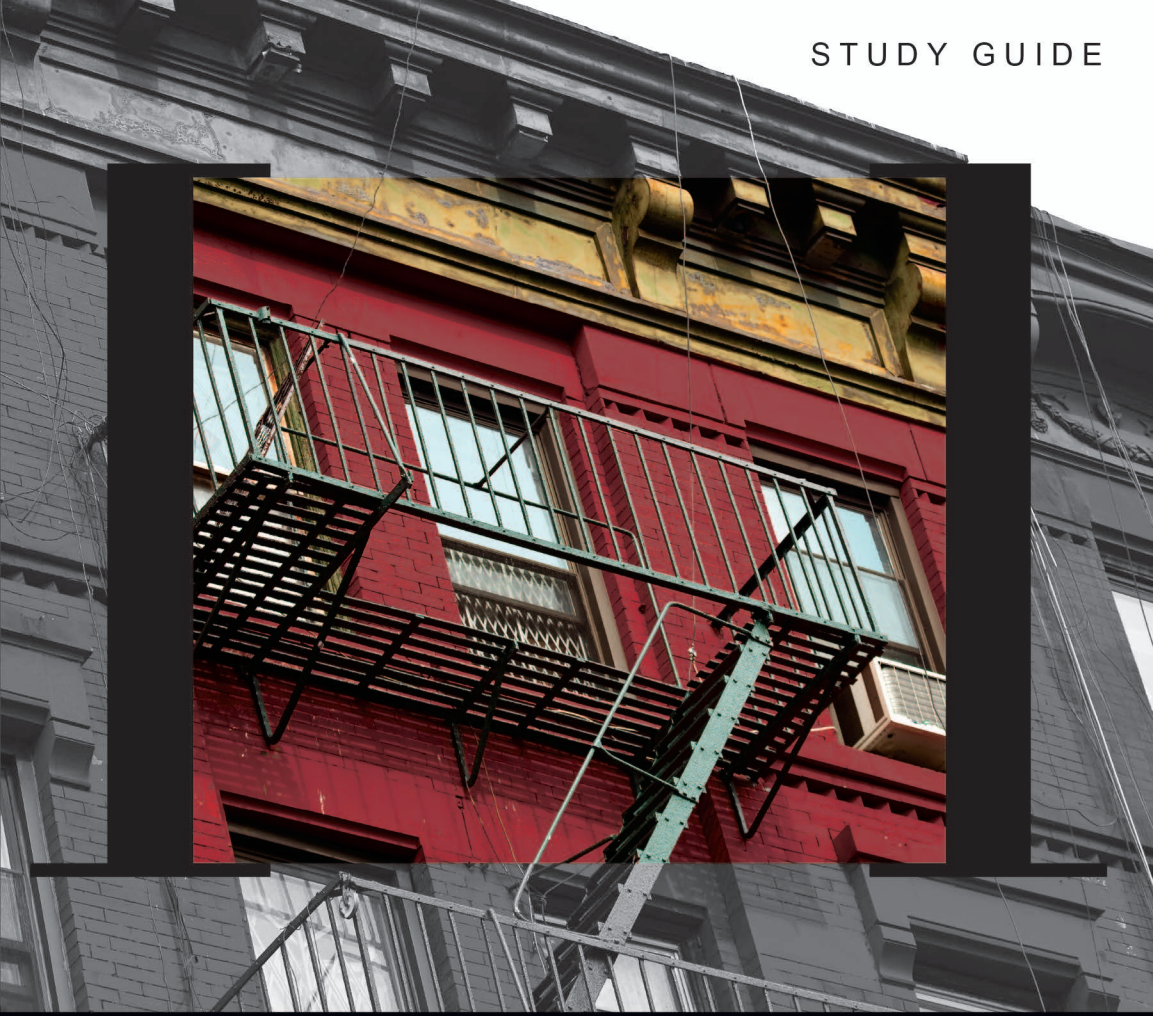


STUDY GUIDE



# gospel<sup>in</sup>life

Grace Changes Everything

EIGHT SESSIONS

**TIMOTHY KELLER**

*New York Times* bestselling author

with **Sam Shammas** and **John Lin**



# Session 1 City The World That Is

## Introduction

gospel<sup>™</sup>life is an eight-session course on the gospel and how to live it out in all of life—first in our hearts, then in community, and ultimately out into the world.

Session 1 opens the course with the theme of the city, our home now, the world that is. Session 8 closes the course with the theme of the eternal city, our heavenly home, the world that is to come. In between we will look at how the gospel changes our hearts (Sessions 2 and 3), changes our community (Sessions 4 and 5), and changes how we live in the world (Sessions 6 and 7).

## How To Use This Guide

This guide includes eight group studies as well as individual *Home Studies*. Each group study consists of:

- A Bible study on the theme of the session.
- A ten-minute DVD presentation by Timothy Keller followed by group discussion questions.

The *Home Studies* introduce the theme of the next session. They are printed on gray pages to distinguish them from the group studies on white pages.

Instructions are in italics and surrounded by these brackets: [ ]

This guide uses the New International Version (NIV) translation of the Bible.

Notes for leaders are located in the back section on pages 148–233.

# Session 1 City The World That Is

## Bible Study

*[ Pray as you begin, asking God to be at work in the group. ]*

*[ In 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and the elite of Jewish society—the artisans and professionals and leaders—were taken to Babylon by force. The prophet Jeremiah received a word from the Lord and wrote these exiles a letter. Read aloud Jeremiah 29:4–14, and then work through the questions below. ]*

1. What specific directions does God give the exiles for relating to the city of Babylon in verses 4–7? How do you think the exiles felt about this?
2. What is the relationship between the “prosper you” of verse 11 and the “prosperity of the city” of verse 7?
3. What was the purpose of the exile, according to verses 11–14? Why do you think these verses were included in the letter?



#### 4. Rodney Stark, a sociologist of religion, writes,

Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world... Christianity revitalized life in...cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments... To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective...services.<sup>1</sup>

**Is this still true of Christianity today? If not, why not? In what ways does Christianity “revitalize life” in your area?**

**[ Watch the DVD for Session 1. ]**

#### DVD Notes

**[ Use this space if you would like to make notes. ]**

<sup>1</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1997), 161.

# Session 1 City The World That Is

## Discussion Questions

*Remember a city is defined as “any place of density, diversity and cultural energy.”*

1. Was there anything from the DVD that was new to you, or had an effect on you? Did you hear anything that raised more questions in your mind?

2. J.N. Manokaran, a pastor from India, writes in his book *Christ and Cities*, “Cities should not be seen as monsters...but communities of people with need.”<sup>2</sup> How do you view the place in which you live? What emotions come to mind? What do you value about it?

3. We heard in the DVD that,

In the city you are going to find people that appear spiritually hopeless. You're going to find people of no religion, people of other religions, and people with deeply non-Christian lifestyles, and you're going to discover that many of them are kinder, deeper, and wiser than you. You will also find that many of the poor and the broken are much more open to the gospel of grace and more dedicated to its practical out-working than you are.

Has this been the case in your own experience or in the experience of people you know? Share examples.



4. It is often said that Christians today have little impact on the world around them. Is that a correct assessment? Why? What prevents us from becoming more engaged in the world around us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. The Hebrew word translated “prosper” means “to be healthy, to increase, to have things go well.” It means growth in all its dimensions. What types of growth within the Christian community can prosper the places in which we live?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In what specific ways can you and your group seek to serve and love your place of residence, rather than resemble it, or remove yourselves from it? What can you and your group do to become genuinely interested in its peace and prosperity?

# Session 1 City The World That Is

## Additional Reading

See [gospelinlife.com](http://gospelinlife.com) for recommended resources to help you further explore this topic.

## Prayer

As you begin this course, pray that the Holy Spirit will empower you inwardly, that Christ may dwell in your heart, and that you will know the love of Christ and be filled with all God's fullness. Pray also that through this course you may be able to grasp more and more of what it means to live out the gospel in your own life, through your community, and for the benefit of the world.

Thank God for the place where you live. Pray for God's peace and prosperity for it, and that you would have love for it and its inhabitants.

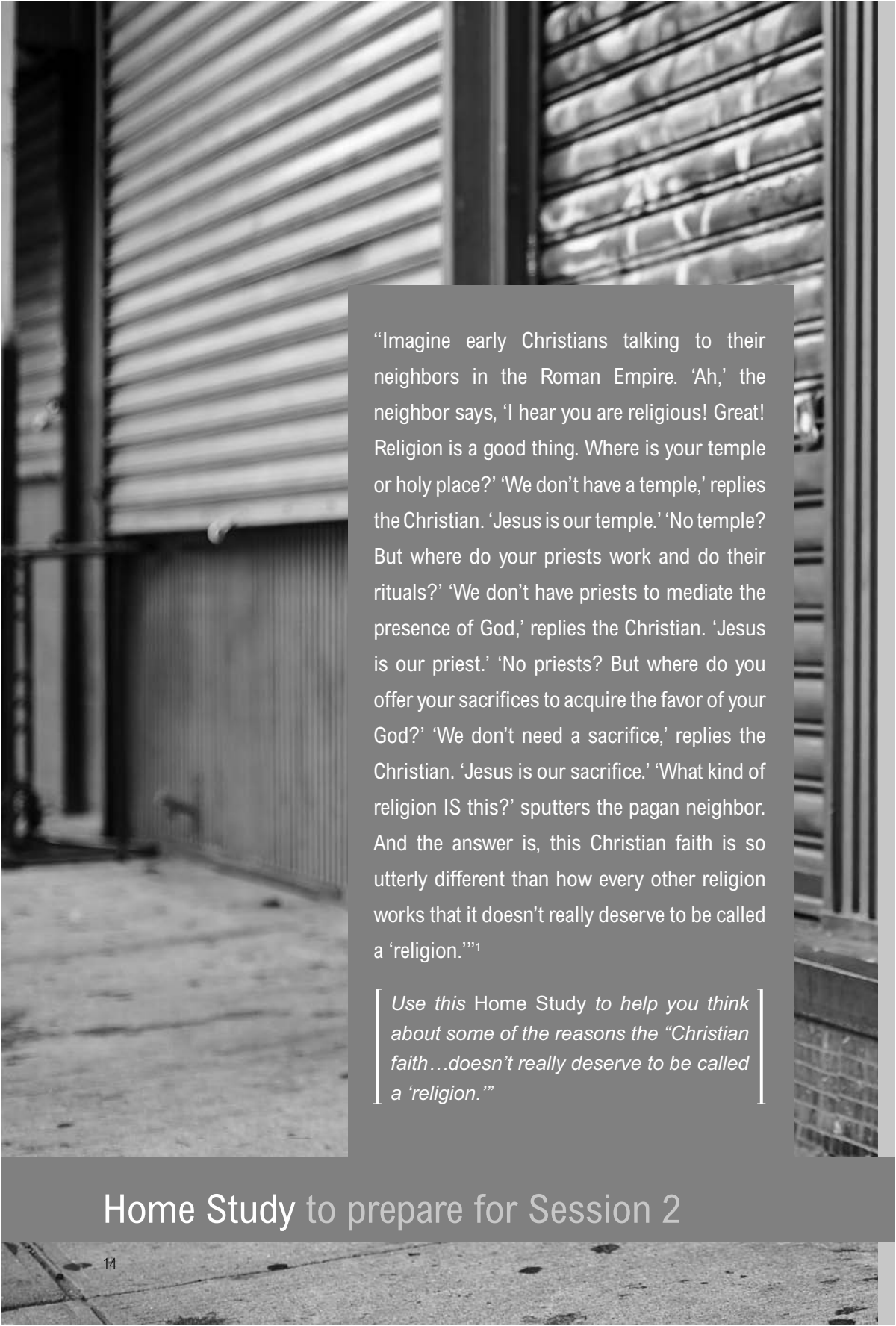


## Introduction Of The Home Study

The *Home Studies* on the gray pages are an integral part of *gospel<sup>™</sup>life*. They consist of a series of readings, exercises, and projects that introduce you to the topic of the following session. It will take about an hour to complete the *Home Study*. If you work and pray through these *Home Studies* you will vastly enhance your experience in the course.

To introduce you to Session 2, the *Home Study* consists of a series of readings and exercises that get to the heart of what it means to believe the gospel.





“Imagine early Christians talking to their neighbors in the Roman Empire. ‘Ah,’ the neighbor says, ‘I hear you are religious! Great! Religion is a good thing. Where is your temple or holy place?’ ‘We don’t have a temple,’ replies the Christian. ‘Jesus is our temple.’ ‘No temple? But where do your priests work and do their rituals?’ ‘We don’t have priests to mediate the presence of God,’ replies the Christian. ‘Jesus is our priest.’ ‘No priests? But where do you offer your sacrifices to acquire the favor of your God?’ ‘We don’t need a sacrifice,’ replies the Christian. ‘Jesus is our sacrifice.’ ‘What kind of religion IS this?’ sputters the pagan neighbor. And the answer is, this Christian faith is so utterly different than how every other religion works that it doesn’t really deserve to be called a ‘religion.’”<sup>1</sup>

*Use this Home Study to help you think about some of the reasons the “Christian faith...doesn’t really deserve to be called a ‘religion.’”*

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

## Three ways to live

Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:13).

People tend to think there are two ways to relate to God—to follow him and do his will or to reject him and do your own thing—but there are also two ways to reject God as Savior. One is the way already mentioned: by rejecting God’s law and living as you see fit. The other, however, is by obeying God’s law, by being really righteous and really moral, so as to earn your own salvation. It is not enough to simply think there are two ways to relate to God. There are three: religion, irreligion, and the gospel.

In “religion,” people may look to God as their helper, teacher, and example, but their moral performance is serving as their savior. Both religious and irreligious people are avoiding God as Savior and Lord. Both are seeking to keep control of their own lives by looking to something besides God as their salvation. Religious legalism/moralism and secular/irreligious relativism are just different strategies of “self-salvation.”

Christians may have had both religious phases and irreligious phases in their lives, but through the gospel they have come to see that the reason for both their irreligion and their religion was essentially the same, and essentially wrong. Christians have come to see that their sins as well as their best deeds have equally been ways of avoiding Jesus as Savior. Christianity is not fundamentally an invitation to get more religious. A Christian says, “Though I have often failed to obey the moral law, the deeper problem was why I was trying to obey it! Even my efforts to obey it have just been a way of seeking to be my own savior.”

The religious only repent of sins. The irreligious don’t repent at all. Christians, however, repent of both their sins and of their self-righteousness.

*The differences between irreligion and the gospel are easy to spot. It is often harder to discern the differences between religion and the gospel. Read through the following table which summarizes the differences between religion and the gospel.*

<sup>1</sup> Illustration is from Dick Lucas, former senior pastor of St. Helen’s Church, London.

Religion	Gospel
"I obey; therefore, I'm accepted."	"I'm accepted; therefore, I obey."
Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.	Motivation is based on grateful joy.
I obey God in order to get things from God.	I obey God to get God—to delight in and resemble him.
When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.	When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while God may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.
When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is critical that I think of myself as a "good person." Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.	When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ.
My prayer life consists largely of petition, and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.	My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.
My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident—I feel like a failure.	My self-view is not based on my moral achievement. In Christ I am <i>simul iustus et peccator</i> —simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad that he had to die for me, and I am so loved that he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deep humility and confidence at the same time.
My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am—and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral.	My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for me. I am saved by sheer grace, so I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am.

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

Charles Spurgeon, England's best-known preacher for most of the second half of the nineteenth century, used the following illustration.

Once upon a time there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot. He took it to his king and said, "My lord, this is the greatest carrot I've ever grown or ever will grow; therefore, I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you." The king was touched and discerned the man's heart, so as he turned to go, the king said, "Wait! You are clearly a good steward of the earth. I own a plot of land right next to yours. I want to give it to you freely as a gift, so you can garden it all." The gardener was amazed and delighted and went home rejoicing. But there was a nobleman at the king's court who overheard all this, and he said, "My! If that is what you get for a carrot, what if you gave the king something better?" The next day the nobleman came before the king, and he was leading a handsome black stallion. He bowed low and said, "My lord, I breed horses, and this is the greatest horse I've ever bred or ever will; therefore, I want to present it to you as a token of my love and respect for you." But the king discerned his heart and said, "Thank you," and took the horse and simply dismissed him. The nobleman was perplexed, so the king said, "Let me explain. That gardener was giving *me* the carrot, but you were giving *yourself* the horse."<sup>2</sup>

If we give God things in the hope that they will earn us blessings or heaven, then we are really not doing anything for him at all—it's for ourselves. Only an experience of grace changes us so we do good things for goodness' sake, for God's sake.

To become a Christian is, therefore, first to admit the problem: that we have been substituting ourselves for God either by religion (trying to be our own savior by obedience to God's law) or by irreligion (trying to be our own lord by disobedience to God's law). This means we change not so much the amount but the depth of our repentance. We have to "repent," but the repentance that receives Christ is not just being sorry for specific sins. It is not less than that, but it is more. "Saving repentance" is also admitting our effort of self-salvation, our effort at trying to be our own savior.

<sup>2</sup> This illustration is attributed to Charles Spurgeon, British preacher and author (1834–1892).

Paul reminds us of the significance of this very forcefully in Galatians 2:21, "...if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" and again in Galatians 5:4, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." We don't just repent of sins, but of the self-righteousness under all we do—not just for law-breaking but also for law-relying.

Second, to become a Christian, we rely on the remedy: asking God to accept us for Jesus' sake and knowing that we are accepted because of his record, not ours. This means we change not so much the amount but the object of our faith. We have to "believe," but the belief that receives Christ is not just subscribing to a set of doctrines about Christ. It is not less than that, but it is more. "Saving faith" is transferring our trust from our own works and record to Christ's work and record.

In Galatians 2:16 Paul further reminds us that, "man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." In Romans 3:22–24 Paul tells us: "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." The determining factor in our relationship with God is not our past but Christ's past.

Christians who know the gospel in principle and who have been changed by it nevertheless continually revert to works-righteousness and self-salvation in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways. A basic insight of Martin Luther's was that "religion" is the default mode of the human heart. Your computer operates automatically in default mode unless you deliberately tell it to do something else. Luther says that even after you are converted by the gospel, your heart will go back to operating on the religious principle unless you deliberately, repeatedly set it to gospel-mode. This then is the basic cause of our spiritual failures, uncontrolled emotions, conflict, lack of joy, and ministry ineffectiveness.

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

We believe the gospel at one level, but at deeper levels we continue to operate as if we are saved by our works. Luther writes,

There is not one in a thousand who does not set his confidence upon his works, expecting by them to win God's favor and anticipate His grace; and so they make a fair of them, a thing which God cannot endure, since He has promised His grace freely, and wills that we begin by trusting that grace, and in it perform all works, whatever they may be.<sup>3</sup>

**[ Answer the following questions. ]**

- 1. Do you agree that “religion is the default mode of the human heart”? At what specific times or in what circumstances has this been true of your own heart?**
- 2. Look at the table on page 16 and circle anything that is true of your own heart. Is there anything you would like to change?**

## Calvin, Luther, and Edwards on the gospel

**[ Read the following extracts from John Calvin's writings which help to explain the connection between works and righteousness. ]**

I would first ask... Whether a man is deemed righteous for one holy work or two, while in all the other acts of his life is a transgressor of the law? This were, indeed, more than absurd. I would next ask, Whether he is deemed righteous on account of many good works if he is guilty of transgression in some one part? Even this he will not venture to maintain in opposition to the authority of the law, which pronounces, “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them,” (Deut. 27:26.) I would go still farther and ask, Whether there be any work which may not justly be convicted of impurity or imperfection? How, then, will it appear to that eye before which even the heavens are not clean, and angels are

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works* (Whitefish, Mont.: Kessinger, n.d.), Part XI, 20.

chargeable with folly? (Job 4:18.) Thus he will be forced to confess that no good work exists that is not defiled, both by contrary transgression and also by its own corruption, so that it cannot be honored as righteousness.<sup>4</sup>

We maintain that of whatever kind a man's work may be, he is regarded as righteous before God simply on the ground of gratuitous mercy; because God, without any respect to works, freely adopts him in Christ, by imputing the righteousness of Christ to him as if it were his own. This we call the righteousness of faith, that is when a man, empty and drained of all confidence in works, feels convinced that the only ground of his acceptance with God is a righteousness which is wanting in himself, and is borrowed from Christ. The point on which the world goes astray (for this error has prevailed in almost every age), is in imagining that man, however partially defective he may be, still in some degree merits the favour of God by works... God reconciles us to himself, from regard not to our works but to Christ alone, and by gratuitous adoption makes us his own children instead of children of wrath. So long as God regards our works, he finds no reason why he ought to love us. Wherefore it is necessary that he should bury our sins, impute to us the obedience of Christ which alone can stand his scrutiny, and adopt us as righteous through his merits. This is the clear and uniform doctrine of Scripture, "witnessed," as Paul says, "by the law and the prophets" (Rom. 3:21), and so explained by the gospel that a clearer law cannot be desired.<sup>5</sup>

**[ Use the following questions to help you think through the extracts. ]**

1. "The point on which the world goes astray...is in imagining that man, however partially defective he may be, still in some degree merits the favor of God by works." Why is attempting to merit the favor of God by works a problem?

2. In what ways do you attempt to merit the favor of God by works?

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

*Read the extracts below taken from Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians.*

As the earth bringeth not forth fruit except it be watered first from above; even so by the righteousness of the law, in doing many things we do nothing, and in fulfilling the law we fulfil it not, except first we are made righteous by the Christian righteousness, which appertaineth nothing to the righteousness of the law... But this righteousness is heavenly, which we have not of ourselves, but receive it from heaven; we work not for it, but by grace it is wrought in us, and is apprehended by faith... Why, do we then nothing? Do we work nothing for the obtaining of this righteousness? I answer, Nothing at all. For this is perfect righteousness, to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing of the law, or of works, but to know and believe this only, that Christ is gone to the Father, and is not now seen; that He sitteth in heaven at the right hand of His Father, not as judge, but...that He is our high priest intreating for us, and reigning over us, and in us, by grace...<sup>6</sup>

Where Christ is truly seen, there must be full and perfect joy in the Lord, with peace of conscience, which thus thinketh: Although I am a sinner by the law, and under condemnation of the law, yet I despair not, yet I die not, because Christ liveth, who is both my righteousness and my everlasting life. In that righteousness and life I have no sin, no fear, no sting of conscience, no care of death. I am indeed a sinner as touching this present life, and the righteousness thereof... But I have another righteousness and life, above this life, which is Christ the Son of God, who knoweth no sin, no death, but is righteousness and life eternal...<sup>7</sup>

He that strayeth from this Christian righteousness, must needs fall into the righteousness of the law; that is to say, when he hath lost Christ, he must fall into the confidence of his own works. But...when I have Christian righteousness reigning in my heart...I do good works, how and wheresoever occasion arise... Whosoever is assuredly persuaded that Christ alone is his righteousness, doth not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation, but also submitteth himself... to all manner of burdens, and to all dangers of the present life, because he knoweth that this is the will of God, and that this obedience pleaseth Him.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A New Translation by Henry Beveridge, Esq. (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society), taken from *Institute of Practical Bible Education*, The Electronic Public Library, Institutes, Vol.3: Part 18: Chapter 17. <sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church in Theological Treatises*. Edited and translated by J. K. S. Reid. *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville: WJKP, 1954), 199.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, translated by Erasmus Middleton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1979), xv. <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi. <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi–xviii.



*[ Use the following questions to help you think through the extracts. ]*

**1. In your own words, what is Christian righteousness? What is the alternative to Christian righteousness?**

**2. What is our motivation to do good works?**

*[ What makes people honest? Or generous? Jonathan Edwards tackled such questions over the years in many of his works. Read the following extracts, which have been abridged and paraphrased by Timothy Keller from Jonathan Edwards' works. ]*

There are two kinds of moral behavior: “common virtue” and “true virtue.”<sup>9</sup> Let’s take one virtue: honesty. The vast majority of people are honest out of fear (“Be honest; it pays!” or “If you are not honest, God will punish you!”) or out of pride (“Don’t be like those terrible, dishonest people”). Edwards is by no means scornful of this, which he calls “common virtue.” Indeed, he believes this is the main way God restrains evil in the world.

Nevertheless, there is a profound tension at the heart of common virtue. If the main reason people are honest is due to fear and pride—what is the main reason people are dishonest? Almost always it is out of fear or pride. In common virtue, you have not done anything to root out the fundamental cause of evil—the radical self-centeredness of the heart. You have restrained the heart’s self-centeredness, but not changed it.

**Home Study to prepare for Session 2**

Ultimately, moral people who are being moral out of fear and pride are being moral for themselves. They may be kind to others and helpful to the poor at one level, but at the deeper level they are doing it so God will bless them (religious version), or so they can think of themselves as virtuous, charitable persons (irreligious version). They don't do good for God's sake, or for goodness' sake, but for their own sake. Their fundamental self-centeredness is not only intact but nurtured by common virtue. This can erupt in shocking ways and is why so many apparently moral people can fall into great sins. Underneath the seeming unselfishness is great self-centeredness.

Edwards then asks, "What is 'true virtue'?" It is when you are honest not because it profits you or makes you feel better, but because you are smitten with the beauty of the God who is all truth and sincerity and faithfulness. It is when you come to love truth-telling not for your sake, but for God's sake and its own sake. That kind of motivation can only grow in someone deeply touched by God's grace.

True virtue comes when you see Christ dying for you, keeping a promise he made despite the infinite suffering it brought him. On the one hand that destroys pride: he had to do this for us, because we were so lost. On the other hand it also destroys fear: because if he'd do this for us while we were his enemies, then he values us infinitely, and nothing we can do will wear out his love. Consequently, our hearts are not just restrained but changed. Their fundamental orientation is transformed.

Whatever is done...if the heart is withheld there is nothing really given to God... What is given is given to that which the man makes his end in giving. If his end be only himself, then it is given only to himself, and not to God. If his aim be his own honor, then the gift is something offered to his honor; if it be his care or worldly profit, then the gift is to these... If the sincere aim of the heart is not to God, then there is nothing given to God.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Edwards tackles the idea of "common virtue" and "true virtue" in his *Miscellanies* and in *Charity and Its Fruits, Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*. He also says many relevant things about this in *Religious Affections*. <sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Charity and Its Fruits" in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale, 1989), 179–180.

They whose affection to God is founded first on his profitableness to them, their affection begins at the wrong end: they regard God only for the utmost limit of the stream of divine good, where it touches them, and reaches their interest... But... in a gracious gratitude, men are affected with the attribute of God's goodness and free grace, not only as they are concerned in it, or as it affects their interest, but as...infinitely glorious in itself.<sup>11</sup>

**[ Use the following questions to help you think through the extracts. ]**

- 1. What is the difference between “common virtue” and “true virtue”? Why is the difference important?**
- 2. What specific steps could you take to live for God's sake or for goodness' sake, rather than for your own sake?**

## The gospel and the heart

The gospel is neither religion nor irreligion—it is something else altogether. Religion makes law and moral obedience a means of salvation, while irreligion makes the individual a law to him- or herself. The gospel, however, is that Jesus takes the law of God so seriously that he paid the penalty of disobedience, so we can be saved by sheer grace.

This means that Christians have a unique attitude toward the law of God and moral obedience. On the one hand, we are freed from the moral law as a system of salvation. Our self-regard is no longer tied to our moral performance; we are God's children, loved unconditionally. On the other hand, we know how supremely important the law of God is, since it reveals the nature and heart of God. It reveals the things God loves and hates, the things that are good and evil. Jesus took it so seriously that he made himself completely obedient to it, in our place,

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

and died to pay its penalty, in our place. We can never take God's revealed will in his Word lightly. We can never see obedience as only an option. Instead, we love and delight in the law of God ("For in my inner being I delight in God's law" [Rom. 7:22]), and yet we are completely free from its condemnation ("Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." [Rom. 8:1]).

We are justified, made right with God, by faith alone through the work of Christ alone. That is, when we unite with Christ by faith, we are now "righteous in God's sight." Through the gospel we are made holy and perfect in God's eyes.

So, we are made righteous in God's sight, but how do we become actually righteous? In other words, how do we grow more and more into real Christlike character? In theological terms, the question is—what is the relationship of my justification (righteousness before God) to my sanctification (gradual, growing, lived righteousness)? For example, in Christ my bad temper and rash words are pardoned and covered by the work of Christ. They can't bring me into condemnation, but how do I now actually make progress in self-control? How do I become less angry?

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul wants the people to give an offering to the poor. But, he doesn't put pressure directly on their will, saying, "I'm an apostle and this is your duty," nor pressure directly on their emotions, telling them stories about how much the poor are suffering and how much more they have than the sufferers. Instead, Paul vividly and unforgettably says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Paul brings Jesus' salvation into the realm of money and wealth and poverty. He reminds them of the gospel. Paul is saying, "Think of Jesus' costly grace until you are changed into generous people by the gospel in your hearts." So the solution to stinginess is a reorientation to the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where he poured out his wealth for you. Because of the gospel you don't have to worry about money: the cross proves God's care for you and gives you security. Because of the gospel you don't have to envy anyone else's money: Jesus' love and salvation confer on you a remarkable status—one that money cannot give you.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale, 1959), 243, 248.

What makes you a sexually faithful spouse, a generous—not avaricious—person, a good parent and/or child is not just redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ. Rather, it is deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding makes in your heart—the seat of your mind, will, and emotions. Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. It changes our hearts. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting.

In Titus 2:11–15 Paul calls his listeners to “say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions” and “to live self-controlled...lives.” How does Paul tell them to get this self-control? Remarkably, he says it is the “grace of God that brings salvation,” which “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness.” He explains what he means by the “grace of God” in Titus 3:5: “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.” This is how we say “no” to temptation.

Think of all the ways you can “say ‘No’” to ungodliness. You can say, “No—because I’ll look bad!” You can say, “No—I’ll be excluded from the social circles I want to belong to.” You can say, “No—because then God will not bless me.” You can say, “No—because I’ll hate myself in the morning and have low self-esteem.” Virtually all of these motives, however, are really just motives of fear and pride—the very things that also lead to sin. You are just using the same self-centered impulses of the heart to keep you compliant to external rules without really changing the heart itself. Also, you are not really doing anything out of love for God. You are using God to get things—self-esteem, prosperity, social approval—so your deepest joys and hopes rest in those things, not God.

The gospel, if it is really believed, removes neediness—the need to be constantly respected, appreciated, and well regarded; the need to have everything in your life go well; the need to have power over others. All of these great, deep needs continue to control you only because the concept of the glorious God delighting in you with all his being is just that—a concept and nothing more. Our hearts don’t believe it, so they operate in default mode. Paul is saying

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

that if you want to really change, you must let the gospel teach you—that is to train, discipline, coach you—over a period of time. You must let the gospel argue with you. You must let the gospel sink down deeply into your heart, until it changes your motivation and views and attitudes.

Richard Lovelace, a professor of church history, notes the following.

Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many...have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification...drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther's platform: you are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude.<sup>12</sup>

**[ Answer the following questions. ]**

**1. What does it mean to rely on our sanctification for our justification?**

**2. What will it mean for you to let “the gospel teach you”—to let “the gospel sink down deeply into your heart”?**

<sup>12</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 101.

## Gospel repentance

Martin Luther set off the Reformation by nailing the “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The very first of the theses stated that “our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”<sup>13</sup>

On the surface this looks a little bleak. Luther seems to be saying Christians will never make much progress in life. That, of course, wasn't Luther's point at all. He was saying that repentance *is* the way we make progress in the Christian life. Indeed, pervasive, all-of-life-repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus.

### Religious repentance versus gospel repentance

There are two different ways to go about repentance—religious repentance and gospel repentance. In “religion,” the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless us and answer our prayers. So, in religion we are sorry for sin only because of its consequences. Sin will bring us punishment—and we want to avoid that, so we repent.

The gospel, however, tells us that as Christians sin can't ultimately bring us into condemnation (Rom. 8:1.) Its heinousness is therefore what it does to God: it displeases and dishonors him. Thus in religion, repentance is self-centered; the gospel makes it God-centered. In religion we are mainly sorry for the consequences of sin, but in the gospel we are sorry for the sin itself.

Also, religious repentance can easily turn into an attempt to “atone” for one's sin—in which we convince God (and ourselves) that we are so truly miserable and regretful that we deserve to be forgiven. In the gospel, however, we know that Jesus suffered for our sin. We do not have to make ourselves suffer to merit God's forgiveness. We simply receive the forgiveness earned by Christ.

Moreover, in religion our only hope is to live a life good enough to require God to bless us, so every instance of sin and repentance is therefore traumatic, unnatural, and threatening. Only under great duress do religious people admit they have sinned, because their only hope is their moral goodness.

## Home Study to prepare for Session 2

In the gospel the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes it easier to admit that we are flawed, because we know we won't be cast off if we confess the true depths of our sinfulness. Our hope is in Christ's righteousness, not our own, so it is not as traumatic to admit our weaknesses and lapses.

Whereas in religion we repent as little as possible, the more we feel accepted and loved in the gospel, the more and more often we will be repenting. Although there is some bitterness in any repentance, in the gospel there is ultimately a sweetness. This creates a thoroughly new dynamic for personal growth. The more we see our own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to us. On the other hand, the more aware we are of God's grace and our acceptance in Christ, the more able we are to drop our denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions of our sin.

George Whitefield, the eighteenth-century Methodist preacher, wrote on repentance, "God give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and a single eye, and then let men or devils do their worst!"<sup>14</sup>

### Gospel repentance involves deep humility (vs. pride)

Have you looked down on anyone? Have you been too stung by criticism? Have you felt snubbed or ignored? Repent by considering the free grace of Jesus until you sense (a) decreasing disdain, since you are a sinner too, and (b) decreasing pain over criticism, since you value God's love more than human approval. Reflect on God's grace until you experience a deep humility and a grateful, restful joy.

### Gospel repentance involves well-guided zeal (vs. anxiety)

Have you avoided people or tasks that you know you should face? Have you been anxious and worried? Have you failed to be circumspect, or have you been rash and impulsive? Repent by considering the free grace of Jesus until there is (a) no cowardly avoidance of hard things, since Jesus faced evil for you, and (b) no anxious or rash behavior, since Jesus' death proves that God cares and watches over you. Reflect on God's grace until you experience calm thoughtfulness and strategic boldness.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, "Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" (1517), Thesis 1. <sup>14</sup> George Whitefield, quoted in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*, 2 vol. (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 1:140.



### Gospel repentance involves burning love (vs. indifference)

Have you spoken or thought unkindly of anyone? Have you been impatient or irritable? Have you been self-absorbed, indifferent, or inattentive to people? Repent by considering the free grace of Jesus until there is (a) no coldness or unkindness, as you think of the sacrificial love of Christ for you, (b) no impatience, as you think of his patience with you, and (c) no indifference, as you think of how God is infinitely attentive to you. Reflect on God's grace until you show warmth and affection.

### Gospel repentance involves a “single eye” (i.e., godly motives)

Are you doing what you do for God's glory and the good of others, or are you being driven by your need for approval, love of comfort, need for control, hunger for acclaim and power, or the fear of other people? Repent by considering how the free grace of Jesus provides you with what you are looking for in these other things. Reflect on God's grace until he becomes your joy and delight.

**[ *Use the above as a basis for reflection and prayer.* ]**

### Additional Reading

See [gospelinlife.com](http://gospelinlife.com) for recommended resources to help you further explore this topic.