

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" (John 3:4)

This verse perfectly illustrates blindness to spiritual truth by a religious unbeliever. Without a human spirit, Nicodemus was incapable of understanding spiritual phenomena (1 Cor. 2:14). He assumed one must be born again physically and he wanted to know how. He even suggested, somewhat facetiously, reentering the womb.

Jesus knew this man was seeking the truth or he would not have come. To help Nicodemus understand how to be born again, Jesus contrasted the beginning of human life at the first birth with the beginning of spiritual life at the second birth or regeneration.²⁵

WATER AND THE SPIRIT

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of *water* and the *Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5, italics added)

When "water" is mentioned in Scripture, some may instantly think of baptism. But water has several other connotations. When water baptism is intended, the context so specifies. However, in this passage baptism is not indicated.

25. Thieme, *The Origin of Human Life*, 30–33.

Water is used *figuratively* in Scripture to indicate:

1. Salvation: “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa. 55:1*a*). The sinner is pictured as being thirsty and coming to Christ for salvation (cf. John 4:14). “And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost” (Rev. 22:17*b*).
2. The Bible or the Word of God (Ezek. 16:9; cf. Eph. 5:26). When applied, the Word of God provides spiritual cleansing, which makes bitter experiences sweet (Ex. 15:23–25) and brings rest and refreshment (Ps. 23:2).
3. The Holy Spirit (Isa. 44:3; cf. John 7:38*b*–39*a*): “‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit.”

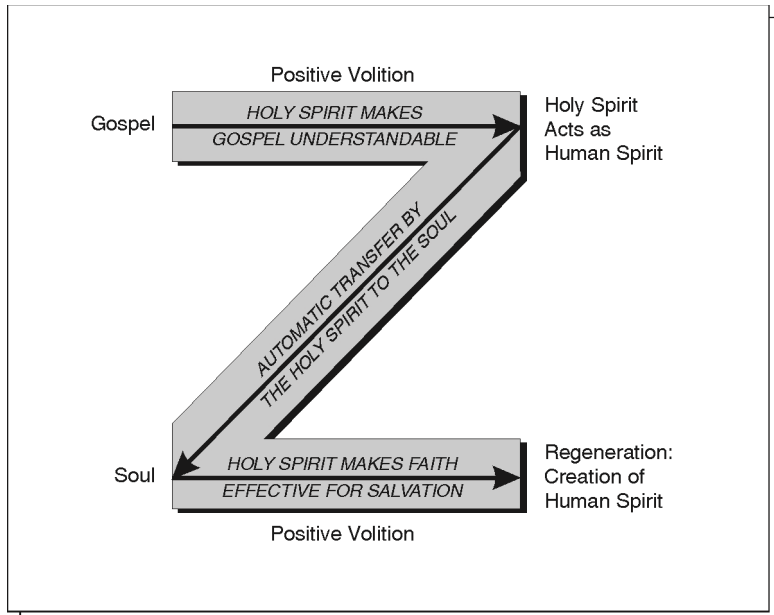
In John 3:5, Jesus uses “water” and “Spirit” to portray physical birth and spiritual birth respectively—the beginning of human life and the beginning of spiritual life. “Born of water” focuses Nicodemus’ attention on one of the events in the human birth process. Inside the womb the fetus is enclosed in a membrane surrounded by amniotic fluid, a water-based liquid. Either just before or during labor, the amniotic sac ruptures and the “water” flows out. As a learned man, Nicodemus would identify the connection between water and physical birth, the imputation of soul life to biological life and the beginning of human life.²⁶

The analogy between water and Spirit births then becomes obvious. Just as a person must be born to receive human life, so a person must be born again to receive spiritual life. Physical birth is the beginning of human life; spiritual birth is the beginning of spiritual life.

“The Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit. The responsibility of the Holy Spirit to the unbeliever is to act as a human spirit and make the Gospel understandable. No one can understand the plan of salvation or be saved apart from this ministry of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The “Z” diagram illustrates how God the Holy Spirit makes the Gospel understandable to the spiritually dead unbeliever.

26. Thieme, *The Integrity of God*, 60–63; *The Origin of Human Life*.

27. Thieme, *Witnessing* (1992), 19–22.



THE MECHANICS OF REGENERATION

Regeneration is the work of God the Holy Spirit. The moment a person believes in Christ, the Holy Spirit creates in him a human spirit to which God the Father imputes eternal life resulting in spiritual life. What was absent at physical birth—a human spirit and relationship with God—is gained through the new birth. The believer becomes trichotomous as was the original Adam (1 Thess. 5:23). At the moment of regeneration, the believer is filled with the Holy Spirit, placed in fellowship with God, and with the human spirit is now able to learn and understand spiritual phenomena (John 16:13–15).²⁸

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh [with a body, an imparted soul, and a sin nature], and that which is born of the [Holy] Spirit is [human] spirit.” (John 3:6)

28. Thieme, *Rebound and Keep Moving!*; *The Integrity of God*, 127–29.

Our first birth provides us with a body of flesh and blood as well as soul life imparted by God, but no human spirit. Yet to enter the kingdom of God and have an eternal relationship with Him, we must have a human spirit. Nicodemus should not have been surprised to learn that a person needs a second or spiritual birth.

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” (John 3:7)

Jesus’ words, “Do not marvel,” reveal the reaction of Nicodemus. He was astonished! Jesus emphatically proclaimed that Nicodemus had to be born again. Despite all of his knowledge of the Old Testament, Nicodemus was utterly perplexed. For the third time, Jesus repeated the need of a second birth, and concluded His explanation with an illustration from nature.

FROM WHENCE COMES THE WIND?

“The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

The wind cannot be seen—only the effect is visible. You know the wind blows because you feel it on your face, see a wave-tossed ocean, watch trees bend, or catch dust in your eye. Yet, you cannot know how the wind comes or goes. So it is with spiritual birth, unseen but nevertheless real.

NICODEMUS BAFFLED

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9)

Nicodemus was baffled. Though he had spent years reading and memorizing all the Old Testament Scriptures and religious teachings of the rabbis, he had never grasped the concept of being “born again.” His theological training was so extensive that he could recite the Scriptures and debate theological questions with consummate skill. Yet Nicodemus was astonished that Jesus understood a theological idea of which he was completely unaware. Nicodemus asked, “How can these things be?”

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not understand these things?” (John 3:10)

Through sarcasm Jesus focused Nicodemus’ attention on his spiritual deficiency. Never once in any examination, seminar, classroom, or at any other time did Nicodemus receive information like this. The rabbinical curriculum ignored the Gospel. Jesus continued:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and you do not receive our witness.” (John 3:11)

Nicodemus was confused because grace was a foreign concept to him. The words “you must be born again” were clear, but the principle was not. For all of his religious learning Nicodemus was ignorant of regeneration.

“If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12)

In the Greek in this verse, “if” is a debater’s first class condition.²⁹ Jesus is saying, “Let’s assume for the moment that I have told you about human phenomena—about earthly things—and you do not believe. How then will you ever believe when I present spiritual or heavenly principles?”

CHRIST, THE TRUE ISSUE

“And no one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, *even* the Son of Man.” (John 3:13)

At the time Jesus made this statement, no member of the human race had yet entered the third heaven, the abode of God. Although countless Old Testament people had been saved from eternal condemnation, after death they resided in Paradise (Luke 16:19–23).³⁰ No one

29. In the Greek, conditional clauses are expressed four different ways. When the debater uses the first class condition, “if, and it is true . . .” he is assuming the truth of the condition for the sake of argument, even though the condition may or may not be true. See Thieme, *Rebound and Keep Moving!*, 18.

30. Paradise, or Abraham’s bosom, was the place of the departed souls of believers who died before the resurrection of Christ (Luke 23:39–43). Paradise was transferred to heaven at the ascension of Christ (Eph. 4:8–10). See Thieme, *Victorious Proclamation* (2002), 20.

would enter heaven until Jesus Christ as the Representative Man was resurrected, ascended, and accepted by the Father. Christ would be the first man to enter into heaven as the “first fruits” (1 Cor. 15:20–23). Christ was resurrected so that all believers may follow Him in resurrection, attaining victory over death.³¹

“Son of Man” is a title of Christ emphasizing His humanity. Jesus is *unique* from all other members of the human race because He is also undiminished deity. While He is fully God, just as are the Father and the Holy Spirit, He is true humanity united with undiminished deity in one person forever.³² In the presentation of the Gospel, the unique person of Jesus Christ is always the issue. If Nicodemus recognizes to whom he is speaking, he will not only believe the words of Jesus but accept His saving work also.

HOW TO BE BORN AGAIN

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten [uniquely born] Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:14–16)

Jesus based His final explanation on Scripture familiar to Nicodemus. To become a Pharisee, Nicodemus had to memorize the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, and take a thorough examination. He was familiar with the events described in Numbers 21.³³ In verse 14 Jesus reminded Nicodemus of those events, enabling him to orient to the principle of regeneration. The analogy of the bronze ser-

31. Thieme, *Victory over Death*.

32. The hypostatic union is the union of two natures, divine and human, in the person of Jesus Christ. These natures are inseparably united without loss or mixture of separate identity, without loss or transfer of properties or attributes, the union being personal and eternal. Jesus Christ is undiminished deity and true humanity in one person forever (Phil. 2:5–11).

33. When the Israelites complained against God’s plan and provision, God disciplined them by sending venomous serpents in their midst. Many died. When the people acknowledged their sin, God instructed Moses to raise a pole with a serpent of bronze on it. When a person who was bitten looked at the serpent of bronze, an expression of faith, they would live and not die (Num. 21:4–9).

pent was an anticipation of the crucifixion. The serpent “lifted up” on the pole was analogous to the lifting up of Christ on the cross.

Verse 15 explains that Jesus Christ was lifted up on the cross so that we could have eternal life. “Whoever” means any member of the human race—religious, irreligious, nonreligious, moral, immoral, amoral—*anyone*. Nicodemus, or anyone who hears or reads the Scriptures, is instructed how to be born again: *Believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is nonmeritorious, there are no works or human merit. The value of faith lies in its object. For salvation, the object of faith is the impeccable Lord Jesus Christ.

Eventually, Nicodemus believed in Jesus Christ as his Savior and became one of His followers. The next time the Bible speaks of Nicodemus is after the crucifixion. He and another Pharisee, Joseph of Arimathea, served as our Lord’s two pallbearers.

MAN’S RELATIVE RIGHTEOUSNESS RESOLVED BY IMPUTATION AND JUSTIFICATION

Man’s relative righteousness is the next brick in the barrier between man and God. Relative righteousness is a comparative righteousness that pits one set of human morals and values against another. Some people are very good, relatively speaking; they are virtuous, honorable, and moral. They have an excellent sense of responsibility, respect for the privacy and property of others, and are genuinely concerned about their fellow man. They may live by establishment principles and be well oriented to life.³⁴ Why do they seem good? When compared to selfish, irresponsible, dishonorable, and immoral people, they are admirable. According to human standards of relative righteousness, one group is ‘good’ and one group is ‘bad.’ Generally speaking, unbelievers fall into these two categories.

The religious, moral, self-righteous unbeliever like Nicodemus may be a respected member of society who rarely appears to do anything wrong or outwardly sinful. He is kind, compassionate, thoughtful, and

34. The laws of divine establishment are principles ordained by God for the protection, orderly function, survival, and blessing of the human race, whether saved or unsaved. See Thieme, *Freedom through Military Victory* (2003).

contributes to worthy causes. Unfortunately, the moral unbeliever may be depending on his relative righteousness to please God and earn his way into heaven. He may not think he needs Jesus Christ as a substitute for his sins because he believes he is a good person.

Then, there is the conspicuously sinful, immoral unbeliever. He may be promiscuous or unethical. Perhaps he is a conniver, a liar, a derelict, a drunkard, a drug addict, or a criminal. The difference between the moral and immoral unbelievers is that the immoral person's sins are blatant, while the self-righteous have hidden their sins behind a façade of respectability. Yet by human standards of comparison, the moral unbeliever is better than the immoral unbeliever.

But compare this moral rating system with God's perfect standards. While the good unbeliever has noble qualities, he is still condemned from birth and still commits personal sins. No human righteousness ever meets God's requirements. The unbeliever's relative righteousness can never compare with God's perfect or absolute righteousness.

Here is God's opinion of us:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory [essence] of God. (Rom. 3:23)

Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins. (Eccl. 7:20)

As it is written,

"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." (Rom. 3:10)

For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment.
(Isa. 64:6a)

The Dilemma of Good Works

Mankind's good deeds, the relative righteousness of Isaiah 64:6, form the most deceptive brick in the barrier. Good works often lead to the same legalistic and sanctimonious illusions Nicodemus had about himself. Some of these include: "I am going to heaven because I deserve to go to heaven." "I am going to heaven because I have lived a good life." "I am going to heaven because I have been religious." But all the good deeds in the world only add up to relative righteousness. God's perfect righteousness can have nothing to do with man's rela-

tive righteousness. The only way for man to have a relationship with God is to possess a righteousness equal to the righteousness of God.

Do not delude yourself; religion and morality provide false hopes for righteousness. Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20*b*). In other words, *no one* is good enough to enter heaven. How can this brick in the barrier be removed? Man’s relative righteousness is eliminated by imputation and justification.

Imputation of God’s Righteousness

THE CREDIT SIDE OF THE LEDGER

A stroke of the pen changes a debit into a credit, but to change our debit of unrighteousness into the credit of the righteousness of God is something only God can do.

He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus Christ] who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus Christ]. (2 Cor. 5:21)

When Christ hung upon the cross, God imputed all the sins of the entire human race to Him and judged them. That payment for sin removed the first brick in the barrier. God accepted Christ as the substitute for us because He was sinless Himself and, therefore, uniquely qualified to be our substitute. He bore in His own body on the cross every sin we have committed or ever will commit—past, present, and future (1 Tim. 4:10; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Our sins were charged to Christ, not to us. But until we accept His sacrifice by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8–9), we retain our own relative righteousness. We are on the debit side of the balance sheet because our righteousness is inadequate. To receive the righteousness of God we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22). At the moment of faith in Christ, God’s righteousness is credited to our account.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned [λογίζομαι, *logizomai*, “imputed”] as righteousness. (Rom. 4:5)

The Greek word *logizomai* means to impute or credit something to someone’s account. Imputation is an ancient accounting term meaning

“to put on the credit side of the ledger.” Expiation takes us out of the ‘red,’ while imputation puts us ‘in the black’. We do not earn or deserve salvation. We cannot work for salvation. The work of Christ on the cross debits from our account our relative righteousness and credits to our account His perfect righteousness.

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and *righteousness* and sanctification, and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30, italics added)

THE VAIN PURSUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue [relative] righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith. (Rom. 9:30)

Countless Gentiles were saved in both Old and New Testament times. What a contrast to the many religious Jews who erroneously relied on keeping the Mosaic Law or their own righteousness for salvation. No matter how devout and law abiding, they still possessed only relative righteousness. Many Gentiles, ignorant of the Law, “did not pursue [relative] righteousness” like these religious Jews, yet they attained God’s righteousness. How? They “attained . . . righteousness which is by faith” by believing in the Lord just as the first Jew, Abraham, did (Gen. 15:6). At the moment of faith in Christ, the righteousness of God was imputed to them.

By contrast, the legalistic Jews kept working, striving, struggling, yet all they ever achieved for their efforts was relative righteousness. The harder these Jews worked at earning righteousness, the deeper into debt they went. Enslaved to legalism, they never attained God’s righteousness (Rom. 4:4). They never comprehended grace, that God’s righteousness was a free gift based on faith.

But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. (Rom. 9:31–32)

“The law of righteousness” is the perfect righteousness acquired by faith in Christ. Many in Israel did not have perfect righteousness because they did not seek it by faith; they did not believe in the Lord.

Trying to merit their salvation, they stumbled over the stumbling stone—the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Justification by Faith Alone

While imputation credits to our account the perfect righteousness of God, justification pronounces us forensically righteous.³⁵ Justification is another manifestation of God's grace. On the basis of His righteousness imputed to the believer, the justice of God declares the undeserving sinner justified or acceptable to Himself. The Greek word δικαίω (*dikaioo*), a common Hellenistic legal term, means to justify, vindicate, or declare righteous. God is free to declare the believer righteous because that person now possesses the righteousness of God. To be justified means to possess God's perfect righteousness. It does not mean "just as if I had never sinned!"

Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified [*dikaioo*] by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (Gal. 2:16)

Being justified [*dikaioo*] as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24)

Notice how we are justified in the eyes of God. Is it by being 'good' or moral? Definitely not! Justification comes only by relying on the grace of God. Grace is manifest throughout the entire plan of God. Grace is the means by which He provides justification that we can never earn or deserve. Perfect righteousness is not a merit badge given for human achievement, but a grace gift freely given at salvation to an undeserving sinner.

Even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction. (Rom. 3:22)

35. Justification is not an experiential act, but a legal or forensic act that takes place before the bench of God's justice. Justification is a legal position rather than an experiential condition of perfection.

The phrase “righteousness of God” refers to perfect righteousness. How do you receive God’s righteousness? By faith, not by keeping the Law: “Even the righteousness of God *by means of faith alone* in Jesus Christ *alone*.” At the moment of salvation, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer.

This righteousness is available to everyone because Christ died for everyone. Christ was judged for sin on the cross. He bore the sins of every person who has ever lived or ever will live—unlimited atonement. Whether you are moral or immoral, atheistic or religious, in God’s sight “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, all are savable (1 Tim. 4:10). Who receives God’s righteousness? All who believe!

For the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:26)

Justification has been in effect since the fall of Adam. Abraham is an Old Testament example. He was justified by faith alone. To make this point, Paul uses a debater’s technique that momentarily assumes Abraham was justified by his own good deeds, although he was not.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works [good deeds], he has something to boast about; but not before God. (Rom. 4:1–2)

If Abraham *were* justified by deeds or good works, he could boast, but not to God.

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Rom. 3:27–28)

If Christ did all the work in providing our so-great salvation, how could Abraham boast? What happens to human achievement? What happens to good works for salvation? They are *excluded*! The way of salvation remains the same throughout human history, before and after the cross.

For what does the Scripture say? “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD [faith in the Lord—Gen. 15:6], AND IT

WAS RECKONED TO HIM [imputed or credited to his account] AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Rom. 4:3)

God’s righteousness was credited to Abraham’s account through faith in the Lord. But what about those who are trying to accomplish enough good works to reach heaven?

Now to the one who works [for his salvation], his wage is not reckoned [credited] as a favor [grace], but as what is due [condemnation]. (Rom. 4:4)

Though they work to gain God’s approval for salvation, they remain just as much in debt. It is humanly impossible to escape eternal condemnation apart from the grace of God.

But to the one who does not work [for his salvation], but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned [credited] as righteousness. (Rom. 4:5)

Only the imputation of divine righteousness results in vindication for the one who believes in Christ and removes the barrier of relative righteousness.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD IS SATISFIED

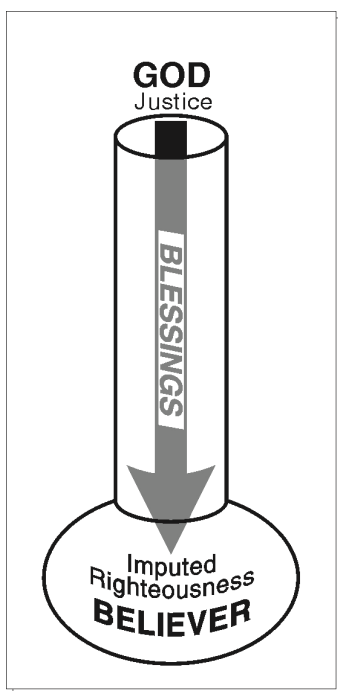
When the Bible speaks of God’s glory, it is a reference to His character or essence—that combination of attributes which distinguishes an individual. Each member of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, possess exactly the same attributes—sovereignty, perfect righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, immutability, and veracity.³⁶ All of these attributes are absolutes. God’s essence is perfect and uncompromising. Therefore, God cannot blot out our sins unless His righteousness and justice are first satisfied. Anything less falls short of His glory.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
(Rom. 3:23)

36. Thieme, *The Trinity*, 5–15; *The Integrity of God*, Appendix A.

Sin is an outrage, an offense and insult to God's perfect holiness or integrity, His righteousness and justice. Since we have all sinned, we are all unacceptable to God (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 8:8). He simply cannot have anything to do with sin or unrighteousness. God's righteousness demands the condemnation of sinful man. What the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes; sin must be judged. The divine blessings of salvation and the Christian life cannot pour through the grace pipeline to man until the righteousness and justice of God are first satisfied.³⁷ How then can God the Father save sinners without compromising His character? How can His righteousness and justice be satisfied?

In eternity past, God made a sovereign decision to treat sinful man in grace—the perfect expression of His divine love and integrity. God the Father provided a plan whereby man could have a relationship with Him forever without compromising His divine character. God demonstrated His love for all mankind when God the Son, Jesus Christ, became our substitute and was judged on the cross for the sins of the world. He was willing to take our place and pay the penalty for our sins. As sinless humanity, the Son satisfied the demands of the righteousness and justice of God the Father. Because God's righteousness and justice were satisfied by His Son's work on the cross, God is perfectly just in forgiving us. Once God's character was satisfied, it is possible for the blessings of salvation and the Christian life to come through the grace pipeline to us.



THE GRACE PIPELINE

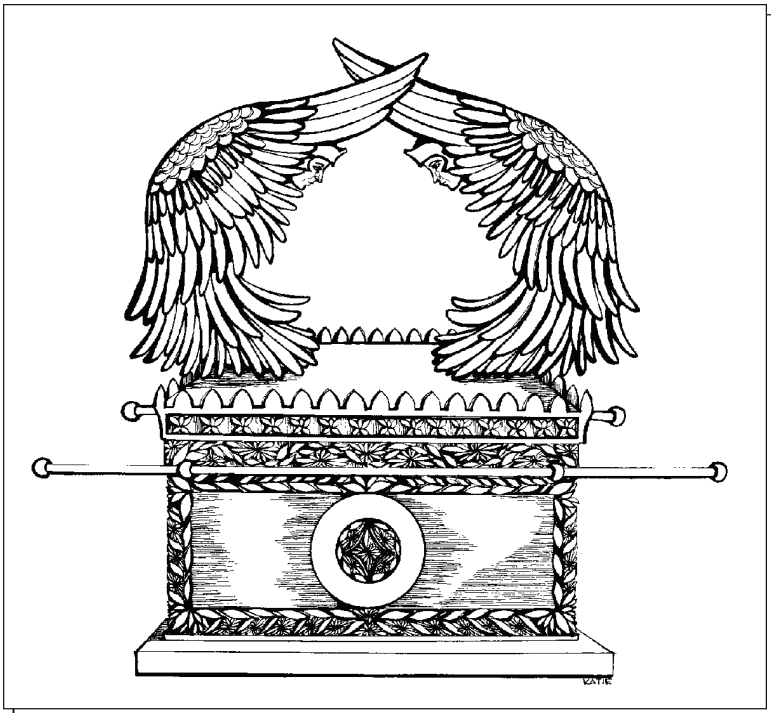
37. The grace pipeline is a metaphorical term that describes the flow of blessings from the justice of God to His imputed righteousness in every Church Age believer.

Propitiation

The work of Christ that satisfied the Father's integrity is called propitiation—the Godward side of the cross.

Whom God displayed publicly [Jesus Christ] as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed. (Rom. 3:25)

Propitiation is the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*), also translated “mercy seat” in Hebrews 9:5 where it means “lid” or “a place of covering.” The mercy seat was the lid placed over the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle of Israel. The ark, a box made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold, depicted the unique



THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

person of Christ. The wood spoke of His humanity, the gold His deity. This box contained the tables of the Mosaic Law, Aaron's rod that budded, and the pot (urn) of manna—all symbolizing various aspects of Israel's sin in rejecting God's gracious provisions for the nation.

The mercy seat of pure gold covered the emblems of sin. Facing each other on either side of the mercy seat were two cherubs—one representing righteousness and the other, justice. As they looked down on the mercy seat, the cherubs saw not the sinfulness of man represented by the contents of the box, but the atoning blood of the animal sacrifice, which had been sprinkled over the golden lid.

Once a year on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), the high priest sacrificed first a bull and then a goat. He went alone into the Holy of Holies carrying the blood of the bull to make atonement for his own sins by sprinkling the blood over the mercy seat. He then returned with the blood of the sacrificed goat to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:14–17). God's righteousness and justice looked down on this blood covering the mercy seat and were ceremonially satisfied. This ritual foreshadowed and represented the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) being sacrificed on the cross, the place where God's righteousness and justice were actually satisfied.³⁸

Just as animal sacrifices pictured the future sacrifice of Christ, so the term "blood" (Rom. 3:25) refers figuratively to His spiritual death—His propitiatory work. When the perfect God-man paid the penalty for all mankind's sins on the cross, God the Father's righteousness and justice were satisfied. Christ was publicly displayed on the cross as our mercy seat. His substitutionary spiritual death paid for or "covered" our sins permanently as depicted by the blood on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9:12–14; 10:4).

God is propitiated by the work of Christ on the cross, and sin no longer presents an obstacle to His relationship with mankind. If Christ's work on the cross was all that was necessary to satisfy the Father, how could anyone presume to add their own works? The work of salvation is completed (John 19:30; Heb. 9:12). God has once and for all been propitiated because of Christ's sacrifice.

38. Thieme, *The Blood of Christ*, 19–20, 36–37.

POSITION IN ADAM RESOLVED BY POSITION IN CHRIST

The final obstacle in the barrier between man and God is our position in Adam. The first man was the representative head of the human race. As we have seen, all of Adam's progeny stand or fall with him and in him. By his willful disobedience, sin and spiritual death came upon the entire human race; "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). As a result we are "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18, KJV). Born "in Adam," the limitations of our brief lives present a barrier to any relationship with eternal God. Our position in Adam necessitates condemnation and death.

To live with God forever, we must possess His perfect righteousness and His eternal life. Only a new position in Christ can guarantee justification and eternal life. To realize this position, we must enter into a relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. This new relationship begins by personal faith in Him: "In Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22b).

Position in Christ

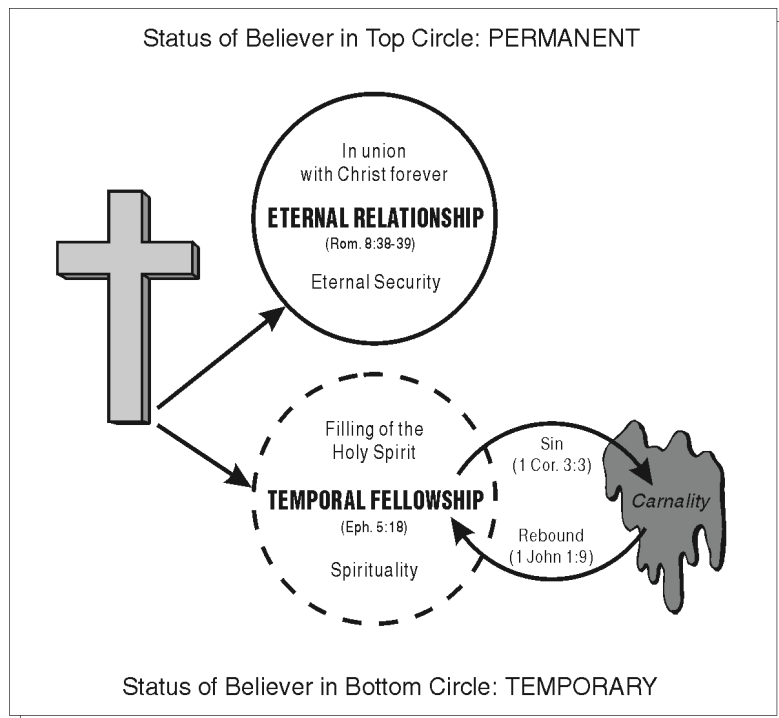
Jesus Christ, called the "last Adam" in 1 Corinthians 15:45, is the head of a "new spiritual species"—believers in union with Christ.

Therefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature [spiritual species]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Cor. 5:17)

"Old things" do not mean old habits; the new believer still possesses the sin nature and along with it, his bad habits.³⁹ The believer is not a "new creature" because of what he does or does not do, but because of what God does for him at the moment of salvation. The "old things passed away" are all the debits that put him behind the barrier. The "new things" are all the phenomenal assets the believer has by virtue of his position in Christ.

39. Bad habits may be overcome as the believer matures. See Thieme, *God the Holy Spirit vs. The Sin Nature*.

The instant we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit places us in union with Christ by means of the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).⁴⁰ From that moment forward we are one with Him. Our physical birth, our position in Adam, ceases to be a problem. With regeneration, the life of Christ becomes *our life*. Christianity is a



relationship with God, not a religion or denomination. Our new position guarantees us an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. We share His eternal life (1 John 5:11–12), His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), His election (Eph. 1:3–4), His sonship (Gal. 3:26), His heirship

40. The baptism of the Holy Spirit takes place at the moment of salvation and identifies every believer with the person of Jesus Christ. Neither seen nor felt, the Holy Spirit places the believer in union with Christ, a union that can never be broken and guarantees salvation to the believer. See Thieme, *Tongues* (2000), 30–36, Appendix A.

(Rom. 8:16–17), His priesthood (Heb. 10:10–14), and His royalty (2 Tim. 2:11–12).

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. (1 John 5:11–12)

In the illustration, the top circle represents our new position in union with Christ. This eternal union or relationship depends solely on the integrity and work of God, not on our works. Union with Christ eliminates our position in Adam, provides us with God's eternal life, and thus removes the final brick in the barrier. Our permanent position in Christ can never be forfeited.

The bottom circle represents the believer's fellowship with God in time under the control of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the believer sins, he loses temporal fellowship—the filling of the Holy Spirit—and is out of the bottom circle. By naming his sins privately to God the Father (1 John 1:9), the believer 'rebounds' back into the bottom circle. Regardless of the sin committed, the believer can never lose his position in Christ.⁴¹

RECONCILIATION

With the last brick in the barrier removed, no obstacle separates man from God. The problems of sin, the penalty of sin, physical birth, man's relative righteousness, the character of God, and man's position in Adam were all resolved by the work of Christ on the cross. The removal of the barrier is called reconciliation.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood [spiritual death] of Christ. For He Himself is our peace [εἰρήνη, *eirene*], who made both *groups into one*,

41. Thieme, *Rebound and Keep Moving!*

and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace [*eirene*], and might reconcile [ἀποκαταλλάσσω, *apokatallasso*] them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Eph. 2:12–16)

Several Greek words communicate the doctrine of reconciliation. Καταλλάσσω (*katallasso*) means “to reconcile,” to change someone from a state of hostility or enmity to a state of peace. The intensified form of this verb, *apokatallasso*, also means “to reconcile” by transferring from the original fallen status of spiritual death to the exalted status of eternal salvation. God is always the subject of these two verbs—He is the source of reconciliation—and man is the recipient of reconciliation.

Just as propitiation is the Godward side of the cross, so reconciliation is the manward side of the cross. Reconciliation encompasses all that Christ did on the cross to remove the barrier for mankind. There is nothing man can do to remove the barrier between himself and God. *Jesus Christ has done all the work.* God is propitiated; man is reconciled.

A third word, *eirene*, is translated “peace.” World peace between nations (Isa. 2:4) was not the mission of Jesus Christ during His first advent. In this verse “peace” emphasizes the results of the saving work of Christ on the cross—the removal of the barrier. He came to provide peace between God and mankind, His enemies (Rom. 5:10); “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19a). This does not mean that all the world is universally saved but that all *may be saved*. Sin is no longer the issue; Christ is. Where once stood the barrier, Christ now stands—the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

The Ministry of Reconciliation

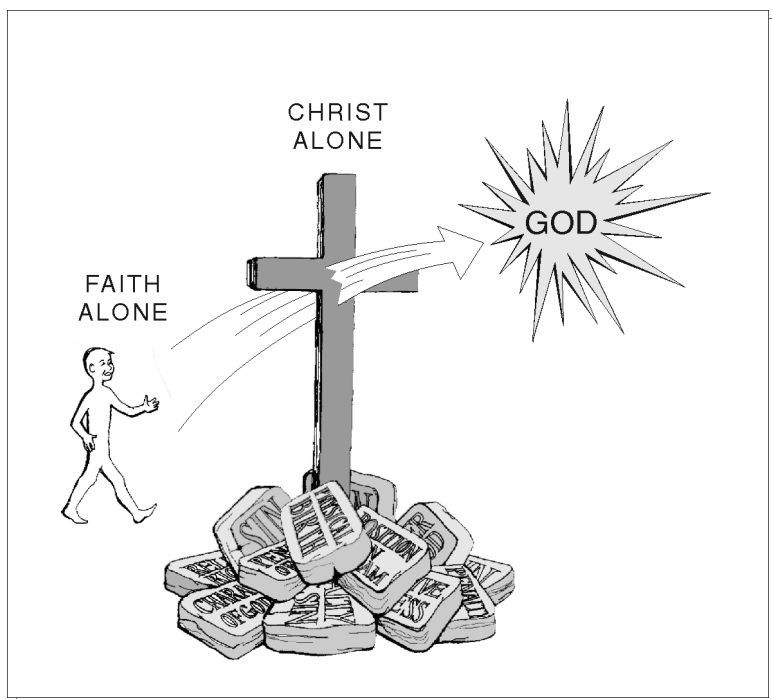
When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are given a new purpose in life, including a message, a ministry, and a title—ambassador for Jesus Christ. Regardless of your vocation, activities, abilities,

education, or circumstances in life, you are as much involved in full-time Christian service as any pastor-teacher, evangelist, or missionary. While pastor-teacher and evangelist are special communication gifts, every believer is an ambassador for Christ.

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the *ministry of reconciliation*. (2 Cor. 5:18, italics added)

Your task as an ambassador for Christ is to proclaim the glorious message of reconciliation; Christ has solved the sin problem (1 Cor. 15:3-4) and made peace between man and God.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)



THE BARRIER REMOVED

CROSSING THE LINE

Before Jesus Christ died, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies into the presence of God. Now that Jesus Christ has sacrificed Himself to remove the barrier, the way has been opened so that all who believe may enter into the presence of God.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6)

With the barrier removed, only unbelief separates you from God. If you believe in Christ, then you have crossed the line of separation. If you do not believe, only your volition separates you from God's gift of salvation.

While Jesus is no longer on the earth to extend the invitation to you personally, He speaks to us through His written Word:

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." (Acts 16:31a)

What happens when you believe, when you cross the barrier? You are regenerated, justified, and united with Christ; eternal salvation is yours forever. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. You now have a permanent relationship with God.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38–39)

Not only are you in Christ, but God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit indwell you.⁴²

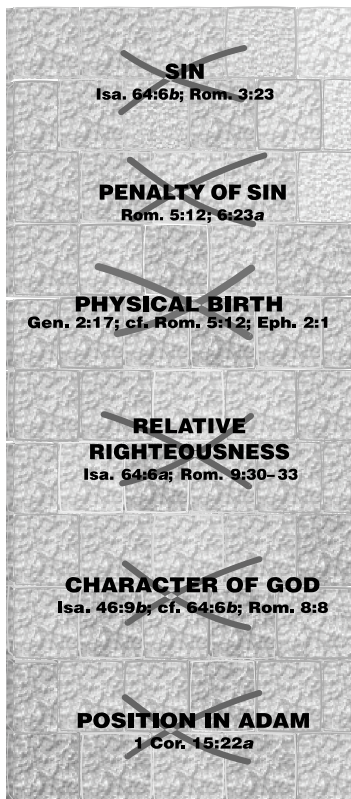
Further, God the Holy Spirit places you in fellowship with God the Father and is the divine power for living your own spiritual life. Fellowship is sustained through naming your sins to God the Father (1 John 1:9). Through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, the Bible, the infallible Word of God, communicates to you everything necessary to live the Christian way of life. As Bible doctrine becomes first

42. Thieme, *The Divine Outline of History*, 126–31.

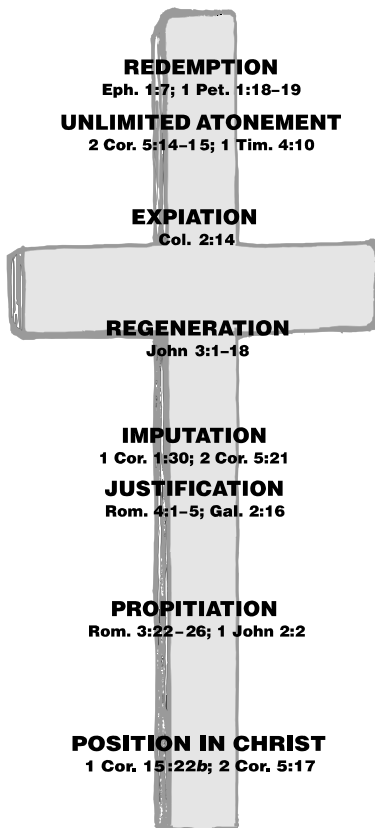
priority in your life and reshapes your thinking, your capacity for life, love, and happiness will increase.

With the barrier removed by Jesus Christ, your opportunities in the Christian life are unlimited. Crossing the barrier is just the beginning. Your challenge is to learn and fulfill the destiny God designed especially for you. As you begin to mature spiritually, your destiny will unfold. An incredible relationship with the Lord, the tangible blessings of “greater grace” (James 4:6), and a life of meaning, purpose, and stability await you.

THE BARRIER **THE PROBLEMS:**



WORK OF CHRIST **THE SOLUTIONS:**



Appendix A

THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTATION

- I. Definition: Imputation means to reckon, to attribute, to ascribe, or to charge to one's account.
- II. While Jesus Christ was on the cross, God the Father imputed all the sins of the human race to Him (2 Cor. 5:21).
- III. Because the sins of the human race were imputed to Christ on the cross, God is free to impute His perfect righteousness to the believer at the moment of faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22).
- IV. Abraham is the pattern of imputation of divine righteousness for all believers (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3).
 - A. He believed or had faith in the Lord.
 - B. God counted, reckoned, or imputed it to him as righteousness.
 - C. Divine righteousness is imputed only on the basis of faith alone in Christ alone (Rom. 3:22).
- V. Many Gentiles during Old Testament times attained God's righteousness by believing in Christ, while many Jews seeking righteousness from obedience to the Mosaic Law never attained the righteousness of God (Rom. 9:30–33).
- VI. Imputation is the basis of justification (Rom. 4:22; 5:1).
- VII. The imputation of perfect righteousness establishes the potential for great blessing in both time and eternity.

Appendix B

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

- I. Definition: Justification means “vindication.” Justification is the legal or forensic act whereby God declares the believer righteous because He has imputed to the believer His perfect righteousness.
- II. Justification or vindication occurs at the moment of faith in Christ (Rom. 3:26–28).
- III. Justification is based on the doctrinal principle of grace (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:7).
- IV. Justification cannot occur through the Mosaic Law (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16).
- V. The mechanics of justification:
 - A. At the moment of faith in Christ, God imputes His righteousness to the believer.
 - B. God declares the believer to be justified because he possesses the righteousness of God.
 - C. Imputation and justification occur simultaneously at the moment of faith. Logically, imputation precedes justification.
- VI. The work of justification was accomplished by Christ on the cross (Rom. 3:24–25).
- VII. Justification and imputation resolve the problem of man’s relative righteousness.

Appendix C

THE DOCTRINE OF POSITION IN CHRIST

- I. At the moment of faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit places the believer in union with Christ by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- II. Union with Christ belongs to every believer permanently, regardless of their spiritual status (1 Cor. 1:2, 30).
- III. The believer's union with Christ exempts him from divine judgment in eternity (Rom. 8:1).
- IV. The believer's position in Christ qualifies him to live with God forever. The believer shares the following with Christ:
 - A. Eternal life (1 John 5:11–12);
 - B. Righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21);
 - C. Election (Eph. 1:4);
 - D. Destiny (Eph. 1:5);
 - E. Sonship (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1–2);
 - F. Heirship (Rom. 8:16–17);
 - G. Sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2, 30);
 - H. Royalty (2 Tim. 2:11–12);
 - I. Priesthood (Heb. 10:10–14).
- V. When a person is placed in union with Christ he becomes a new spiritual species (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10).

- VI. Union with Christ guarantees the eternal security of the believer (Rom. 8:38–39).
- VII. The characteristics of our position in Christ:
 - A. Known only through the Word of God;
 - B. Obtained at the moment of salvation;
 - C. Eternal in nature and cannot be changed by God, angels, or mankind;
 - D. Not an emotional or ecstatic experience;
 - E. Not related to human merit, ability, or human good;
 - F. Not progressive, cannot be improved in time or eternity.
- VIII. Our position in Christ removes the problem of our position in Adam.

Appendix D

THE DOCTRINE OF PROPITIATION

- I. Definition: Propitiation means “satisfaction.” Propitiation is the Godward side of salvation whereby God’s integrity or holiness, His righteousness and justice, is satisfied by Jesus Christ’s payment for our sins on the cross.
 - A. God the Father is satisfied with the work of God the Son on the cross. He is satisfied with His perfect person and His perfect payment for our sins on the cross.
 - B. Propitiation, translated from the Greek word ἱλαστήριον (*hilasterion*), means “mercy seat” (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:5) relating this doctrine to the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant.
- II. Propitiation was communicated to Israel through the sacrificial blood sprinkled on the mercy seat.
 - A. The mercy seat covered the emblems of Israel’s sin inside the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:17–22; 37:6–9).
 - B. Two cherubs, representing God’s righteousness and justice, gazed upon the sacrificial blood sprinkled on the mercy seat.
 - C. The blood covering the emblems of sin pictured the ceremonial satisfaction of God’s righteousness and justice.

- III. Propitiation is related to the work of Christ on the cross. The death of Christ covered or paid for our sins, satisfying the righteousness and justice of God (Lev. 16:13–16).
- IV. Propitiation is appropriated by faith in Christ and is the basis for the imputation of divine righteousness (Rom. 3:25–26).
- V. Propitiation resolves the problem of the demands of God's righteousness and justice.

Appendix E

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION

- I. Definition: Reconciliation is the removal of the barrier between God and man, replacing enmity with peace. While propitiation is Godward, reconciliation is manward (2 Cor. 5:18; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20–22).
- II. Prior to salvation, mankind is regarded as the enemy of God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21).
- III. Peace is a synonym for reconciliation. Jesus Christ came to provide peace with God through His work on the cross (Eph. 2:14–16; Col. 1:20).
- IV. The peace offering of Leviticus 3 depicts the doctrine of reconciliation (Lev. 7:11–38; 8:15).
- V. Every member of the royal family of God (Church Age believer) is an ambassador representing Christ on earth. Therefore, each member of the royal family has the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20).
- VI. The mechanics of reconciliation remove the barrier:
 - A. Sin removed by redemption (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18–19) and unlimited atonement (2 Cor. 5:14–15, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2);

- B. Penalty of sin removed by expiation (Ps. 22:1–6; Col. 2:14);
- C. Problem of physical birth removed by regeneration (John 3:1–18; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23);
- D. Relative righteousness or human good removed by imputation (Rom. 3:22; 9:30—10:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:14) and justification (Rom. 4:1–5, 25; 5:1; 8:29–30; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:7);
- E. The barrier of God's perfect character removed by propitiation (Rom. 3:22–26; 1 John 2:1–2);
- F. Problem of position in Adam removed by position in Christ (1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:3–6).

Appendix F

THE DOCTRINE OF REGENERATION

- I. Definition: Regeneration is the theological term for spiritual birth, or being “born again,” the imputation of eternal life to the newly created human spirit at the moment anyone believes in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation. A regenerate person passes from spiritual death into spiritual life.
- II. Every human being since Adam’s fall is born spiritually dead, without a human spirit and possessing a sin nature.
 - A. Adam was created trichotomous—possessing a body, a soul, and a human spirit.
 - B. When Adam sinned he lost his human spirit, became spiritually dead, and acquired a sin nature.
 - C. All Adam’s progeny are born spiritually dead.
- III. The human spirit provides the capability to understand, assimilate, and categorize spiritual phenomena and enables the believer to have fellowship with God (1 Cor. 2:10, 12–14).
- IV. To have fellowship with God a person must first be “born again” or born spiritually (John 3:3).
- V. Regeneration or spiritual birth is the work of the Holy Spirit that takes place the moment a person trusts in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:5–18; Titus 3:5).

Scripture Index

OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS

2:17	5, 7, 36
3:8	1
5:5	7
15:6	22, 24, 37

EXODUS

15:23–25	14
25:17–22	41
37:6–9	41

LEVITICUS

3	43
7:11–38	43
8:15	43
16:13–16	42
16:14–17	28

NUMBERS

21	18
21:4–9	18
21:14	18
21:15	19

PSALMS

22:1–6	44
23:2	14

PROVERBS

6:16	11
------	----

ECCLESIASTES

7:20	20
------	----

ISAIAH

2:4	32
30:18	2
44:3	14
44:22	6
49:9	36
53:6	8
55:1	14
64:6	3, 10, 20, 26, 36

EZEKIEL

16:9	14
------	----

NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW	
1:18	5
5:20	21
23:27	11
25:41	2

MARK	
10:45	6
15:34	8

LUKE	
16:19-23	17
23:39-43	17

JOHN	
1:12	6, 39
1:29	8, 28
3	10
3:1	10
3:1-18	36, 44
3:2	11
3:3	12, 45
3:4	13
3:5	13, 14
3:5-18	45
3:6	9, 15
3:7	16
3:8	16
3:9	16
3:10	17
3:11	17
3:12	17
3:13	17
3:14-16	18
3:18	2
3:36	2
4:14	14
7:38-39	14
10:28	6

14:6	34
16:13-15	15
19:30	8, 28

ACTS	
16:31	34

ROMANS	
1:4	12
3:10	20
3:12	3
3:20	38
3:22	21, 23, 37, 44
3:22-26	36, 44
3:23	3, 4, 20, 24, 25, 36
3:24	6, 23, 38
3:24-25	38
3:25	27, 28, 41
3:25-26	42
3:26	24
3:26-28	38
3:27-28	24
3:28	6, 38
4:1-2	24
4:1-5	36, 44
4:3	25, 37
4:4	22, 25
4:5	21, 25
4:22	37
4:25	44
5:1	6, 37, 44
5:10	32, 43
5:12	5, 36
5:19	5
6:6	5
6:23	3, 7, 36
7:5	5
7:18	5
8:1	39

8:3-4	5
8:8	26, 36
8:16-17	31, 39
8:29-30	44
8:38-39	30, 34, 40
9:30	22
9:30-33	36, 37
9:30-10:10	44
9:31-32	22

1 CORINTHIANS

1:2	39
1:30	22, 36, 39
2:10	9, 45
2:12	9
2:12-14	45
2:14	9, 13
3:3	30
12:13	30
15:3-4	33
15:20-23	18
15:22	3, 29, 36, 44
15:45	29
15:51-55	2
15:54-57	8

2 CORINTHIANS

4:18	13
5:14-15	6, 36, 43
5:17	29, 36, 40, 44
5:18	33, 43
5:18-20	43
5:19	32, 43
5:20	33
5:21	21, 30, 36, 37, 39, 44

GALATIANS

2:16	23, 36, 38, 44
2:16-17	6
3:13	6, 43
3:26	30

EPHESIANS

1:3-4	30
1:3-6	44
1:4	39
1:5	39
1:7	6, 36, 43
2:1	3, 36
2:8-9	11, 21
2:10	40
2:12-16	32
2:14-16	43
2:16	43
4:8-10	17
4:18	29
4:22	5
5:18	30
5:26	14

PHILIPPIANS

2:5-11	18
3:9	44

COLOSSIANS

1:14	6, 43
1:20	43
1:20-22	43
1:21	43
2:14	7, 36, 44

1 THESSALONIANS

1:10	2
4:13-17	2
5:23	15

1 TIMOTHY

2:5	32
2:6	6, 43
4:10	6, 21, 24, 36, 43

2 TIMOTHY

2:11-12	31, 39
---------	--------

TITUS

2:11	43
2:14	6, 8
3:5	10, 44, 45
3:7	38, 44

HEBREWS

2:9	43
9:5	27, 41
9:12	28
9:12-14	28
9:22	6
10:4	28
10:10-14	31, 39
10:14	44

JAMES

4:6	35
-----	----

1 PETER

1:18-19	6, 36, 43
1:23	44
2:24	6, 8, 21

1 JOHN

1:9	30, 31, 34
2:1-2	44
2:2	6, 36, 43
3:1-2	39
5:11-12	30, 31, 39

REVELATION

3:10	2
19:20	2
20:10	2
20:14-15	2
22:17	14