

Prevailing Misconceptions Examined in Light of Scripture

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Misconception #1: You cannot claim that God has worked in your soul unless you know of a clear beginning. Only when the beginning is right, will the rest of your experience be right. Thus, anyone who cannot speak of a clear beginning is self-deceived.

Biblical Truth: It is beyond dispute that salvation is always the result of God's initiative and never of man's initiative. God declares in Isaiah 65:1 that He is found of them that sought Him not, and true believers will therefore give all the glory to God for their salvation.

However, the exact moment when God regenerates a sinner is a moment known to Him alone—as is true for the moment of our conception in our mother's womb. No one would therefore posit that one cannot know that he is a human being unless he knows the exact moment when he was conceived. The reality of that conception will be affirmed by the life that begins to develop as a result of that conception.

Likewise, the secret work of regeneration will become visible by the spiritual life that grows and develops as a result of the new birth. The biblical fruits of this new life, namely, repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21), will affirm that God has indeed begun a good work in our souls.

Yet, as true as it is that God is always the One who begins this good work, it is quite another thing to insist that one must have a clear knowledge of such a beginning in order for there to be any legitimacy to one's spiritual life.

If that were indeed a biblical requirement, several of the saints of Scripture would be disqualified. How would Jeremiah and John the Baptist be able to explain their beginning, having been regenerated in the womb? How would Timothy be able to explain his beginning, having feared God from his youth? How would the renowned Dutch divine, Wilhelms à Brakel, be able to speak of his beginning when he could not remember a day in his life when he did not love the Lord Jesus Christ?

Nowhere do we read in Scripture that one must know of a beginning in order to entertain any hope that one might be a child of God. Instead, Scripture consistently teaches that repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are the legitimate evidences of the saving work of the Holy Spirit. Any beginning that does not culminate in a coming to and believing in Christ is not the work of the Holy Spirit. Just because someone can tearfully and emotionally speak of his or her sins does not prove that God has begun a good work in that person. Only when such knowledge of sin leads to a believing embrace of the Lord Jesus Christ do we have biblical proof of the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

We therefore read in John 3:36 that "he that believeth in the Son hath life." How could it be stated any more plainly than that? No one can claim to have spiritual life unless that spiritual life revolves around believing in the Son. If that repeated taking refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ is missing, everything is missing—no matter what

dramatic beginning story one may be able to tell. In the Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus teaches that the poor in spirit mourn over their sin, and in meekness humble themselves before God, hunger and thirst after Him and His righteousness—and will not be able to be satisfied with anything less! They will not be able to find rest in their beginnings.

The Spirit of Christ draws sinners to Christ and will not give them peace until they, by faith, rest in Christ. That is the irrefutable evidence of His saving work in sinners. “Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, **cometh unto Me!**” (John 6:45). Instead of insisting that one must know of a beginning, Christ is saying all is well only if it ends well—experience that culminates in a coming to Him by faith.

Nowhere does Scripture teach that one must know of a beginning in order to be saved. Instead, it teaches unequivocally that one must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. To tell sinners otherwise is a grievous misrepresentation of Scripture!

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**Misconception #2:** You cannot claim to be a child of God unless a text of the Bible was applied to you with power. Without such an experience, you cannot claim to be converted.

**Biblical Truth:** This is another extra-biblical requirement that is nowhere to be found in Scripture. Nowhere does the Word of God declare that we must be able to speak of having received a special text in order to claim our conversion to be genuine. Who would be able to judge whether a text was applied to you with power? Who would be able to accurately analyze and evaluate your emotional condition and chemistry at the time when such a text was allegedly received?

This is not to suggest, however, that there cannot be special and unforgettable moments in the life of a believer. However, such experiences can never be the resting ground for our souls. God’s normal way is to lead sinners to a saving knowledge of His Son through the regular reading of His Word and the faithful preaching of His Word.

This is so simply stated in Acts 13:12: “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, **believed**, being astonished at the **doctrine** of the Lord.”

What a simple, straightforward account of the deputy’s conversion! He believed the doctrine of the Lord (= the gospel as preached by Paul), and He was saved. That is the hallmark of the saving work of the Holy Spirit. That matches the conversion account of Abraham, the father of all the faithful, of whom we simply read that “he **believed** God, and it was counted to him for righteousness” (Gal 3:6).

In Acts 14:1, we read that Paul and Barnabas “**so** spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks **believed.**” Verse 3 explains why this happened: “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, **which gave testimony unto the word of his grace** (the gospel which Paul and Barnabas **SO** preached).

Thus we do not read that they individually received a special text, could speak of a beginning, or gave a satisfactory account of the knowledge of their misery. Instead, they responded in faith to the word of God’s grace—no doubt because the Spirit of Christ used His inspired Word to show them their need of Christ in order to lead them to embrace Him by faith.

What a simple and biblical account of how the Lord leads His people! That’s why the psalmist of Psalm 119 never speaks of any special texts he had received. Instead,

throughout the Psalm he expresses in every conceivable way how much he loves and relishes the Word of God—in its totality. Thus he ends with this confession: “I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; **and thy law (= Thy Word) is my delight**. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; **and let thy judgments (plural!) help me**” Psa. 119:174-175.



**Misconception #3:** Since many are called, and only few are chosen, one lives with the slender hope that the day might dawn that one might possibly be one of the elect.

**Biblical Truth:** This text is often quoted out of context. **Calvin** gives the proper interpretation of Matthew 20:16. He writes,

“*So the first shall be last*. He does not now compare the Jews to the Gentiles, (as in another passage) nor the reprobate, who swerve from the faith, to the elect who persevere. Therefore the sentence which is introduced by some interpreters, *many are called, but few are chosen*, does not apply to that point. Christ only meant to say that everyone who has been called before others ought to run with so much the greater alacrity, and, next, to exhort all men to be modest, not to give themselves the preference above others, but willingly to share with them a common prize. As the apostles were the first-fruits of the whole church, they appeared to possess some superiority; and Christ did not deny that they would *sit as judges to govern the twelve tribes of Israel*. Yet that they should not be carried away by ambition or vain confidence in themselves, it was also necessary to remind them that others, who would long afterwards be called, would be partakers of the same glory because God is not limited to any person, for He calls freely whomsoever He pleases, and bestows on those who are called whatever rewards He thinks fit.

This text may, therefore not be misinterpreted to mean that among those to whom God’s Word is preached, there are but very few who are elect. To suggest otherwise is one of Satan’s devious deceptions whereby he seeks to dissuade men from seeking the Lord and responding to His Word.

When God’s Word speaks of election, it does so primarily to comfort believers. When Christ and the apostles preached the gospel to sinners, they never spoke of election—not even in Christ’s private conversation with Nicodemus (John 3).

Luke 13:23-24 records an instance for us when Jesus is approached by someone regarding election” Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?” In other words, “Are there but few who are chosen unto salvation?” Remarkably, He ignores the question, and answers, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Rather than dwelling on election, Jesus told this man plainly that his concern should be with God’s revealed will, namely, that he should strive to enter!



**Misconception #4:** Since man is spiritually dead, sinners cannot be exhorted to repent and believe the gospel, and to do so is to preach “free will.”

**Biblical Truth:** Men are indeed spiritually dead, but that does not mean that they have been reduced to non-responsive spiritual corpses. Fallen man is rebelliously dead and has a carnal mind that is utterly hostile to God and His Word (Rom. 8:7). However, God still treats man as a morally accountable creature. God’s Word is therefore filled with exhortations in which God commands man to respond to His Word. To suggest that calling sinners to repent and believe the gospel is “free will” would mean that God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles would be “free will.”

**Example #1:** “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek. 33:11). God is not saying to the wicked that they must wait until He turns them. Instead, He pleads with them, “Turn ye, turn ye...”

**Example #2:** “Now after John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). Here Christ Himself says to sinners, “Repent...and believe.” As His servants, ministers may not preach otherwise!

**Example #3:** “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles,” Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Then Peter said unto them,” Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37-38). Peter did **not** say, “There is nothing you can do. Wait until the Lord works in you.” Instead, he did as his Master instructed him and called sinners to repent and believe the gospel (by submitting to baptism).

**Example #4:** “Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:29-31). Again, Paul did **not** say, “You must wait till the Lord works in you and reveals Christ to you.” Without hesitation, he responded as his Master had taught him to respond. Had he given any other answer, he would have been guilty of spiritual malpractice!

Therefore he summarized his entire ministry to the elders of Ephesus, saying, “I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, **repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**” (Acts 20:20-21).

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Misconception #5: The most important thing is to know your sin and misery—to the point that conviction of sin is more important than knowing Christ. To speak of Christ is almost considered presumptuous. The deeper the experience of misery is, the more

likely the possibility will be that one is truly converted, and that one might thus escape hell and arrive in heaven.

Biblical Truth: It is important to know experientially how great our sins and miseries are, for without such knowledge, we will never see our need for precisely such a Savior as the Lord Jesus Christ is. However, this knowledge is only a means to an end. In discovering their sin and misery to sinners, the Holy Spirit has but one objective: to lead sinners to a believing embrace of the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation. His great work is as follows:

- 1) to lead us unto the truth as it is in Christ Jesus,
- 2) to glorify Him, and
- 3) to take out of Him and show it unto us (John 16:13-15).

How deep must the knowledge of our misery be? The Puritans would say, “Deep enough to see our need of Christ.” Thus the knowledge of our sin and misery does not qualify us for heaven. Rather, only they who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will have eternal life—a truth Jesus repeatedly emphasized during His ministry on earth. Any knowledge and conviction of sin that does not bring us to the feet of Christ and to a believing embrace of Him is not the result of the saving work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. For anyone to claim to be converted and yet not speak of Christ is presumptuous, and such a person is self-deceived.

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**Misconception #6:** One can be considered a child of God without having any knowledge of Christ. Being able to speak of your sins and misery will already qualify you as a converted person.

**Biblical Truth:** No one can claim to be a child of God unless he or she can testify of having taken refuge to Christ by faith. Coming to Christ and believing in Him is the very essence of Christian experience. All Christian experience revolves around the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ made this crystal clear in John 6:45—a text of crucial importance. Here He says, “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, **cometh unto me.**”

In other words, Christ is saying that when His Father teaches sinners by His Spirit, they will always come to Him—and they will keep on coming to Him (indicated by the Greek present tense). Consequently, no one can claim to be taught of God unless he or she has come to Christ and embraced Him by faith. The Father’s instruction will always lead sinners to His Son. Nothing pleases and honors the Father more than when needy sinners believe in His Son. When sinners believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, touching the hem of His garment, God is truly exalted to the highest. It stirs Him to the depth of His heart when sinners are well pleased with the Son with whom He is well pleased.

Bottom line: **There are no Christless conversions.** To give sinners hope merely because they are troubled about their sins is seriously misleading and will lead them to the self-deceiving conclusion that God might be at work in them.

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Misconception #7: One must passively wait to experience something, and people are consequently waiting their entire lives for something to happen to them.

Biblical Truth: Nowhere does Scripture teach that sinners must passively wait to experience something in order to be saved. Instead, Scripture teaches from Genesis to Revelation that sinners must **believe** something in order to be saved. Never does God give sinners the option to wait for Him to work in them. God knows better than we do that without the work of His Spirit, sinners will neither repent nor believe. Yet He swears by His own Name that He has no pleasure in the death of sinners **but that they would turn unto Him**. He pleads with sinners, “Turn ye, turn ye, for would you die?”

Christ summarizes this with unmistakable clarity when He says, “**Ask**, and it shall be given you; **seek**, and ye shall find; **knock**, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Mat. 7:7-8).

To piously excuse ourselves by saying, “It has to be given” when we are confronted with the exhortations and commands of Scripture is to be guilty of making the Word of God of none effect. This pious and wicked excuse allows people to keep God and His Word at a distance, failing to realize that the issue is not their inability, but rather, their unbelief. They fail to understand the seriousness of these Scripture passages:

“He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36);

“The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and **that obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:7-9);

“What shall the end be of them **that obey not the gospel** of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Pet. 4:17-18).

Sinners will not be damned because of their inability, but rather, because of their unbelief whereby they make God a liar by not believing the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:9-10). There will be many in hell who waited their entire lives for God to work in them, and who thought that by praying for a new heart, they were absolved from all responsibility.

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**Misconception #8:** The experience of salvation has been redefined as consisting of an elaborate system of successive experiential stations that one must arrive at, in the proper sequence, in order to have any claim to the knowledge of Christ. To speak of Christ before having passed these experiential stations is to be guilty of running ahead of the Lord. Your Jesus will then be a stolen Jesus.

**Biblical Truth:** Nowhere does Scripture teach that we must have a certain sequence of experiences in order to come to a true knowledge of Christ. Neither the prophets, Christ,

the apostles, nor our Puritan and Dutch forefathers taught such an experiential system. To claim that the life story of Jacob is the pattern of all Christian experience is to be guilty of imposing a pre-conceived experiential framework on Scripture in order to let Scripture say what we want it to say. Nowhere does Scripture remotely imply that in the lives of every believer there has to be a Bethel and Peniel experience. Neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Moses, nor David, nor Paul, nor Timothy had such experiential milestones. Jacob is therefore **not** called the father of all believers. His Bethel and Peniel experiences were uniquely related to the serious sins he had committed.

Instead, God's Word tells us that Abraham is the father of all believers (Gal. 3:7-9). His experience is identified as the pattern of all Spirit-wrought experience: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." That is the core component of true experience! I heard Rev. Lamain once say that you can write a true conversion on the back of a postage stamp. Abraham's experience fits on the back of a postage stamp!

Rather than waiting to arrive at certain experiential milestones (defined by men rather than Scripture!), God's Word encourages sinners to come to Christ, and believers are exhorted to make use of Christ by faith. Paul therefore unreservedly does so when he writes, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14). Likewise Peter wrote: "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

Therefore, to suggest that one can steal Jesus is decidedly unscriptural. Nowhere in Scripture are we warned not to steal Jesus! On the contrary! We are repeatedly encouraged to come to Him and to believe in Him. To claim that one can steal Jesus would imply that somehow we must earn the experiential right to speak of Jesus by having gone through a prescribed sequence of experiences. Such a notion is utterly foreign to the Word of God! Instead, Scripture exhorts us to believe in Jesus, and warns us what the dire consequences will be if we do not believe in Him (John 3:36).

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Misconception #9: Having an assured knowledge of your sins being forgiven and of God being your heavenly Father for Christ's sake is but a rare privilege for very few converted people.

Biblical Truth: Such a notion is the troubling result of imposing on Scripture a man-made experiential framework. In this framework or paradigm, only they who have advanced spiritually according to a prescribed sequence of experiences may legitimately declare that their sins are forgiven and that God is their heavenly Father. In this man-made system, there are but few who arrive at such an advanced stage of spiritual life. According to this system, the majority of God's children therefore lack the assurance of these foundational benefits of saving faith. They who claim to have an in-depth knowledge of all the stations of this spiritual trajectory will then be the judges to determine whether anyone has legitimately arrived at a given station of spiritual experience. They will harshly rebuke all whose experience does not match their approved experiential blueprint.

What a grievous misunderstanding of Scripture and a misrepresentation of the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit! Nowhere does Scripture even remotely imply that the

enjoyment of these rich benefits of salvation is but the privilege of very few. The proponents of this experiential system will often refer to 1 John 2:12-14 in support of their system. John writes the following:

- 12 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.
- 13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.
- 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

John indeed distinguishes between little children, young men, and fathers in grace. Thus he uses the sequence of natural growth as a pattern for spiritual growth. However, John does not in any way imply that spiritual growth is to be measured by where you have arrived along the trajectory of spiritual experiences. In what normal family would little children not have the same privileges as adult children?

What then is John saying? He writes that the little children of God's family are they who know 1) that their sins are forgiven, and 2) that God is their Father! This flatly contradicts what the proponents of this experiential system or blueprint are teaching. In their system, only very few arrive at this knowledge. However, God's Word teaches that these two benefits are the two most foundational benefits of the gospel! Peter, inspired by the Spirit, clearly affirms this truth, saying, "To him (i.e. Christ) give all the prophets (i.e. the entire Old Testament!) witness, that through his name **whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins**" (Acts 10:43).

Paul makes this unmistakably clear when he concludes his sermon in Antioch of Pisidia, saying, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you **the forgiveness of sins**: And by him **all that believe** are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38-39). Furthermore, he writes in Romans 8:14-15, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; **but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.**"

Paul is not remotely implying that this is the privilege of only a very few. Instead, he is plainly saying that the Spirit of adoption (= the Spirit of sonship) causes all God's children to cry, "Abba, Father." God is delighted and honored when His children address Him as their Father—just as an earthly father is delighted when his little one calls him "Daddy" for the first time. What earthly father would let his children be in doubt about their relationship to him for most of their lives? Why then would God allow only the most advanced of His children to call Him by that precious Name?

Why would a God who has loved His people with an everlasting love—who gave His Son to purchase their redemption, and who, by His Spirit, has made them a new creature in Christ—withhold from the majority of His children the assurance of that love and of the full pardon of their sins?

Paul addresses this clearly when he writes, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered

him up for us all, **how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?**” (Rom. 8:31-32).

Therefore, to maintain that having an assured knowledge of the forgiveness of sins and knowing that God is our Father for Christ’s sake is but the privilege and experience of very few is a grievous misrepresentation of God’s character, of His Son, and of the work of His Spirit.

The foundational truth that the simple exercise of faith yields the full and free pardon of sins is stated very succinctly by the Heidelberg Catechism when it speaks of opening the kingdom of heaven with the key of the gospel:

Question 84: How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

Answer: Thus: when according to the command of Christ, it is declared and publicly testified **to all and every believer**, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, **all their sins are really forgiven them** of God, for the sake of Christ's merits.

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**Misconception #10:** God gives His children only crumbs of grace—and then only every so often.

**Biblical Truth:** Again, there is no support at all for such an assertion about God. In fact, it is also a grievous misrepresentation of His character. It plainly contradicts the words I just quoted above, saying that God freely gives His children all things—not just a few crumbs. Let me give you a few passages that underscore this truth:

“They shall be **abundantly** satisfied with the **fatness** of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Psa. 36:8).

“For thou, Lord, art good, and **ready to forgive**; and **plenteous** in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psa. 86:5).

“I will **abundantly** bless her provision: I will **satisfy** her poor with bread” (Psa. 132:15).

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more **abundantly**” (John 10:10).

These passages could be multiplied with many more! God is not a God who is reluctantly gracious and rarely gives His children a token of His favor. As the Belgic Confession states it so beautifully, “God is an **overflowing** Fountain of good!” He wants His children to abide in His love—not a drop now and then.

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Misconception #11: The promises of God are almost entirely beyond reach. To take God at His Word and to trust in His promises is denounced as a stealing of God’s promises.

Biblical Truth: Again, a warning not to steal God’s promises is nowhere to be found in Scripture! Such a notion is but another manifestation of a prevailing misrepresentation of God’s character. How would we feel if others would treat our promises in such a fashion? We would be grieved over the fact that they so mistrust us that they do not take us at our word. Why would God fill His Word with promises and then forbid us to make use of them? How contrary to His character this would be!

In His promises, God, so to speak, stretches forth His hand and says to the sinner, “Take hold of my Word, for you can absolutely trust me that I will do what I promise to do.” Failure to take God at His Word is therefore a blatant manifestation of unbelief! The warrant to make use of God’s promises is not to be found in us. Instead, God’s Word tells us that all God’s promises are yea and amen in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Jesus Christ, as the Living Word of God, is the Divine warranty of all God’s promises.

Therefore, to suggest that the promises can be stolen is a grievous error, for it implies again that somehow we must experientially qualify for the use of God’s promises. It fails to recognize that Christ shed His precious blood to secure the unfettered use of God’s promises. Nothing has to be done on our part to qualify us to make use of them. To suggest otherwise is a grievous denial of what Christ has accomplished with His finished work.

I recognize that certain promises in Scripture have labels. There are promises that are clearly addressed to believers, and unbelievers may therefore not comfort themselves with them. For example, when Paul writes that all things will work together for good, he immediately adds “to those that love God.” The ungodly can therefore not comfort themselves with this promise.

However, there are also gospel promises addressed unconditionally to all who hear the gospel. When Jesus says that all who believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life, He means “all” without exception. This also applies to the precious words, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Bottom line: God’s promises cannot be stolen! God reveals Himself in His Word because He desires that we respond to His Word. God does not speak to us and then keep us at bay, saying, “Don’t you dare respond to My Word without My permission.” That is the devil’s logic. He said to our first parents, “Hath God said?” The devil has everything to gain by keeping us from responding to the Word of the God who delights in mercy and is ready to forgive.

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**Misconception # 12:** The only thing a sinner may “do” is to read the Bible, ask for a new heart, and never leave his or her place empty in church.

**Biblical Truth:** How can one read the Bible with any profit if it has been reinforced during an entire lifetime that you may not in any way assert that God has spoken to you through His Word unless it has been applied with power? How does one know whether God’s Word has been applied with power? Is that to be determined by any emotional impact that God’s Word has on us? Does that then mean that at other times God is not speaking to us when we are reading His Word? Such reasoning effectually renders the Bible a closed book and robs you from reading the Bible with profit.

When we have a Bible in our hands, it is there because God has sovereignly placed it there, and it pleases Him to communicate His Word to us at precisely that moment. He has given us His Word because it pleases Him to reveal Himself to the children of men. Therefore, when you read your Bible, you may know with certainty that God is speaking to you at that very moment. It is one of the devil's evil devices to persuade you otherwise!

Furthermore, although we need a new heart, and God does indeed renew the hearts of sinners by His Spirit, nowhere does God's Word even remotely imply that the only thing one can and must do to be saved is to pray for a new heart. Countless people have prayed for a new heart their entire lives and have died that way. Others conveniently use this as an excuse to continue to live in sin, thinking there is nothing more that they either must or can do. This fosters the grievous misinterpretation of God's Word that all I need to do is pray for a new heart, and that the rest is now up to the Lord. A young man once told me coldly, "I will just wait till I am stopped. There is nothing I can do about it." That is the devil's logic rather than the teaching of God's Word!

In Acts 3:19, Peter speaks the same language as in Acts 2 when sinners cried out, "What must we do?" Again, Peter does not say to his audience that they must now sit back and wait for the Lord to work in them. Instead, he addresses them as God Himself addresses sinners: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

The sacred calling of God's servants is therefore to call sinners to repentance and to urge them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He commissioned His disciples to go forth into the world to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name (Luke 24:47). To give perishing sinners any other counsel is to be guilty of spiritual malpractice, and God will require their blood from the hands of those who have told them that all they can "do" to be saved is to read their Bible and pray for a new heart.

How stunned many will be who have thought that doing this would absolve them from all responsibility, and who will hear in the Day of Judgment

- 24 I have called, and ye **refused**; I have stretched out my hand, and **no man regarded**;
- 25 But **ye have set at nought all my counsel**, and would none of my reproof:
- 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;
- 27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.
- 28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:
- 29 For that they hated knowledge, and **did not choose the fear of the LORD**:
- 30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.
- 31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (Prov. 1:24-31).

Jesus affirmed this when He said, "And if any man hear my words, **and believe not**, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 **He that rejecteth me**, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47-48).

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Misconception #13: The “gospel” is that there is a possibility of being converted, and all you can do is to wait passively for this to happen.

Biblical Truth: The biblical gospel is that God promises salvation to sinners who believe in the Name of His only begotten Son. It is not merely possible that they will be saved, but rather, they **will** be saved. Jesus Himself uttered the profound words of John 3:16 to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” And in John 6:40, He said, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that **every one** which seeth the Son, **and believeth on him**, may have everlasting life.”

That is why Paul, at the conclusion of his sermon in Acts 13, did not merely tell his mixed audience that it is possible to be saved. Instead, he declared boldly, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached **unto you** the forgiveness of sins!”

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**Misconception #14:** It appears to be God’s normal way to keep most of His children in doubt about their salvation—and thus to keep them as poor and humble as possible. Only they who can speak of extraordinary experiences are permitted to claim assurance of salvation.

**Biblical Truth:** I have already addressed this earlier. What a grievous misrepresentation of God’s character this is! What a troubling misunderstanding of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit! Would the God who has loved His people with an everlasting love, and who gave His beloved Son as a sacrifice for their sins, not want to assure them by His Spirit of His love and that He is their Father for Christ’s sake?

The notion that assurance of salvation is the privilege of only a few is an offensive distortion of the Word of God. The apostle Paul speaks an entirely different language. He writes,

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, **being rooted and grounded in love**, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to **know** the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might **be filled** with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3: 18-19).

This is precisely what God desires for all His children. God will indeed keep His people poor in themselves, but He will do so for one reason only: to lead them to the enjoyment of the unsearchable riches to be found in Christ. Paul understood this well, and adds,

“Now unto him that is able **to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think**, according to the power that worketh in us, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.” Ephesians 3:20, 21

That is the language that fits the God who has loved His people with an everlasting love!

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Misconception #15: Justification is an almost unattainable and rare experience. One must have an extraordinary visionary experience before one can claim to have been justified by faith.

Biblical Truth: In light of all that I have said already, you will understand that this statement likewise cannot possibly be true. Justification is the legal act of the Judge of all the earth when He imputes to the sinner who believes in His beloved Son the flawless righteousness of His Son, and then, on the basis of that imputed righteousness, will fully acquit the guilty sinner and declare him righteous. However, Scripture teaches nowhere that this is but the privilege of a few of God’s children. On the contrary, it teaches that this is the privilege of all God’s children. Romans 5:1 teaches that God’s children are justified by **faith**—and not by some extraordinary experience.

Again, I refer to Paul’s sermon in Acts 13. Not only did he freely and unconditionally offer the full pardon of sin to all who heard him, but he also added, “And by him all that **believe** are justified from all things” (v. 39). The moment a sinner believes in Christ, he will be fully justified—even if that faith is as feeble as the faith of the woman with the issue of blood. The moment she touched Jesus’ garment, virtue went out from Him, and she was healed instantly and fully. Though the assurance of that justification may be feeble at first, the Spirit will work restlessly to lead the believer to the full enjoyment of that benefit. God wants all His children to be fully assured of their salvation.

God enabled Luther to recover and proclaim this precious truth in the Reformation, and this is the consistent teaching of our Puritan and Dutch forefathers. God’s sacred demand of all His servants is to do what He commissioned Isaiah to do: “**Comfort** ye, **comfort** ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye **comfortably** to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, **that her iniquity is pardoned**: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins” (Isa. 40:1-2).

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**Misconception #16:** Though people may refer to themselves as children of God, it is viewed as presumptuous and almost sacrilegious to refer to God as Father. Only those who have passed many experiential stations may call God their Father.

**Biblical Truth:** I have already addressed this misconception. Let me add that the Father name of God is the most prominent Name of God in the New Testament. Throughout His three-year public ministry, the Lord Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that God was **their** Father, and He did so when they were still quite ignorant spiritually. Thus, when they asked Him, “Teach us to pray,” He taught them to begin their prayer, saying, “Our **Father** which art in heaven...”

It is, therefore, highly significant that on the day of His resurrection He gave Mary Magdalene the following instruction: “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and **your** Father; and to my God, and **your** God” (John 20:17). Christ here summarizes the great purpose of His redeeming work, namely, that He gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin, so His people may know that His Father is **their** Father and that His God is **their** God. Christ wants all His people to rejoice in that assured knowledge.

How beautifully this is expressed in the words of 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 : “I will receive you, and will be a **Father** unto you, and **ye shall be my sons and daughters**, saith the Lord Almighty.”

How grievous it is when God’s children are robbed of that joyful privilege and do not dare to take that precious Name upon their lips! How grievous and offensive this is to the Spirit of God whose work it is, as the Spirit of adoption, to cause all believers to say, Abba, Father!”

Paul summarizes this beautifully and succinctly in Galatians 4:4-7:

- 4 But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
- 5 To redeem them that were under the law, **that we might receive the adoption of sons.**
- 6 And because ye are sons, **God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.**
- 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, **but a son**; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

To contradict that is to make the Word of God of none effect. To use the words of Christ Himself: “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition...In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat. 15:6, 9).

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Misconception #17: When the truth is defined as “God everything and man nothing,” it means that man does nothing. Any reference to man’s obligation to respond to God’s Word is reasoned away with the response, “It has to be given.”

Biblical Truth: Again, I have already addressed this in various ways. Yes, salvation is for 100% the work of God. Not one tear or sigh needs to be added to it. However, that does not mean that biblical religion is a “do nothing” religion. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible exhorts us to respond to God’s Word. Nowhere does the Bible tell us that we must wait until it is given to us. For many this is but a convenient cover for their root problem: an unrepentant and unbelieving heart. This abuse of our spiritual inability (due to a hostile and unbelieving heart!) is one of Satan’s devices to keep us from repenting of our sins and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. To achieve that, Satan will masquerade as a very orthodox devil by removing biblical truths from their biblical context. He is the author of a “do nothing” religion, knowing that all who subscribe to it

will most certainly be damned and spend eternity with him. The devil does not care how he deceives souls!



Misconception #18: There is only one accepted experiential blueprint by which all religious experience is to be measured. All experience that does not conform to that blueprint will be dismissed, and any person claiming such experience will be labeled as being self-deceived.

Biblical Truth: It all depends what one means by this statement. Abraham’s story is very different from Jacob’s story, from David’s story, and from Manasseh’s story. Paul’s story is very different from Timothy’s story, and Lydia’s story differs from the jailor’s story. They differ as much as the individual leaves of the same tree. Who would dare to disqualify Timothy’s conversion because he did not have a Damascus road experience? Who would dare to disqualify Lydia’s story because she did not experience the despair of the jailor?

However, what do all these believers have in common? Abraham’s experience: “He believed God, and it was counted unto him as righteousness.” In other words, faith in Christ is what unites all believers—a faith that functions within the experiential framework of misery, deliverance, and gratitude.

This framework is beautifully articulated in Psalm 130:3:

- If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? (Misery)
- But there is forgiveness with thee, (Deliverance)
- that thou mayest be feared. (Gratitude)

This experiential framework revolves around the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, Peter writes, “Unto you therefore which **believe *he is precious***” (1 Peter 2:7). That is the core mark of all true experience, and thus Paul describes believers as “all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph. 6:24). If that is missing, everything is missing—even if someone could speak for hours about their misery.

The notion that one may not go to Christ until one has been led to Christ via a prescribed pathway of successive experiences is not to be found in Scripture. Paul would be stunned if someone were to suggest to him that the Christian life consists of waiting passively to be led from station to station to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Instead, Paul and our forefathers went out of their way to encourage sinners to flee to Christ, and to encourage believers to make use of Christ by faith. Wilhelmus à Brakel therefore writes that true believers will take refuge to Christ thousands upon thousands of time. That is the true story of the Christian life!

