

# Bread & Wine



**JANUARY 2007**

## BREAD & WINE

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# **Editorial**

*Russ Atmore*

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The New Year brings with it many changes. Some of these will no doubt be good and beneficial, and others will not. Some things remain constant like the earth rotating around the sun. Some things are unpleasant and remain with us, like sin. Like it or not, sin is a definite issue, and the only time it will be no more, is when we are with the Lord. Until that time, we recognize this great enemy. The Christian is involved in, what I call, "The Great War." This is not the war of 1914-1918, but another war that is long lasting, deadly, persistent, painful and destructive.

When a person becomes a Christian, the first thing they become aware of this great conflict. Many become disillusioned quickly because they thought that becoming a believer in Christ meant the removal of sin. This is not so. Becoming a Christian makes a person immediately aware of the contest between the Spirit and the flesh. There is no bell at the end of the round to signal a rest period. It is perpetual, constant and very vicious. One of the most remarkable things about this contest is that if you are involved in it and are fighting it, it is an evidence of new life within. The believer longs to be free of his or her sin, but continues fighting and struggling – sometimes losing and sometimes winning.

This issue is about this great war. It is about mortification. We are to actively put to death the old man. It is about sanctification – the inward work of the Holy Spirit conforming us to the image of Jesus and on other hand, our labors to be like Christ, hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It is about conflict. Our enemies are deadly and are concerned with our loss. Satan leads the foe against us. Our own flesh rushes to the battle and the world prods and probes us at every turn of life. We need all the spiritual help we can obtain to wage this war. Let no-one think that the enemy is mild or you are not affected by them. That would be unbiblical. There is not one Christian who has not had to engage this trinity of enemies. So be strong and fight to the very end, and then our great Captain, King Jesus shall prevail so completely that we shall marvel at the ease with which He dispenses the enemy.

Don't imagine for one moment that because this is the New Year that the battle will stop. Through summer days and winter nights, the war rages on and on. It is not a question of age – young and old alike feel the heat of battle. It is to be hoped that as we get older, we get wiser and we rely more on Christ in this war. It is a war made up of many battles. Imagine how we would fare if our Lord were not with us, but he has promised to be with us to the end – till we are with Him face to face, and all sorrow has been erased. So onward, Christian Soldiers, marching as to war.

We have included a portion of George Whitefield's (1714 – 1770) great sermon on walking with God in which he outlines for us how the prevailing enmity of our hearts has been removed by the power of the Holy Spirit; how we are actually reconciled and united to God by faith in Christ; of how we can and ought to have continual communion and fellowship with God; and how we can make daily progress in this fellowship. The goal of these things is so that we can become more like our Lord. We have included some past observations by men who have fought the good fight and prevailed. In addition we have some excerpts from the great preacher Gardiner Spring on separation from the world.

What would Bread & Wine be without a troublesome quiz to provoke the saints to consideration of Scripture? Be careful as always as you work your way through the crossword.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*“True godliness is a gift from God by which man is made willing and able to serve God.”*

*Willem Teelinck (1579 – 1629)*

# Onward to the Struggle

Russ Atmore

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Every born again child of God understands that the Christian life is a major struggle. John Calvin (1509-1564) understood this well when he said in his commentary on Psalm 45, *“the faithful do not deny themselves, and lay aside their former habits without intense and painful effort.”* The Apostle Paul agrees, when he says in Romans 7:21 *“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”* The Christian is exhorted to put on the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6:10 – 18. Armor is designed to protect us. Our Christian armor will protect us from all the insidious attacks of the devil, and will provide an impervious hide to the subtle attacks of our flesh. The world also will fail to get through this impenetrable armor. We are not at war with flesh and blood, but against all the forces of evil and darkness (Eph. 6:12).

So, the Christian must clothe himself or herself with this armor. Paul says, *“put on the full armor of God”*. It is no good putting on a portion of the armor – we must put it all on. Our armor is described as the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, for shoes, the readiness of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and finally and most importantly, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:14 – 17). It is a spiritual armor. The reason we put it on, (vs.11) is so that we can withstand the devil’s schemes (wiles). He is firing arrows of deadly evil at us. All the forces of cosmic power are arrayed against us – so we need spiritual armor to counteract and defeat this great force. Paul also tells us that this armor is not ours – it is God’s armor. Everyone knows that you don’t need armor when you are at peace with your enemies. But we are not at peace with our enemies – we are at war with them, and as long as we are still in our flesh and on this earth we will always be at war – There are no peace days – no days off, no vacations.

Here are some helpful points to consider:

1. Engage the enemy violently – resist the devil and he will flee from you (James 4:7).

2. Consciously submit to God the area(s) of struggle (James 4:7, 8). Do this over and over again.
3. Recognize that greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).
4. Yield to the Holy Spirit – walk in (live by) the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh (sinful nature) (Galatians 5:16).
5. If you are tempted by the flesh – do not put yourself in a position to submit to it. If you are tempted by pride and a boastful spirit, then praise someone else – *“Let another man praise you and not your own lips”* (Proverbs 27:2). Remember *“the crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, but a man is tested by the praise that he receives.”* (Proverbs 27:21). There are too many Christians who talk about themselves – they often have the most problems and difficulties.
6. If the world has attraction for you (money, sport, thrill, attraction, ambition), crucify yourself to it. Put it to death. Mortify the lusts of the flesh. Remember, if you love these things (the world), the love of the Father is not in you – you are not a Christian (1 John 2:15 - 17)
7. Pray without ceasing – develop a regular prayer life. Meditate on some promise from God’s Word, believe it and live it (1 Thessalonians 5:16 - 24; 1 Timothy 4:7, 15, 16).

The Lord Jesus did not promise us a life of health, wealth and prosperity here on earth. What He did promise us was *“because I live, you will live also”* (John 14:19). *“If anyone loves Me, he will obey my word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him”* (John 14:23). *“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33).

Be encouraged then as you face the struggle against your sin(s). Remember that every Christian before you has had to face the same struggle.

Don't ever give up, not for one moment – Persevere – have a believing heart – hold onto Christ. We walk by faith and not by sight. Trust the Lord Jesus. Clothe yourself in the armor available to all believers. Submit to God. As John Owen said, “*be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.*”

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*“Faith stands or falls on the truth that the future with God is more satisfying than the one promised by sin. Where this truth is embraced and God is cherished above all, the power of sin is broken.”*

*John Piper*

# Walking with God

George Whitefield (1714 – 1770)

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Genesis 5:24 - *"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."*

Various are the pleas and arguments which men of corrupt minds frequently urge against yielding obedience to the just and holy commands of God. But, perhaps, one of the most common objections that they make is this, that our Lord's commands are not practical, because they are contrary to flesh and blood; and consequently, he is 'an hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strewed'. These we find were the sentiments entertained by that wicked and slothful servant mentioned in Matthew 25; and are undoubtedly the same with many which are maintained in the present wicked and adulterous generation.

The Holy Spirit foreseeing this, has taken care to inspire holy men of old, to record the examples of many holy men and women; who, even under the Old Testament dispensation, were enabled cheerfully to take Christ's yoke upon them, and count his service as perfect freedom. The large catalog of saints, confessors, and martyrs, drawn up in Hebrews 11, abundantly evidences the truth of this observation. What a great cloud of witnesses have we there presented to our view? All these were eminent for their faith, but some shone with a greater degree of glory than others. The proto-martyr Abel leads the way. And next to him we find Enoch mentioned, not only because he was next in order of time, but also on account of his exalted piety; he is spoken of in the text in a very extraordinary manner. We have here a short but very full and glorious account, both of his behavior in this world, and the triumphant manner of his entry into the next. The former is contained in these words, 'And Enoch walked with God'. The Scripture also says, 'and he was not: for God took him'. He was not; that is, he was not found, he was not taken away in the common manner, but he did not see death; for God had translated him. (Heb. 11:5.)

Who this Enoch was, does not appear so plainly. To me, he seems to have been a person of public character; I suppose, like Noah, a preacher of righteousness. And, if we may credit the apostle Jude, he was a flaming preacher. For he quotes one of his prophecies, where he says, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him'. The author to the Hebrews says, that before his translation he had this testimony, 'that he pleased God'; and his being translated, was a proof of it. And I would observe, that it was wonderful wisdom in God to translate Enoch and Elijah under the Old Testament dispensation, that hereafter, when it should be asserted that the Lord Jesus was carried into heaven, it might not seem a thing altogether incredible to the Jews; since they themselves confessed that two of their own prophets had been translated several hundred years before. But it is not my design to detain you any longer, by enlarging, or making observations, on Enoch's short but comprehensive character: the thing I have in view being to give a discourse, as the Lord shall enable, upon a weighty and a very important subject; I mean, WALKING WITH GOD. 'And Enoch walked with God.' If so much as this can be truly said of you and me after our death, we shall not have any reason to complain that we have lived in vain.

In handling my intended subject, I shall,

FIRST, Endeavor to show what is implied in these words, WALKED WITH GOD.

SECONDLY, I shall prescribe some means, upon the due observance of which, believers may keep up and maintain their WALK WITH GOD.

THIRDLY, Offer some motives to stir us up, if we never walked with God before, to come and walk with God now.

FIRST, I want to show what is implied in these words, and what we are to understand by WALKING WITH GOD.

FIRST, WALKING WITH GOD implies, that the prevailing power of the enmity of a person's heart be taken away by the blessed Spirit of God. Perhaps it may seem a hard saying to some, but our own experience daily proves what the Scriptures in many places assert, that the carnal mind, the mind of the unconverted natural man, nay, the mind of the regenerate, so far as any part of him remains unrenewed, is enmity, not only an enemy, but enmity itself, against God; so that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be. Indeed, one may well wonder that any creature, especially that lovely creature man, made after his Maker's own image, should ever have any enmity, much less a prevailing enmity, against that very God in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being. But alas! so it is. Our first parents contracted it when they fell from God by eating the forbidden fruit, and the bitter and malignant ruin of our nature has descended to, and quite overspread, their whole posterity.

This enmity discovered itself in Adam's endeavoring to hide himself in the trees of the garden. When he heard the voice of the Lord God, instead of running with an open heart, saying Here I am; alas! he now wanted no communion with God; and still more discovered his lately contracted enmity, by the excuse he made to the Most High: 'The woman (or, this woman) you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat'. By saying this, he in effect, lays all the fault upon God; as though he had said, If you had not given me this woman, I would not have sinned against you, so you may thank yourself for my transgression. In the same manner, this enmity works in the hearts of Adam's children. They now and again find something rising against God, and say even to God, What are you doing? "It scorns any meaner competitor (says John Owen, in his excellent work on indwelling sin) than God himself.'

Its command is like that of the Assyrians in respect to Ahab \_ shoot only at the king. And it strikes against every thing that has the appearance of real piety, as the Assyrians shot at Jehoshaphat in his royal clothes. But the opposition ceases when it finds that it is only an appearance, as the Assyrians left off shooting at Jehoshaphat, when they perceived it was not Ahab they were

shooting at. This enmity discovered itself in accursed Cain; he hated and killed his brother Abel, because Abel loved, and was

avored by God. And this same enmity rules and prevails in every man that is from Adam. Here we find an averseness to prayer and holy duties in children, and very often in older persons, who have notwithstanding, been blessed with a religious education. And all that open sin and wickedness, which like a deluge has overflowed the world, are only so many streams running from this dreadful contagious fountain; I mean the enmity of man's desperately wicked and deceitful heart.

He that cannot give his approval to this truth knows nothing yet, in a saving manner, of the Holy Scriptures, or of the power of God. And all that do know this, will readily acknowledge, that before a person can be said to walk with God, the prevailing power of this heart-enmity must be destroyed: for persons do not walk and keep company together who entertain an irreconcilable enmity and hatred towards each other. Observe when I say, the prevailing power of this enmity must be taken away; for the in-being of it will never be totally removed, till we bow down our heads, and give up the ghost. The apostle Paul, no doubt, speaks of himself, and that, too, not when he was a Pharisee, but a real Christian; when he complains, `that when he would do good, evil was present with him'; not having dominion over him, but opposing and resisting his good intentions and actions, so that he could not do the things which he would, in that perfection which the new man desired.

This is what he calls sin dwelling in him. But as for its prevailing power, it is destroyed in every soul that is truly born of God, and gradually more and more weakened as the believer grows in grace, and the Spirit of God gains a greater and greater ascendancy in the heart.

SECONDLY, Walking with God not only implies, that the prevailing power of the enmity of a man's heart be taken away, but also that a person is actually reconciled to God the Father, in and through the all-sufficient righteousness and atonement of his dear Son. `Can two walk together, (Amos 3:3) unless they are agreed?' Jesus is our peace as well as our peace-maker. When we are

justified by faith in Christ, then, but not till then, we have peace with God; and consequently it cannot be said till then that we walk with God, walking with him as a friend. This is the great errand that gospel ministers are sent out upon. To us is committed the ministry of reconciliation; as ambassadors for God, we are to beseech sinners, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God, and when they comply with the gracious invitation, and are actually by faith brought into a state of reconciliation with God, then, and not till then, may they be said to begin to walk with God.

THIRDLY, Walking with God implies a settled abiding communion and fellowship with God, or what in Scripture is called, 'The Holy Spirit dwelling in us'. This is what our Lord promised when he told his disciples that 'the Holy Spirit would be in and with them'; not to be like wayfaring man, to say only for a night, but to reside and make his abode in their hearts. This, I am apt to believe, is what the apostle John would have us understand, when he talks of a person 'abiding in him, in Christ, and walking as he himself also walked'. And this is what is particularly meant in the words of our text. 'And Enoch walked with God', that is, he kept up and maintained a holy, settled, habitual, though undoubtedly not altogether uninterrupted communion and fellowship with God, in and through Christ Jesus. So to sum up what has been said so far, WALKING WITH GOD consists especially in the fixed habitual bent of the will for God, in an habitual dependence upon his power and promise, in an habitual voluntary dedication of our all to his glory, in an habitual eyeing of his precept in all we do, and in an habitual complacence in his pleasure in all we suffer.

FOURTHLY, WALKING WITH GOD implies our making progress or advances in the divine life. WALKING, in the very first idea of the word, seems to suppose a progressive motion. A person that walks, though he moves slowly, yet he goes forward, and does not continue in one place. And so it is with those who walk with God. They go on, as the Psalmist says, 'from strength to strength'; or, in the language of the apostle Paul, 'they pass from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of the Lord'. Indeed, in one sense, the divine life admits of neither increase nor decrease. When a soul is born of

God, to all intents and purposes he is a child of God; and though he should live to the age of Methuselah, yet he would then be only a child of God after all. But in another sense, the divine life admits of decays and additions. Hence it is, that we find the people of God charged with backslidings and losing their first love. And hence it is that we hear of babes, young men, and fathers in Christ. And upon this account it is that the apostle exhorts Timothy, 'to let his progress be made known to all men'. And what is here required of Timothy in particular, is also by the Apostle Peter required of all Christians in general. 'But grow in grace, (says he), and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ'. For the new creature increases in spiritual stature; and though a person can but be a new creature, yet there are some that are more conformed to the divine image than others, and will after death be admitted to a greater degree of blessedness. For want of observing this distinction, even some gracious souls, that have better hearts than heads, (as well as men of corrupt minds, reprobates concerning the faith) have unawares run into downright Antinomian principles, denying all growth of grace in a believer, or any marks of grace to be laid down in the Scriptures. From such principles, and more especially from practices naturally consequent on such principles, may the Lord of all lords deliver us!

From what then has been said, we may now know what is implied in the words, 'walked with God', viz. Our having the prevailing enmity of our hearts taken away by the power of the Spirit of God; our being actually reconciled and united to him by faith in Jesus Christ; our having and keeping up a settled communion and fellowship with him; and our making a daily progress in this fellowship, so as to be conformed to the divine image more and more.

*Taken from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (ccel.org), and adapted for publication in Bread & Wine by Russ Atmore.*

## Past Observations

*Various Authors*

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O Lord, what evil have we not done? Or if there is evil that we have not done, what evil is there that we have not spoken? If there is any that we have not spoken, what evil is there that we have not thought to do? But you, O Lord, are good. You are merciful. You saw how deep we were sunk in death, and it was your power that drained dry the well of corruption in the depths of our hearts. All that You have asked of us was to deny our own wills and accept yours. Forgive us for every failure to do so and help us to follow You in every way and always, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

***(Augustine – 354 – 430 [The Confessions, IX, x])***

"Suppose a man to be a true believer, and yet finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin, leading him captive to the law of it, consuming his heart with trouble, perplexing his thoughts, weakening his soul as to duties of communion with God, disquieting him as to peace, and perhaps defiling his conscience and exposing him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin—what shall he do? What shall he take and insist on for the mortification of this sin, lust, distemper, or corruption?"

***(John Owen – 1616 – 1683 [as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford to 15 year old students coming to study at Oxford])***

"I have begun to realize that the seeds of every known sin still linger in my heart."

***(Robert Murray M'Cheyne – 1813 - 1843)***

Let this support us when we feel ourselves bruised. Christ's way is first to wound, then to heal. No sound, whole soul shall ever enter into heaven. Think when in temptation, Christ was tempted for me; according to my trials will be my graces and comforts. If Christ be so merciful as not to break me, I will not break myself by despair, nor yield myself over to the roaring lion, Satan, to break me in pieces. See the contrary disposition of Christ on the one hand and Satan and his instruments on the other. Satan sets upon us when we are weakest, as Simeon and Levi upon the

Shechemites, `when they were sore' (Gen. 34:25), but Christ will make up in us all the breaches which sin and Satan have made. He `binds up the broken hearted' (Isa. 61:1). As a mother is tenderest to the most diseased and weakest child, so does Christ most mercifully incline to the weakest. Likewise he puts an instinct into the weakest things to rely upon something stronger than themselves for support. The vine stays itself upon the elm, and the weakest creatures often have the strongest shelters. The consciousness of the church's weakness makes her willing to lean on her beloved, and to hide herself under his wing.

***(Richard Sibbes - 1577 - 1635)***

Engage not against Satan in your own strength. but be every day drawing new strength from the Lord Jesus. Undoubtedly, that soul that engages against any old or new temptation without new strength, new influences from on high, will fall before the power of the temptation. You may see this in Peter; he rested upon some old received strength. – "Though all men should deny Thee, yet will not I." and therefore he falls sadly before a new temptation, denying Christ thrice, that had thrice appeared gloriously to him. Ah, souls! remember this, that your strength to stand and overcome must not be expected from grace received, but from the renewed influences of heaven. You must lean more upon Christ than upon your duties; you must lean more upon Christ than upon your experience; you must lean more upon Christ than upon your graces, or else Satan will carry you into captivity.

***(Thomas Brooks – 1608 - 1680)***

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*“We must saturate ourselves with  
Scripture...and pray without ceasing to  
overcome the world”*

*Joel Beeke*

# Separation

*Gardiner Spring (1785 – 1873)*<sup>1</sup>

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A convincing evidence of true piety is the spirit of separation from the world. Saints are expectants of glory. They are born from above and have no home beneath their native skies. Here they are strangers and pilgrims and plainly declare that they seek a better country (Heb. 11:13-14). It is their avowed profession that their happiness and hopes are neither in nor from the present world. Their treasure is in heaven. They are not of this world even as Christ was not of this world (John 17:14).

The spirit of the world is incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel. It is the spirit of pride and not of humility; of self-indulgence rather than of self-denial. Riches, honors, and pleasure form the grand object of pursuit with the men of the world. Their great inquiry is “Who will show us any good?” Indifferent to everything but that which is calculated to gratify a carnal mind, they lift up their souls unto vanity and pant after the dust of the earth. Their thoughts and their affections are chained down to the things of time and sense. And in these they seem to be irrecoverably immersed. They seldom think but they think of the world; they seldom converse but they converse of the world. The world is the cause of their perplexity and the source of their enjoyment. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life close every avenue of the soul to the exclusion of every holy desire. I had almost said, every serious reflection. This spirit the Christian has mortified. “Now we,” says St. Paul, “have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God” (I Cor. 2:12).

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<sup>1</sup> Gardiner Spring was born in 1785 and graduated from Yale University in 1805. In 1806 after his marriage to Susan Barney, he moved to Bermuda working as a teacher while studying law. In 1808 he was admitted to the bar in Connecticut, but believing that God had called him into the ministry he attended Andover Seminary from 1809 - 1810. His first pastoral call was to the Brick Church of New York City in 1810 and his entire ministerial career of 63 years was served at this post. Gardiner Spring was well known as a gifted preacher of the Word of God.

The disciple of Jesus has nobler affections than the worldly person. While the wise man glories in his wisdom, the mighty man glories in his might, and the rich man glories in his riches, it is the Christian's privilege to glory in nothing save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto him, and he unto the world (Gal. 6:14). The character and cause of the blessed Redeemer lie so near to his heart that in comparison with these everything else vanishes to nothing. He views the world by the eye of faith and in a light that reflects its intrinsic importance—the light of eternity. There the world shrinks to a point and the fashion of it passes away. As the spirit of the world is not the spirit of God's people, so the men of the world are not their companions. "We know that we are of God," says the apostle, "and the whole world lies in wickedness" (I John 5:19).

Between the people of God and the men of the world there is an essential difference of character. The views, the desires, and the designs of the children of God are diametrically opposite to the views, the desires, and the designs of the men of the world. The one loves what the other hates; the one pursues what the other shuns. Saints are passing on the narrow way which leads to life; sinners the broad way which leads to death (Mat. 7:13-14). If there were no other ground for the expectation, therefore, than the common principles of human nature, we might look for dissension rather than unity between the disciples of Christ and the men of the world. "How can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). What fellowship has light with darkness? Or what communion has Christ with Belial? (II Cor. 6:14-15).

The same principles which prompt the men of the world not to select the people of God for their familiar companions also induce the people of God to choose other companions than the men of the world. There is an irreconcilable spirit between them. The friendship of the world is enmity with God (James 4:4). Many as may be mutual tokens of respect, civility, and kindness (and many there should be) between Christians and the men of the world, they are notwithstanding two distinct classes of men. Much as Christians esteem the men of the world as good members of civil society, much as they regard their happiness, and endeavor to advance it, much as they have compassion on their depravity, and deplore their prospects, much as they are

conversant with them in the ordinary calls of duty, still they are not their chosen companions. They cannot court their friendship because they are afraid of it. “Evil communications corrupt good manners” (I Cor. 16:33). “He that walks with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20).

Those who have mortified the spirit and who stand at a distance from the men of the world are also in some good degree above its corrupting influence. Though good men may be often seduced by the smiles and awed by the frowns of the world, it is no part of their general character to conform either to its pleasure or displeasure. They act from higher motives and maintain a more consistent character than to give way to indulgences merely for the sake of pleasing the world or to avoid duty merely through the fear of offending it. While they regard the fear of God more than the fear of man, they will not dishonor God to please the world. And while they regard the favor of God more than the favor of man, they will not purchase the favor of man at the expense of the favor of God.

Show me the men who imbibe the spirit of the world, who choose the company of the world, who imitate the example of the world, conform to the maxims of the world, are swallowed up in the gaiety, fashions, and amusements of the world—behold, these are the ungodly who are brought into desolation as in a moment! I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo he was not; yes, I sought him, but he could not be found (Psalm. 37:35).

(taken from *The Distinguishing Traits of Christian Character* by Gardiner Spring and his chapter entitled, “Separation from the world,” and adapted by Russ Atmore for *Bread & Wine*)

# Authority to Forgive Sins (Mark 2:1 – 12)

Russ Atmore

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## Scripture

**Mark 2:1 – 12**

## Key Verse

*“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”- he said to the paralytic- “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” Mark 2:10, 11*

## Theme

Jesus has not only the power to heal all diseases, but He has authority also to forgive sins because he is God.

## Exposition

Jesus has had a demanding preaching tour (Mark 1:39) throughout the Galilee region. His fame has spread everywhere and he has had virtually no rest. In chapter 2, we find our Lord returning to Capernaum, the city He calls home (Matthew 4:13). His presence in Capernaum has been unobserved for a few days due largely to the disobedience of the leper whom He had cleansed in 1:40 – 45. Once the people knew that He was back in town, a great crowd (v. 2) assembled at his house (this may be his own house or that of Simon Peter (see 1:29). The events that follow are climaxed by conflict by a statement made by the Lord Jesus that He has the power to forgive sins (v. 5, 10). In fact, on four other occasions the remarks of Jesus in Mark 2: 17, 19, 28, & 3:4 lead to conflict. This is also paralleled by five other occasions in Mark 11:27 – 12:37). For the first time in Mark’s Gospel we see

conflict surrounding the Lord Jesus. While Jesus is preaching to the crowd (v. 2), a group of men brought one of their friends to see Jesus. The crowd was so great that they were forced to use the stairs on the outside that led to the flat rooftop, where they began to remove a section of it, in order to let their friend down into the house into the midst of Jesus and the crowd (vv. 3, 4). Jesus saw in both this paralytic and his friends the one thing He desires of all of us, namely; faith, and He remarks to the man, that his sins are forgiven.

This was not what the friends or the man would have been expecting. They were looking for physical healing, but before there can be physical healing there must be spiritual healing. This statement by our Lord is full of concern and compassion for the man. This man's greatest need was salvation, not physical healing. The scribes who were sitting there, (v. 6) were probably looking for some miracle along with the crowd's expectation. What they got was a staggering assertion about sins being forgiven. Of all people, the scribes would have been very familiar with the truth that only God can forgive sins. They therefore viewed Jesus' statement as blasphemy (vv. 6, 7)

We should not infer from Jesus' statement that the physical paralysis of the man was due in some measure to his sins. This belief was not absent from Jewish thought (see Job 4:7; 22:5 – 10; Luke 13:4; John 9:2). In fact, Jesus is concerned about both aspects of this man's life. His physical condition and his spiritual condition were important to him. Mark tells us that Jesus immediately perceived in His spirit (v. 8) what the scribes were thinking. This is an indication, of course, of the omniscience of God. Only God can know our innermost thoughts. We often claim to know what someone is thinking based on what we see on their faces, and there may be some truth to that, but this was not what happened with our Lord. He knows their thoughts. No doubt though, their faces would have expressed their thoughts. They were not prepared to consider the alternative before them. They were correct in their theology. Only God can forgive sins, but they thought that since Jesus had made this statement about forgiving sins, that therefore he must be blaspheming. The alternative was simply that Jesus was God and therefore could forgive sins was something they did not consider. We know Jesus knew what they were thinking by what He said to them

in verse 8, *“why do you question these things in your hearts?”* Ultimately it was this kind of conflict that occurred numerous times between our Lord and the religious leaders that would lead to the Cross

Jesus drives home His authority by giving them a challenge in verse 9. Was it easier to say, *“your sins are forgiven,”* or *“get up and walk?”* The easier thing to say was, *“your sins are forgiven.”* The condition of the man precluded anyone saying, *“get up and walk”* because they all knew he could not do that. The visible signs of paralysis were beyond their ability. So Jesus says the easier thing, but in order to prove that He does actually have the power to forgive sins, He says the more difficult thing (in the eyes of the scribes and people), *“rise, pick up your bed and go home”* (v. 10, 11).

The response of the man is immediate (v. 12). He gets up, picks up his bed and goes home in the presence of them all. What Jesus had just done was to prove that if He could heal the man of his paralysis (as He did), then He also had the power to forgive sins. Here is the undeniable logic of theology. His power to heal is no less than His power to forgive. Both acts flow from the same Lord.

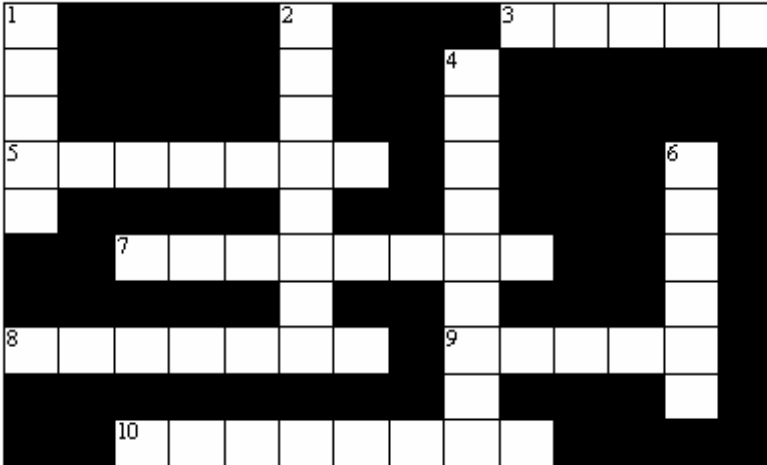
### **Application**

In this passage we see the undeniable power of our Lord in healing and forgiving. Is it not strange in our world today among many Christians, that they are quick to assert their involvement in their salvation (the forgiveness of their sins), but always say that healing is undeniably from God because it is beyond them? Why make healing a monergistic act, but salvation a synergistic act? We should see from this story that Jesus saves and Jesus heals, and the power is all His – it is not in our power to effect the change in either salvation or healing. Jesus indeed possesses the authority and the power to heal and forgive. We should be like the crowd who glorified God, and who were amazed at what they saw (v. 12). When it comes to our salvation (or healing) we should say, *“we never saw anything like this”* (v. 12). To God alone belongs the power and the glory forever and ever.

# Bible Quiz

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## Across

- 3. “being confident of this, that he who \_\_\_\_\_ a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
- 5. “he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and \_\_\_\_\_ by the Holy Spirit,”
- 7. “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the \_\_\_\_\_ of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”
- 8. “A new \_\_\_\_\_ I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

9. "In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born \_\_\_\_\_."

10. "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their \_\_\_\_\_. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

### Down

1. "I will give you a new \_\_\_\_\_ and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

2. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new \_\_\_\_\_; the old has gone, the new has come!"

4. "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a \_\_\_\_\_ spirit within me."

6. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a \_\_\_\_\_ hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"

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*"The best way never to fall is ever to  
fear."*

*William Jenkyn (Puritan)*