

The **Acts** Transition

From Prophecy to Mystery

From Covenant to Grace

By Pastor Matthew Ritchey

In our last article (*Truth Aflame*, spring/summer 2025), we touched on the fact that the “New Testament” is actually a progression of the promises made to Israel found in the “Old Testament.” The same themes found in the Old Testament are evident throughout the Gospel accounts. We highlighted:

- 1.) Prophecy was fulfilled. Compare Isaiah 9:6 with Luke 1:30-33, 67-79.
- 2.) Jesus was born under the Promise. Read Luke 1:72-73; 2:21-24; 41-42.
- 3.) Christ arrived as the Messiah sent to the nation of Israel. See Matthew 1:16; 10:5-6; 15:24; John 1:41; 4:22; 12:12-13.
- 4.) The prophesied, promised Davidic kingdom was declared to be near. See Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:14-15.
- 5.) Christ prepared His people to go through the Tribulation before He would return for the second time to regather the faithful from the nation into the promised land where He will reign as King. Read Matthew 24:3-31.
- 6.) Salvation was taught as provided through a covenant. See Matthew 7:20-24.
- 7.) Even Paul confirmed Christ’s earthly ministry had to do with Israel’s promises. See Romans 5:8.

Most dispensationalists explain that Acts is a record of the birth and growth of the Church. Make no mistake, there is something progressive to be found in the book of Acts. As we turn to Acts, we have the Messiah identified, redemption completed, and the start of the transition to the New Covenant. The focus turns from Law to trust in the name of Christ. However, a more accurate approach to Acts is to realize it is the offer of the Messianic Kingdom, the rejection of this offer, and the setting aside of Israel. It is a tale of two churches: it begins with the Kingdom church thriving and ends with a new church revealed while the Kingdom church is being set aside until a future time.

The initial chapters of Acts are a continuation of what Jesus taught, along with the progressive information that had now been entrusted to His Apostles (1:1-3). Other items of note are:

- 1). The promise of the Comforter was fulfilled (1:4-5 cf. John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7).
- 2). It was still focused on the restoration of the kingdom on earth to Israel (1:6 cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:14-15).
- 3). Israelites will be His witnesses (1:7-8 cf. Isa. 43) and the locations mentioned begin at Jerusalem and ripple outward.

(Continued on page 3)

News from the President

A lot has happened since we greeted you in last year's edition of *Truth Aflame*. The most impactful has been Joel and Susan McGarvey's retirement from the ministry of Bible Doctrines To Live By (see page 8). Joel and Susan have officially been part of BDTLB for over twenty years (not counting all the times they joined with Lee and Darlene before that). Things will be different, but we are excited to see how the Lord will continue to use BDTLB in the years and decades ahead.

Bible Doctrines has always been, and will continue to be focused on evangelism and mid-Acts dispensationalism.

We have been left with a solid foundation of Bible study and evangelistic resources for those with a working knowledge of the Bible (see page 5). While we won't stop providing materials for those who already know, we are going to focus some time on reaching a world that has no foundational Bible knowledge. They don't know the buzz words; they know nothing about God or Jesus Christ; they are uninterested in church; they don't know Christian traditions, but we are still called to reach them and teach them. Jesus did not tell his disciples to sit in the house and let the harvest come to them; instead, if we want fruit for our labors, we have to go out into the field.

We trust you have a passion to help all see what is the fellowship of the Mystery and will partner with us in our desire to see souls saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (see bottom of page 11). It may not look as churchy or formal as you are used to (see ad top of page 11), but it will be the Truth of God.

Again, we will still have dispensational Bible

study (see "The Acts Transition" beginning on page one). You'll find the "Truth for Youth" article in the center of this magazine (the larger edition is online). We also recognize there are real-life applications and relevant topics that need addressed (see page 4). In other words, the Bible has Bible doctrines to live by.

Thank you for your prayers, financial support, and encouragement through the years. I trust you'll catch the excitement of how the Lord is going to use Bible Doctrines To Live By in the years ahead!

Always for His glory and praise,



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(continued from page 1)

- 4). The apostles question was not “when can we go up to be with you?” but “when are you coming back down here” (1:9-12 cf. Zech 14:4)?
- 5). Pentecost was a Jewish feast day (2:1-4 cf. “feast of weeks” in Deut. 16:9-10).
- 6). The events of Pentecost were a prophesied event signifying the last days of prophecy and the kingdom to come (2:16-21 cf. Joel 2:27).
- 7). The audience Peter addressed was largely Jewish (“Judaea” “Jerusalem” in 2:14; “men of Israel” in v. 22) and the Gentile’s place was as “proselytes” (2:10).
- 8). Peter’s message was not simply “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” First, one had to recognize they were guilty of crucifying God’s Anointed One and repent of it. Note Acts 2:36: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”
- 9). They are still observing ceremonial law as they went to the temple at the prescribed hour of prayer (3:1).
- 10). As Peter once again addressed “Ye men of Israel” (3:12), he called God “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers” (3:13) a unique covenant title.
- 11). The sermon was scattered with terms (i.e., “sins blotted out at the time of refreshing,” “spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began,” etc.) suggesting Israel’s covenant with God (3:19-26).

The overall nation and its leadership ultimately reject God’s salvation through Christ (the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7; worshipping Herod as god in chapter 12). Instead of wrath, God had another plan.

God chose a former persecutor by the name of Saul (8:1-3) and chose him to reveal the previously unknown plan of Grace. As Jesus confronted Saul on his way to persecute Christ-

followers in Damascus, these words are recorded, “for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee” (as recounted in Acts 26:16). This former persecutor would later go on to become Paul the administrator of Grace, which we will talk about more in the next issue of *Truth Aflame*.

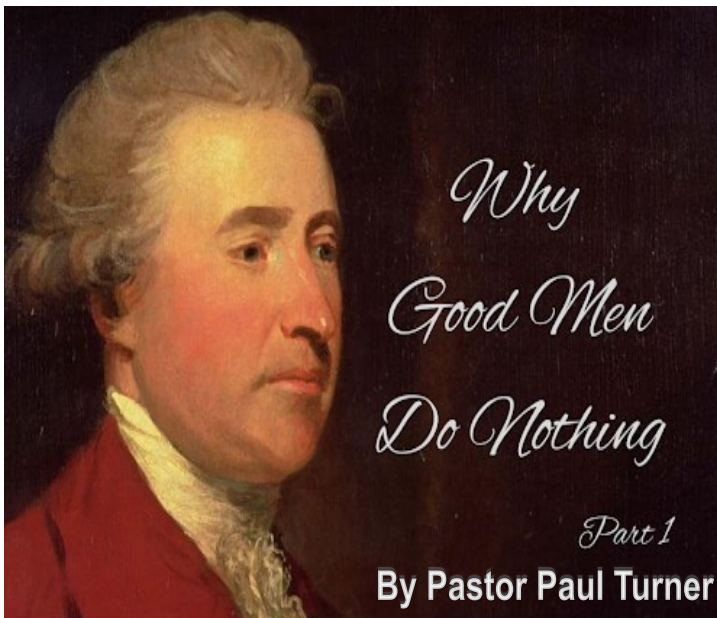
Before we depart, let me restate some truths that shouldn’t be ignored as we desire to promote and teach the uniqueness of the Gospel of the Grace of God in the Bible. First, redemption in/through/by Christ was NOT the Mystery. It was promised in the Garden (Gen. 3:15); it was foreshadowed in the Law (Exod. 12) and prophesied in the Old Testament (Isa. 53). Jesus taught it to His disciples (Matt. 16:21; 20:28), and Peter wrote about it in His letters (1 Pet. 1:3-5, 18-21). It is the “to whom, and how, and when” that we find is different¹ between Prophecy and Mystery.

Second, faith and grace were just as essential in any program. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6) is applicable to any program. It is the requirement of faith that varies from economy to economy, or between dispensations.²

It is for this reason that the honor, glory, and praise, at any time and in every dispensation, always goes to God for the great things He has done.

1. For examples of what I mean by “different,” compare these passages: timing of salvation and forgiveness in Acts 3:19 and 1 Pet. 1:9 with 1 Cor. 6:11, Eph. 1:7,13, Col. 2:13; when was salvation known in Acts 3:21 and 1 Pet. 1:10 in comparison with Gal. 1:11-12, 15; the outward requirements of Acts 3:21 and 1 Pet. 1:22 with Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 2:10-12; salvation’s destination in Acts 1:11-12/Zech. 14:4 and 2 Pet. 3:10-11/Isa. 65:17-19 with Col. 3:1-4, 1 Thess. 4:17).

2. e.g., “keep the (Mosaic) commandments” (Deut. 6:17-18; 7:9; Psa. 112:1; Ecc. 12:13); “believe in the name in Christ” (Acts 8:12,37) and “keep the (Messianic) commandments” (John 14:15,21; 1 John 3:21-24) “believe in the work of Christ and live in the Spirit according to the new life” (Rom. 4:4-5; 6:4; 8:1-4).



18th Century Irish Philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke is credited with the familiar quote, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” While we cannot find the exact quote in his writings, we can find a similar statement in his 1770 work entitled, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontent*. It is interesting that in 1770 when Edmund Burke penned that writing, the cause of discontent was linked to good men doing nothing, especially in light of all we know was taking place around the world at that time. There truly is “nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

We must ask why! Why do seemingly good men choose to not join the “fellowship of the doers”? Why do good men willingly choose passivity? Scripture challenges us on this topic in two ways. First, God’s Word gives testimonies of men who were doers. James 1:22 directly states,

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

While James 1:1 is clear that this letter was written to “the twelve tribes scattered abroad,” we cannot deny that the call to active obedience is a parallel truth for us today (Philippians 3:13–15). Scripture does refer to us as “servants” and “saints.” I cannot imagine how a servant or saint serves without doing.

The second way Scripture tackles this issue is in also addressing the many reasons why we, as men, choose to shrink back into passivity. While there are many reasons why passivity is so popular among men, let’s look at only one.

Proverbs 21:17 begins with four words, “He that loveth pleasure.” Herein lies one of the most insidious attacks of Satan on mankind. We are passive in things that matter because we are active in things that don’t! Neil Postman once wrote a book entitled *Amusing Ourselves to Death*; a great book that well summarizes our current society. As Christian men, we should stand out from the society. Sadly, far too often, rather than standing out from the society, we are standing knee deep in it. It is impossible to obey Galatians 5:1 to “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” when our boots are stuck fast in the muck of this world.

While I disagree with Matt Walsh’s theology on many fronts, he was right in his book *Church of Cowards* when he described the church today as being lulled to sleep by having our pillows fluffed to keep us comfortable. As the spiritual war rages around us, we rest comfortably, oblivious that our marriages, homes, churches, and societies are being laid waste.

I will not deny that the world, and all its pleasures, does have a way of enticing us. King David, a man after God’s own heart, fell prey to passivity and pleasure. You may be familiar with David’s affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, but 2 Samuel 11:1 gives the full story.

And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at **the time when kings go forth to battle**, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. **But David tarried still at Jerusalem.**

David should have been leading his men and his nation in doing what God had called him to do, but instead he chose passivity and pleasure that led to his own failure. Note that his choice had consequences that he could not have foreseen. Those consequences went far beyond his own personal life. When we choose passivity and pleasure, our choices will not just affect us.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7 says he “kept the faith,” but in Romans 7:19 he admits to the inward struggle with sin. He says, “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.” In 2 Timothy 4:10 he points out that Demas left him and cites the cause of his departure as, “having loved this present world.” Far too often man willingly

chooses passivity for pleasure. We choose passivity because we love this present world.

Is there anything in this present world that you love? Is there anything that keeps you from living and leading as God desires and commands in this life? Are you passive in the things that matter because you are active in the things that don't?



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Western Michigan Women's Conference

Life is often a real struggle. Even when you know God intimately and spend time in His Word, it is challenging to trust at times. When you are hurting, afraid, or even feeling despair, it can be difficult to make sense of it all. While we know we will face hardships in this life, God's Word has the answers to how we can face them with an eternal perspective and hope in the One who holds our lives together.

On Saturday, March 28, 2026, on the campus of Grace Christian University, join other women as Rebecca Turner shares the Hope found in God's Word.

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ANGER

By Matthew Ritchey



"Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil." Psalms 37:8.

Have you ever gotten angry? Have you been so mad that you broke something or hit something or said mean things to someone? The Bible has many verses that talk about the dangers of anger. Even adults struggle with anger, talking bad about people who are different or doing unkind things to others. This is not what God wants from us. Let's look at some verses that help us keep our anger in control.

Be Like God



"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 103:8



The first key to controlling our anger is to see that God is patient. Because He is slow to anger, He sent His Son to pay the price for the sins of all people. Because God is a gracious God, He offers salvation to us even though we deserve His anger. Even after we are saved, we can do things that are not pleasing to Him, but the Bible tells us God will never be angry toward us. Our first step in controlling our anger is to know that God has called us to love, not anger. Be like God and replace anger with love,

Don't Let Anger Simmer



"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Ephesians 4:26

Soup usually has to simmer, meaning you keep it on a low heat until it starts to boil. This verse tells us NOT to let our anger simmer. If someone did something to us during the day, we are not to let it simmer in our minds all day and all night. This just moves our anger toward a boil. If we think and think about what makes us mad, it will someday make us act in anger. We need to deal with our anger before the day is done. We may have to talk to someone who made us mad to work it out, and we should definitely talk to God about it so He can help us with our anger. Get rid of anger right away!



Quick to Listen; Slow to Talk



"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." James 1:19-20



Imagine if you were making soup for the first time and did not listen to the adult giving you instructions. The soup would probably turn out gross! Many people don't follow the Lord's instructions when it comes to anger. They are quick to talk bad and argue right away. This is not the instruction God has given to us. First, we should listen before we speak. Our first response is never to act in anger because our anger will never produce God's rightness. It just makes a mess, like gross soup. Proverbs 14:29 says that the person who is slow to anger has great understanding, but the one who is quick to be angry is foolish. We should listen to God and listen to others before getting mad.

Soft Answer

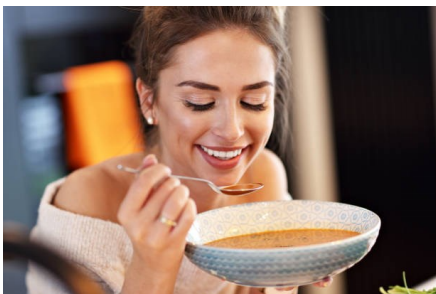


"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1.

When anger wants to scream and yell and say unkind things, love will respond gently with patience. Proverbs tells us that a fool allows his anger to walk freely, while a wise person keeps it contained (see Proverbs 16:32 and 29:11). The best way to calm down a situation when the anger-soup is boiling is to turn down the heat with a soft reply. A mad response only makes the anger flames get hotter. To stop anger, answer someone softly.



Love and Kindness



The Bible tells us love is kind and patient. It also tells us that only kindness can turn our enemies into friends. Always remember, Christ died for us while when we deserved God's anger, but instead of anger, God acted in love, kindness, and grace. Now, if we have trusted in Jesus Christ, we are part of God's family. The recipe God has given us uses kindness, love, grace, patience, and gentleness. Anger will ruin the soup, so throw it in the trash!

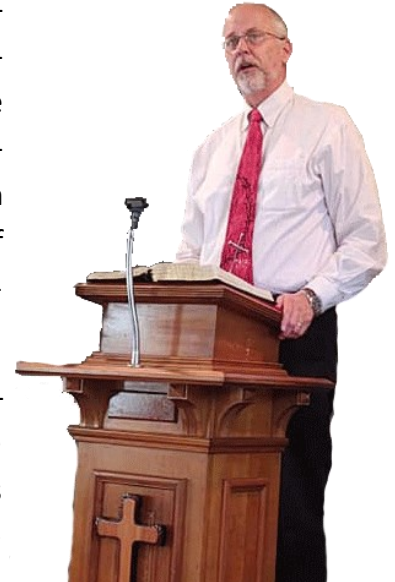
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Thank You, Joel and Susan



Joel and Susan McGarvey have dedicated twenty years of their lives to serving the Lord through Bible Doctrines To Live By. During that time, countless lives have made a profession of accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior while many others have been reaffirmed or were introduced to the doctrines of Grace. Joel and Susan brought an excitement to VBS through years of travel and many appreciate Joel's zeal for the message revealed to the Apostle Paul.



Five years ago, Joel transformed the back room at the BDTLB office into a studio for online ministry. Through live programming, Joel has been able to provide studies on "Right Division," "Through the Bible" and several other topics through these years. Many have tuned in on Sunday and Tuesday nights to benefit from mid-Acts teaching. In addition, Susan began "Miss Susan's Bible Buddies" for younger children.

Joel and Susan poured their heart and soul into the ministry of Bible Doctrines To Live By for two decades, and their imprint will be felt in years ahead.

Now, they have made the difficult decision to retire from BDTLB in order to focus on continuing the online ministries, slow down, and also free them up to allow the Lord to use them in other endeavors. They are not ready to retire completely from ministry but will continue to represent the Lord. *Sunday Bible Time* and *Tuesday Bible Hour* have been uniquely Joel since their beginnings, so if you have enjoyed the programs, we encourage you to search "Grace Bible Ministries" on Facebook.

We thank the McGarveys for their faithful, sacrificial service for the Lord Jesus Christ through Bible Doctrines To Live By. Will you join us in praying that our Savior will continue to use them in their years ahead?

As Joel constantly encourages you, "Keep Looking Up!"



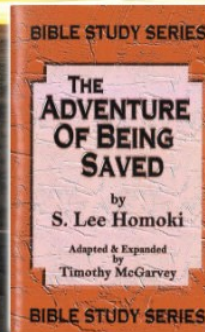
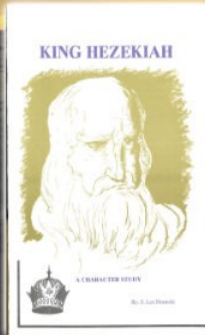
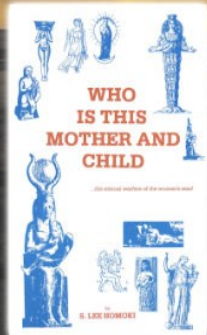


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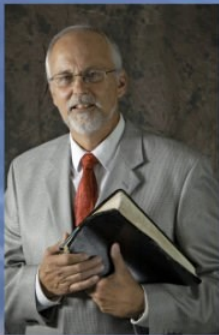
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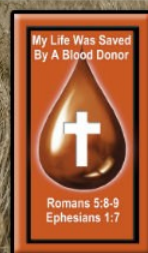
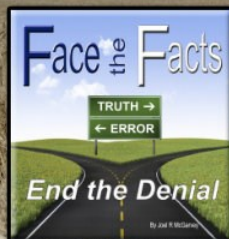
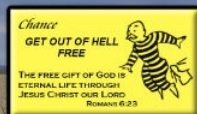


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2 Timothy 1:6—2:13

I believe the Apostle Paul is encouraging Timothy to personal revival. To be more specific, I am persuaded that the revival of the Grace Message is the burden of Paul’s message in this text.

FIRST, Paul is saying that Timothy was to “stir up the gift of God” (vs. 6). The picture here is that of an ample campfire that once attracted those around to its beneficial warmth, light and protection; but now, those benefits are in jeopardy because its flames have died out and it is generating more smoke than heat. It is badly in need of being rekindled and fanned again into a flame. Timothy is in need of revival; likewise, we are in need of revival. Without revival we shall suffer great loss.

SECONDLY, Paul is saying that a revival in Timothy’s life and ministry (vs. 7) would be characterized by (a) a “power” to do right (Phil. 4:13); (b) a “love which is in Christ” - we are to love God’s Word, the saints, the lost (2 Tim. 1:13); and (c) a “sound mind” to bring every thought into subjection to Christ—a thinking like the mind of Christ; a thinking of Bible truth (2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 2:5).

THIRDLY, Paul is saying that a revival in Timothy’s life and ministry would give proper recognition to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and to the Apostle Paul as Christ’s special prisoner (vs. 8).

The issue here is addressed by the word “ashamed” (vss. 8, 12, 16). In Paul’s case, he was a prisoner because God had appointed him to be “a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (vs. 11), with the special deposit of the Grace Message being entrusted to his care (vs. 12). Revival will bring recognition of this fact and boldness for the believer to be a “partaker of the afflictions of the gospel” (vs. 8; Eph. 6:19-20).

NOTE: Verse 12 of this chapter has caused a great deal of discussion as to its interpretation. Because the overall context does not have to do with salvation, but service, I am forced to conclude, with Dr. Kenneth Wuest in his book, “Word Studies,” that verse 12 refers to the deposit of truth that was committed to Paul. One translation of this Scripture renders Verse 12 as follows: “I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that He is able to guard, until that Day, what has been entrusted to me.”

FOURTHLY, Paul was saying that a revival in Timothy’s life and ministry would result in a militant defense and propagation of the Grace Message. Hence, Paul’s comment to Timothy was to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2:1) and to “endure hardness, as a good soldier” (2:3).

A good soldier must stand fast and not retreat from the “sound words” of the commanding officer (1:13). He must guard the “good thing” that was committed to his care (1:14), and he must advance the cause for which he was enlisted (2:2).

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Something as simple as an email can keep you better informed how Christ is working through Bible Doctrines To Live By.

Is there interest in a longer subscription based Truth Aflame?

Cost for the printed page has gone up significantly. This is why once popular magazines and newspapers are disappearing or going solely online. While I don't think we can ignore the trend, I still believe in hard copy.

One of the ideas we are considering is offering an expanded Truth Aflame-like periodical in addition to the free version. This would allow a wide variety of guest contributors and wider topics. There would be a low cost subscription for the magazine to cover printing and mailing.

If you would be interested in an annual or bi-annual magazine like this, send us an email (staff@bibledoctrines.org) to let us know.



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Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again

The Need: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)
"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)
"...there is none that doeth good, no not one." (Romans 3:12b)

The Result: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Romans 5:12)

God's Response: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)
"In {Christ} we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins..." (Ephesians 1:7)

The Gospel: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you...by which also ye are saved...For I delivered unto you that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried according to the Scriptures, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

Man's Response: "To declare...that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:26)
"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." (Ephesians 1:13)

Believe and have eternal life