

I. INTRODUCTION

REVIEW: Four realities in the believer's life: (1) **The Spiritual Life is impossible; it requires a miracle.** Romans 12-16 contain 48 (of many) commands God expects us to obey; they are impossible without a miracle. (2) **Christ's death on the Cross freed us from the shackles of sin.** Just like Christ was raised from the dead, so too we have been given new life that enables us to obey God instead of our sinful flesh, Romans 6. (3) **Although we are new creatures in Christ, we still have a sin nature that remains in our flesh,** Romans 7. But God has also given us an "inner man" to overcome the flesh. (4) **God performs a resurrection miracle with our dead bodies of sin through His Son's Sacrifice.** Even though we have to contend with our sin nature, God's Spirit resurrects our dead bodies enabling them to live for God.

But is all this mere academics or is God true to His Word? A look at human history and the lives of (just) two believers shows God's faithfulness in keeping His Word.

II. IS GOD TRUE TO HIS WORD, i.e., IS THE SPIRITUAL LIFE *REALLY* POSSIBLE?

A. *What Was God's Original Intent for Mankind? Fellowship With Man*

1. *Adam and the Fall → Tunics of Skin*

God's desire, from the beginning, was/is to fellowship with mankind. When man sinned and tore that fellowship, God made *tunics of skin*, 3:21, to cover man's sin. Something else that will carry on throughout history is man's dominion over earth.

2. *Cain Before Abel's Murder*

Knowing that Cain is about to murder his brother Abel and his recent sin against God with an improper sacrifice, God reaches out to Cain, Genesis 4:1-7.

3. *All Mankind is Corrupt Except Noah and Co.*

The 1st "stop" God places on man's sinful nature is conscience, but it doesn't work. By Noah's day, the entire human race is corrupt. So God destroys mankind, except for Noah & Co.—showing God's desire to continue fellowship with man. God adds a 2nd "stop" against man's sin nature: human government (capital punishment in Gen. 9). But it doesn't keep man from breaking fellowship with God. In Gen. 9, Noah gets drunk and his son, Ham, sins against him. Ham is the father of the Canaanite nations, who would eventually entice Israel to forsake God. Dominion over the earth is still present and applies to all mankind: Gen. 9:1-3.

4. *God's Covenant With Abraham and Israel's Rebellion*

By the time of Gen 11 mankind is one people, who seek to glorify themselves, thus man continues his sinfulness. Eventually God seeks fellowship with one nation, Israel. And through Israel with the rest of mankind—by way of His Son.

God makes a covenant with Abraham. But Abraham's family doesn't do so well: Judah endangers the Messianic line by having relations with Canaanites. So God sends Israel to Egypt for 400yrs of bondage. He then frees them and gives them the Mosaic Law, the 3rd "stop" against the sin nature. God brings them to the Promise Land, but they refuse to enter. God punishes them in the wilderness for 40yrs and brings them back. This time Israel begins conquering the Land. Then we have the period of the judges, where everyone does *what is right in their own eyes*, Judges 17:6, showing that the 3rd stop didn't work too well either.

Israel cries for a king; God gives them one—the 4th "stop" on man's sin nature. The 1st king, Saul, doesn't do so well. The 2nd, David, does much better. But eventually, this too fails. Israel splits in two: the Northern & Southern kingdoms. Out of the 19 northern kings, 0 serve the Lord. Out of the 20 Southern kings, 8 serve the Lord. God eventually punishes both by sending them into captivity.

B. *God Still Desires Fellowship With Mankind, So He Provides the Final Way: Christ*

Throughout all of this, what's been the issue? Keeping fellowship with God. This time God provides a permanent fix to the fellowship problem: His Son's death on the Cross. It provides man new life and freedom from his rebellious nature. This fix gives man a way back to God in spite of his rebellious nature. And ultimately, the fix will be applied fully and completely when Christ returns.

Gentiles who read the OT may wonder if they even have a role in the rest of human history, since the Bible is such a Jewish book and speaks of God fulfilling His promises to Israel and its Greater Son, Messiah (Jesus Christ). However, Gentiles will have a role to play and it's foretold in the OT (e.g., Deut., Jer. and Is.), but their exact role God doesn't reveal until the NT.

Using Paul, God reveals that Gentiles will actually have a ruling position in the future kingdom. As He states in Ephesians 3:1-12, this was a mystery hidden from all ages. The OT states that Israel will rule over the earth, with Messiah sitting as King of the earth. So to see Gentiles participate in this is news to all.

And this ruling over the earth is God restoring his original mandate to man to have dominion over the earth. It first went to Adam when God told him to tend and keep the Garden, name the animals, and gave him all plant life as food, then to Noah and his 3 sons (i.e., all mankind) and this time God adds meat to the diet. It went next to Abraham and Israel when God set aside a specific piece of the earth, the Promise Land, for Israel to rule over. Eventually it will go back to all mankind by way of His Son, Messiah (a man). He and the rest of mankind, i.e., all who are part of His royal family, will rule the earth, which was God's original intent.

But before this final rule is established, there is intervening history. Israel has periods of blessing and cursing as described in the OT. Eventually her Messiah arrives and Israel is again under discipline because she rejects Him—He’s crucified. Does this spell the end for Israel? No! (see Rom 9-11). God uses Gentiles to restore Israel and bring her back to her Messiah (Deut. 32:16, 21; Rom 11). This was part of God’s plan for Israel.

Eventually, God raptures the Church and the antichrist and tribulation cause Israel to call for her Messiah’s return (Zech 13:9). He returns and God’s original plan is on the march. God vindicates three things: (1) *Conscience*, it was a “stop” on the sin nature, but didn’t work too well, in the future kingdom, God gives Israel a new heart to serve Him (Jer. 31:31-34), (2) *Human Government*, Messiah, a man, rules over the earth, (3) *Man’s Dominion Over Earth* is reestablished when God removes creation’s curse and fulfills His promise to Abraham to rule the Promise Land.

After a 1000yrs of peace, Satan is release and in spite of perfect environment man rebels one last time. God destroys Satan and all who rebel, the heavens and earth are destroyed and God creates a new heaven and earth. God realizes His original intent: man’s finally in harmony with God and himself, which was delayed by the Fall.

All this is the foundation of everything related to the spiritual life. Without realizing that God has an ultimate goal in mind (to restore fellowship with man) everyday life doesn’t make sense nor is it worth living, all there is is the here & now (as many have concluded, e.g., Nietzsche). But there’s a much BIGGER picture involved and for believers it includes suffering, Phil. 1:29. But our suffering is not without hope, Rom. 5:1-5. Does this put paying the rent and driving to work in perspective?

III. DOES THE SPIRITUAL LIFE ACTUALLY WORK IN *REAL* LIFE?

A. *Abraham and God’s Command to Kill His Only Son, Isaac*

We are not alone in the impossible task (the spiritual life) God places before us and the incredible means that He provides to fulfill it. The OT saints faced similar trials. God gave some impossible promises to Abraham: (1) the Promise Land, (2) You’ll have a son, even though you’re 100yrs old and your wife Sarah is 90. There’s initial doubt, but they trust the Lord, Rom. 4:18-20; Heb. 11:11-12.

Isaac is born and when he’s a teenager, God gives Abraham an impossible command. But he wavered not at God’s command because he knew God’s faithfulness and if need be, God could raise Isaac from the dead, Heb. 11: 17-19.

B. *David and God's Command Not to Kill Saul, the King*

In 1 Sam. 16 God anoints David to be the next king of Israel. In 1 Sam. 17 David fights Goliath, a 9' 9" giant. In this battle David reveals his utter and absolute trust in the Lord. In 1 Sam. 18, Saul, the king, makes David a commander in his army. But because of David's great success, Saul becomes jealous and suspicious of him.

Instead of praising God for providing such a valiant warrior to fight for Israel, Saul seeks to take David's life....when you live by the flesh, you will do the flesh's bidding and instead of obeying God you will make up your own rules and fantasies about what it means to serve God (1 Sam. 23:19-21) and what His will is (1 Sam 20: 31).

But when you live by the Spirit of God, you will be able to obey, even His most impossible commands. After being pursued for so long and having his life threatened over 11 times by Saul, David refrains from killing him, even when he has two perfect opportunities, 1 Sam. 24:1-7; 26:5-12. David was given the ability to obey this difficult command not to kill Saul the moment God anointed him the next king of Israel because David knew that his life was not in Saul's hands, it was in God's. He trusted God's promise to him.

IV. CONCLUSION

Yes, God gives the believer an impossible command: live the spiritual life, but, He also provides the means to live that life. At its basic essence, the spiritual life is living in harmony with God, in fellowship with Him. This was His intent from the beginning, but Man's Fall interrupted that fellowship. However, all of human history reveals that God continued reaching out to man in order to bridge the gap that separated them. He provides a permanent fix to the dilemma when He sends His Son to die for man. Simply put, the first two chapters in the Bible reveal life before man's Fall, the last two chapters reveal life after man's Fall. In between these God reveals what He did to remedy the problem of the Fall.

Additionally, believers can look at the lives of past believers and see that God is true to His Word. God's faithfulness to them proves His faithfulness to us, i.e., He will provide His children the ability to obey His impossible commands.