

“LIFE’S MOST GLORIOUS FACTS”

(Romans 8:1-3)

Napoleon Bonaparte once remarked that “there is nothing so stubborn and irresistible as a fact.” A detective on a once-popular television show was renowned for his restrictive statement, “The facts, Ma’am (or Sir), just give me the facts; I’m interested in nothing but the facts.” Truth is more than facts. Facts are just historically accurate statements, but truth as a category has permanent and determinative dimensions to it. According to Jesus, it is the “truth” that will “set you free.” *Truth is more than facts.*

Gospel truth has many substantial facts at its heart. In fact, it is hard to distinguish in the case of the Gospel between truth and facts. I am calling this message, “Life’s Most Glorious Facts.” These facts are true.

I. There is a POSITION to EXPLORE, 8:1b

First, there is the fact of an incredible *position* which every Christian occupies, a position which must be constantly *explored*. The position is stated in three words in verse one, “in Christ Jesus.” Jesus Himself initiated this idea of the believer’s position in Him in the great fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of John when He used this phrase six times in the opening verses of the chapter: “in Me.” “Every branch (the symbol in the passage for a Christian) *in Me*.” “He who abides *in Me*.” “Abide *in Me*.”

Paul took up this concept as His favorite expression. In fact, in his epistles, he used the phrases “in Him,” “in Christ,” and “in Christ Jesus” (as in our text) no less than 164 times! A key example is this well-known verse, “If any man is *in Christ*, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, all things have become new.” This verse indicates that something experiential (he becomes a “new creature”) and something positional (he is placed “in Christ”) occurs when a person becomes a Christian.

The concept of the believer’s new position was “locked into” Paul at the hour of his conversion. His two leading doctrines thereafter were the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ and the doctrine of the believer’s position in Christ. Both of these were initiated into Paul’s life, Paul’s experience, Paul’s heart, Paul’s mind on the day of his conversion. When on the Damascus Road, he asked the Divine Intruder, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am Jesus,” and Paul’s entire life was turned right-side-up. This was the very Jesus whom he knew to have been crucified and buried – but here the dead Jesus was alive and speaking to him *after He had been killed and buried!* So the doctrine of the resurrection was profoundly lodged in Paul when he was saved.

But the Intruder said even more: “I am Jesus *whom you have been persecuting.*” Paul might have answered, “Say what? *Me*, persecuting *you*? I don’t even *know* you; I’ve never *met* you; I have never even *seen* you?” But the Voice clearly said, “You have

been persecuting *Me*.” So Paul knew immediately, by both intelligence, intuition, insight and illumination, that *when anyone touches a Christian, he touches Christ!* Christ and the Christian are so identified with each other, in such union, that you cannot deal with one without dealing in the same act with the other. He knew at this moment that every Christian is “in Christ.” He knew that a Christian is incorporated into Christ at the moment of salvation, and that incorporation into Christ at conversion means an inviolable identification with Christ thereafter.

Dear Christian, do you realize that the most important thing about you is not *who* you are, or *what* you are, or what you *do*, but *where you are*. The most important thing about you is not your *person*, or your *performance*, or your *product*, or your *social position*; it is rather your *spiritual position*. It is the supernatural and miraculous fact, secured by the grace and power of God, that you are “in Christ Jesus.”

Biblically, you are in Christ like Noah and his family were in the ark. The ark is a type of Christ, and it was God who shut them in the ark. So it is God Who, by a miracle of His love, grace and power, places you in Christ at the moment of your conversion – and shuts you in! The storm was raging outside, loosing its full destruction upon the whole unprotected world of men, but Noah and his family had perfect salvation and perfect security inside the ark. In the same way, while the wrath of God abides on everyone outside of Christ today (Romans 1:18, John 3:36), the person who has trusted Christ is in a position of perfect salvation and perfect security “in Christ.”

Just as the unintentional manslayer in Israel could be saved by getting inside of one of the “cities of refuge” provided for his sanctuary, safety and security, so the sinner who flees to Christ in faith is saved from the avenging Holiness, Justice and Law of God by getting into the Person of Refuge who was provided for his sanctuary, safety and security. The moment he trusts Christ, he is placed into Christ, thus escaping the destruction invited by his sins, and thus enjoying the provisions of his newfound Saviour.

Just as the Israelites in Egypt on Passover night were secure by getting inside a house whose doorposts were sprinkled with prescribed sacrificial blood, so the trembling sinner who takes refuge inside the sanctuary prescribed in His Word and provided through the shedding of His blood, is safe from the Death Angel who will visit every unprotected person with the just wrath of God against sin. This is another Biblical picture of what it means to be “in Christ.”

Just as Rahab hid herself in the house with the scarlet thread in the window and thus was secure from judgment, so the believer who seeks resort in Him whose most conspicuous provision is the scarlet sign of His own blood will find himself perfectly protected “in Christ.”

Some years ago, while reading a book on the Christian life, I came across this suggestive illustration. “It’s as though the whole human race were gathered in a giant Boeing 747 superjet which had been hijacked and was flying full speed to a place we didn’t want to go. We land to refuel and are rescued. All who wish can enter another

Boeing 747 which immediately takes off and turns back toward the plane's original destination. In Adam, all of us were hijacked, captured and imprisoned by sin. We were subjected to someone whose intentions toward us were evil, and headed for death and punishment. When we became Christians, we changed course. By turning away from sin and trusting in Christ, a spiritual change occurred that united us with Christ. We deplaned from our seats in Adam, and found our places in Christ. Almost before we knew it, we were forgiven, placed under Christ's protection and governance, given the gift of His perfect righteousness, given His Spirit and His relationship with the Father – in short, we were given the gift of eternal life. Forever after, we are defined by the phrase, 'in Christ.'”

While reading a book by Pastor Rick Yohn, I found another beautiful illustration of our position in Christ. Upon the insistence of his two children, Yohn bought a hamster as a pet for the children. The matter was complicated by the fact that they already had a pet dog, and the dog was excited and aggressive about the new pet which competed with him for the children's attention and affection. The tension was resolved when Rick Yohn purchased a large plastic ball which could rotate with the hamster's movements. The hamster was placed in the big ball and immediately began to play on all the features inside the ball. The dog would animatedly jump around the ball and bark excitedly at the hamster-and-ball arrangement, but after a time, the dog realized that the hamster was unreachable inside the ball and he settled down to his own interests outside the ball. The Christian is like that hamster – he is in Christ, where there are a plethora of “enjoyable features,” and he is safe and secure no matter who is outside desiring his discomfort and destruction.

One more matter before we go beyond this point. There is a vocation for the Christian because he is “in Christ.” An entire new mental science has developed, entitled “positional awareness.” It can be clearly illustrated in the diverse worlds of aviation and sports. In aviation, a pilot is taught to fly by instruments, not just by sight or feeling. He is taught that the position of the airplane in alignment with its flight plan, its received positional signals, and its on-course adjustments to those positional requirements, are all-important if the plane is to be navigated safely and successfully to its intended destination. The same is true of a Christian. He is to live by faith, not by sight or feelings. He is to trust the Flight Plan given in the Word of God and consciously maintain his fixed position “in Christ.” This is called “abiding in Me” by Jesus (John 15). I call it “continual centering in Christ.” This is the vocation of a Christian after he is saved.

The importance of “positional awareness” can also be illustrated in almost all sports. A coach's admonition to “play your position” is crucial in all team sports, and position is equally crucial in sports which call only for individual participation. The team player who leaves his position may be a hero for one play, but he may be the game-forfeiting goat later. Opponents notice quickly when a position is abandoned, and they will certainly exploit the failure when the game is on the line. So it is in the Christian life. The position of a Christian is fixed by the grace and power of God at his conversion, and it never varies. He is positionally perfect from the moment of his salvation, but his

practice often does not match his *position*. He has lost his “positional awareness” and is acting in his own autonomy – and the Enemy will exploit the weakness when the game is on the line! I John 2:27 admonishes us, “And now, little children, *abide in Christ*, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”

Here, then, is the new position of the believer, a position which needs to be continually explored, explained and exploited in the fellowship of believers.

II. There is a PRIVILEGE (or a PROMISE) to ENJOY, 8:1a

Second, the text informs us of an incredible *promise to be enjoyed*. Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Thank God for texts like this! When a believer first reads such texts, and begins to realize what they mean, he tends to question that they could really be true, and even to doubt their reliability. “This might be true, but surely not for me, and especially at this moment, in this place, and with me in my present condition.” We tend to associate the degree of condemnation we experience with the degree of sin and failure we are aware of in our lives at any moment, but this is a total fallacy. Remember that this promise is not based in any way on your practice of the Christian life or on your performance of good deeds (or on the purging of your life of sins and bad deeds), but it is based entirely on your perfect position “in Christ Jesus.” “There is ... no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” If your position can vary, your appropriation of this promise can legitimately rise and fall proportionately. But if your position is perfect, so is this promise.

Let me begin to explore this incredible promise of “no condemnation” by examining its opposite. The promise is totally true for every person in Christ, and its opposite is totally true for every person outside of Christ. Here is the opposite truth: “There is now nothing *but* condemnation for those who are *not* in Christ Jesus.” This, too, is an absolute truth. You see again that *everything is a matter of position*. Personality counts for nothing here; intelligence quotient counts for nothing here; community or social rank counts for nothing here; vocational position counts for nothing here; service contribution and personal performance count for nothing here. The beautiful fact of “no condemnation” belongs only to the person who is “in Christ Jesus,” but it belongs perfectly to him

Note the clear statements of Jesus at this point. In John 3:16-18, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed on the only begotten Son of God.” So it is not God’s initial design to condemn human beings. He did not send His Son to condemn people. Then why are so many people condemned? They are condemned for two reasons: (1) They were already under condemnation when Jesus came; they were *personally* condemned because of what

they were (sinners) and because of what they had done (broken God's law in a wholesale manner); (2) Since they confirmed their own condemnation by their response to Jesus when He came, they were *practically* condemned because they rejected the only One who could remove their sin and its condemnation.

Jesus further explained (John 3:19-21), "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world (see John 1:4, 6-9, and John 8:12), and *men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*. For every one that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he who does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Jesus provided "happy light" on the matter of man's just condemnation because of sin when he said (John 5:24), "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent Me, has everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation*, but has passed from death unto life."

In summary, by nature, I am *in myself*, and in *sin* (and theologically, I am *in Adam*); therefore, I am justly condemned by a holy God who is morally committed to support righteousness and destroy (the unbelievably destructive power of) sin. But *by grace*, I can escape the just condemnation that is due to me because of sin, and be *totally and perfectly justified* before God through faith in Jesus Christ. In that new context, the text is absolutely true: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

I carefully call your attention to what Paul did *not* say here (or elsewhere). He did *not* say, "There is no *cause* for condemnation" in the lives of Christians. Every honest and transparent Christian knows and will admit that there is still plenty of cause for condemnation in his daily life and practice, but the verse still happily declares that "there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." The verse does *not* say, "There are no *complications*" in the lives of Christians, for that certainly is not true. Indeed, the very fact that he is "in Christ" will create further complications for him – as if he did not have enough complications merely because of the calculated risks of daily living! So being "in Christ Jesus" is no guarantee against life's complications. Then, the text does *not* say, "There are no *conflicts*" in the lives of Christians, for that certainly is not true. As long as "your adversary, the devil, walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and as long as he is unrestrained as "the accuser of the brethren," every line of communication open to Satan (even his audience with God – see Job 1) will be filled with ceaseless charges and accusations against Christians. And the truth is that every Christian gives him plenty of useable material to work with every day in building his case! He will register his charges before God, before a lost world, and even before the believer himself – and the result for the believer will be incrimination and intimidation if he does not know how to disarm and disqualify "that old serpent, the devil." What is the believer to do when the devil marshals his valid arguments and states his case? The believer should stand reminded that he has a counselor for his defense, a personal Lawyer, "Jesus Christ the righteous," in heaven to secure his case before God (see I John 2:2). In practical experience, when Satan's accusation reaches the believer, he should reply, "You go talk to my Lawyer!" Satan, the prosecuting attorney, will say, "But

you don't have a leg to stand on (snakes know a lot about 'not having a leg to stand on'); your case is not defensible." Then you reply, "Look, I don't call a lawyer when I don't need one; I call a lawyer *when I don't have a good case*. That's when I need the best lawyer I can get." And, dear Christian, that's why Jesus is called the "Friend of sinners." He has made every provision necessary for the full and total settlement of our sins, the full and total satisfaction of the Holy Law and Perfect Justice of God, and the full and total guarantee of our eternal salvation and security – and He is the Attorney for my Defence and the Guarantor (the "Surety") of my salvation before God now and forever. "Satan, all my dealings with you now will be conducted through my Lawyer; my case rests in His hands. *You go talk to my Lawyer!*" And Satan dares not do that, because it is dangerous for Him to go into the Presence of Jesus. He is over-matched in that Presence, and he knows it. The text does *not* say, "There is no *accusation*" for believers, but never mind; all possible accusations were perfectly settled by our Attorney before court convened! "The Lord is my Lawyer," and He has never lost a case!

Note, also, that the text does not say, "There are now no *consequences*" in the lives of Christians. The fact that there is no condemnation for sin to those who are in Christ Jesus does not mean that sin's consequences are removed from a justified person. The sin may be completely forgiven, the sinner may be completely justified, but this does not prevent the occurrence of serious consequences following the sin.

A father watched sadly as his son rebelled against his authority and went out into a life of serious sin. Every time the boy came home with the signs of sin upon him, the father drove a nail into the door facing at the entrance into the boy's room. Months later, the boy brokenly confessed his sin, asking and receiving God's forgiveness and his father's as well. Both forgave him and the boy was restored to the fellowship of both fathers. The same day, the father removed all the nails from the door facing. When the boy looked at the evidence, he tearfully remarked, "Dad, you removed the nails, but the gaping holes remain." The father gently replied, "Son, that's the way it is with sin. The sin may be forgiven, but the consequences of it cannot be removed." The text does not say, "There are no consequences to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Now, we will examine the promise itself. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Note the two small words that are similar, "now" and "no." "There is *now* no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." This is the promise of a present reality in the life of every Christian. What is life but "now"? Both time and eternity are only a succession of "nows". For a believer in Christ, in *this* now, in *every* now, in *any* now, there is no condemnation.

Though a "guilty" verdict has been declared against every sinner, and though a death sentence has been imposed upon every sinner, God has reversed the verdict and revoked the penalty for those who are "in Christ Jesus." No true believer in Christ has ever faced God's condemnation after his salvation. Because of his position in Christ Jesus the believer is forever placed beyond the reach of immediate condemnation, future condemnation and eternal hell. What a Gospel!

Finally, consider the word “no.” “There is now *no* condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” The word “no” is a tiny word, but it is a total, complete, absolute word. What a thrilling reality! As a Christian, in spite of the fact that I fully deserve condemnation in myself because of my sins, and in spite of the fact that the sin of any unsaved person would continue in eternity and its judgment would attend it, making hell eternal, *nonetheless I am now completely and unconditionally free of condemnation because I am “in Christ Jesus.”* Thus, I am saved now and forever, and there is no longer any condemnation possible for me.

Firefighters often use a special technique to fight big and stubborn forest fires. They go to a place well ahead of the advancing wall of fire and deliberately set “back fires,” fires which burn toward the advancing fire. Then they quench the part of the fire burning nearest them. When the raging flames of the oncoming fire reach the burned-over area, there is nothing flammable left for them to ignite and thus the fire can be brought under control. In the same manner, God exhausted His just condemnation of sin in the infinite death of His perfect Son at Calvary. When a sinner trusts Jesus Christ and His payment for sin, he stands in the burned-over area, where God’s wrath against sin has been totally exhausted, and thus he is *free of condemnation*. What a glorious truth! What a great promise to claim! What a great privilege to enjoy!

III. There is a POWER to be EMPLOYED, 8:2-3

Third, the text indicates that there is a great *power to be employed* by every Christian in living the Christian life. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.”

What a statement this is! Note that three laws are mentioned in these verses. You’ve probably heard of the Four Spiritual Laws. Well, there are *three spiritual laws* mentioned in these verses. In textual order, they are: “the law of the Spirit of life,” “the law of sin and death,” and (simply) “*the law*.” The three laws, when arranged in the order of human experience, are slightly different in order. The order of experience is that “the law of sin and death” is experienced first, then “the law” (the law of God given through Moses) is experienced second, then “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is experienced last (this last-named law has operated only in the life of a Christian – with continuing implications), while the other two laws occur automatically in the life of every human being. Let’s consider these three laws in the order of human experience.

A. The law that CONTROLS all lost people

The first law any human being experiences is “the law of sin and death.” This law begins to operate in each person’s life the moment he is conceived, then it completely

governs his life when he is born into human experience on earth. This is the law that *controls* every lost person on earth.

“Sin and death” are always closely connected in the Bible. They are the Siamese twins of human experience. Where sin occurs, death follows. They are like two sides of the same coin. The connection between them is not a chance connection. In the Garden of Eden, God stated a prohibition regarding the fruit of a certain tree; “You shall not eat of it,” He said. Then He added, “In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die.” Ezekiel 18:4 echoes this law when it says, “The soul that sins, it shall surely die.” Romans 6:23 declares that “the wages of sin is death.” Romans 5:12 says that “by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” James 1:15 says, “Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death.” All of these texts express “the law of sin and death.” This is a universal law, a law that is self-executing. No sinner has ever survived sin – it always kills him! Even the sinless Son of God did not survive sin when He took it upon Himself on the Cross – it killed Him! The chief illusion of sin-deceived and self-deceived man is, “I can have sin without having death,” but that illusion will be quickly dispelled (though his awakening may come too late). Death always follows sin. This is a cause-and-effect law. It is called a “law” because it operates with fixed and regular dependability. It is completely trustworthy and reliable. I repeat: this law, the law of sin and death, controls every lost person on earth.

B. The Law that CONDEMNS all lost people

Next in human experience is “the law,” verse three. This is a reference to the law of God mediated to the human race through Moses. This law is recorded in the Old Testament (primarily in the Pentateuch, the first five books), and is summarized in the Ten Commandments (recorded in Exodus 20). This law had several purposes (see the separate study on the law), and one of them is to reveal human sin and point the sinner to the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. *The law fully exposes man’s moral failure!* Several texts of the New Testament clearly state this purpose of the law. In Romans 7:7, Paul said, “I would not have known what sin really was except through the law.” Romans 4:15 says, “The law works wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.” Galatians 3:19 supports that statement when it says, “Wherefore then serves the law? It was added because of transgressions.” Note the word “transgression” in both of these verses. Each word used for sin in the Bible has a very specialized meaning: the word, “sin,” for example, means “to miss the mark.” “Transgression” means “the deliberate and wilful crossing of a prescribed boundary.” The seriousness of sin could never have been truly recognized if no standard for righteousness had been given, and that is the purpose of the law. The law helps the sinner realize the heinous nature of his sin, and enables him to recognize the true value of Jesus Christ as Saviour. When the law was given, and men continued to sin, they now violated a known standard. Thus, they could recognize the nature of their sin as “transgression.” Romans 5:20 says, “The law entered that the offence might abound.” The overflowing and deadly nature of sin could never be fully known if the law had not been given. “By the commandment (of the law), sin was recognized as exceeding sinful” (Romans 7:13). So law both aggravated and exposed the

sin of man. Though it exposed the moral standard of God, the law could neither prevent us from violating it nor could it provide dynamic so we could fulfill it.

Suppose you are standing near the Rock of Gibraltar at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea, wanting to come to the United States of America. You have a map in your hands, and it gives you directions. But you can't get to your destination by reading the directions on the map. In the same way, the Law of God gives directions, but does not supply the dynamic to bring you to your destination. If you set out swimming, the map cannot "get you there" because it is *weak through your flesh*. What you need is a boat or an airplane which will *cover* you and *carry* you to your destination, and supply all your needs along the way.

So the law of God, which is "holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12), was never meant to provide a map to heaven, or a way of salvation, for sinners. Rather, it was to cause the offence of sin to be fully exposed, and to condemn it. The law of God, which is good in itself, became an instrument of condemnation and death to us because of the sinfulness of our lives. Romans 7:13 says, "Sin, that it might appear sin, worked death in me by that which was good."

The text explains the source and cause of man's moral failure. "For what the law could not do *in that it was weak through the flesh, . . .*" The problem is not in God's law, which is "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12), but in the sinner who simply cannot keep the law.

The text indicates that there were two laws in man's experience, and those two laws were in violent collision. The *law of God* required him to do what was *right*; the *law of sin* compelled him to do what was *wrong*. He could neither *fulfill* the law of God, nor *escape* the law of sin. It is no wonder, then that the law is called "the ministration of death and condemnation" (II Corinthians 3:7, 9). The "bottom line" of human experience is that God is the great Plaintiff in the Court of the universe, and He has brought a serious indictment against mankind. Damage has been done by man's moral choice – great dishonor has been brought to the Divine throne, and the moral structure of the universe is seriously threatened by man's sin – and no excuse man can make can erase the guilt of his crimes or evade the penalty they require.

In John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, the author presents several pictures which reveal the hopelessness of trying to save yourself by living by the law. Pilgrim is seeking moral guidance in his pilgrimage, and Mr. Worldly Wiseman counsels him to see Mr. Legality. Mr. Legality, of course, represents the law. When Pilgrim asks directions to Mr. Legality's house, Mr. Worldly Wiseman says, "Do you see yonder high Hill?" "Yes," answers Pilgrim, "very well." Mr. Worldly Wiseman says, "By that Hill you must go, and the first house you come at is his." The narrative then adds, "So Christian turned out of his way, to go to Mr. Legality's house for help. But behold, when he was got now hard by the Hill, it seemed so high, and also that side of it that was next to the Wayside, did hang so much over, that Christian was afraid to venture further, lest the Hill should fall on his head. There came also flashes of fire out of the Hill, that made Christian afraid that

he should be burned.” The sinner fails to keep the law because he is “weak through the flesh,” and these are the threats of the law against the failing sinner.

Scaled down to its basic statement, Hebrews 10:1 says, “The law . . . can never . . . make . . . perfect.” Mark this down: only perfect people are going to heaven! The only standard of entrance into heaven is the standard of perfection. But the law of God given through Moses cannot make sinners perfect, because of the weakness of their flesh. That law only *condemns* sinful men. So all men are condemned by the law.

Martin Luther, in his usual abrupt and candid way, said, “The law of God is a mirror, a hammer and a whip.” The law as a mirror reflects our true sinful nature back to us when we look into that mirror. The law as a hammer smashes and shatters self-trust, thus precluding the possibility of self-salvation. And the law as a whip drives us to Christ as our only hope of salvation. In Galatians, Paul said that the purpose of the law was to serve as the sinner’s “escort” (KJV, “schoolmaster”) to bring him to Christ.

C. The law that COUNTERACTS the other two laws

There is a third and final law in the text, and it is this law that provides the solution to the deadly effects of the first two laws. It is called “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” This law *contradicts* and *counteracts* the other two laws. How does this third law *correct* the human failure that is induced by the other two laws?

Note the sharp succession of powerful phrases in the text. “The law could not (save) because of the weakness of the flesh.” Theoretically, a person *can* get to heaven by keeping the law. Galatians 3:12 says, “The man that does (all things that are written in the book of the law) shall live in them.” However, anyone who hopes to save himself by his own law-keeping should be sure that he fully understands the terms. The terms of self-saving are these: *If you wish to get to heaven by your own goodness, then 100% of you (you personally) must keep 100% of the law 100% of the time – from the moment of your conception through the moment of your death.* Rots o’ ruck! You can dismiss the possibility without another thought, because you not only cannot deserve heaven by your performance, your performance clearly deserves hell! Because of this failure of man, God has graciously acted in love and mercy to redeem helpless, sinful man.

“God sending His own Son.” What a world of truth in a phrase? Here we see: (1) The sovereign initiative (grace) of God in acting to save man; (2) The eternal pre-existence of the Son of God; He was “sent” from a previous existence, relationship, status and location; (3) The Deity of the Son of God; He is co-existent, co-efficient, co-equal, and co-eternal with the Father.

“In the likeness of sinful flesh.” Again, it is absolutely crucial to note what the text does *not* say. It does not say that Jesus came “in the likeness of flesh.” This would suggest that His humanity was only a “likeness” to human flesh and not really flesh at all. But Jesus came to this world as a real “flesh and bone” human being. Then, the text does not say that He came “in sinful flesh.” This would mean that He is a sinner just like you

or me. No, the words and the truth about Jesus are carefully guarded words: “God sent His own Son *in the likeness of human flesh.*”

One of the Old Testament types (pictures) of Christ presents a perfect picture of this truth. When the children of Israel had sinned their way into deadly judgment (a plague of venomous serpents was sent among them, and they were dying wholesale by the bite of the snakes), God again provided a gracious remedy. He told them to fashion a serpent of brass and elevate it on a pole in the center of the camp. Then, whoever looked on that serpent would live. God commanded His people to use an exact likeness of the thing that had previously caused their death as the means of their salvation! Even so, Jesus came “in the *likeness* of sinful flesh” in order to bring salvation to us.

“And for sin.” This may mean “in reference to sin,” or “because of sin,” but the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament uses this same phrase in the sense of “a sin-offering.” Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh to present Himself as an offering for sin. This is the foundation of the truth of His death for sinners. We are saved only because of His atoning, redeeming death for us.

“(He) condemned sin in the flesh.” He condemned the sin in *our* flesh by what He did in His *own* flesh. He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (I Peter 2:24), and took it to the place of full and final judgment. Now, “there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

On the basis of these great redemptive truths, the third law can work in our lives. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made us free from the law of sin and death.” This “law of ... life” contradicts and counteracts the *condemnation* of the law of God and the *control* of the law of sin and death. When we trust Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Redeemer, we immediately are “made free from the law of sin and death.” The verb that is used is an aorist tense, picturing one-time point action. So this freedom is gained in a moment of time.

However, there is also a sense in which the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is *continually* activated in our lives as we walk by faith. Just as it took Jesus Christ and His Death on the Cross to pointedly save me from the penalty of my sin, so it takes Jesus Christ and His saving work to progressively do for me what I cannot do for myself--to set me free day by day and moment by moment from the perversions, the poverty, the power and the pollution of sin.

There are certain fixed laws that operate in the physical universe, and it surely is sensible that there are also fixed laws that operate in the spiritual universe. One of the fixed laws in the physical world is the law of gravity.

On the old “Hee Haw” television show, two hayseeds were lazily lying beside a haystack, each chewing on a piece of straw. One drawled to the other, “What keeps us from fallin’ off this world?” The other disinterestedly answered, “The law of gravity, stupid.” After a moment of thought, the first asked, “Then what kept us from fallin’ off

this world before they *passed* that law?” Well, there has never been a time in our history when the law of gravity was not operating. The law of gravity roughly corresponds to the law of sin and death in our text. Both laws pull us down and bind us. Remember, too, that hell is described in the New Testament as a “bottomless pit.” If you were thrown into a bottomless pit, what would you do? You would fall! How long? *Forever!* Remember, it is *bottomless!*

In contrast, life in Christ has limitless potential for continuing ascendancy. In his classic, The Great Divorce, C. S. Lewis summarized its possibilities in the words, “Further up and further in.” Always! But what changes our direction? What gives the upward momentum? What guarantees the victory today, here and now, since the “law of sin and death,” like the law of gravity, is still operating? The answer is found in the third law mentioned in the text.

I travel by airplane into many parts of the world. When I board an airplane, does the pilot press an immunity button that turns off the law of gravity for that particular plane and guarantees that it won't be pulled down? No, the law of gravity continues to work. It doesn't give up and abandon the field when an airplane reaches lift-off point as it completes its taxi down the runway. The law of gravity remains in full operation, but there is another law which is exploited by the pilots on board the plane, an instrument which is designed to overcome the law of gravity by utilizing the other law. That other law is called “the law of aerodynamics.”

British Pastor Charles Price gave this illustration. “Three years ago I was speaking in Cape Town on the fact that the Christian life is the consequence of the life of Christ in the Christian. Jesus is not the patron or guru of our Christianity. He is Himself the very content of it, for Scripture says God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. A young man in his thirties objected that it all sounded very impracticable. ‘You’ve been saying that it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ living in me who is the source of deliverance and power over the old natural self.’ I said, ‘Yes’”. He countered, ‘But you haven’t told me what I have to do to make it work.

I said, ‘Maybe you’re asking the wrong question. Not ‘What do I have to do?’ but ‘Who has to do it?’

He replied, ‘I’m not a zombie. I don’t want to sit back and say, ‘Well, it’s not me, it’s Christ’, and hope something will happen.’

He worked as a helicopter charter pilot, and one of his jobs involved flying around Cape Town on a Friday afternoon observing traffic patterns. He suggested I accompany him, so that we could continue the discussion.

So that Friday I found myself getting into a tiny helicopter and feeling quite nervous. ‘How does it work?’ I asked. He showed me the rotor above me. ‘The blades are slightly angled. When the rotor begins to rotate, they push down the air which creates a vacuum which causes a lift.’

I said, ‘What’s that called?’ He said, ‘That’s what we call the law of aerodynamics.’ ‘What does it do?’ ‘Well, it lifts the helicopter off the ground.’ ‘What happens to gravity?’ ‘What do you mean?’ ‘Well—I’m secure with gravity, I’m used to being on the ground. But I don’t like this idea of floating in the air.’ ‘You’ll be safe,’ he reassured me, and we took off. Sensing an opportunity to reveal the truth, I said, ‘What do I have to do though to make sure that it’s going to work? Do I have to flap my arms at all?’ He laughed, but I continued: ‘We were talking about the fact that the source of Christian living is Christ Himself, and that as we live in dependency upon the life of Jesus Christ in us, it is He who enables us to live a Godly life. You’re telling me now that this helicopter, when you begin to rotate its blades, begins to bring into force the law of aerodynamics which is more powerful than, and sets the helicopter free from, the law of gravity.’ Then I read Romans 8:2 to him. ‘That’s what I’m telling you about Jesus Christ. When we got into this helicopter, I said to you, ‘What do I have to do?’ You said, ‘Put your seatbelt on and relax.’ Don’t you see, you’ve been illustrating what I’ve been preaching, that there’s a more powerful law than the law of gravity—the law of aerodynamics? *There’s a more powerful law than the law of sin, which otherwise will pull you down. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus will enable you to overcome the law of sin and death.*’ The law of sin and death continues to operate for everybody else, but the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets every believer free from that law.’

He said, ‘I can see that. You are telling me that just as I trusted Jesus Christ to set me free from my sins, as I trusted Christ who enabled me to become a Christian, I am to equally trust Jesus Christ everyday so that His ‘Spirit of life’ can enable me to overcome all the deadly forces that stand against me and to be the Christian I became when I trusted Him.’ I said, ‘My brother, you’ve got it!’

These are the facts, and there is nothing so stubborn and irresistible as a fact. My heart says, Give me the truth, Lord, just the truth. I can be content with that.”