

Rightly Proclaiming the
Gospel
and
Rightly Dividing the
Laws

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Rightly Proclaiming the Gospel

Scripture's use of Gospel

The New Testament Scriptures summarily use the term “gospel” (“good news”) to refer to the preaching of **the kingdom of God** in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are many passages that explicitly describe the term “gospel” in this way. For example:

- ✦ “Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel of the kingdom**, and healing every kind of disease . . . among the people.” (Matt. 4:23)
- ✦ “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the **gospel of the kingdom of God** has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.” (Luke 16:16)
- ✦ “But when they believed Philip preaching the **good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were being baptized, men and women alike.” (Acts 8:15)

Sometimes the gospel is described as a gospel of peace or the gospel of God's grace, particularly in Acts. Acts uses the broadest vocabulary for describing the gospel, and these expressions add depth to the import of good news rather than restrict or pluralize its definition. For example, Acts 20:24-25 reads,

- ✦ “But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of

the **gospel of the grace of God**. And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about **preaching the kingdom**, will no longer see my face.”

In this example, when considering similar language used both within Acts and throughout the New Testament, the “gospel of the grace of God” and “preaching the kingdom” clearly refer to the same message.

The gospel in the Scriptures never refers to the forgiveness of sins we have through Christ’s propitiatory sacrifice on the cross in a way that distinguishes it from this context of the good news of the kingdom of God.¹

Overall, in the New Testament the “gospel” is described variously as good news:

- Of the name/person of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:15, Phil. 1:12-17)
- Of the fulfillment of God’s promise to the Jewish fathers (Acts 13:32)
- Of the grace of God (Acts 20:24)
- Of salvation (Rom. 1:16, Eph. 1:13)
- Of peace (Acts 10:36, Eph. 2:17)
- That the law is not for the righteous but for the rebellious (1 Tim. 1:8-11)
- Of judgment through Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16, Rev. 14:6-7)

¹ Does the term “gospel” in the New Testament ever refer to something other than the kingdom of God? The word “evangelize” (a single Greek word often translated as “to preach the gospel”) sometimes means simply “to tell good news”, and not to specifically preach *the* good news of God’s kingdom. 1 Thes. 3:6 is the main example of this. (“Timothy has come to us from you and has ‘brought us good news’ [evangelized us] of your faith and love...”) Other instances of “evangelize” in the New Testament largely refer to the same good news as the normal noun “gospel” described above.

- Of our hope laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5)

And these all follow as different aspects of preaching the kingdom of God, which is the fulfillment of the Messianic promise given throughout the Old Testament Scriptures: That the Davidic King will crush the serpent's head and restore peace between God and man and whose kingdom shall have no end:

- *Gospel of salvation / grace*: Membership in God's kingdom and peace with God is made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection as our incarnate Lord. By this He purchases (redeems) us. He pays our debt that we cannot repay. (Thus His death on the cross is the center of the good news for us.)
- *Gospel of peace*: Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, who restores our union with God that was severed by Adam and Eve in humanity's fall into sin. Christ as our King and Head means peace for all who are in Him: peace with God and with fellow members of the kingdom. (See Eph. 2 ff.)
- *Gospel that the law is not for the righteous but for the rebellious*: Our membership with Christ in His kingdom means we are freed from slavery to the demands of the letter of the law and free to live maturely in accord with the Father's will. (See 2 Cor. 3:5-6, and the ensuing sections here.)
- *Gospel of judgment through Jesus*: God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus, the true King, who destroys the works of the devil. He does this both by freeing us from bondage to sin and the letter of the law and by countering the corruption brought into the world by the devil and ultimately by destroying him and his servants on the final day of judgment. (See John 16:11, 1 John 3:4-10.)
- *Gospel of hope*: All of this means we have an inheritance of God's eternal dwelling and kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth, where the devil and his works are

completely removed. This hope is what makes the good news truly good for us.

A concise union of these various aspects of the good news is found in Zechariah's prophecy of the Christ:

- ✦ “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, O prisoners who have the hope; this very day I am declaring that I will restore double to you. For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. and I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; and I will make you like a warrior's sword. Then the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow the trumpet, and will march in the storm winds of the south. The LORD of hosts will defend them. And they will devour and trample on the sling stones; and they will drink and be boisterous as with wine; and they will be filled like a sacrificial basin, drenched like the corners of the altar. And the LORD their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they are as the stones of a crown, sparkling in His land. For what comeliness and beauty will be theirs! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.” (Zech. 9:9-17)

The Gospel Story

Thus, the gospel is the story of two kingdoms:

- **The Domain of Darkness:** The domain of the devil and all those who follow him in rebellion. All members of this domain will burn eternally under God's judgment.
- **The Kingdom of Heaven:** The kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord, who has redeemed us, that is, paid our debts and purchased us to be His own. All members of His kingdom are fellow heirs of God's eternal goodness and life with Christ.

As it is written:

- ✚ “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:13-14)
- ✚ “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ . . .” (Rom. 8:16-17)
- ✚ “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” (Phil. 3:20-21)

Jesus' most common titles reflect the emphasis on His kingship, particularly, “Christ”, “Lord”, “Son of Man”, “Son of David”, “King of the Jews.”² The title “Son of David” clearly refers to His inheritance of the throne of David, which God promised would have no end. (1

² “Lamb of God” is an important title that does not inherently connote kingship, at least not by the world's idea of kingship.

Chron. 17:11-14) “Christ/Messiah/Anointed One” is a reference to this same promise. “Son of Man” refers to Daniel’s prophecies of the king from God who would supplant the world’s kings, whose kingdom would have no end. (Dan. 7) It also ties back to the first Messianic promise made to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head.

We preach Christ crucified. We bow to the Lamb who was slain. But the good news is not good news if we stop at Christ’s death. The good news is that the kingdom of the prince of this world is and will be overthrown and that the members of our King’s kingdom will have everlasting life in the kingdom that has no end. The good news is that we have been transferred out of darkness (and our corresponding debts) and into that kingdom of marvelous, blameless light.

- ✦ “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God;” (Job 19:25-26)
- ✦ “O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” (Ps. 130:7-8)

Thus, the preaching of Christ Himself is, “Repent and believe the gospel!” (Mark 1:15) For the king is coming with His winnowing fork in His hand. We are called to repent so that we may be part of His kingdom and not part of the rebels whom He will burn with unquenchable fire. Peter concludes his Pentecost sermon with the same call:

- ✦ “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as

the Lord our God will call to Himself.’ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation!’” (Acts 2:38-40)

Faith in the Gospel³

If the gospel is news of the kingdom, what does it mean to “believe” the gospel or have “faith” in the gospel? (The Greek word translated as “believe” is simply the verb form of the noun translated as “faith”: [*pistis*](#).)

Biblical “faith” today is incorrectly understood by most English speakers. The English word used to mean something different from how we use it today. The old translations of the Bible into English used the word “faith” according to the old sense. Modern translations continue to use the word “faith”, but the meaning of “faith” in English has shifted over the centuries while the translations have not. Today, English “faith” refers either to simply trust (such as “I have faith that Jesus will take care of me”) or to a religion (such as “the Christian faith” or “the Muslim faith”). Similarly, the word “belief” is now understood simply as an opinion held subjectively to be true in the mind, often without certainty (such as “I believe it might rain today,” and “Well that’s your belief.”). But originally, “faith” in English meant fealty and commitment and “good faith” in addition to trust. Or, as the 2nd edition of the Oxford English Dictionary describes it, “loyalty to a person to whom one is bound by promise or duty”⁴. (The same entry notes that the old sense of “belief” is very similar.) It is a

³ The material in this section is derived from *Faith Misused*, by Alvin J. Schmidt (Concordia Publishing House, 2022).

⁴ “belief, n.,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 782.

word of fealty, fidelity, and faithfulness⁵. This former English sense of “faith” aligns with the meaning of the Greek *pistis* used in the Scriptures.

What of the Biblical Greek word? The Septuagint uses the term *pistis* to translate the Hebrew word for faithfulness/steadiness/office. For example:

- ✦ “[Moses’] hands were steady [faithful] until the going down of the sun,” (Ex. 17:12)
- ✦ “For these Levites ... were in their set office [in their faith] and were over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God.” (1 Chron 9:26)
- ✦ “And the men did the work faithfully.” (2 Chron. 34:12)

The New Testament describes “faith” with multiple pictures. Hebrews describes it in terms of unwavering confidence (Heb. 10:35-11:2). Elsewhere it is exemplified especially in the trust and obedience of Abraham (Rom. 4:1-22, Gal. 3:5-9, Heb. 11:8-10, 17-19, James 2:21-23). Jesus especially praises the examples of the centurion’s confession of Jesus’ power over creation (Matt. 8:8-10) and the Canaanite woman’s trust with submission (Matt. 15:22-28). Jesus contrasts faith with both doubt in the sense of critiquing (Matt. 21:21) and doubt in the sense of inconsistent stances (Matt. 14:31)⁶. Paul describes faith as coming from

⁵ “Faith”, “fealty”, and “fidelity” in English all originate from *fides*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *pistis*.

⁶ One Greek word for “doubt” is *diakrino* (lit. “over-judge”), which is the word for “discriminate” or “dispute”, such that when a hearer doubts the speaker, his heart is pitting some authority over and against the authority of the word that is heard rather than receiving it submissively. For example, “Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed [doubted] with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 8-9) See uses in Matt. 21:21 and James 1:6. Another Greek word for “doubt” is *distazo* (lit. “two-

hearing (Rom. 10:16-17, Gal. 3:2). Overall, the picture of faith is of complete trust and inward submission to a spoken word, which flows from the heart to produce behavior consistent with that submission. Faith can be used to refer to belief in a specific statement (e.g. Heb. 11:6), but with respect to Christianity there is only “one faith” (Eph. 4:5).

Consistent with this picture, Aristotle uses the Greek word for “faiths” to mean “modes of persuasion, or rhetorical proof”⁷. This provides a helpful sense of how the same word can mean both “trust” and “fealty”. Note that a faith is not merely a persuasion but a mode of persuasion. “Faith” means fealty of the heart in the same sense as how a very young child’s default mode is to believe anything his or her parents say as absolute truth. When a man “believes *in*” the name of Jesus, it does not mean that he merely believes a statement about Jesus but rather that his “mode of persuasion” is in Jesus. That is, his heart is loyal to Jesus to be persuaded by His Word in all things, with confidence. It means that when Jesus speaks, he listens to Him, even in the face of any dissenting voices.

Faith that is pure thus also entails “good faith” or trustworthiness in the one who has faith. For a person cannot submit to an authority in their heart while knowingly refusing to act in a manner that is faithful to their authority, as James explains in James 2:14-23. But we do all stumble in many ways, as Peter did when walking on the water (Matt. 14:30-31), and as James also says in James 3:2.

stanced”, which indicates vacillation or mixed loyalties in one’s mind. See uses in Matt. 14:31 and Matt. 28:17.

⁷ *The Rhetoric of Aristotle with a Commentary*, Edward Meredith Cope and John Edwin Sandys, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1877) 196.

To have faith in Jesus Christ thus means to submit to Him as Lord and King. He is the Christ, the Son of God (Martha's confession of faith in John 11:27), the one with the highest authority over all things (Eph. 1:19-23). The Christian Faith is looking to the Son of Man lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness and saying, "That is the banner I follow. He has redeemed me, purchased, and won me. I am His." It is a term of servant/master loyalty, fidelity, trustworthiness, and trust, all bound into one. For us Christians, "*the faith*" is the fealty and persuasion of the Word that unites the hearts of all subjects of our King.

- ✦ "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-6)

The triad "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" are thus not three disconnected ideas but parallel expressions of the same idea: We have one Lord and King, to whom we are joined by baptism into His name. "For there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

The Gospel in a Nutshell

So the "gospel in a nutshell" is, as commonly stated:

- ✦ "God [loved the world in this way], that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

By faith in His name, we are brought out of the domain of darkness and made members of His kingdom, and we shall not perish but have eternal life. And this truly does reflect the fact that the fundamental confession of the faith expressed in the New

Testament is not “Jesus died for my sins,” but rather “Jesus is Lord”:

- ✦ “The righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: . . . ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (Rom. 10:6-13)⁸

In summary, the gospel includes Christ’s death and also His resurrection and also the coming of His kingdom among us since Pentecost and especially also the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ again on the Last Day, which will bring us to our inheritance with Him in the Father’s house that Christ is now preparing for us. We receive this life and salvation and kingdom through faith in Jesus the Anointed King, which means confident fealty of the heart to listen to Him as our Lord above all others.

⁸ See also John 20:28-21, Phil. 2:11, 1 Tim. 6:12-16, and Rev. 19:16.

Rightly Dividing the Laws

The Meaning of Law

The New Testament Scriptures use the term “law” in a broader way than is expected by modern English speakers. (This is why Pauline phrases such as “law of faith” tend to cause confusion, though “law of Moses” still makes sense.) Modern English “law” is typically constrained to specific, written legal requirements⁹. The New Testament Greek word for “law” (*nomos*) means “that which is parceled out / assigned”. It is used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew word (*torah*), which means “direction, instruction, or law”, which comes from the root word for “to shoot” (as in, “to shoot forth instruction”).

Clearly in the New Testament the word “law” is used at different times to refer to different objects, such as to the words God gave through Moses (e.g. “the law and prophets” in Matt. 7:12; also John 1:45), the assignment of responsible freedom (e.g. “the law of liberty” in James 2:12), the influence of the desires of the flesh (e.g. “the law of sin in my members” in Rom. 7:23), or to the entire collection of the Old Testament (e.g. the reference to the Psalms in John 10:34). Yet while these distinct objects are different from each other, the same term “law” is used for each. Specifically, each case represents **an assigned bond or instruction by which an authority leads its subjects**.

At first glance, the use of “Law” as a common shorthand for the books of Moses (the Pentateuch) or the Old Testament seems like a special case due to how specific the object is. However, even this represents another application of the broad definition given in bold above. To God’s people after Moses and before the Christ,

⁹ Though the English sense of “law” does not technically have to be so constrained.

the Pentateuch was *the* bond and instruction by which God led His people. So, for God's people, it was simply "*the* law". In a context where "the law" is, by default, the law of Moses, additional words are needed when one needs to refer to an assignment given by a different authority (the law of sin) or to the new way in which the same God leads after the advent of Jesus as the redeeming King (the law of Christ).

Three Laws

There is but one law that rebels against God's law:

- **The Law of Sin:** The bond of our selfish, sinful, rebellious nature, following the will of the devil. This law drives a person to pursue pleasure, pride, independence, and self-destruction.
 - This label is taken from Rom. 7:23: "but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members."
 - It is also referred to as the "**law of sin and death.**" (Rom. 8:2)
 - It is also referred to as the "**obligation to the flesh.**" (Rom. 8:12)

However, with respect to laws from God that are to rule His people, Christ's apostles make an overall distinction between two particular types of "law"¹⁰. Both reflect God's will and nature, but each presents a different assignment by which it leads mankind:

- ❖ **The Law of Ordinances:** The bond of God's demands and teachings for every behavior of body and mind. This law

¹⁰ The distinction that follows corresponds to definitions 2 and 3 of [Thayer's Greek Lexicon](#) for the Greek for law (*nomos*).

reflects God's will but also condemns a person to death for any single transgression.

- This label is taken from Eph. 2:15: "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . . by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances" (Eph. 2:13,15)
 - This law is also referred to as the "**decrees against us.**" (Col. 2:14)
 - It is often also referred to with "**law of Moses,**" as in 1 Cor. 9:9, "For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.'"
 - The Law of Ordinances condemned Adam and his descendants to death before Moses, but the Law of Moses subsumed and increased this same law. (Rom. 5:12-14,20)
- ❖ **The Law of the Spirit:** The bond of free responsibility under Christ in faith to Him to pursue His will of love by His Spirit as adopted sons and as stewards of His house. This law does not condemn a person for individual failures in perfectly executing love, but it does condemn anyone who abandons faith, that is, anyone who intentionally rebels, shirks their duty, or otherwise refuses to be ruled by the Spirit.
- This label is taken from Rom. 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death," in combination with the passages that command those in Christ to be ruled by the Spirit (such as Gal. 5:16-25).
 - This Law is also referred to as the "**law of Christ**", as in Gal. 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

- It is also referred to as the “**law of my mind**”, as in Rom. 7:23, “but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind”
- It is also referred to as the “**law of liberty**”, as in James 2:12: “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.” (See also 2 Cor. 3:17.)
- It is also referred to as the “**law of faith**”, as in Rom. 3:27: “By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.”
- The Law of the Spirit is often not explicitly called a law when the term “law” is reserved to refer to the Law of Ordinances. Nevertheless, the rule of the Spirit is still called a law as noted above.

This is not a distinction of different uses of the same law, but rather it is a distinction of different laws¹¹. Both the **Law of Ordinances** and the **Law of the Spirit** reflect the nature of God in that God gave them both and He does not change (James 1:17). But Scripture is clear that they are different laws with respect to their bondage and judgments of man, and the freedoms they offer.

In brief: The **Law of Ordinances** rules from outside of its subjects, as a tutor over children who do not understand the spirit of the law (Gal. 3:23-29), particularly those who are inwardly ruled by the **Law of Sin** (1 Tim. 1:9). But for those who are made alive in Christ, the **Law of the Spirit** replaces both the **Law of Sin** in inward rule (Rom. 7:4-6, Rom. 8:2-4, Col. 3:5-8) and the **Law of**

¹¹ This section will use the red/orange/blue color scheme to distinguish portions of text that relate to these different laws.

Ordinances in outward rule (Col. 2:14, 2 Cor. 3, James 2:12, Matt. 24:45-51).¹²

As it is written:

- ✦ “But before faith came, we were kept in custody **under the law**, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore **the Law** has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by **faith**. But now that **faith** has come, we are no longer under a **tutor**.” (Gal. 3:23-25)
- ✦ “After saying above, ‘**Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin** You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them’ (which are offered according to **the Law**), then He said, ‘Behold, **I have come to do Your will**.’ He takes away **the first** in order to establish **the second**.” (Heb. 10:8-9)
- ✦ “But we know that the **Law** is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that **law** is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are **lawless and rebellious . . .**” (1 Tim. 1:8-9)
- ✦ “But if **the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones**, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the **ministry of the Spirit** fail to be even more with glory? . . . But to this day whenever **Moses** is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the

¹² One might argue that the Law of the Spirit could be further divided into two laws, the external command from Christ to love one another and the inward rule of the Spirit. However, it is important to note that these are not divided bonds or wills, just as the will of the Son is not different from that of the Father, and by the Spirit we are to be one with Him as the Son is with the Father (John 14:16-24, 17:11). Thus, this law is a “law of liberty” (James 2:12), not of external compulsion.

Lord is the Spirit, and **where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty**. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:7-8,15-18)

Paul explains in greater detail in Romans that we are born under the authority of the **Law of Ordinances**, that we are guilty of death by that law of God because we all instead obey the **Law of Sin** in our flesh as slaves to sin, but that through baptism into Christ we die to the authority of the **Law of Ordinances** and to **slavery to sin** so that we might instead be **slaves of righteousness in fealty to Christ** our Lord:

- ✦ “Now we know that whatever **the Law** says, it speaks to those who are under **the Law**, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because **by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight**; for through **the Law** comes the knowledge of **sin**. But now apart from **the Law** the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by **the Law** and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who **believe**; for there is no distinction; for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. . . so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. . . . 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**. Do we then nullify the Law through **faith**? May it never be! On the contrary, **we establish the Law**.” (Rom. 3:19-24,26,27-28,31)

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism

into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so **we too might walk in newness of life**. . . . Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either **of sin resulting in death**, or **of obedience resulting in righteousness**? But thanks be to God that though **you were slaves of sin**, you became obedient from the heart to **that form of teaching** to which you were committed, and having been freed from **sin**, **you became slaves of righteousness**.” (Rom. 6:3-4,16-18)

“But now having been freed from **sin** and **enslaved to God**, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of **sin** is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made **to die to the Law** through the body of Christ, so that you might be **joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God**. For while we were in the flesh, the **sinful passions**, which were aroused by the **Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the **Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve **in newness of the Spirit** and not **in oldness of the letter**.” (Rom. 6:22-7:6)

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” (Rom. 8:2)

The transfer from slavery under the Law of Sin and the Law of Ordinances to be free under the Law of the Spirit in Christ directly corresponds with the gospel transfer of a person from slavery under the Domain of Darkness to citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Salvation Apart from Works

Paul in Rom. 3, quoted above, makes it clear that we are saved apart from works of the law. He states further:

- ✦ “‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’” (Rom. 4:4-8)
- ✦ “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Gal. 3:21-22)
- ✦ “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees

against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” (Col. 2:13-14)

What does it mean to be saved? It is to be delivered from the death sentence that we earn by breaking the **Law of Ordinances** and to be reborn to eternal life in the Kingdom of Christ and God as fellow heirs with Christ. This is the gospel, the message of transfer between the two kingdoms, as described earlier.

How could such salvation ever be earned by works of any law, whether of **Ordinances** or of the **Spirit**? We know that earthly laws do not grant freedoms; they only create constraints for the sake of order and they establish punishments for people who transgress that order. If a man earns a \$1000 penalty for failing to pay earthly taxes, he cannot make that penalty go away simply by continuing thereafter to pay his taxes properly like a good citizen. Paying his taxes might keep him from building up an even bigger fine, but it will not pay the penalty he already owes. He does not earn anything by paying his taxes properly. And even should he pay his penalty, he then still remains under the authority of the same law of taxation, and he must be wary to keep paying his taxes in the future. Yet for some reason our human nature wants to believe that by being a good citizen under God we can somehow make our debts to Him go away. We cannot pay our debts to God, for “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23)

So we must be saved only by grace as a gift, as it is written:

- ✚ “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so **that we would walk in them**. . . . For He Himself is our peace, who made both [Gentiles and Israel] into one 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**, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace.” (Eph. 2:8-10,14-15)

- ✦ “. . . so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the **Law**, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:8-11)
- ✦ “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. . . .” (Matt. 18:23-27)

In the same way, after God transfers us freely into His kingdom through faith in Christ, why should we think that any amount of our works can do anything to then earn that transfer? The transfer is already made. We walk in love according to the **Law of the Spirit** because of this transfer, not to earn it. This is exemplified by Paul’s use of “therefore” in Col. 3 (following the passage from Col. 2 quoted earlier):

- ✦ ”Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on **the things above**, not

on **the things that are on earth**. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed**, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of **disobedience**, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, **put them all aside**” (Col. 3:1-8)

Once the transfer is made, we pursue works of love because we are sons of God in **Spirit and truth**. We do not perform these works out of obligation to any **Law of Ordinances**. We “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the **law**.” (Rom. 13:8) We are free as sons of God.

- ✦ “From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?’ When Peter said, ‘From strangers,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Then the sons are exempt.’” (Matt. 17:25-26)

Rewards in the Kingdom

We do not merit the **Kingdom of Heaven** for our works. But doing well with the liberty given to us as members of the Kingdom is rewarded. This reward is not the gift of our salvation; it is a reward within the gifted Kingdom:

- ✦ “. . . each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss;

but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” (1 Cor. 3:13-15)

- ✦ “The first appeared, saying, ‘Master, your mina has made ten minas more.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.’ The second came, saying, ‘Your mina, master, has made five minas.’ And he said to him also, ‘And you are to be over five cities.’” (Luke 19:16-19) (See also Matt. 25:20-23,28-29.)
- ✦ “. . . at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Dan. 12:1-3)¹³

Two Paths of Judgment

To reject the assignment from God is to break one’s bond with God—to be severed from God. There are two ways by which a person can be condemned and left outside the Christ’s inheritance:

1. Remaining under the **Domain of Darkness**. This judgment is for those who refuse the call of Jesus Christ or who never hear it. These remain in slavery and condemnation under the **Law of Ordinances**.
2. After being called into the **Kingdom of Heaven**, refusing to be ruled by the **Law of the Spirit**. This judgment is for those

¹³ See also [Against Heresies 5.36.1-2](#) for Irenaeus’ account of what he says the disciples of the apostles passed along to him regarding the different honors given in the resurrection.

who have been baptized into the name of Christ Jesus but then willfully obey the **Law of Sin** despite a knowledge of the truth of God's will. These rebel against God in intentional, unrepentant sin, whether by willful sins of commission or by willfully shirking duty with sins of omission.

Paul in 1 Corinthians notes the chief illustration of this reality that God gave us through Israel's history: they were redeemed from the slavery of Egypt; they were, by grace, made heirs of the promised land through baptism into a kingdom of God's people in communion with Christ; and yet many still died for their rebellion, not reaching that promised land:

- ❖ “Our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not **crave evil things** as they also craved. . . . Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.” (1 Cor 10:1-6,12)

That is, there was judgment both for the people of Egypt and also for the people God called out of Egypt but who rebelled in the wilderness.

Other passages say the same thing more explicitly:

- ✦ “For if we go on **sinning willfully** after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone

who has set aside the **Law of Moses** dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:26-29)

- ✦ "For this you know with certainty, that no **immoral or impure person or covetous man**, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly **darkness**, but now you are **Light in the Lord**; **walk as children of Light**" (Eph. 5:5-8)
- ✦ ". . . But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matt. 18:28-35)

Christ our Lord likewise addresses the parable of servants waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast to people inside

the church. The master will reward the faithful steward, but will come to the wicked servant and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers:

- ❖ “Be dressed in readiness, and **keep your lamps lit**. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. . . . You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect.’ Peter said, ‘Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?’ And the Lord said, ‘Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds **so doing** when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, ‘My master will be a long time in coming,’ and begins to **beat the slaves**, both men and women, **and to eat and drink and get drunk**; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master’s will and **did not get ready or act in accord with his will**, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.” (Luke 12:35-37,40-48)

Christ's parables of the talents and minas together also illustrate this same image of both judgments in one picture. The parable of the minas (Luke 19:12-27) includes an emphasis on the judgment of the enemies of the kingdom, while the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) emphasizes the judgment of the wicked servant. The parable of the wedding banquet (Matt 22:1-14) also especially illustrates the two paths of judgment: Those who refuse the call to the feast are destroyed and burned. Those who refuse the master's garments after following the call are cast into the outer darkness¹⁴.

Both paths of judgment are the fruit of obeying the **Law of Sin**.

So while we cannot earn our transfer into the Kingdom of Heaven, we do earn any judgment that casts us out of it. We are dependent on receiving life from Christ the Vine, and when severed we must be reattached by His grace and Spirit alone. Severed rebels have no authority to command God's Spirit into their hearts. But those who are alive are capable of choosing to cut themselves off from that Vine and His Spirit.¹⁵

Two Obediences

Paul writes:

- ✦ “. . . you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of **sin** resulting in death, or of **obedience** resulting in righteousness” (Rom. 6:16)

¹⁴ C.f. Rev. 19:8: “It was given to her [the bride] to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” See also Zech. 3:1-7.

¹⁵ So also with earthly life. We cannot choose to be conceived, but we can choose to kill ourselves.

He then distinguishes between the obedience of the flesh and the obedience of the mind:

- ✦ “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. . . . For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the law, confessing that the law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.” (Rom. 7:6,14-25)

Paul thus makes the distinction between the service carried out by the flesh and by the mind. Our flesh is and will always be a slave of sinful passions until Christ returns and resurrects us. Then we will be changed to have perfected, heavenly bodies, for our “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” (See 1 Cor. 15:42-57.)

Unlike in modern English, the Greek word for “obey” (*hupakouó*—literally “under-hear”) is a word closer in meaning to faith than to outward works. It is the act of listening submissively in the mind so that the mind produces works as a fruit. That is, the mind believes the word and therefore acts consistently with that word.¹⁶

You are slaves of the one you obey. Thus, there are two options for obedience by your mind:

1. Submit to and serve the **Law of Sin** and death from your flesh,
2. Submit to and serve the **Law of the Spirit** of Christ our Lord.¹⁷

It must be emphasized that this is not “Law” in the sense of external obligation. It is a question of whom one serves in the “obedience of faith” in one’s heart and mind (Rom. 1:5). You cannot serve two masters.

Our flesh serves the **Law of Sin**, and we cannot change that. But obedience to Christ with our minds means that we do wrestle against the desires of the flesh and do not let them rule over us.

- ✦ “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey **its lusts**.” (Rom. 6:12)
- ✦ “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is **for you**, but **you must master it**.’” (Gen. 4:6-7)

¹⁶ Hebrew does not even have a distinct word for “obey”. Its corresponding word (*shama*) is simply the word for “hear”.

¹⁷ Compare with early church writings on the “Two Ways” such as in the *Didache* (1st century A.D.)

So there remains condemnation for those who willfully obey the **Law of Sin**—who do not submit to the “**Law of God** in the inner man.” (Rom. 7:21) But there is no condemnation for those in Jesus, as Paul continues:

- ✦ “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the **law of the Spirit of life** in Christ Jesus has set you free from the **law of sin and of death**. For what the **Law** could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the **Law** might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the **flesh** but according to the **Spirit**. For those who are according to the **flesh** set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the **Spirit**, the things of the Spirit. For the **mind set on the flesh** is death, but the **mind set on the Spirit** is life and peace, because the **mind set on the flesh** is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the **flesh** cannot please God. However, you are not in the **flesh** but in the **Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the **body is dead because of sin**, yet the **spirit is alive because of righteousness**. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom. 8:1-11)

It must be emphasized that the **Law of the Spirit** does not condemn us to death for individual transgressions or failures in our conduct as we war to rule over the desires of our flesh. Jesus

Christ has paid our debts fully once for all time and He still intercedes for us, knowing our weaknesses:

- ✦ “The **former priests**, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb. 7:23-25)
 “. . . the **high priest** enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. . . . how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? . . . For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Heb. 9:7,14,24)
- ✦ “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1)
- ✦ “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:31-35)

If you choose to reject the headship of Christ and to obey sin even while having a full knowledge of the truth of what you do and that by doing so you oppose God’s will, then you obey the **Law of Sin**

in your mind and rebel against the [Law of the Spirit](#). But if you can say to yourself, with Paul, that the sin you do is what you do not want, then with him you can also say that it is not you who does it but the sin dwelling in your flesh. Take heart; you have an Advocate with the Father. He will deliver you from this body of death. Come, Lord Jesus!

Law and Gospel Confidence

Can a Christian on their deathbed, if asked, “Will you be raised to life everlasting and not to eternal death?” answer with a confident, “Absolutely!” and not with an uncertain, “I hope so”? And if so, what is the source of such confidence? Obviously, as noted in the previous sections, God will condemn the hard-hearted who claim to follow Him but still rebel against Him, such as the Pharisees or the apostate portions of Old Testament Israel, even though they may claim confidence in God’s salvation. But what about the genuine Christians? Can they have true confidence during this life that they will receive eternal life in the resurrection?

Scriptural Examples

Do Christ and His followers speak of the resurrection as a matter of uncertainty? Christ and Martha speak as follows:

- ✦ “Martha then said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.’” (John 11:21-27)

Do the faithful of the Old Testament church speak of the resurrection with uncertainty, even while being under the Law of Ordinances? Their example matters, for Christ did not abolish the Old Testament, but He fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17). Did they place their

confidence in the sacrifices and works God instituted in the Law, or in their gifted status as adopted children of God's covenant, received through the obedience of faith?

- ✦ “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another.” (*Job*, Job 19:25-27)
- ✦ “If there is an angel as mediator for him, one out of a thousand, to remind a man what is right for him, then let him be gracious to him, and say, ‘Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom’; let his flesh become fresher than in youth, let him return to the days of his youthful vigor; then he will pray to God, and He will accept him, that he may see His face with joy, and He may restore His righteousness to man. He will sing to men and say, ‘I have sinned and perverted what is right, and it is not proper for me. ‘He has redeemed my soul from going to the pit, and my life shall see the light.’” (*Elihu*, Job 33:23-28)
- ✦ “Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying [hearing] the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” (*Samuel*, 1 Sam. 15:22)
- ✦ “I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. . . . So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ . . . While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD.” (*Jonah from the belly of the fish*, Jonah 2:2,4,7-9)

- Note that sacrifices follow deliverance. They do not contribute to causing it.
- ✦ “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! . . . I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. . . . Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.” (*David*, Ps. 32:1-2,5,10-11)
- ✦ “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.
 “O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise. For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
 “By Your favor do good to Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, in burnt offering and whole burnt offering; then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.” (*David*, Ps. 51:14-19)
- ✦ “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope. . . . O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” (*A Song of Ascents*, Ps. 130:3-5,7-8)

Covenant Confidence

Old Testament Israel's trust in God was not based on the merits of Israel but on the LORD's covenant with Abraham and his offspring. Paul references this covenant trust when he argues against trust in descent according to the flesh:

- ✦ “I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. . . . But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: ‘through Isaac your descendants will be named.’ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.” (Rom. 9:3,6-8)

The author of Hebrews argues that confidence in our promised inheritance as God's children is our motivation now to endure any present hardships that would tempt us back into rebellion. He argues this precisely by pointing to the example of God's faithful people in Old Testament times, who lived by this confidence:

- ✦ “Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, he who is coming will come, and will not delay. ‘But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. . . . Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval. . . . And without faith it is impossible to

please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance. .

. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. . . .

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. . . .

By faith Moses. . . left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. . . .

And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 10:29-12:2, condensed)

See that we are called to lay aside sin out of faith and faithfulness to Christ, our Lord, with the same expectation that Christ Himself had while enduring the cross. Christ knew with confidence that God would raise Him from the dead, as He often stated (e.g. Matt. 16:21). If we did not share that confidence, then we cannot run the race with the same assurance of joy set before us.

Christian Hope

If a Christian cannot know for certain that he is saved, how are we to share our hope to the unbelieving world, as Peter says?

- ✦ ““And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,’ but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you. . .” (1 Pet. 3:14-15)

Hope (Greek: elpis) does not mean a wish, as when in English one says, “I hope it doesn’t rain tomorrow.” This Greek word for Christian hope means confident expectation.

If we cannot say with confidence on our deathbed, “I know that where Christ is, there I will be also,” then, by definition, we have no hope.

But Peter says:

- ✦ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials. . .” (1 Pet. 1:3-6)

And Paul says:

- ✦ “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into

the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." (Rom. 8:20-25)

And again Peter says:

- ✦ "[God] raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." (1 Pet. 1:21)

If a Christian on his deathbed were to doubt his inheritance because of his past sins or because he doubts that he has done enough to be worthy of that inheritance, then his trust is not in God but in himself. Yet Peter exhorts the church to fix our hope completely on God's grace at the same time as we strive to live in the holiness that God demands, not as a result of that striving:

- ✦ "Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Pet. 1:13-16)

The Test of Faith

If a Christian can say, with Paul, that Jesus is his Lord (according to the law of his mind) and believes with him with this same confidence that God raised Jesus up from the dead, he too will be saved and similarly raised with Him.

- ✦ “. . . the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.’ . . . For ‘Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (Rom. 10:8-11,13)
- ✦ “. . . no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:3)

Just as Paul says that “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved,” there are then two ways that a person can legitimately doubt that they will be saved:

1. They do not confess Jesus as their Lord (they wilfully obey the Law of Sin with their mind and spirit),
2. They do not believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead (and thus that God raises those who are joined to Him).

Regarding the first, it is obvious when one does not truly submit to Jesus as Lord, for even if they claim on the surface to follow Him, such a person openly chooses to reject His Word once they

acknowledge that it says something they disagree with¹⁸. Of such lawless people it is written:

- ✦ “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matt. 7:18-23)

Both Jesus’ and Paul’s statements stand together. The heart of true faith and fealty pursues faithfulness in word and deed, even while it fights against the Law of Sin in the flesh. Those who only say the words, “Lord, Lord” but do not submit to Christ as their Lord in spirit and practice are hypocrites, and they will be assigned a place with the hypocrites (see Matt. 24:48-51). As John writes:

- ✦ “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. This is His commandment, that we believe in the

¹⁸ Though when people disagree about what God’s Word says, such people can disagree out of zeal for following God.

name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.” (1 John 3:18-23)

Similarly, regarding the second, those who openly reject that God raised Jesus and will raise His church from the dead are the obvious enemies of God who deny His power. (These are typically those who outwardly identify as belonging to other religions or to atheism.)

But what of those who today claim love for God but act in service to the lusts of their flesh, not out of overt rebellion, but out of ignorance to what God’s Way is? They are like sheep without a shepherd. Out of love for serving your Lord and out of love for them, that they may not earn punishment in their ignorance (see Luke 12:47-48), you go and show them what God demands from His Word. Those who have faith in Jesus as their Lord will conform their willful behavior to His Word when they are shown their error from His Word. Only after a person is confronted with their sin in private, and before witnesses, and before the church, and still willfully rejects Christ’s authority, should we treat that person as someone who is outside of Christ’s body and outside of His certain hope of resurrection (see Matt. 18:15-20).

In this way, you can know a person’s allegiance and faith, and thus his relation to God, by his fruits. Fruits do not save the man. Rather, union with Christ through faith under Him saves the man, because Christ transfers him from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God. This faith must then war against the Law of Sin in his members to pursue fruits in imitation of and obedience to Christ, his Lord.

But if any man looks to his own fruits not as a measure of whether he is faithfully listening to his Lord but as a measure of whether he has merited enough through his fruits to earn life from God, he poisons faith and returns to a Law of Ordinances. He must then doubt his future just as Peter did while walking on the waves, for

he will never be able to meet God's standard of perfection in his works. Truly, our whole lives in this flesh are a continual confrontation with the lusts of our flesh and of the world. That is why the apostles urge the church to endurance.

As the author of Hebrews wrote, faith is assurance, as with what Paul says regarding our free confidence in the foods we eat:

- ✦ “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.” (Rom. 14:22-23)

If any man rejects that he can know for certain that God will save him, given that he does confess Jesus as his Lord and does believe that God raised Him from the dead, this is not humility. This is rejecting the authority and power of God's Word.

The good news is that God's Anointed, Jesus our King, has come, has died to pay our debts, and has been raised to eternal life to bring into His eternal kingdom with Him all those who are united to Him through faith, and has defeated the prince of this world, and will on the last day cast out all evil. He has freed us from the penalties of God's ordinances so that in this faith and grace in which we stand we may freely and confidently bear fruit for Him in love.

- ✦ “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3:4-6)

This confidence, faith with hope with love, is the object and goal of the proclamation of the gospel and the dividing of the laws.

- ✦ “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 15:13)