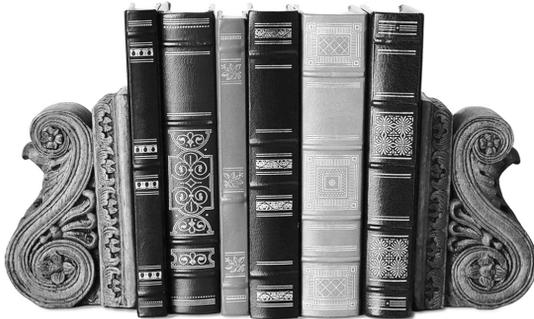


THE  
**BOOKENDS**  
OF THE  
CHRISTIAN LIFE



JERRY BRIDGES  
& BOB BEVINGTON

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*The Bookends of the Christian Life*

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*To all who, like the two of us,  
recognize the utter insufficiency of their own  
righteousness and strength,  
and thus are desperate for the gospel.  
And to our Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—  
who provides us with an impeccable righteousness  
and an indomitable strength  
through our union with Christ.*

*Only in the LORD . . . are righteousness and strength.*

ISAIAH 45:24

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# PREFACE

Over the past several years, as the two of us have shared with each other what God is teaching us through his Word and our experiences, we've concluded there are two foundational truths that give stability to our Christian lives. We've chosen to use the illustration of bookends to teach these two truths.

*The Bookends of the Christian Life* is a collaborative effort. So in every instance, whether the teaching or illustration is from one or both of us, we've chosen to use the plural pronouns *we* or *us*.

We would like to acknowledge Greg Plitt, Chris Thifault, Steve Myers, and Joe Coffey for their valuable assistance with the early drafts and Greg Bryan for the diagram design. Thanks also to Allan Fisher, senior vice president for book publishing at Crossway, for his support of this project, and to Lydia Brownback and Thomas Womack for their outstanding editorial work. In addition, we're grateful for each and every member of the Crossway team.

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*Jerry Bridges  
Bob Bevington*



CHAPTER FOUR

## GOSPEL ENEMY #2: PERSISTENT GUILT

*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

GALATIANS 2:21

As we've seen, by depending on our own performance to merit God's approval and blessings, we spurn the support and security of the first bookend. If we successfully measure up to our standards, we harbor Gospel Enemy #1, self-righteousness. If we fall short, self-righteousness can give birth to Gospel Enemy #2, persistent guilt. In this case, our dependence is still on our own righteousness, though we're painfully aware of its inadequacy. We view Christ's obedient life and death for us as though it fell short of its intended purpose—removing *all* our guilt so that we bear none of it ourselves. Here, too, our ability to experience the joys of God's grace is nullified.

Living under a stronghold of guilt is a story that goes all the way back to the garden of Eden. When Adam and

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Eve sinned, they knew they'd done something wrong even before coming into the presence of God. Why? They felt *guilty*. So they covered themselves and hid from God. Later, when confronted by God, they resorted to finger-pointing (Genesis 3:7–13). And ever since, throughout human history, awareness of guilt is awakened at a very early age. How does this happen?

The Bible tells us that God has supplied every person with a conscience. It's part and parcel of all human hearts:

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires . . . they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. (Romans 2:14–15)

The conscience is our God-given inner voice, an internal witness that testifies to the level of our personal obedience using God's perfect law as a measuring stick. Its voice is heard in both our mind and our emotions. Sometimes it whispers; sometimes it shouts.

Our conscience serves two important purposes for our good, just as pain does for our body. First, it sends off warning signals when we're about to go astray. This should remind us to renew our dependence on God's enabling strength, the second bookend (as we'll explore later). Second, when we sin, our conscience declares us guilty. This should remind us to renew our dependence on the cure for our sin-sickness, the righteousness of Christ crucified, the first bookend.

## *Gospel Enemy #2: Persistent Guilt*

Our conscience is a good thing. But at times it can make us extremely uncomfortable. It can exert such a powerful force that it becomes downright painful. No wonder humans have invented such a vast array of escape mechanisms—everything from the subtle misuse of entertainment such as TV, movies, sports, video games, and hobbies, to the abuse of mind-altering substances such as alcohol and drugs, or even the unwavering pursuit of career or good works. These serve to numb the pain of our conscience, or to artificially make us feel better about ourselves, or both. The same can be said of addictions and preoccupations of every kind. Escape mechanisms are sinful responses that sidestep the God-given purpose of our conscience. This can lead to big trouble because it compounds sin upon sin.

When neglected or misused, our conscience, like our body, can malfunction. It breaks down and fails when we habitually embrace lies and double standards (1 Timothy 4:2). It becomes dirty and dysfunctional when we stubbornly cling to impurity (Titus 1:15). And repeatedly rejecting the voice of our conscience can eventually result in the shipwreck of our faith (1 Timothy 1:19). Failure to respond to our conscience in a biblical way can lead to self-loathing, clinical depression, and even suicide.

As we've noted earlier, all believers often commit sin (1 John 1:8, 10). Therefore we regularly hear the voice of our conscience. But, take note: *The message of the cross is absent from the signals sent by our guilty conscience*; it knows only the law. So all we hear from it is bad news, not good news.

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In fact, embracing the nagging voice of our conscience instead of silencing it with the gospel is exactly how Gospel Enemy #2, persistent guilt, gets a stranglehold on believers. You may be there right now. And the sound may be deafening.

For others, the voice of conscience drones on like background noise. It becomes so “normal” they become unaware of being in the grip of guilt, even though it’s making them spiritually (and possibly physically) sick.

Whether the voice of your conscience is extremely loud or barely audible, remember that you don’t have to be a scandalous sinner to suffer from persistent guilt. So we should ask and answer the following questions carefully and regularly in order to identify the influence of this gospel enemy:

- 1) Are you painfully preoccupied with a particular habitual sin?
- 2) Are you discouraged or depressed by your failure to measure up?
- 3) Do you frequently experience anxiety that something’s about to go wrong?
- 4) Does it appear God can use others but not you?
- 5) Is there something in your past you just can’t seem to get over?
- 6) Do you fear that your past will come back to haunt you?
- 7) Do your difficult circumstances seem like God’s judgment for your sin?
- 8) Do you steer clear of intimate relationships or small-group discussions?

## *Gospel Enemy #2: Persistent Guilt*

- 9) When you sin, do you get a vague sense that somehow there'll be a price to pay?
- 10) Do you seldom think of the cross?

Persistent guilt sometimes incapacitates a believer. Take the case of Mark (not his real name). People at his church described him as conscientious and humble. Yet he struggled with anxiety and discouragement. And he tended to disappear from church for weeks at a time. After several years of observing this pattern, his pastor finally got to the bottom of it. Mark, it turned out, binged on Internet pornography three or four times a year. Each time he would succumb to paralyzing guilt. He couldn't face his Christian brothers and sisters until he could first "fix himself" for a few weeks.

Guilt-ridden believers often become desperate enough to seek help. A troubled believer we know went to a professional counselor and was advised, "You must learn to forgive yourself." But there's not a shred of biblical support for this concept. The truth is, our sin is real—we *are* guilty, just like our conscience tells us. And we have no authority or basis for making a self-declaration of forgiveness.

Instead, we must go back to the first bookend. Only the life and death of Christ offers a legitimate path to freedom from a guilty conscience—legitimate because it was a real, lived-in-the-flesh, finished righteousness, applied to us forever. It was an obedience "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8), where "Christ . . . offered himself without blemish to God, [to] purify our

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conscience” (Hebrews 9:14). What makes it legitimate *for us* is that he did it in our place as our substitute. Christ transfers (imputes, credits) his perfect righteousness to every sinner who is “in him” by faith (2 Corinthians 5:21). Yes, it’s amazing and undeserved. But, as we saw earlier, when the Bible says we’re just-if-ied by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16), it means it’s just-as-if *we*—like Christ himself—always obeyed. From the moment we’re united to Christ by faith in the gospel, in God’s own eyes we’re permanently clothed in the very righteousness of Christ.

But we may not always experience this. Our awareness of our permanent standing may grow dim when we sin by embracing other treasures and dependencies. It’s then we must return to our Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ *the righteous* (1 John 2:1), and stand in the present reality of our justification. With our dependence back on the first bookend, the weight of our guilt melts away and we feel lighter than air—not because of anything we do or don’t do, but because of the infinite, infallible, interminable righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Whereas guilt is a curse, a healthy remembrance of our sin is a blessing. Guilt ignores the cross but remembering our sin should drive us *to* the cross. Paul never forgot his sin. He not only remembered it, but he also used it to display the gospel:

Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy . . . and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ

## *Gospel Enemy #2: Persistent Guilt*

Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:13-15)

Another example is John Newton, who never forgot his depravity as a notorious slave trader. But instead of wallowing in guilt, he took it to the cross and left it there. And he wrote the most famous Christian hymn, the one that begins, “Amazing grace / how sweet the sound! / that saved a wretch like me.” To the very end, Newton remembered both his sin and the gospel. On his deathbed at age eighty-two, he said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.”<sup>1</sup>

As authors, we acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of some of the giants of the Christian faith whose works are just as relevant today as when they were written centuries ago. We have tremendous respect for their insights into the gospel, insights which have stood the test of time. One such author is a little-known seventeenth-century Puritan, Thomas Wilcox, who wrote *Honey out of the Rock*,<sup>2</sup> one of the most helpful essays we’ve found on dealing with persistent guilt. We’ve updated into modern language a series of Wilcox’s instructions for dealing with persistent guilt:

- *Shift your focus away from your sin and onto Christ:* don’t persist in looking upon sin; look upon Christ instead, and don’t look away from him for a moment. When we see our guilt, if we don’t see Christ in the scene, away with it! In all our

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storms of conscience, we must look at Christ exclusively and continually.

- *Shift your focus to Christ, our mediator.* If we're so discouraged we cannot pray, then we must see Christ praying for us (Romans 8:34), using his influence with the Father on our behalf. What better news could we ever want than to know Jesus Christ—the Son of God, co-creator of the Universe—is addressing the Father on our behalf?
- *Shift your focus to Christ crucified, risen, and ascended.* When guilt persists, remember where Jesus is and where he's been. He has been upon the cross, where he spoiled all that can ruin us. He's now upon the throne of heaven, as our advocate and mediator. His state in glory doesn't make him neglectful or scornful of the guilty sinners he died to redeem. He has the same heart now in heaven as he had upon the cross.
- *Shift your focus to the glory of Christ.* If guilt still persists, remember that he pardons for his own name's sake (Isaiah 43:25; Ezekiel 36:22; 1 John 2:12), because in pardoning us he'll make us living monuments of the glory of the grace he purchased. It's Christ's own happiness to pardon, so he does. By embracing this truth, even the most desperate sinner's conscience can rest absolutely assured.
- *Shift your focus off of self-condemnation.* When our conscience relentlessly condemns us, remember that Christ will have the last word. He is judge of the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5) and only he can pronounce the final sentence. Christ is the judge—not us or our conscience. So never for a moment dare to take the judge's place by proclaiming irreparable guilt when he proclaims hope, grace, and pardon. If we think our sin is too great to be pardoned, remember that Christ doesn't agree.
- *Shift your focus off of self-contempt.* If we're focused on hating ourselves, realize that we're focused on ourselves and not

## *Gospel Enemy #2: Persistent Guilt*

on him. Self-contempt is a subtle form of self-centeredness, which is the opposite of Christ-centeredness. Unless our self-contempt makes us look more at the righteousness of Christ and the cross of Christ and less at ourselves, the whole endeavor leads to death. Let our sin break our hearts but not our hope in the gospel.

There's only one way to escape the grip of guilt: we must flee to the gospel. It's the only perfectly safe and sufficient place to turn. Be assured, there's no lack of grace for us there. John Owen, another of our favorite giants of the faith, pointed to "the *infiniteness of grace*" and asked, "What is our *finite guilt* before it?"<sup>3</sup> Owen knew we can never exhaust the supply of the grace purchased by Christ's obedient life and sacrifice for us.

Here's one last consideration from our adaptation of *Honey out of the Rock*, one that explains how our desperate need for the first bookend results in our treasuring Christ:

The greatness of Christ's merit is known best by sinners in deep distress. The thirstier a man is, the more he'll prize a cup of water; the more our sins break and burden us, the more we'll treasure our Healer and Deliverer.

Join us in letting this quote resonate deeply within you. Don't avoid the voice of your conscience; instead deliberately and regularly remember your past sin and acknowledge your present sin. Then return to the cross, the epicenter of the unfathomable greatness of Christ's merit. Don't be reluctant to feel thirsty; it points you to

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living water where you can cherish every drop of it he gives for what it really is—precious beyond comparison. And when those old guilt pangs stab at you, thank them for doing you a great service by reminding you afresh that there’s a Deliverer who has already delivered you, a Healer whose stripes have already healed you (Colossians 1:13–14; Isaiah 53:5). And because of this, Christ is your all-surpassing treasure.

Not only do we recognize that we deserve none of this, but also we *love* the fact that we don’t deserve it. It’s a fact that displays and magnifies his grace. We share something in common with the sinful woman in Luke 7: our tears and our “ointment” don’t earn a thing; they simply express our gratitude for the overwhelming way Christ has loved us in the gospel. We’ve been forgiven much, freed from much, and blessed much. So we love him much (but not nearly as much as he deserves). We continue to sin every day in ways that, if not big and scandalous, are nevertheless offensive and grieve his heart. And amazingly, he continues to love us, and keep us, and treasure us as the apple of his eye (Zechariah 2:8).

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14, the tax collector took a far different approach from the self-righteous Pharisee. Trembling because of his guilt, he stood far off, eyes to the ground. He beat his breast and acknowledged his sinfulness. And he begged for God’s mercy. Remarkably, Jesus declared him justified! And as if that good news were not astonishing enough, there’s more. Jesus declared that in the future this tax collector would be

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*exalted!* And for what? Begging for mercy? Yes! Because his begging was a heartfelt acknowledgment of his sinfulness in the light of God's holiness; it was a burning expression of his desperate need of mercy—the very thing the gospel provides. His begging did not nullify the grace of God but exalted it.

If you're embracing persistent guilt, lay it down at Christ's feet and beg for a cleansed conscience—for the mercy, freedom, and peace he provides in his righteousness. That's the first step. In the next chapter we'll discuss more steps, important strategies for leaning our books on this first bookend.



CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE HELP OF THE DIVINE ENCOURAGER

*By the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

ROMANS 15:13

One of the most important aspects of the second bookend is the hope the Holy Spirit provides to believers. Every believer needs this divine encouragement because our opposition is relentless, and there are plenty of disappointments along the way. Sometimes we think we've turned the corner on a particular sin, only to discover a few days later that we've merely gone around the block and are dealing with it again. But there is hope in our battle with sin, and it lies in placing our dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit, our ever-present Helper (John 14:16–17).

The Holy Spirit often provides hope for the battle by pointing us back to the righteousness of Christ—the first bookend. Paul alluded to this when he wrote, “*Through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of*

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*righteousness*" (Galatians 5:5). There's nothing more encouraging for the battle-weary believer than to receive a fresh view of the righteousness of Christ. Strengthened by the gospel, we find renewed courage to lean hard on the second bookend while we actively participate in the process of transformation. This is yet another reason we never outgrow or move past the first bookend.

We're going to discuss four ways the Holy Spirit encourages us, and it's our prayer that they would become living realities in your heart as the Spirit encourages you to renew your dependence on the second bookend by remembering the first.

## LIFE-CHANGING GRATITUDE FOR PURCHASED GRACE

Jesus said, "When the Helper comes . . . he will bear witness *about me*" (John 15:26). What does he have to relate to us about Jesus? He opens the eyes of our hearts to the gospel—the most encouraging news of all. He reminds us that Jesus said things such as "greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). We didn't deserve to be loved to the death; it's pure grace, the amazing and undeserved blessings of privilege and power purchased for us by Christ's obedient life and death. The Spirit's witness about the infinitely costly work paid for us by an infinitely valuable Person causes our hearts to see Christ in such a way that gratitude transforms us at the very core of our being. Paul explained it like this:

### *The Help of the Divine Encourager*

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

The love Paul refers to here is not our love for Christ. If it were, he would have said “love *for* Christ controls us.” Instead he says “love *of* Christ,” which clearly refers to his love for us, a love forever proven at the cross. As our experience of Christ’s love grips us more deeply, our gratitude for the grace he purchased gradually overcomes the vise-grip of our self-centeredness, and we “no longer live for ourselves.” This illumination into Christ’s great love is born in us only through the work of the Spirit.

John echoed this principle when he wrote, “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, *not that we have loved God but that he loved us* and sent his Son to be the propitiation<sup>1</sup> for our sins.” A few verses later John added, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:9–10, 19). Our gratitude for the love that provided the first bookend encourages us to depend on the second for strength to obey the commandments, including the greatest ones—to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

A great way to apply this is exemplified by the pastor friend we quoted earlier who was learning to shift

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his dependence away from functional saviors. He refuses to leave home in the morning until a deep awareness of God's love for him in the gospel is renewed. He works at this each morning through the spiritual disciplines of Bible meditation and prayer, but he's dependent on the Holy Spirit all the while. Since he started this habit, he is often encouraged by grace and strengthened for the daily battle against his functional saviors. And by sharing this aspect of his life with others, many who were once spiritually paralyzed and numb in his church have been awakened to the gospel and are being transformed as well.

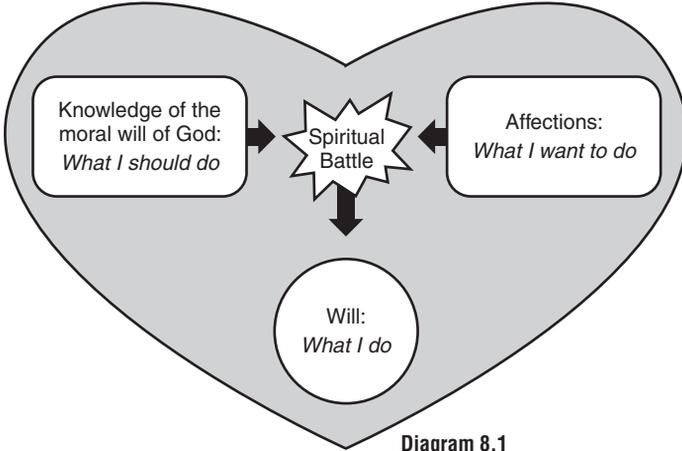
By revisiting the gospel daily, we too can keep a deep sense of gratitude "bubbling up" like a steady spring in our lives as the Holy Spirit illuminates Christ's great love for us each day. Such gratitude will keep us encouraged even in times when we don't feel we're making any progress.

## THE EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION

For many years, the two of us thought that the mind was the best weapon against the sins of the heart. We attempted to use our knowledge of "what I *should* do" to fight our sinful desire of "what I *want* to do." We assumed that if the argument of our mind prevailed, we would do the right thing. Diagram 8.1 illustrates our old approach to battling sin.

*The Help of the Divine Encourager*

**OLD PARADIGM**



**Diagram 8.1**

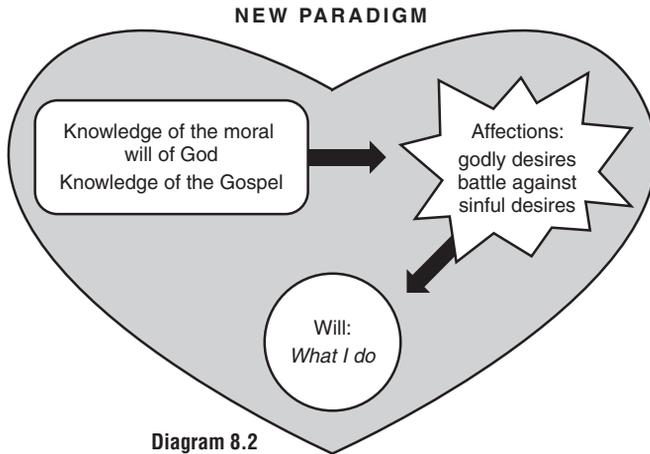
However, this approach resulted in very limited success.

A sermon by the nineteenth-century Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers helped us immensely. Called “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection,”<sup>2</sup> the title alone speaks volumes. Here’s an excerpt from Chalmers’s sermon that we’ve updated into modern language:

The best way to disengage an impure desire is to engage a pure one; the best way to expel the love of what is evil is to embrace the love of what is good instead. To be specific, we must replace the object of our sinful affection with an infinitely more worthy one—God himself. In this way we do not move from a full heart into a vacuum. Instead we move from a full heart to a heart bursting with fullness. And the expulsive power of our new affection weakens and even destroys the power of sin in our hearts.

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Chalmers's point is that we must battle desire with desire. Whichever desire is the strongest will always determine the outcome. Paul also wrote about this battle against sin in terms of two competing desires: "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do" (Galatians 5:17). Diagram 8.2 is the diagram we now use to more accurately illustrate the battle.



Ultimately, our godly desires must overcome our sinful desires if we're to obey God. So to win the battle against sin, we must strengthen and encourage our godly desires. How? By simultaneously growing in our awareness of: (1) our sin—our knowledge of the moral will of God and how far short we fall daily; and (2) God's love—the grace and blessings purchased by Christ in the gospel.

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Though we work hard at this, we ultimately need the Divine Encourager to make it happen. Jesus said that when the Helper comes, “he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness” (John 16:8). As the Spirit testifies to our sin and to the righteousness Christ graciously provides in the first bookend, our hearts are gripped by the immensity of the gap between what we deserve and the blessings purchased by Christ’s obedient death. As we become increasingly desperate for the gospel, our sinful desires are expelled from our heart because they’re replaced with a new desire for the God who demonstrated “his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). As a simple yet practical application of this understanding, we might preach the following one-sentence sermon to ourselves every day: “Because he loves me so much, I love him more than \_\_\_\_\_.”

As we see how incomparably desirable God is, he becomes our superior satisfaction, our all-surpassing treasure (Matthew 13:44). Our appetite for sin grows weak by comparison, and we expel it because there’s not room enough in our heart for both. Our affection—our love for God—is then expressed in personal obedience and deepened relationship with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . . And we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:21, 23).

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### ENJOYING THE RELATIONSHIP

The Westminster Confession of Faith provides a succinct and extraordinary statement of our purpose in life: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” We hear a lot about what it means to glorify God, but little is taught about what it means to really enjoy him. As believers, we’re meant to enjoy God in the here and now as well as in heaven. And we enjoy him when we experience him in an active and intimate relationship of communion.

The gospel is the news that we can have such a relationship. Christ came with a particular goal in mind: “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God*” (1 Peter 3:18). In Christ, the sinless sin bearer, God qualified believing sinners to enter into a favorable, intimate, and enjoyable relationship with him. Remarkably, as adopted members of the family of God we can literally *bask* in the love shared between the members of the Trinity. As we’ll demonstrate, this is not an overstatement or a mere metaphor.

The entire seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John records the prayer Jesus prayed before he entered the garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death. It’s one of the most remarkable portions in all of Scripture; it provides us with an amazing glimpse behind the curtain into the inner workings of the Trinity. Jesus not only prayed for his disciples, he also prayed for *us* (John 17:20). In a single, monumental sentence, Jesus tells the Father two things that take our breath away:

### *The Help of the Divine Encourager*

*The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you . . . loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:22–23)*

This is an incredible statement! Because of our union with Christ, the Father loves us the same way he loves the Son,<sup>3</sup> and the glory the Father has given to the Son is in turn given to us by the Son. Therefore, the glorifying love that exists within the Trinity is shed upon us and shared by us in such a way that we are capable of experiencing communion with the triune God that is enjoyable beyond measure.

To use a Puritan phrase, we have “exquisite moments”<sup>4</sup> when we experience this. Sometimes we can even bask in intimate, glorious love for quite a while. It’s the worship-driven life. It’s heaven on earth. Yet before long we recognize that our sin clouds our experience of it once again.

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit uses our growing appetite for enjoying our relationship with God as a powerful encouragement in our battle against sin. He causes us to pause when we consider turning our backs on God in order to enjoy sin’s fleeting pleasures instead. When we’re tempted, he reminds us of the second bookend, and we are motivated to fall down in desperate dependence, and to beg, “Enable me to fight this sin so I might abide in relationship with you.” When we enjoy God more than sin, we give him an even deeper level of glorifying love, a level he alone deserves.

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The Holy Spirit truly is the Divine Encourager. Directly before Jesus began his prayer, he said this about the Spirit: “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14). The Spirit declares what is Christ’s—*glory!* The blazing center of his glory is seen at the cross where he accomplished what no one else could do by opening our access into a relationship so satisfying, so intimate, and so desirable that it provides a continuous offer we cannot refuse: a relationship with God that is so enjoyable it makes other pleasures appear as they really are—small by comparison. And that is why, for the two of us, the greatest source of encouragement in our battle against sin is often our Spirit-driven desire to experience this enjoyment. You can’t enjoy sin and God at the same time.

## THE PROMISES OF GOD

Another powerful way the Holy Spirit encourages us to lean our books on the second bookend is to point us to truth. Jesus told the disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). What is this truth? At one point in his ministry Jesus said, “I . . . am the truth” (John 14:6); soon afterward he said *God’s Word* was truth (John 17:17). The Spirit points us both to Jesus, our source of our righteousness for justification, and to the truth of God’s written Word, the Bible, to help us in our battle with sin and to grow in Christlikeness.

In his role as our Encourager, the Spirit frequently leads us to specific promises of God. For the most part,

### *The Help of the Divine Encourager*

when the Spirit guides us to God's promises, they're for use in our immediate or near future. They provide us with assurance that when we take a step of faith, as our weight shifts forward and our foot descends, God's grace and truth will arrive in time to support our foot as it lands. The promises equip us in the moment-by-moment heat of our battles against sin. Even when we don't experience the immediate fulfillment of the promise, we can always be certain he'll fulfill his promise in his own way and in his own perfect timing.

Living by faith in the future grace<sup>5</sup> promised in the Bible definitely has a purifying power. As Paul said, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Peter put it like this:

He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that *through them* you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:4)

Though the Spirit often gives us momentary strength through the promises of God, the Spirit also directs us to promises to equip us for events that may not take place right away. When this occurs, we need to collect these promises so we can have easy access to them in a future battle. Journaling is a good way to do this. But we believe the best method may very well be Scripture memorization. The psalmist would agree: "I have stored

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up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

Some of the most motivating promises of God are the ones designed to point us toward heaven and our eternal life with God. Jesus said, “The Spirit of truth . . . will declare to you the things that are to come” (John 16:13). Paul elaborated on this truth: “As it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).

Ultimately these promises motivate greater dependence on the second bookend as we face our own death or the death of a loved one. They give us hope and confidence in God, the sovereign provider and sustainer of life—the very God who created our lives and will preserve our lives to eternity and cause us to have a peace that passes understanding, even in death, because we hold fast to his promises (Colossians 3:1–4).

The promises of eternal life stored up in our heart through the work of the Holy Spirit empower us to walk through the most difficult of life’s trials and tragedies *and* glorify God in the process. The promises become the anchor of our soul (Hebrews 6:19) as we hold to the Rock of our Salvation.

Whether we live or die, the Spirit sustains us through the promises of God (Philippians 1:19–21). Along these lines, John wrote:

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Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

This verse stretches our imaginations to the limit. What will it be like to see God as he is? And to be like him? It thrills our hearts and minds and fills us with hope. But John added a caveat for the here-and-now: "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (verse 3). These same promises also provide a powerful purifying and sanctifying effect.

Isn't it amazing to ponder all the ways the Holy Spirit works to provide us with divine encouragement? And because he is God, we will never lack the grace we need for every moment.

Meanwhile, there is another gospel enemy we have yet to discuss, and it may be the most insidious one of all.



# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

1. For example, see Matthew 23.

## CHAPTER 1: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

1. These statements are validated in Romans 2:12–16.
2. Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, *The Great Exchange* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) 41–45, 111–19, 159–64.

## CHAPTER 3: GOSPEL ENEMY #1: SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

1. John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly Kopic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 30.

## CHAPTER 4: GOSPEL ENEMY #2: PERSISTENT GUILT

1. Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 374.
2. Original and abridged versions of Thomas Wilcox's essay "Honey out of the Rock" are widely available for no charge on the Internet.
3. John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly Kopic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 162.

## CHAPTER 5: LEANING ON THE FIRST BOOKEND

1. From our adaptation of Thomas Wilcox's "Honey out of the Rock."
2. Adapted from Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 105.
3. Joe Coffey, "How a Mega-Church Is Rediscovering the Gospel," *Themelios*, vol. 33, no. 1 (May 2008): 60–62.

## Notes

### CHAPTER 6: THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. John Owen, *The Holy Spirit*, abridged R. J. K. Law (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 8, 19.

### CHAPTER 8: THE HELP OF THE DIVINE ENCOURAGER

1. The word *propitiation* used here means “wrath bearer.”
2. Original digital versions of Thomas Chalmers’s sermon “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection” are widely available for no charge on the Internet.
3. It is also amazing to note that Jesus loves us the same way the Father loves him! See John 15:9.
4. “Exquisite moments” is an expression used by John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, and many other Puritan writers to describe moments of pleasure experienced in communion with God.
5. To fully unpack the meaning of this power-filled sentence, we highly recommend a book by John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1995).

### CHAPTER 9: GOSPEL ENEMY #3: SELF-RELIANCE

1. We recommend the message by Joni Eareckson Tada delivered at the 2005 Desiring God National Conference. Free audio and video downloads are available at <http://www.desiringGOD.org>.
2. Adapted from *Letters of John Newton* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000), 128, 133–34.

### CHAPTER 10: LEANING ON THE SECOND BOOKEND

1. C. J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 22.
2. John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 179.

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