

Our Unity with Christ

A Series by Robert Jackson

The Spirit searches all things – even the deep things of Christ.

– 1 Corinthians 2:10b

This is a seven part study series which delves into some profound truths concerning our standing in Christ. It is my hope that these studies will help to deepen the convictions of anyone who happens upon my web site. The overarching theme of these studies is that

Disciples of Christ are one with Christ.

In his ministry, Paul was continually threatened by people who sought to add requirements to the gospel, as if the cross were not enough to save us (see, for instance, Galatians 3:2-3). Paul's response to this challenge was not to warn his churches or to confront his enemies. He simply lifted Christ higher. If his churches could understand the supremacy of Christ, they would never listen to the legalists – they would know that Jesus is enough.

These studies focus on five different aspects of the uniqueness of Christ, not as a mere intellectual exercise, but in order to utterly convince us that Jesus is enough – that we need nothing in addition to Him, because the cross must stand alone, or else it will not stand at all. I will argue in these studies that Christ's body and His flesh are sacred and powerful, and that, as disciples, we partake of His flesh in a profound way. I will also argue that His power and authority rise to the highest heavens, and that this is the power available to us. This is because, as disciples, our oneness with Christ runs far deeper than most of us imagine.

I would recommend printing out the studies and doing them for your quiet times, and really looking up all the verses that are referred to, instead of just taking my word for it. Each study is intended to be done in order; each study tends to build on what has gone before. Since there are seven studies, it would be possible to do one a day and have a week's worth of quiet times.

The studies tend to assume that you're pretty familiar with the New Testament – its authors, teachings and events, especially in regard to the Gospels. However, whether you are or are not, I expect that for most readers these studies will delve into new waters, so I recommend going through them carefully and striving to understand the flow of the arguments. There are some things in these studies which I guess you could classify as "my opinion", but I'll do my best to stay on the straight and narrow.

I hope that you enjoy these studies, and that they help you to read the Scriptures in new and exciting ways.

Christ's Body, Our Body – Part 1

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit – 1 Corinthians 6:19

This study is not about the idea of Christ's body being the church, although that is certainly true in a metaphorical sense (Colossians 1:18 – I talk more about this concept in study 4). Instead, this study focuses on the physical body which Jesus had when he walked among us on earth. I believe that by understanding the nature and the sanctity of Jesus' body, we will be able to more deeply appreciate the cross, as well as our own bodies. Part 2 of this study will talk about how our bodies are connected with our hope for the afterlife.

So, now that we're ready, let's dive in. But just before you go on, answer the following question to yourself: "When you hear the word *temple*, what do you think of?" ... My answer? The Taj Mahal – in all its glory. What jumped into your head? As we go on, we'll see what Jesus thought of when He said the word *temple*.

The Temple

Read John 2:13-22 (I'm serious, read it, this won't make sense unless you do...) Jesus clears the temple in Jerusalem. We know that story: He cleared it because the courts were full of greedy money changers, and they were disrespecting God and needed to be taught a lesson. There are some scoffers in verse 18, and it's their conversation with Jesus that I want to focus on. This is very early in Jesus' ministry. So far, He has only performed *one* miracle His whole life (see verses 11-12), and that was up in Galilee (north Israel, Jerusalem is in the south). So, Jesus is new on the scene – these guys have never heard of Him (things are very different next time He goes to Jerusalem), and they want Him to do a miracle to prove His authority.

Basically, these guys think that Jesus is a fake, someone with no authority to do what He's doing. They think He's just a normal man. They are just like many sceptics today, who think that Jesus is no one special, and who demand "proof" that Jesus was who He said He was. "Anyone could make those claims", sceptics say, "what proof is there that He was sent from God?" Jesus gave one answer to the sceptics of His day, and that is the only answer we should give today:

Jesus rose from the dead.

His body was destroyed, and then He raised it to life. That is our evidence that Jesus is genuine. That is our proof that He is God – He rose from the dead. There is a wealth of material to show just how compelling the evidence is that Jesus rose from the dead – "True and Reasonable" by Doug Jacoby is a great place to start.

So, that was Jesus' powerful answer in verse 19. Did they get it? Did they understand a word of what He was saying? Look at their answer in verse 20: "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" They totally missed the point: When they heard "temple," they thought "building". They thought he must be talking about the building in which they were standing – I mean, that is the temple, right?

Wrong! “The temple he had spoken of was his body” (v21). I have no doubt that most people today, when they think of a temple, think of a building. Aren’t you that same? But this is because

[The religions of men sanctify places, but the religion of God sanctifies people.](#)

(To sanctify means to “treat as holy.”) In Christianity, our body is our temple. What are the implications of thinking any differently? I would like to quote this story:

Readers will remember the assassination of India’s Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. The murder was prompted by revenge because she had sent the military into the Sikh temple, where weapons were being stored. She was murdered in order to preserve a temple. Jesus would have told them that they had actually destroyed what was intended to be His temple in order to preserve a place.

– Ravi Zacharias, “Jesus among other gods”, page 72.

Many religions of men have elaborate purification rituals in order to enter supposed ‘holy places’. In Christianity, God makes *us* holy (Hebrews 2:11), so that we can come directly to Him (Hebrews 4:16). The thinking of God is truly the opposite of the thoughts of men! It is our bodies that are the holy temple in God’s sight. What does this mean? It means that our bodies are sacred. Our bodies are one of the greatest gifts which God gives us, and we need to hold them in the highest honour. Jesus knew that His temple was sacred, and our view of ourselves as well as our sin will be transformed when we realize that simple fact as well:

[Your body is a sacred temple of the Lord your God.](#)

The world will never understand this. In the world, our bodies are mere tools to use and abuse however we feel like. Some overeat, some starve themselves; some are slothful, some work themselves to the bone. People get drunk, take drugs, sleep around, dress lewdly, indulge in lust – people have no respect either of their own bodies or those of other people, and they abuse their bodies in the name of pleasure, freedom and independence. The world places no value on God’s holy temple – we are encouraged to profane it daily. But sometimes the truth comes bursting through, like a bolt of lightning.

In March 1998, two boys, ages eleven and thirteen, went on a shooting rampage in their school in Jonesboro Arkansas, killing four girls and a teacher and injuring ten others. That tragedy at Westside Middle School was at the time the largest school massacre in America. On the night of the shooting, many were being counselled in small groups on the hospital waiting room. Friends and relatives were waiting for word of the victims. The whole scene was one of desolation and horror. In one corner sat a woman alone, looking dazed and helpless. A counsellor went to her to see if she needed any assistance and discovered that she was the mother of one of the girls who had been killed... ‘I just came to find out how to get my little girl’s body back’, she said.

– Zacharias, page 70.

That mother just wanted her daughter’s body – so that she could give her a funeral, remember her for who she was, and put her body to rest. That woman knew that her

daughter's body was not some tool to be used and abused. At that point in time, there was at least one person on earth who understood the sanctity of the body. Our bodies are temples. We need to honour and respect them, and make every effort to never abuse them. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 with this in mind, and allow this profound truth to sink deeply into your heart.

The Cross

As a final turn in this tale, let us now consider the cross from this perspective. Jesus was broken, beaten, punished, wounded and mocked (Matthew 27:27-31). It was a temple that was being desecrated. As Paul painstakingly points out in Colossians 1:22, it is by Christ's physical body, that was "destroyed" at Calvary, that we are made holy.

This was not the first or last time that God's temple was violated. As prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 11:31), King Antiochus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem in about 160 BC. He stripped its alter and sacrificed a pig there – what a hideous abomination to God's people! As prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 24:15), Titus again desecrated it in AD 70, profaning the alter and ultimately destroying the building entirely. (It is ironic that this happened about 40 years after the conversation in John 2.) In AD 70, the temple building was profaned, destroyed, and has never been rebuilt. It lies in dust to this very day.

But we know that the temple built by hands was just a shadow of the reality found in Christ (Hebrews 8:5; 10:1). Jesus' physical body was the true temple, and it was profaned in the Pretorium, and then destroyed at Calvary. Unlike the buildings, though, Jesus' body did not remain in the dust.

Our God is a living God, and His temple is a living temple.

After Antiochus desecrated the temple, the Jews dedicated it again, and that day was one of the greatest triumphs imaginable for God's people. That day is still celebrated every year in the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22 – it is also known as Hanukah). As Christians, we also celebrate the restoration of a temple. But our temple is not a building, it is Jesus Himself.

Even today, God's temple stands in living, breathing glory – in you, in me, in all His sons and daughters. As it was in Christ's body, so it is in our body. The church rises as a holy temple to the Lord, shining the light of God to all nations. We worship a living God in His living temple. And that is something to rejoice about!

Christ's Body, Our Body – Part 2

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. – 2 Corinthians 5:1

Now that we have a better understanding of the physical body of Jesus, as well as our own physical body, we can journey to deeper waters and ask what is in store for the future. This study will have a lot to say about our eschatological hope, because our bodies will actually be very significant in the world to come. But, hang on, “What in the world is our eschatological hope?”, I hear you asking. Let me define a couple of terms:

- ✚ **Eschatology:** Concerns expectations of the end of time, whether the close of history, the world itself, or the present age. (Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible)
- ✚ **Our eschatological hope:** The hope shared by all disciples that we will be transformed on the Last Day and go to heaven. (My definition)

A very significant aspect of our transformation on the last day is the renewal of our bodies. This is something which disciples tend to know very little about, so let's dig in.

In my flesh...

Read Job 19:23-27 (as before, I'm very hopeful that you do really read it). Job wishes that his words were preserved for eternity. Well, they are part of holy Scripture, so they most certainly will be. So there's a good start, but what does Job have to say that's so important? Job was one of the most righteous men ever to have lived (Ezekiel 14:14). This was probably because he never lost sight of God amidst the most extreme suffering. According to Job himself, he was able to do this because he was focused on the world to come. He knew that one day he would see God (v 26-27).

It is often mistaught that the Old Testament has little to say about the after life. I can only think that this is because people simply do not know the Old Testament. In Matthew 22:23-33, the Sadducees ask Jesus a ridiculous question about the resurrection. Jesus gives them a simple answer:

You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God
– Matthew 22:29

I'm sure that I don't need to remind you what Scriptures He was referring to – the Old Testament, of course. You see, Jesus had a simple conviction: If you know the Old Testament, you know about the resurrection, the afterlife and the judgment – in fact, you know all about it, because Scripture makes it clear. It is beyond the scope of this study to show why this is true, but for now, let's just take Jesus at His word.

Back to Job 19. He knew that one day he would stand before God, and his heart yearned for that day. He is referring to his exaltation in heaven, and yet he keeps emphasizing the *physicality*, not the *spirituality*, of the experience. It will be in his “flesh”, with his “own eyes”. There is no evidence that Job bodily ascended to heaven, so we are pretty safe to assume that he is dead and buried. Considering that he probably lived over 4000 years ago, I would imagine that his skin and eyes are “destroyed”, as he knew they

would be (v 26). And yet his hope, his eschatological hope, was that he would see God *in the flesh*. And by this hope we are saved (Romans 8:24). So what flesh is he talking about? With what eyes will he see God? Let's hold that thought, and look at Jesus' own new body in Luke 24.

The Resurrected Christ

Let me begin by emphasizing one point. One fact about the resurrected Christ which we always hold onto is that he was bodily resurrected, something which Jesus himself made a big deal of (John 20:27). And nothing is truer: Jesus rose in the flesh – and Part 1 of this series gave some indication of just how significant it was that Jesus did just that. Jesus ate in the disciples' presence (Luke 24:41-43) and made sure that they all saw Him in the flesh. Thomas touched His wounds, a story we are familiar with. But if you read the account carefully, you will notice that *all* the apostles had to see Jesus before they believed – none of them accepted it “on faith.” In my opinion, Thomas was not the most doubtful, he was simply the most honest about his doubts.

There is a “christian” heresy called Gnosticism which originally denied that Jesus was ever even a man. They taught that He was just a spirit of some sort. Nowadays, though, they tend to teach only that Jesus was resurrected as a spirit. They reject the bodily resurrection and, in so doing, they reject the Gospel message. It is beyond this study to go into why the Gnostics teach this. So let's move on.

Scan Luke 24:13-32, focusing on the first and last paragraphs of the passage. This is one of the key resurrection appearances of Christ. He walks for miles with two of his own disciples, one of whom is his own uncle (compare Luke 24:18 with John 19:25). He even goes into their house and eats with them. Think about it: He is with two disciples, one of whom has known Him all His life. Jesus talks with them and studies the Bible with them, and then has a meal with them in their own village, at their own table.

[And yet they never recognise Him.](#)

Only when Jesus left did they realize that it was Him. Isn't that bizarre? Doesn't that freak you out? Doesn't that spin your mind? There is something going on in this passage which we may be too fearful to even ask about. But we should never fear the deep truths of Christ, for by them we will be sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2). When the Gospel writers wrote about the resurrection, they wrote about something that had never happened before. Something about which no one had ever dreamed (except maybe Job).

Let us recall that in Scripture, many people had been raised to life. Elijah raised the widow's son in 1 Kings 17; Elisha raised the Shunammite's son in 2 Kings 4; and Jesus raised 3 people during his ministry (the widow's son in Luke 7, Jairus' daughter in Luke 8 and Lazarus in John 11). Furthermore, people came out of tombs in Matthew 27:52. But look at what Paul says in Colossians 1:18:

[He is ... the firstborn from among the dead.](#)

How could that be, if so many had already been raised to life? The fact is that even though so many had been raised, when Jesus rose, something radically new happened. It was a totally unique event in all history. What made it unique? Well, firstly, Jesus was

the first person to rise from the dead *by His own power*. The Bible teaches that death had no hold over Jesus (Acts 2:24) – He was too powerful for death. But there’s more. The fact is that when Jesus rose, He rose with a spiritual body.

He rose with a heavenly body – the kind of body that could go directly to heaven (see Luke 24:51). Just like his resurrection, Jesus’ ascension was something radically new. Enoch was taken up (Genesis 5:24), as was Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), and, perhaps, Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:3). But when Jesus ascended, history was being rewritten – something happened that had never happened before, because he already had a heavenly body. What do I mean by that? I mean that His body was dominated by its spiritual aspect. His body was *spirit triumphing over matter*.

What I’m trying to say, brothers and sisters, is that the resurrected Christ had the same kind of body that we are going to have in heaven. Before you write me off as a lunatic, I urge you to keep reading...

The Resurrection Body

Scan 1 Corinthians 15:20-58, focusing on verses 35-44. In this passage, Paul says everything else that I want to say, and he says it far better than I could ever hope to. What I will do here is focus on v42-44, and show how our new body in heaven is actually the same as the body which Jesus had in Luke 24. This is because these verses apply just as much to the resurrected Christ as they will apply to us when we are in heaven.

It was Jesus who, like us, had a body that was “sown perishable” (v42). He died, meaning that the body he was born with must have been mortal one, just like ours. But when he rose, he had an imperishable body, one that will persist for eternity in heaven. Moreover, Jesus was born in “dishonour” – not only did he have to lay aside his heavenly glory to become a man (Philippians 2:7), but he was dishonoured in the Pretorium, as mentioned earlier. But after he was raised, he had a body of glory, and could never be dishonoured again (Galatians 6:7). Further, Jesus was born in “weakness” – He was confined to this earth, and felt it when power went out of Him (Luke 8:46). But when He rose, He rose in power – the earth shook, and He had the power to ascend all the way to heaven, and the heavens are pretty high above the earth (Psalm 103:11).

Finally, and most importantly of all, He was sown with “a natural body”, just like ours, but when He rose, He had a spiritual body. There’s no doubt about it – this is the gospel message. Jesus rose with a spiritual body, and nothing said has ever been truer. Was it material? Absolutely. To say anything else would be blasphemy. But it was a body of spirit triumphing over matter. No longer could the material (anything of this world) overcome Jesus’ body. No. Now, the spirit had overcome, because He had overcome death. And this is just as much a description of heaven as it is a description of the resurrected Christ.

You see, this passage simultaneously describes what is in store for us – it illustrates our eschatological hope. In *our* resurrection, the resurrection of the dead, the same thing will happen to us. Our perishable body will be raised imperishable; our dishonoured body will be raised in glory; our weak body will be raised in power. We will exchange

our natural body for a spiritual one – a new body, a heavenly body, a glorious body. As it was for Jesus, so it will be for us. And that is the body that we will live in for eternity. How awesome is that?

Now, some people might be thinking that all of this stuff is pretty irrelevant for their life. “I mean, does it really matter?” they ask. Well, absolutely it does. The Bible talks about it, shouldn’t we try to understand it? Shouldn’t we know what we’re hoping for? Job, one of the most righteous men who ever lived, knew that he was going to be bodily resurrected, and that hope sustained him. It sustained him through life’s greatest trials.

[We need to know what we’re hoping for, or else our hope will not carry us through.](#)

Our faith won’t be up to the task.

Conclusion

Our bodies are special – sacred temples of God. They need to be cherished, respected – and treated as they are: as one of God’s greatest gifts. We need to be so motivated to uphold God’s standards of righteousness and to fight our sinful nature, especially in regard to sexual purity, because anything less will mean that our temples will be desecrated, and that is a tragedy. (But not a tragedy that God’s grace can’t cover – Jesus rose from the ashes, so that means we can too.)

But once we understand all that, we then need to see that our bodies are just shadows of what is to come. Our eternity in heaven will be incredible: It will be material, but it will be a state of the spirit triumphing over matter. We will receive new bodies in heaven, which will be glorious bodies that matter will never be able to rule over – they will be eternal bodies, our soul’s true home (2 Corinthians 5:1-10).

I encourage you to go back and read over all of John 2, Job 19, Luke 24 and 1 Corinthians 15 with this new understanding. For more on the sanctity of our bodies, go thoroughly through 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Thessalonians 4. Also, I recommend “Jesus among other gods” by Ravi Zacharias, which is where I got most of the material for Part 1. For more on our heavenly body, study through 2 Peter 3 and 2 Corinthians 5. If you want to find out even more about the resurrection, study the sermons in the book of Acts – their focus on Jesus’ resurrection is incredible. I also recommend “Miracles” by C. S. Lewis, which is where I got most of the material for Part 2. Enjoy delving into these deep truths, and remember to start viewing your body in new way – a biblical way.

Christ's Flesh, Our Flesh – Part 1

As you have promised... my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in the sight of all people. – Luke 2:29-31

This study is about Christ's flesh, and how intimately our flesh is related to it. The truths I seek to bring to light here are truly mysteries of Christ. But they are not mysterious in the sense that they are so obscure and complex that no one knows them. Certainly not: They are mysterious in the sense that not many people have taken the effort to understand them, even though God's word makes them clear, over and over again. God reveals mysteries. There is one word I'd like to define before we move on:

✚ **Incarnation:** The belief that God has disclosed the divine self in human reality in the person and work of Jesus. (Eerdmans)

Prophets and Kings

In Luke 10:24, Jesus says to his disciples, "For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." How incredible: To talk about prophets and kings in this way! Perhaps he has in mind the people who wrote the Old Testament, people such as David, Moses and Isaiah. Those guys longed to see what the disciples saw, but never did.

Of course, what Jesus is referring to is Himself. He's talking to the Seventy-two, whom he had just sent out, and He's saying to all of them, "You know what, people like David and Moses longed to see what you're looking at right now, but they never did. You're seeing me, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. That's special, you'd better remember it."

The question, though, which this verse raises is, "Does this verse apply to us?" Does it apply to you and me? Have we seen something that David never saw? What about Moses? Have we seen something that they longed to see? Well, we've never seen Jesus in the flesh. So, perhaps the answer is "No, Luke 10:24 only applied to people who were around during the Incarnation. Only if you saw Jesus in the flesh could you claim this promise." Maybe that's what people would conclude if they thought about it.

But I disagree. I think the verse does apply today, and the two parts of this study are about this very fact.

In my flesh...

This is not the first time I've used this subtitle, but it's just so often appropriate! In Colossians 1:24, Paul writes,

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still
lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

This has got to be one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. It's so mysterious, that I wonder how many people would *dare to delve* into what this passage is really saying. It will take me until the very end of this study to fully reveal it.

My conviction is that this verse needs to be our mission statement. We're always taught, of course, that Christ is enough. When He died, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). His death is enough. The debt is paid – cancelled, forever. Everything that we need to be saved was achieved at Calvary. Jesus' death is sufficient to take away all our sin. He suffered so that we will never have to pay for our sins ourselves, which we simply can't do. To be saved in Christ is to be saved completely (Hebrews 7:25).

So, God is enough: To say anything less would be a denial of the Gospels. But, ultimately, this is just a basic truth – a building block. You need to know this in order to even become a disciple: You need to study the cross and understand that it is what saves us. And, amen, we study that with people, which is a good thing. But when we enter a verse like Colossians 1:24, we're entering a deeper teaching, because Paul clearly implies that something is *lacking* in regard to Christ's afflictions. Something's lacking. And that's why Paul made it his goal to fill up in his flesh what is lacking in Christ's sufferings. And if Paul did it, we need to do it as well – it's not like there's a standard for him and another standard for us – there is one standard for everyone.

[So you need to fill up in your flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, and so do I.](#)

The question is, "What is lacking in Christ's afflictions?" That's what I want to reveal, but in order to do so we'll need to go to the heart of the Gospel. Now, I'm not the first person to reveal this (in fact I lifted this answer out of "Victory in Surrender" by Gordon Ferguson). But I was so inspired that I wanted to put it in my own words.

Christ: The Fullness of God

In Colossians 1:19 it says "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (NKJV). This refers, of course, to Jesus – the fullness of the Father dwells in Jesus, because He is God, through and through. Maybe we read verse 24 and think, "Oh no, Paul's forgotten that Christ is the fullness of God..." But how could he have forgotten? He just said it a few verses ago. Is Paul that absent-minded? If we're tempted to attribute error to Scripture, it often helps to ponder just we are accusing the author of.

The fullness of God dwells in Jesus. We should always remember that, and I'm not here to deny it, because it's absolutely true. We can look more into that in John 1:18: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." There is much debate about this verse, as evidenced by the footnotes, but the basic meaning is clear: Jesus made God known. Remember that "God the One and Only" is not the Father – He is "at the Father's side" (v18); He "came from the Father" (v14). He is none other than Jesus Christ.

Why did Jesus have to make God known? Because no one has ever seen God (v18), so Jesus had to come to earth to make Him known. That's a powerful thing: John's effectively saying that no one understood God in the way that we can, since we know, or at the very least, known about, Jesus Christ.

It is worthwhile asking at this point what, exactly, Jesus did reveal about God. Well, I think one of the biggest things that Jesus revealed about God is His empathy. Throughout the Old Testament, people could always know that God sympathizes with us. We have David, crying out "O Lord, how long will you look on? Rescue my life

form their ravages... Do not be far from me, O Lord. Awake, and rise to my defence” (Psalm 35:17; 22-23). He was down in the depths, and he knew that God could look down and have mercy on him, and stoop down to rescue him. He knew that God could sympathize with him, and give him strength.

But that’s not the whole story. We know Jesus, and we know that God is not someone who just looks down and strengthens us when we’re in need. No. God is right there with us (Hebrews 4:15). He is an empathetic saviour. Jesus has been in the depths, in Gethsemane, feeling all the pain that we feel when life is tough and tragedy hits us. He feels our pain, when we’re out there in the desert, crying out for answers – Jesus has been through the desert, fasting for forty days, He knows exactly what it’s like, and He’ll be there, with us, no matter what. In the depths, in the desert, God is there. This reminds me of a story I’d like to share, it occurred in the Nazi concentration camp named Auschwitz:

A Jewish prisoner was being executed while the rest of the camp was forced to watch. As the prisoner hung on the gallows – kicking and struggling in the throes of death, refusing to die – an onlooker was heard to mutter under his breath with increasing desperation, “Where is God? Where is He?” From out of nowhere, Wiesel says, a voice within him spoke to his own heart, saying, “Right there on the gallows; where else?” Theologian Jurgen Moltmann, commenting on Wiesel’s story, astutely observed that any other answer would have been blasphemous. – Zacharias, page 135.

Absolutely. God was right there, in the gallows. Jesus suffered death. He tasted death, he experienced it. God can empathize with us. That’s what Jesus revealed when He became a man.

Now I think that Jesus revealed many other things about God as well. And I think that’s something that you should really think about. I leave it as an exercise for the reader to explore the question of what else Jesus revealed about the character of God that no one ever knew before He came to earth. I think you could do a pretty incredible study by scanning through the Gospels and thinking about that very question.

But for now, let’s just remember that Jesus came to earth in order to make God known. It’s often taught that Jesus came to earth in order to save mankind (John 12:47), but I think that this is oversimplifying.

Jesus *died* in order to save mankind, but He was born in order to make God known.

If all He needed to do was die, then He could have made His job *a lot* easier than He did. Now obviously Jesus could not have died unless He became Incarnate, but I do believe that His purpose in coming to earth was to make God known, as per John 1, and due to the infinite wisdom of God, it worked out that He was also able to cap that mission off by dying, which achieved another ultimate purpose of God as well.

For reasons of space, I will end part one of this study here. By all means, think deeply about the many questions which have been raised so far. By thinking about these questions for yourself first, finding some answers will be far more rewarding.

Christ's Flesh, Our Flesh – Part 2

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed
– Romans 8:19

And so, we continue our investigation into the nature of Christ's flesh and its relationship to our flesh. We have been convinced that Christ in the flesh revealed God's character. Now we can go on to see an even grander scope in the plan of God.

Christ: Bridging the Gap

Scan John 14:1-14, focusing on v9-10. Jesus' bodily presence, His enfleshment, His Incarnation, was the most important thing that had ever occurred on earth at that time.

No one can understand God unless they see Him in the flesh.

The basis of the gospel is that God needed to come down to earth as a man; He needed to Incarnate Himself so that we could understand Him: It was a necessary thing.

It goes without saying that God had to come in the flesh for us to clearly see Him. As human beings, we are bodily, so there will always be a separation between us and the spiritual – and God is spirit (John 4:24). As has been mentioned earlier, who we really are is spirit as well (in fact, we were made in the spiritual image of God), but no one is fully in tune with that: No one is truly spiritual – at least, not on this side of heaven. We are all “of the flesh” in this world. As disciples, of course, we constantly fight that, but nothing will change the fact that right now, we are bodily, and we can't comprehend the spirit. We just can't get our head around what is in the spiritual world because we cannot perceive it. And so, God bridged the gap between Him and us by becoming a man.

Have the implications of all this dawned on you? The truth is that this fact leaves us in a quandary, because we have not seen Jesus. In fact, he was only on earth for about 33 years – so few people actually saw Jesus. And if we can only see the Father by seeing Jesus in the flesh, where does that leave you and me? Where does that leave us? Can we understand God without seeing him in the flesh?

I think it all comes back to Luke 10:24. Read it with new understanding: “Many prophets and kings have longed to *see* what you see but did not see it, and *hear* what you hear but did not hear it.” (emphasis mine) Maybe they could read about it (Isaiah 53, Psalm 22...), but they could never *see* it. That's what they longed for. Don't we long for it? We're supposed to long to see God. Now we discussed earlier that our eschatological hope is connected with us seeing God in our flesh in heaven. But what about in the here and now? Can we see God? I think that the Bible has the answer.

The Church: The Fullness of God

Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” The first thing question that this verse answers is why God

created all things, and placed Jesus above all things. In other words, “Why did God make the universe? Why is God sovereign over the universe?” These are hefty questions, about which men have pondered for all time. But Paul’s answer is simple:

It was for the church – the universe exists for the church.

God has authority over everything for the church. The church is the purpose of God’s creation. A lot of disciples don’t realize this, which is sad: Everything has been made for the church. Every quasar, every atom, every planet, every cell, every tree, every blade of grass – they all exist for one reason: the church. That is, so that people would seek God, come to know Him, and be part of His eternal Kingdom. And how does God describe the church? It is the “fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

The church is the fullness of Christ, and Christ is the fullness of God. The fullness of God dwells bodily in the church. In case we’re not convinced, Paul says the same thing again in Colossians 2:9-10: “For in Christ all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” The church has been given the fullness of God. Should this be a surprise to us? The church is Jesus’ body, so naturally, the fullness of Him dwells within it. How could it be any other way?

The church is filled with the glory of the divine fullness of God. Ephesians 3:19 says “[I pray that you may have power] to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” The spiritual reality of the church is that it expresses the fullness of God. I believe that this is one of the greatest revelations of the New Testament – it’s no wonder that Paul says it time and time again.

In the next chapter of Ephesians, Ephesians 4:12-13, we find it written that “[Leaders] prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” There are all passages which demand our deepest and most careful attention and study. It is essential that we let these truths permeate our hearts and minds. Collectively, God has imbued us with the glory and the completeness of Christ’s nature and love.

The Church: Bridging the Gap

The point of this is that Jesus represented the fullness of God during His time on earth. And then he went away, and the church was set up. And now, the church represents the fullness of God on earth. The body of Jesus is still here on earth – in the church, which expresses God’s fullness, just like Jesus did. We already know why this is necessary. It is because God cannot be understood unless He is seen in the flesh. And this began in Jesus Christ, when God was seen in the flesh. And now, what flesh is God seen in?

Your flesh. The presence of God is continued in us; God is seen through His church.

The world must see the sons of God in order to understand God: The purpose of the physical creation is the spiritual creation, which is the church. The purpose of the church is to reveal God to the world – to be a priest to all the nations (1 Peter 2:9); to mediate God’s love and God’s justice; to show God to all people.

The prophets and kings longed to see what we see, but never did. Absolutely that verse applies today. It applies so powerfully, because it applies to the church, just as much as it applied to Jesus. We can understand God because we've seen God in the flesh.

Full Circle

Okay, we've come full circle. We've ended where we begun, at Luke 10:24. But there are still a few more things that must be said, especially about Colossians 1:24. Read it again, slowly. When you read it, try to think about all the things which I've said so far.

What is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions? Well, in regard to their *effect* and *power*, of course, nothing is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions. But what is lacking is the fact that Christ is no longer around: Christ's afflictions were limited not in *power* but in *time* – He suffered for a certain length of time, and now He's not around any more. He's "lacking" – His physical presence is lacking. Now obviously, He's gone back to His home, in heaven, where He's preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3), interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25), and so on – it's not like He's no good to us anymore or that He's forgotten us. No way! But He *is* no longer physically around. So what do we need to do?

[We need to be filled with the fullness of God and represent God to the world so that He can continue to be seen in the flesh – in our flesh.](#)

So, our mission statement here on earth is to fill up in our flesh the fullness of God. That's just another way of stating Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:19, isn't it? That we be filled with the fullness of God. And that is the goal of the church in Ephesians 4:13 – that we attain to the whole measure of Christ. It is clearly our mission statement. That's why we're still here on earth.

When we think of showing God to the world, what do we think of? I think of God's glory, that is, His character, being shown through His people. Surely you already knew that our purpose is to glorify God. I guess the purpose of this study has been to deepen our understanding of what it means to glorify God. It means to make Him known. Perhaps the greatest application of this is that we need to live God's love in our relationships with each-other, so that people can see God's love through us.

There's not much more I can say about showing God to the world, because it really is the whole of the teaching of the Bible for us to be more like God, in righteousness and holiness, so that the world can see God. As it was in Christ's flesh, so it must be in ours.

Where to from here? Well, to find out more about Jesus' current "ministry" in heaven, scan Hebrews. The Gospel of John focuses on the concept of Jesus revealing God's character – there are seven major signs recorded in that book, which reveal different aspects of God's nature. The book of Ephesians, as you no doubt have noticed, has a special focus on the church revealing God to the world. I wish I could be more specific about these things, but these concepts, as you can see, are very wide ranging ones. My main advice as a result of this study is to let these truths influence all your bible reading, as well as the way you see the church, from now onwards. I hope that this study has been revealing for you – you're now more than ready to plunge into the next one.

Christ's Authority, Our Authority

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.
– 1 Corinthians 15:51

By now, you will have learned that Jesus' body, like yours, is a sacred temple and that the resurrected Christ was a living prophesy of our heavenly body. And you have seen that it's God's plan to be seen in us, just as He was seen in Christ.

This study will be a shift from the seen to the unseen. It will investigate the supremacy of Christ's authority, and ask how this relates to our own authority as His disciples.

The Heavenly Realms

There is a spiritual world, no doubt about it. It is where God dwells (Isaiah 33:5a, John 4:24), and it is eternal, while the world we see will pass away (2 Peter 3:10). Our spiritual well-being is more important than our physical well-being (1 Timothy 4:8). In fact, our true self is our spirit, not our body. Our bodies are wasting away (2 Corinthians 4:16), but our spirit defines our true self. Currently, our bodies often hold sway over our spirits (Matthew 26:41), and we battle against the flesh (Romans 7:23). In heaven, as you know, this will be reversed and the spirit will triumph over matter.

But what do we really know about the spiritual world? For one thing, there are thrones, powers, rulers and authorities there (Colossians 1:16), which sounds surprisingly like earth. The NIV refers to the spiritual world as "the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 1:3; 1:20; 2:6 and many others). This does not refer only to heaven, because evil powers are there (Ephesians 6:12). So, the spiritual world has many "realms", and each of them is associated with a certain power or authority. There is probably a realm for angels, but as 1 Peter 3:22 implies, we would equate this with heaven (Matthew 18:10). And this makes sense, for there are many realms in heaven – Paul was caught up to the "third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2). There are most likely levels of angelic powers (Daniel 10:13). And then there is also the realm of Satan and his demons (Ephesians 6:12).

It's obvious where Jesus fits into this picture. He is high above every authority (Ephesians 1:21), and all realms are under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:27). God reigns in supremacy, He has no power struggles. Obviously Satan is a rebel prince (John 16:11), but he is no ultimate threat, because God's rule is absolute (Exodus 3:14). But, returning to the idea that Jesus is "far above" everything else, we have the concept of there being a vertical hierarchy of powers in the spiritual world (just as there is, ultimately, on earth). The 'higher' a being is, the more authority it exerts; the 'lower' it is, the weaker. While it is a metaphor to say that Jesus is the "head" over all, He truly does stand at the peak of the entire creation, for all things were made through Him (Colossians 1:15-20).

Where we stand

It's more interesting question to ask where we stand in all this. We're spiritual beings, so where do we fit in – how much authority do we wield in the spiritual world? Well, as humans, our natural state is to be dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). Before we entered Christ, we were still physically alive – so Ephesians 2:1 must be a reference to our

spiritual state. So there you have it: In our natural state, we have the spiritual authority of a corpse. We have no influence or standing – we are spiritually dead. I don't say this to demean you; I just think it's important for us to see how lost we are without Jesus. Our spirits were at the bottom of the heap; we were without hope (Ephesians 2:12).

What about now? As Christians, our spiritual standing changes radically. In the heavenly realms, we are seated with Christ. Ephesians 2:6 says

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace

We have “the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:5), and God has already liquidated a huge part of our inheritance for our benefit – by seating us with Him in the highest of the heavenly realms. And that is an incredible blessing.

That is why, if we resist Satan, he will flee (James 4:7). This passage is mistaught to say that Satan is a coward. I disagree: He has the nerve to set up a rebellious reign in opposition to God Himself. Satan is as bold as we could possibly imagine. But, as a being in the spiritual realms, he is bound by spiritual laws. Our authority is higher than his, because we are seated with Christ, and so Satan has no choice but to submit.

This is also why the angels are our ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14). God has never called any angel His son (Hebrews 1:5), but He has called us His sons (Galatians 4:6). This is because the angels have a subordinate authority to God, but God has adopted us into His own family (Ephesians 1:5). In ancient times, as is often the case today, a son would inherit the business, title, wealth and standing of his father. And God has made us “a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:6).

Wherefore?

These truths will always be a great mystery to us, but God has not left us in the dark about how our cosmic regeneration took place. Read Philippians 2:6-11, and read it well. Alongside John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1-2 and Isaiah 53, this is one of the great meditations on the Incarnation. Its focus is the humility of God which was revealed through the Incarnation. Some people believe that the act of God becoming a man is the greatest miracle God has ever performed – by this thinking, God becoming man is a greater feat even than Jesus raising from the dead. And I agree.

It says that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (v7, NRSV). Jesus emptied Himself of glory when He came to earth. That's why people were able to “see Him and live” (contra Exodus 33:20). We know that Jesus gave up His life so we could have life. We know that His temple was destroyed so we could be a temple of the God. But did you know that Jesus gave up divine authority so that we could share in it? In case you didn't, let me restate it:

Jesus gave up heavenly glory so that we could be given heavenly glory here and now.

Jesus, whose home is heaven, came and walked an earthly path of suffering and death, so that we could escape the confines of this world and be exalted to the highest heavens. He gave up His life and now offers to us life eternal. He gave up His throne, and has

now seated us there, forever. “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him” (Psalm 103:11). Jesus is truly our redeemer – he exchanged comfort, life and heaven for earthly suffering and death. and it was all for you – all so you could have endless comfort, eternal life and heavenly bliss.

Now, but not yet

In 1 John 3:1, John is enraptured by these truths. Then, in verse 2, he says: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” If we are already sons and daughters of God, what more is there for us to be? If we are already seated with Christ, then we more do we have to hope for? I can’t end this study without pointing out the eschatological truths of these concepts. They contain some of the greatest paradoxes in the Bible. We have already been adopted as sons (Romans 8:14-15), but what we are hoping for *is* our adoption as sons (Romans 8:23). Could Paul have set up a greater paradox – two colliding statements, within a couple of paragraphs.

We are seated with Christ (Ephesians 2:6), but we are hoping to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). How are we to make sense of this? We need to remember that we are works in progress. We are not yet completed products – God still has a lot to do. An incredible amount has already been achieved, at Calvary, and in our baptismal waters (which connected us with what Jesus achieved at Calvary – Romans 6:3-4), and we should rejoice unendingly in what God has already done for us. *But*, we still have a long way to go – we are not yet perfected, the adoption papers have not been fully processed, and we need to persevere if we want to guarantee our inheritance (Hebrews 10:36).

[We are there, but not yet. We’ve made it, but still have a long way to go.](#)

God has much to reveal to us in this matter. Take the Kingdom. We disciples use the term too loosely to refer to the church, as if the church was the perfected city of God. In truth, the Kingdom will not be consummated until the final Day. Am I saying that it’s not here yet? Yes and no... The Kingdom *has* begun, but it is not yet complete – like us, it is a work in progress, looking to the final Day for its true completion. So, yes, we *should* continue to pray “May your Kingdom come” – it is a false teaching to say that this is an “out of date” prayer. But that’s another study in itself, so we need to move on.

I don’t mean to undermine any of my earlier points about our authority. Far from it, I just want to make sure that you progress to a deeper and deeper understanding of our union with Christ, so I had no choice but to introduce you to the initially confusing, but ultimately enlightening concept of “now/ not yet” – a concept you will come across a lot if you read theology, and even more if you read the Bible with both eyes open.

When we were baptized, our spirits were lifted up by God from the lowest dregs into His very throne room. I have pointed out a couple of examples that illustrate our awesome spiritual authority, which truly does “show the incomparable riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:7). Our authority can and will reach to the highest heavens – as with Christ, so it shall be with us. But we are still works in progress, and we look, strive and yearn constantly for our final consummation, when we “will be raised imperishable” (1 Corinthians 15:52), and behold, with our own eyes, the very throne room where our spirits are already dwelling. As it is for Christ, so it is for you and me.

Christ's Power, Our Power

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable
and the mortal with immortality. – 1 Corinthians 15:54

We've come a long way together, you and me. This is the second last instalment of this study series. This study builds on ideas from the last one, seeking to open our eyes to the incredible extent of Christ's power, and inviting you to claim this power as your own.

The New Creation

Some of you may be aware that the main purpose of biblical miracles was to confirm the spoken word of the prophets, the apostles, and of Christ (Hebrews 2:3-4). However, on an equally practical level, it must also be recognised that miracles show God's power and character. It was a messianic prophesy that Jesus would heal the sick (Isaiah 53:4), not only so that people would take notice of His words, but also so that people would see that God is a God of healing, who feels our pain, and longs to carry our burdens.

But there's more to it than that. The truth is that God is *always* healing wounds. Our bodies heal, and that is an act of God. Some years ago I had a small operation in which the doctor had to use a scalpel. At the end of the operation, he stitched me up and sent me home and I thought "Well, isn't that incredible! He's just put string to hold my skin together, and that's it." All he could do was hope that, ultimately, my body would heal itself – and, based on past experience, he could be quite certain that it would. Doctors can't heal any more than surfers can create waves. Healing is from God; and He's always healing us – that's what Jesus reminded us of in His ministry.

John's Gospel most closely follows this thinking. Jesus turns water into wine (John 2:1-11), to the amazement of the wedding guests. But God is always turning water into wine! Every season, God sends rain, which waters crops which are then picked, crushed and fermented into wine. All this is from God (Job 36:26-29). Jesus simply did what God had been doing every season for thousands of years – except He did it in an instant, showing that God is sovereign over agriculture. God is the provider of food for our sustenance, and wine for our pleasure. Each of the signs in John's gospel shows a different aspect of God's sovereignty (see Merrill Tenney's "New Testament Survey" for a full account).

But do all miracles follow this pattern? Do all miracles reflect the way God is working in the here and now? The answer is no. There are two miracles in the Gospels which actually reverse the way that God works in this world. Firstly, there is walking on water (John 6:16-21). This defies the laws of science; there is no parallel to it in this world. The second is raising people from the dead – which Jesus did three times, and then, ultimately to Himself, as we've explored earlier. These miracles go beyond this world – what is God trying to show us about Himself through these miracles?

The answer suggested by C.S. Lewis is that most miracles are miracles of the "Old Creation" (that is, the current world), while others are miracles of the "New Creation" (that is, the world to come). When Jesus walked on water, He gave us a glimpse of the

fact that, in heaven, we will triumph over the material – a fact that we already know.

[Jesus was showing us the way it will be in the world to come.](#)

So, explaining resurrection is very straightforward indeed. Jesus raised people from the dead in order to compellingly demonstrate to us that on the Final Day, all the righteous will raise from their graves, from death to life – and this reversal of natural processes is what will characterize heaven. It's a cliché that “nothing lasts forever”, but in heaven, everything will last forever – the natural order will be turned on its head. Resurrection is a glimpse of the world to come; it gives us a foreshadowing of what awaits our eternity.

Resurrection Power

Now that we have a deeper understanding of the cosmic resurrection, we turn to the topic of this study, and ask what power God makes available to us. But let's start by pondering what power we have in our natural state. To begin with, we are “sold as a slave to sin” (Romans 7:14), “nothing good lives in [us],” and we can barely even choose to do what is right (Romans 7:18). We are captives to sin, without strength and without hope.

The world beckons us to spend our lives scrambling for power – social power, physical strength, economic power, political power and, one of the most popular, “mind power” (which is, of course, pure humanism). Such thinking is futility (Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:17), and, in the end, it will all come to nothing. How do we profit if we gain the entire world, but lose our very soul? When we are alive to God, we recognise that the power sources that the world offers have little merit; it is spiritual sustenance that we crave.

As risen sons and daughters of God, we have a very different kind of power available to us. Ephesians 1:19-21 says “[I pray that you may know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God has put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.” (NRSV) So, the power which God gives us is resurrection power:

[The power to be transformed from death into life.](#)

God would not have it any way. When we were baptized, it was Christ's resurrection that we connected with (Romans 6:3-4), because we were brought from spiritual deadness to eternal life. But what we urgently need to remember is that this is *still* the power which is available to us, day by day. Paul prayed that the church in Ephesus would know this resurrection power, and remember that it is “for us who believe.”

At every moment, with every passing breath, God has one power source available to us: the cosmic power source of the resurrection; a power source which leaves nuclear power in the dust. Nuclear power may well be able to blow this world to smithereens – in fact, I have no doubt that it could! But it will never have the power to transform death into life. This power belongs to God alone, and the amazing fact is that He makes it available to all of His sons and daughters, and that is something to rejoice about.

The Light Switch

Hopefully we are starting to be convinced about just how incredible the power is which God makes available to us. The challenge for us, then, is to tap into this incredible reserve. Rising to this call is the very same challenge as the call to wield our spiritual authority which we learned about in the previous study. If we feel incapable of rising above our sin, if we feel trapped in a cycle of ungodly behaviour, then one thing is sure: We are living our lives on our strength, rather than the resurrection power of God. I am the first to plead “guilty as charged”. In fact, of all the points made in this series, this is the one I’m most excited about. It’s time for another story from Ravi’s book:

Years ago, there was a light-hearted story making the rounds. It was the story of a breakdown in a power plant that sent the city into confusion. For a long time, no engineer could be found who was able to fix the problem. Finally a man came along who, by the push of a button, restarted the system. He billed the city for a million and one dollars. Surprised by the number, somebody asked him why it was a million and one, and not just a million. His answer was that one dollar was for pushing the button. The one million was for knowing where to push.

– Zacharias, page 107.

You are aware that you are seated with Christ, and that the power which raised Him from death is the same power available to you – right now. With Jesus in death, with you in life. But where is the light switch? Which button do you need to push in order to surge the system with the power that’s been waiting there the whole time, but which, for some reason, has been blocked off?

As with every mystery of Scripture, that answer was there all along. What do notice that is common about Ephesians 1:18-20, Ephesians 3:19, and many other passages that we have been turning to? They are prayers. The light switch is not high above our reach, as we may imagine: “I need to be so much more spiritual before I can reach these blessings – I’ll need to prove myself before God blesses me.” What futile thinking. After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? (Galatians 3:3)

In fact, the light switch is in such a location that we can only reach it when we’re on our knees. We need to be so convinced of our lostness and powerlessness outside of Christ that we forsake our confidence in ourselves and fall before God in dependence on Him. We ought to throw ourselves into prayer – not because we’re “so spiritual”, but because we’re so *unspiritual*! Only then will we attain to the full measure of God’s power and renewal in our life.

Christ’s body was made new through his triumph over death;
Our spirits will also be made new as God’s strength empowers us to triumph over sin.

Christ's Righteousness, Our Righteousness

[O LORD... deliver me in your righteousness – Psalm 31:1](#)

This study is the conclusion of this entire series. Our righteousness is from God, and this is one of the great revelations of Scripture. In this study, our memories of Christ's perfection will be refreshed, and the true nature of our righteousness will be revealed.

A Sinless Saviour or a Sinless Mankind

Jesus is our perfect Lord. He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15); His life was in total conformity to the Father's will and plan. God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), and can have nothing to do with sin. Related to this, Jesus needed to be the perfect, unblemished sacrifice – once for all (Hebrews 9:14). If He Himself was marred by sin, He would first have needed to sacrifice on His own behalf (Hebrews 9:25-26). And this process would have had to have been repeated over and over, just like it was under the Old Covenant.

But this would not do – Jesus' death is once for all, which required Jesus to be perfect. If Jesus is anything less than a sinless Saviour, then we have no hope. But why all this fuss? Because we are so *imperfect*, that's why. God's plan is a perfect one, not because it requires us to be perfect (such a plan would be doomed to fail), but because it caters for our imperfections. Christ is our sinless Saviour; and we don't want it any other way.

[We are saved through Christ's righteousness \(Romans 1:17\).](#)

I might take a detour here in order to illustrate a point. God always leaves open the possibility of us being saved by our own righteousness. (This is the path that the Jews took – Romans 9:31-10:3.) This path could be called the "works model" of salvation.

Consider Romans 2:14-15. Read it carefully, because a great many disciples are very confused about this verse. For those who do not hear God's message, their conscience is their law. Everyone knows that stealing is wrong (except those whose consciences are seared – 1 Timothy 4:2 – but even they *did* know at one point.) It is, in fact, very reasonable that people will be judged by their conscience if they never had the opportunity to hear God's message – conscience is the law which God gives to all men.

But who has never offended their conscience? The answer is obvious: Not even one (Romans 3:10). In other words, if we forget the Bible, forget discipleship and forget being baptized and praying and repenting etc., and if we make our conscience *alone* the standard, who would pass the test? No one – not in the entire history of mankind (James 2:10). So, is God unjust? Not at all (Romans 9:14). Everyone will be judged only according to "what they know", and that is fair, through and through.

The only alternative to accepting Jesus' righteousness is to rely on our own, but this is no alternative at all. Salvation cannot be by works – our works lead to condemnation.

A Substitute Offering

Maybe some of you have always been confused by this. "Christ's righteousness is well and good for Him, about what about me? If I'll never measure up, how will I be saved?"

The fact that we are saved by grace alone (Ephesians 2:5b-9) goes to the heart of our insecurities, especially if we trust in ourselves, instead of in God. The basis of our salvation is also the basis of our righteousness. What is true righteousness? From where does it stem? These are the most crucial questions for a disciple to get *right*, because, yes, there *will* be a test (Romans 2:16).

Righteousness is from God, and not from ourselves. It is time to read Romans 1:17 carefully: “In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” Paul can say that our righteousness is “by faith from first to last” because righteousness is 100% about accepting Jesus, and 0% about us being perfect, because we never can be. And this fact, brothers and sisters, is the big one, the climax, the grand turismo.

[True righteousness is from God alone, and nothing said has ever been truer.](#)

If you remember one fact from this series, remember this, because it’s the most important. As disciples, we tend to know that if we trust in God instead of ourselves, our life will be far more effective (or fruitful), and we’ll also be far more happy. But the truth is deeper than that. If we trust in ourselves, our salvation is in jeopardy. Righteousness is from God, and God alone. A moment’s reflection should convince you that you really don’t want it any other way. We spend so much time thinking about our own sin, when our focus should be God’s righteousness. Is it our perfection that saves us, or God’s righteousness? Which do you prefer: The works model (which is man’s idea, to be a ‘good person’), or salvation by grace alone (which is God’s plan)?

The decision we must make is to leave our humanistic plans in the dust, and embrace God’s perfect plan – perfect because it is tailored for sinners like me and you. To say it another way: There are two kinds of righteousness: self-righteousness (which is no righteousness at all), and righteousness from God, which is pure and perfect. The choice is yours. Am I saying to forget about your sin? Well, God does (Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12), so why can’t you? In truth, if your focus is God’s righteousness, instead of your sin, you’ll actually become more sensitive, but less guilted out, about sin than ever before. This study, you see, is an invitation to be freed from guilt (1 John 1:7) and shame (Romans 10:11) by being delivered by God’s righteousness (Psalm 31:1).

Digging Deeper

Let’s deepen our understanding of this concept of true righteousness. In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for righteousness means strikingly the same thing. It means to *fulfil the obligations of a relationship*. If I turn up to work on time, work diligently, and never skimp, lie or cheat, then chances are that I’d be acting righteously toward my boss. And if my boss paid me what was right, wasn’t harsh etc., we’d have a righteous relationship. I’m aware that the English word is not used in this way, but this *is* what the Biblical term means (and that’s what counts).

God is righteous (Ezra 9:15, Psalm 119:137), meaning that He never fails to love, never fails to keep His promises, never fails to treat people how they deserve (there’s a scary one). He is perfect in justice, perfect in grace. We are unrighteous (Romans 3), both in our human relationships, and, most importantly, in our relationship with God. This is not to say that we always fail, but we do from time to time – and if we fail even once,

we're gone (James 2:10). We owe God our lives and souls, and yet we sin – and all sin is ultimately against Him.

But it's God who makes the rules, right? And *He* decided before the beginning of time that He would accept substitutory payments. Through Jesus' death, a substitutory payment was made for our unrighteousness. Now, all sin *will* be punished, since God is righteous, it's just that *our* punishment falls on Christ instead of on us. You see, God's grace and His justice were brought together in perfect harmony at the cross. It is not as if God's wrath is in conflict with His love. God is an absolute unity – and to think anything less is surely in error. It doesn't take long to realise that the cross shows us God's wrath just as powerfully as it shows us His love. To see the cross and not see God's wrath is to miss the point entirely.

But there's another clause which God put in place. He decided that,

[If we just met one particular article of righteousness, then that would be enough for us to be considered righteous in His sight, due to the mercy made available by the cross.](#)

And we already know what that article is. Read Genesis 15:6 with new understanding: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited to him as righteousness." There's a reason it's quoted so many times (Romans 4:3, 22-24; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). It's because it reveals the incredible plan and wisdom of God. If we meet that one, all important requirement of faith, then, through the mercy of the cross, we receive the righteousness of God. The perfection of Christ nullifies our imperfection; we are infused with his righteousness – His since the dawn of time, and now ours forevermore.

Conclusion

I hope I didn't lose you. Now, hopefully, we know what it means for Noah to be righteous (Genesis 6:9), not to mention Abel (Matthew 23:35), Job (Job 12:4), Joseph (Matthew 1:19), and many others. Now we even know that, yes, James 5:16b *does* apply to us! A man is righteous because God has given him righteousness from Himself (Job 33:26). You are righteous, because the Lord within you is righteous (Zephaniah 3:5a) – it is not from yourself, it is from God. So continue in faith and hope and you will be declared righteous on the final Day, not because of the great things that you've done, but because the righteousness of Jesus will actually stand in place of your unrighteousness.

Some think that when we're baptized, Jesus just clears our name. But that's not the whole story. He doesn't just clear our name, He gives us His name in exchange, because we enter His very own family (Romans 8:15-17, Ephesians 2:19). Christ's righteousness is our righteousness – embrace this truth, and find true freedom in Him. Paul, writing to a church seeking self-righteousness, had this to say: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1) Especially not the slavery of seeking self-righteousness.

I hope that these studies have been an inspiration to you, that they have sparked in you a new appreciation and a deeper love for our wonderful Saviour, that they have called you to drink more deeply from the wellspring of the Word, and that they have brought you to a deeper understanding of your oneness with Christ.