

# *Knowing God*

## **Study Guide**

**An Exercise in Spiritual  
Growth and Discipleship  
Using the Book by J.I. Packer**

### **Section Three: If God be for Us Student Edition**

by

**William G. Meisheid**

**For Study Groups or Personal Use**

Sageline Publishing  
502 Oella Avenue  
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

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Printed in the United States of America



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## Preface

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Congratulations on arriving at Section Three of J I Packer's seminal work on practical theology, *Knowing God*. By now you have found yourself challenged on many fronts to think deeply about what you believe about the God in whom you live and move and have your being.

In Part One, you learned about the purpose of theology and the goal of this study. Then you met the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as you encountered the nature of the Trinity and the Christian Godhead.

In Part Two, you examined the attributes of God, building from the necessity of His unchanging nature through majesty, wisdom, truth, love, and grace, leading to God's judgment, wrath, goodness and severity, and finally that our God is a jealous God. These last aspects are difficult for most post-modern Christians to deal with. However, we learned as Job did before us, God is God and we are not and we move on in hope and trust, for whatever He gives we thankfully take.

We now approach the luscious canopy of the Gospel, having faithfully establish its root and branch, we reach high to its central meaning since without the final flowering what purpose in this case do the root and branch serve us. Packer calls this section the Heart of the Gospel and it is, since it is life giving to all of creation, that which has been subjected to futility, in hopes of seeing the revealing of the Sons of God, of whom we are. [Romans 8:19](#) We now embrace the joy set before us in hope everlasting.

### A prayer for this study

Dear Lord God, you have challenged us in your Word to study to show ourselves approved and told us to leave aside the milk of the Gospel and mature into its meat. Open our hearts, O Lord, and prepare us to learn of you, to drink deep of your revelation of yourself. And as we come to know you better, O Lord, may we also come to better know ourselves. Grant us, by your grace, success in our efforts.

May your Holy Spirit by his witness authenticate what we study and learn, and may we always remember that it is the Spirit who testifies and leads us into all truth and knowledge of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we struggle to apprehend the faith once delivered unto the saints, we thank you, O Lord, for your mercy and patience with us as we endeavor to understand both you and ourselves better. May everything we do be to your eternal honor and glory. Amen.

William (Bill) G. Meisheid

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## Section Three: If God Be for Us...

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### Scriptures

[Romans 8:31](#) "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

[Hebrews 9:24](#) "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

[Hebrews 4:15-16](#) "For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

[1 Corinthians 10:13](#) "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

[1 Corinthians, 1:27](#) "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."

[Matthew 19:26b](#) "...but for God all things are possible."

### Quotes

"He whom God has touched will always be a being apart: he is, whatever he may do, a stranger among men; he is marked by a sign." Ernest Renan (1823–1892), French writer, critic, scholar. *repr. In Oeuvres Complètes, vol. 3. L'Avenir de la Science (1890).*

"God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the learned." Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French mathematician, scientist, philosopher. "*Memorial 1654,*" p. 69, *Selections, ed. R.H. Popkin, Macmillan, New York (1989).*

God pity them both! and pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall. For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: "It might have been!" John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), U.S. poet.

"If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me." Joan of Arc (c.1412–1431), French patriot, martyr. Quoted in *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc, ed. W.P. Barrett (1931)* On being asked whether she knew she was in God's grace.

"God is subtle, but he is not malicious." Albert Einstein (1879–1955), German-born U.S. theoretical physicist. Quoted in *Einstein, ch. 14, R.W. Clark (1973).*

"There is hope. There is hope everywhere. Today God gives milk and I have the pail." Anne Sexton (1928–1974), U.S. poet. "*Snow.*"

"The gods help them that help themselves." Aesop (6th century B.C.), Greek fabulist. *Fables, "Hercules and the Wagoner."*

"God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Madman, in The Gay Science, first edition, "Third Book," aphorism 125 (1882).*

## Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

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**Today's theme:** Where God's sacrifice meets our soul.

**Scriptural background:** [1 John 4:10](#) "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins."

### Quotes for the week

"...yielding momentarily to sin when sorely tempted, acknowledged his error when calm reflection had shown it to him, and came forward with noble frankness and offered up his grandmother as an atoning sacrifice—in those old days when the luckless sinner could keep on cleansing his conscience and achieving periodical happiness as long as his relations held out." Mark Twain. Samuel Clemons, author, newspaperman. *Roughing It*.

"The effects of the incapacity shown by the popular leaders in all the great members of the commonwealth are to be covered with the 'all-atoning name' of liberty." Edmund Burke. English statesman, author, orator, politician, philosopher, and supporter of the American Revolution. *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

"I do not charge the merchant or the manufacturer. The sins of our trade belong to no class, to no individual. One plucks, one distributes, one eats. Everybody partakes, everybody confesses, with cap and knee volunteers his confession, yet none feels himself accountable. He did not create the abuse; he cannot alter it." Ralph Waldo Emerson. American essayist, philosopher, and poet. *Essays and English Traits: III. Man the Reformer*.

### Concern: That we understand the difference between expiation and propitiation, and not minimize God's wrath over sin

There have always been those who have argued against God being angry against human sin and therefore claim no need of appeasement, as if the mere thought was denigrating to God. The very idea that God should need to be appeased was/is anathema to them, and therefore the passion and cross is anathema also. However, what is forgotten in this approach is an appreciation of God's utter holiness and the clear attempt to put aside the obvious statements of his wrath against sin.

"Thus, I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the Lord GOD." [Ezekiel 22:31](#)

1. Why do you think the "progressive" church, and to some degree the "[emergent](#)" church, focuses almost entirely on God's love, allowing it to crowd out any other possible representation of God's nature?







## Meditation on Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

Section Three is where Dr. Packer begins icing the cake he has spent the last seventeen chapters baking. He takes the title for this section from [Romans 8:31](#)

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

We will take two weeks to navigate this chapter. After all, the heart of the gospel cannot be rushed through, especially since this is the place where God’s redemptive sacrifice meets our sinful soul and transforms us into a new creation. That needs a bit of pondering, especially because the central theme and primary theological concept is so unfamiliar to most Christians: the biblical doctrine of propitiation.

The apostle John hits the nail on the head concerning this chapter’s theme when he said in his first letter:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins. [1 John 4:10](#) NIV

That insertion of propitiation, which is the word actually used in the English Standard and King James Versions, notes the classic meaning of the Greek word used here, *hilasmos*, and helps to separate the fundamental biblical meaning from the watered-down versions that substitute the idea of expiation. Modern men have sought a less demanding term more amenable to progressive theologians who want to distance themselves from the need to propitiate God’s wrath against sin, if not deny it altogether. Propitiation, you see, has a long history of use in pagan religions, where men attempted to mollify the anger of the gods by making offerings to them. Packer notes that this “appeasing of celestial bad tempers, takes its place as a regular part of life...” As a result, some might think that this idea would be foreign to Christianity, but instead we see the opposite. The need to deal with God’s anger toward sin by making an offering is a central theme of the Bible.

Those who argue against God expressing wrath against human sin have existed throughout Judeo-Christian history. But we already dealt with that argument when we looked at Chapter 15: The Wrath of God. Therefore, the claim that God does not need propitiation, as if the mere thought was denigrated him, is bogus. However, that doesn’t stop those who claim the mantle of Christ from rejecting the idea that God should need to be appeased or admitting that it is anathema to them. But the problem doesn’t stop there, since if the wrath of God is really anathema, then so is the passion and the cross, as well as the whole process of atonement. If you don’t believe those claiming the mantle of Christ go this far, then let me introduce you to retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong and his view that this is a [barbaric understanding of God](#). However, note how at the end of the second paragraph he admits, “It is clear, however, that this constitutes the frame of reference that underlies most of the Bible.” Hear, hear.

It is clear that those who take this road have forgotten any appreciation of *God’s complete and utter holiness*. I don’t want to get into why they embrace such heresy here but I will say that we need to remember that God’s holiness is what drives him to deal so radically with sin. To have a *Full* Gospel, we must have a God who can be no less holy than he is loving and despite how hard that is for some to see, it is through propitiation that God uses his enduring love to reconcile his utter holiness, which kindled his wrath against sin in the first place.

Thus, I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 22:31](#)

Those who attempt to side step this issue try to argue that all of this wrath and propitiation stuff is a holdover from the “primitive” Old Testament view of salvation. Not so. Paul is very explicit while giving council to the Colossians.

### Section Three: If God Be For Us...

Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amount to idolatry. For it is because of these things *that the wrath of God* will come upon the sons of disobedience... [Colossians 3:5-6](#)

Therefore, our goal as we start out this section is to meld forever in our understanding God's justice with his mercy without ever giving short shrift to either. We want to balance wrath with redemption and the demand for holiness with loving forgiveness. But to do that we have to understand and accept propitiation.

Dr. Packer introduces four New Testament passages covering this pivotal idea that he believes are of "transcendent importance" in understanding the biblical doctrine of propitiation.

1. [Romans 3:21-26](#). God's justification of sinners.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

2. [Hebrews 2:17](#). Incarnation of God the Son.

Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

3. [1 John 2:1-2](#). Heavenly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

4. [1 John 4:8-10](#). Definition of the love of God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

If you need to, please reread the lesson on God's wrath, but in this chapter, Packer uses John Murray to remind us that his wrath is "*the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness*" and I might add, *against his very nature as God*. Those who would carve out his holiness and wrath at the behest of his love create a caricature of God, fashioned in an agreeable image (a real idol by definition) that lets them continue in their sin.

We will close this first half of chapter 18 with Packer's description of propitiation, which he takes from Paul and divides it into three elements.

1. **It is the work of God himself.** Contrary to pagan religions where man was the agent of propitiation, in Christianity it is God through Christ and the cross that accomplishes the atonement and propitiates his wrath against sin.
2. **It was accomplished by the death of Christ.** There must be an offering, which was prefigured as far back as Abraham and Isaac. Without a sacrifice, the shedding of blood (for life is in the blood

## **Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1**

[Genesis 9:4](#)), there is no atonement, no propitiation, no forgiveness.

3. **It manifests God's righteousness.** Justice must be served and it is through Christ's substitutionary death that a just judgment is rendered, the penalty is paid, and the debt freed. Righteousness is upheld.

In closing, propitiation is the demand, rooted in the holiness and immutable character of God. God is not a man that he should lie. He cannot deny himself for he is God and what propitiation demands, love found a solution to. But, without a full appreciation of propitiation and its place in the economy of creation and redemption, the love of God immediately degrades into mushy sentiments that are manipulated by evil men to excuse their sin and like the blind leading the blind they lead a long procession of souls into hell and damnation.

Harsh words? Yes, they are, but holiness and the character of God demands them. Remember the words of the author of Hebrews.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. [Hebrews 10:31](#)

May the grace and mercy of God always bind within your life his forgiveness to his demand for righteousness and may the blood of Christ forever wash you free of the stain of sin and be your eternal propitiation, now and forever, amen.

## Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2

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**Today's theme:** Jesus' death becomes the centerpiece of history.

**Scriptural background:** [Romans 2:23-25](#) "...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God..."

### Quotes for the week

The famous painting of The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David, if examined as a crucifixion picture, brings out a way in which Socrates' death was quite unlike that of Christ. While his disciples are in agonies of grief, Socrates himself remains calm and poised; his philosophy has saved him from pain and passion. Christ, on the contrary, dies after hours of torment and doubt. Socrates imperturbably takes the cup of hemlock: Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane cries out, "Take this cup from me." Oliver Taplin, British classical scholar. "Ideas: The Uneasy Marriage of Minds," *Greek Fire: The Influence of Ancient Greece on the Modern World*, Atheneum (1990).

"...let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant, Moses." [Nehemiah 1:6-7](#)

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred Head  
For such a worm as I

Isaac Watts (1674–1748), British hymn-writer. *Godly Sorrow Arising from the Sufferings of Christ*, l. 1-4 (1709).

**Concern: That even when we understand the importance of propitiation and God's wrath over sin, we still will not understand the absolute centrality of Jesus' death to everything he was and did**

"The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death." [Proverbs 14:27](#)

1. Do you fear death? If so, why? If not why not? Maybe the best time to answer this is in the middle of the night after you have been awakened and are lying there in the dark.





6. How are God's love and glory served by the death of Jesus Christ?

## **What to Do Next**

Read Chapter Nineteen: *Sons of God*. This chapter will take two sessions to complete. We will be investigating the very nature of what it means to be Christian. Prepare yourself for some important insights as you interact with Packer's arguments.

**Goal: To never lose sight of the centrality of Jesus' death as an explanation of who he was and what he did**

Remember, what Jesus experienced was so horribly difficult that as a man he shrunk back from its difficulty while praying in the garden. Yet, he embraced his role in redemption despite its painful requirements. We too should accept the painful requirements of our redemption and sanctification and overcome any desire to shrink back from God's discipline in our lives. You can't take your cross and follow Jesus if you are unwilling to bend down and pick it up.

## **Meditation on Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2**

In our last lesson we asked, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" It is really meant as a rhetorical question because there is no other answer other than no one. No one can resist God. He, who created all things and orders even the minute functions of the universe, is supreme over everything. That does not mean that people and spiritual entities (Satan is an obvious example) do not try act against us, but their efforts are doomed to failure, no matter how successful they might seem at first, no matter how difficult our trials and tribulations might seem.

Right after the terrorism in the London (July, 2005) I wrote an article which included a prayer inspired by a famous chant from the main character in the science fiction novel *Dune*. Since some of you will not have read that posting I will repeat the prayer here, because I believe it is appropriate to the question of "who can be against us," especially in relation to the fear that opposition to the gospel can generate. The devil and his fellow-travelers are not playing tiddlywinks by any means.

However, as Christians, who are reborn in Christ Jesus, we of all people have nothing to fear. Paul the apostle buoyed us with the knowledge that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. So inspired by [Romans 8:39](#) I offer this prayer, written as part of a response to the bombing of the London tube:

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

Fear Not  
I will not fear  
For fear diminishes my soul.  
Though I walk through the valley of death  
I will not fear.  
Though all the forces of evil array against me  
I will not fear.  
Though my life is forfeit and my body destroyed  
I will not fear.  
For the peace that passes understanding comforts me.  
The joy that is unspeakable consumes my soul.  
The fire of the Spirit of the Living God resides within me.  
Grace beyond measure is my birthright.  
For I know that my Redeemer lives  
And absolutely know that I will see him on the last day.  
Nothing in all of creation can change my eternal destiny.  
So Christian, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees  
And you will mount up with wings as eagles.  
You will run and not be weary; walk, and not be faint  
For your God is the Lord, and your Savior is Christ Jesus.

Mankind's primary fear is death, including nonbeing and the death of self. Secondary to that fear is the pain and suffering associated with living in a fallen world driven by the evil that operates within the limits set by the providence of God. Lastly there is the overriding concern of judgment. While death is inevitable and pain and suffering is endemic to the human condition the authors of Hebrews and Revelation make it very clear we will all be also be judged.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment... [Hebrews 9:27](#)

I also saw all the dead people standing in front of that throne. Every one of them was there, no matter who they had once been. [Revelation 20:12a](#)

In the second half of this chapter Packer points out how looking from the vantage point of propitiation, the entirety of the Bible comes into perspective and then proceeds to touch on five key matters illuminated by that truth.

1. The driving force in the life of Jesus. Packer suggests reading the Gospel of Mark straight through. From that exercise four things about Jesus will become clear.
  - **Jesus is a man of action.** Jesus did not wait for the lost to come to him, but went out and engaged the wandering sheep of the house of Israel, teaching, preaching, healing, and proclaiming the kingdom.
  - **Jesus knew himself to be the Son of God.** The closer his disciples came to him the more they had to deal with his divinity, the more they came to see him as their savior and God.
  - **He knew he was to die to fulfill his messianic mission.** He predicted his death and considered it the purpose for which he came. His blood was to be the covenantal ransom.
  - **He considered his approaching sacrificial death a fearful ordeal.** One way of coming to grips with the immensity of his sacrifice is to examine how difficult it was for him to face it. If nothing else this should give you an idea of the absolute depravity of sin and how fundamentally God abhors it. The follow on of course is our complete inability to deal with it by our own efforts.

## ***Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2***

2. The destiny of those who reject God. To put it simply, we reap what we sow. There is no way to form an adequate understanding of hell, except that it exists and encompasses the pain and grief Jesus experienced on the cross, including that soul-wrenching sense of loss (My God; my God; why have you forsaken me?).
3. God's gift of peace. In discussing the nature of peace, Packer makes an interesting observation: right words do not guarantee right thoughts. God's peace is not a mere inner tranquility or a sense of happiness or any of the other myriad emotionally centered things people claim it to be. It is instead power, power to live out our Christian life despite our failings and weaknesses. It is also, and this is primary, peace with God. It is as Packer notes, the state of God being for us, instead of against us. It is a new relationship with God, harkening back to the original purpose of our creation.
4. The dimensions of God's love. We like the Ephesians have a problem grasping the full extent of God's love. It is inexpressively great, yet we try to express its greatness. When we grasp the full dimension of God's love, we are able to see the cross and Christ's sacrifice as its centerpiece, freely given, freely received.
5. The meaning of God's glory. God's glory is centered in the act of redemption. Calvary exposes its heart, becoming a rising hymn to the Lamb who was slain.

The heart of the Gospel is the heart of sacrifice, the act of propitiation in which the unfathomable love of God gives worth to the worthless, freedom to the bound, and life to the dead. Are you counted among the recipients? If not, open your heart and be counted and enter into the state of having no fear, being able to say, "I fear not, for God is for me; who can be against me?"

## Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

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**Today's theme:** A Christian is... "the mystery of adoption".

**Scriptural background:** [John 1:12-13](#) "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, *nor of the will of man*, but of God."

### Quotes for the week

"Now, there is a sense in which all men are the sons of God, for it is to God that all men owe their life. And there is, further, as the New Testament has taught us, another and deeper sense in which men who are not may "*become*" the sons of God, through faith in Christ." George Jackson (1864-1945). Methodist Pastor and Seminary Professor. *The Teaching of Jesus*, H & S 1903.

"The first is, that the Son of God became man. The second is, why he became man. That men might become the sons of God through him. Therefore St. Paul says, "You are the sons of God. Not - you may be, if you are very good: but you are, in order that you may become very good". Charles Kingsley. English clergyman, university professor, historian, and novelist. *The Good News of God*, Macmillan and Co. 1887.

### Concern: That we will define our Christianity by other than biblical standards

Jesus said in [Mark 12:29-30](#) that "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

1. The mystery of the Trinity casts a whole new light on our interaction with and relationship to God as compared to the Jews of the Old Testament. How is our relationship the same and how is it different?

Paul said to the Athenians in [Acts 17:27-28](#) "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"

2. How is this view of God any different from the traditional Jewish view? (e.g. Think of the Holy Spirit)





7. How does YOUR adoption show you the greatness of God's grace? Who sustains this adoption? How?

8. Why does YOUR adoption demonstrate the hope at the center of the Christian faith? What is that hope?

## **What to Do Next**

Reread Chapter Nineteen: *Sons of God*. This chapter will take one more session to complete as we continue our investigation into the very nature of what it means to be Christian. Think about the discussion we had during today's lesson and let those insights inform your thinking as you reread the text and address the next set of questions.

### **Goal: To understand what it really means to be a Christian**

Begin to explore this week what it means to have God as Father, as well as Savior (Jesus the Son), and Comforter (Holy Spirit). The Lord's prayer focuses us on God as our Father. Think about why, when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he pointed them to the Father; why of all the possible prayers he could have commanded, he commanded this one.

## **Meditation on Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1**

Packer starts out this chapter with a provocative question: "What is a Christian?" Admitting that there

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

are many ways to answer that question, he states that the richest answer is that a “Christian is one who has God as Father.” I love the progression of Packer’s chapters. We have moved from settling the problem of sin through redemption by propitiation as *The Heart of the Gospel*, to now arriving at the essence of redeemed souls being sons of God. While one cannot deny that historically and biblically, God has always been a father to his people, I have to agree, that is not only the richest definition of a Christian but the richest moment in anyone’s existence; when we can call God our Father, we are rich beyond measuring.

Packer then addresses the fundamental problem: Those who say we are all children of God. The problem is that position is not biblical. It is found nowhere in the Bible. Nada. Being created in the image of God and the fact that every man is given light by light of Christ, does not make us his children; that comes either by birth, with him as father (Christ alone) or adoption as an active decision and action by God. Being illuminated and having a good image only means being illuminated and having a good image. When people make a big deal over the ninth verse of [John 1](#), they then try to slide past verse [12 and 13](#):

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born **not** of natural descent, **nor** of human decision or a husband’s will, **but born of God.** [John 1:12-13](#)

Packer goes on to boldly state that you can sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in one phrase: the “revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator.” He goes further to say that New Testament religion can be summed up as “knowledge of God as one’s holy Father.” Packer hinges our successful understanding of Christianity on our understanding of being God’s child, having God as our Father. That is a bold declaration. If you accept this, you can say, taking our cue from Packer, the purpose of mankind is to become sons of God.

So, what is the problem? That does not appear to be the way so many who claim Christ define the heart of being Christian. Yet, everything else flows out from that. Why should we love God as defined by the foremost commandment? [Mark 12:30](#) Because, he is our perfect loving Father and deserves all our love, love that encompasses all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What makes this unique is that we are God’s children by adoption, not by right of birth (Jesus alone). We are sinners deserving of damnation, but God adopts us through Christ. How does he adopt us through Christ? By the propitiation of his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, Chapter 18 providing the foundation, the rock, for Chapter 19. It is all interconnected; the one depends on the other.

There is a fundamental shift that comes with the arrival of Jesus on the scene of human history. We go from an emphasis on our sinfulness and God’s holiness that drove the substance of the Old Testament, to having our sinfulness being fully dealt with by the cross and our lives being utterly changed by adoption as sons of God. We are new creations, with a new and everlasting Father. No longer is the holy presence of God that which separates him from mankind by a veils and inner sanctums, instead we made holy by Christ. The author of Hebrews tells us that:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [Hebrews 10:19-22](#)

And earlier:

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. [Hebrews 4:16](#)

## Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Into this glorious revelation comes the fallacious argument that while that is all well and good, it means nothing to those who have had bad human fathers. Packer rightly calls this silly. I will call it stupid. Most of what we learn in life is built on contrasts and if our father was bad someone else's father was good, or we were exposed to good fathers through literature or stories in movies or television. The concept of a good father exists and God is the supreme good father, the very archetype.

Packer points out four things that fatherhood implies:

1. **Authority**—While he demands obedience, that obedience is for our best. It is never capricious or self-serving.
2. **Affection**—God loves us with an everlasting love and while we were still sinners, he loved us.
3. **Fellowship**—We are never completely alone. God is always with us. Indeed, the Holy Spirit.
4. **Honor**—God honors us with the ultimate honor, being glorified as his children spending eternity going from grace to grace. As he told Samuel, "...for those who honor me I will honor." 1 Samuel 2:30

Packer argues that of all the blessings of the gospel, including justification, adoption is the highest. While adoption depends on justification, the act of propitiation is only the means to the glorious end of becoming a child of God. Adoption is God's wonderful purpose, justification through the sacrifice of Christ is his means to bring it about.

Packer focuses the New Testament message and summarizes it with three words: "***adoption through propitiation***," or we are God's children through Christ's sacrifice.

No wonder when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he began, "Our Father..." Amen to that.

May God grant you the grace to know and the peace to rest in your adoption into the family of God. My daughter, when she was growing up, whenever she had a crisis, she would come rushing to me for a hug. What mattered most was that I was always there for her. In the same way, may you always know that God is there for you and that nothing, no not anything, nada, can separate you from his love. [Romans 8:35-39](#)







7. Look at the 18 questions Packer asks at the end of this chapter. At the end of the day, ask each of these questions of yourself. What do you think would happen if you asked yourself all 18 of these questions every day for a month? Would that change your life? Why or why not?

Note: A page, with the questions laid out in a 30-day grid (for you to keep track), is included at the end of this Section.

### **What to Do Next**

Read Chapter Twenty: *Thou our Guide* and consider the importance of God having a plan for your life that fits within his larger plan for humanity and all of history. Think about why this knowledge is significant.

### **Goal: To understand the significance of our assurance in God**

In the end, it is our grasp of our blessed assurance that brings stability and unrelenting hope to our Christian walk. Consider the eighteen questions every day for a month as an exercise. If you decided to do it, then do it at the same time every day so it will become a habit. Record your observations throughout the exercise and especially note any differences as the exercise progresses.

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

## **Meditation on Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2**

In Part I of this chapter, we began examining the significance of our adoption as sons of God. Dr. Packer argued that of all the blessings that the gospel imparts to us, including justification, adoption is the highest and greatest blessing. Indeed, the whole purpose of our existence is to become children of God, heirs of eternal life. Everything else is a means and facilitator to that end.

We have been examining the nature of being Christian, which has at its root the continuing mystery of adoption. As the Apostle John says in his first letter:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! [1 John 3:1a](#)

Yes, we are children of God! But being part of that august family means there are expectations for and of us. God is a holy God and he demands of children holiness. As Packer notes, he demands “gospel holiness.” The term is borrowed from the Puritans as “shorthand for authentic Christian living.” This is distinct from “legal holiness” that was the province of the Pharisees, centered in the religious forms, outward routines and appearances that spring from self-centered motives. Gospel holiness is the natural desire of the child of God for authentic purity of life that flows out of our love and gratitude to our heavenly Father.

If we are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and filled with the righteousness that comes by grace and submission to the will of the Father, then our goal is to be holy as he is holy. We are called to be blameless, pure, and set apart as Christ our Lord has been set apart, the firstborn of many brethren.

We don't start out holy. We start out forgiven. It is only over the course of a life of ongoing discipleship that we grow into our holiness. Along the way we will endure both correction at the hand of our heavenly Father as he trains us up in righteousness and satanic assaults against our ongoing efforts.

It is the demand for holiness that gives the law its proper place in our life. We are not antinomian, feeling that we are free from the law and then sin has no meaning, that keeping the law has no purpose. Instead, we submit to what God demands. Jesus argued,

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. [John 15:10](#)

And John added:

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. [2 John 1:6](#)

So, when we sin, when we fail to keep his commandments, we repent, confess our failures and seek his forgiveness. After all, if you have been adopted you are his children, which leads us into the other important aspect of our adoption and that is our assurance, our understanding and faith in the finality of what God has done. Jesus said:

Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. [John 8:34-36](#)

This is one of the ongoing areas of dispute within the Christian faith and it has been so since very early in the life of the Church. From the argument on one end of “once saved, always saved” to the other extreme of being a yo-yo between heaven and hell, going from saved to lost, to saved to lost, as sin and repentance

## ***Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2***

twist us back and forth while we are praying all the while that the string doesn't break at the wrong time. Packer touches on the various positions that different elements in the Church have postured over the centuries.

While it appears there will be no agreement on a final understanding this side of heaven, there are some important things to remember. Jesus never says to those who are sent to his left and damnation, "I no longer know you." No, he says "I never knew you." How can that be said to a member of the family of God. The son abides forever and nothing can separate the child of God from the love of God a love that is defined by an intimate knowing.

Viewed in the light of our adoption into the family of God, assurance is not an idle part of the ongoing outworking of our sonship. As a perfect Father, he has sent his son to be the author and finisher of our faith, and he who has begun this good work in us is eternally faithful to complete it. He has told us so. Who or what can then separate us from the love of our heavenly Father? Indeed, who?

Packer closes with a discussion of "The Great Secret." How little regarded within the history of the Church has been given to the truth of adoption. It is almost as if it is our secret identity, hidden in the corner of our faith and seldom talked about. As Packer says,

For is this is the Christian's secret of a happy life? Yes, certainly, but we have something both higher and profounder to say. This is the Christian's secret of a Christian life, and of a God-honoring life, and these are the aspects of the situation that really matter. May this secret become fully yours and fully mine.

Then Dr. Packer closes the chapter with a series of seventeen questions, designed to test how well we understand who we are and who we are called to be. I suggest you meditate on these questions every night for twenty-eight nights (the amount of time for something to become a habit) and I guarantee you that your life will not be the same when you are done.

May God our Father bless you and keep you and may you fully grasp the significance of your adoption as his child, of Christ as your brother, and what that acceptance means to the rest of your life, both in how you live and the trust that guides your every step along the way. Hallelujah!

## Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

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**Today's theme:** God always has a plan for us.

**Scriptural background:** [Psalm 25:9](#) "He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way."

### Quotes for the week

"A blocked path also offers guidance." Mason Cooley, US aphorist. *The Columbia World of Quotations, City Aphorisms, Fourth Selection*, New York, 1987.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." *Proverbs 29:18*.

"I so love the Spanish proverb "God says, 'Choose what you will and pay for it,'" which stresses that life holds no easy answers, that conscious choices are often costly ones. We must live with and pay for their consequences." Marsha Sinetar. American author. *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love: The Spiritual Dimension of Entrepreneurship*. St. Martin's Press. 1996.

### Concern: That we would know what to do so that we could do it.

"I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" He answered, "Do you not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I replied. So, he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." [Zechariah 4:4-6](#)

1. Looking at this scripture, how do we usually make our decisions?

2. What does this scripture say is the right way to make decisions?





8. Why is [Joel 22:22-26](#) so important to this discussion about guidance? Explain.

## **What to Do Next**

Read Chapter Twenty-one: *These Inward Trials* and consider how you can believe the right doctrine yet go so wrong in your application that you destroy the very work you are trying to do.

### **Goal: To listen to God as he leads us along the path of righteousness and then act on that guidance**

It is one thing to know what God has called you to do and quite another thing to actually *do* it. Many of us say if we only knew what God wanted, we would do it. Would we; or is that a convenient excuse to avoid dealing with what we already know we need to be doing and aren't? I have some seminal advice: do what you know to do and when you run out of those challenges then you can tell me that you wish God would tell what you are supposed to do.

## **Meditation on Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide**

Now that we know we are sons of God, what does this insight mean to our daily life and the decisions that face us each day? Does God help us with these decisions? Does he have a desired outcome for how our life turns out and what we decide to do along the way or are we on our own? If God is concerned, how detailed is that concern? Is it for the big picture only or does our heavenly Father get down into the little things, the minutia of our lives? We will look at these important considerations, which go to the heart of our decision-making process and the responsibility inherent in our choices.

I often hear people say, "If only I knew the right thing to do [what God wants me to do], I would do it." I have even said the same thing myself, but I know that while this may sound good, it's not true, and in the end is just a good excuse and the "if only" is a way to get ourselves off the hook of responsibility. We try to transfer the accountability or blame to God. We get to save face and appear spiritual. That said, it is true that sometimes the frustration over what we should do is real and it exposes the very genuine dissatisfaction with flying blind and not being sure what God wants from us.

With that problem (both our excuse and legitimate concern) as background, Packer begins this chapter admitting that divine guidance is a chronic problem for Christians. While there are many who don't know God well enough to hear him clearly when he is giving them guidance, there are also many others who don't believe that God cares enough about their daily concerns to tell them what to do. While most Christians want God to guide them, so many are frustrated with their inability to be sure if God is speaking, they are being deceived, or they are just plain missing it.

The fundamental truth that Packer wants us grasp in this chapter is that God has a plan for every one of

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

us and it begins with two fundamental truths:

1. **God's plan for each of us is real.** Theologically God's plan is multifaceted. He has an eternal purpose, a plan for the ages that applies to all of creation through all time. It is his big picture plan. But our heavenly Father also has specific destinies for each of us, just as a potter has a specific purpose for the vessel he is creating as he molds it on the wheel. This unique specificity goes so far, Jesus said, that even the hairs on our head are numbered and God take note of everything we do ([Matthew 10:29-31](#)). The Psalmist knew that from the moment of conception God had been working out a plan for his life ([Psalm 139:13](#)). Isaiah noted that God has appointed all things (including the events of our lives) in their proper time ([Isaiah 44:7-8; 24-28](#)).
2. **God's ability to communicate that plan is real.** We can rightly admit that it is one thing to have a plan and another thing to make that plan known, a necessity if we are going to make decisions based on it. Packer argues that God communicates what he wants us to know about his plan in many ways: through biblical prophets, in his written Word, through miraculous or apparently coincidental occurrences, in dreams and visions, by directly speaking to us both audibly and through that still small voice that nudges us along or turns us away, and in the circumstances and events that constantly confront us. Put simply, doors open, doors close.

So why do we fail to see or properly interpret God's guidance? This is an important question and Packer argues the problem is that we distort the evidence, overlooking the obvious and demanding the esoteric or miraculous, thereby opening ourselves to easy delusion—how often do you test the “spirits” when you think God is “guiding” you? We start with the Word. There is no other option. Everything we think God may be saying **HAS** to be assessed against what we know he has said before. *God does not contradict himself.* He is not going to tell you to leave your wife for another woman who is your “soul mate,” because he forbids that in his Word. It is remarkable how many “leadings” people get, when examined properly, are biblically unacceptable.

Packer notes one major area that seems consistently to be a problem, especially for younger Christians: vocational choices. This area is legitimately very broad and encompasses things as diverse as choosing a school to choosing a wife and everything in between. Packer states that these kinds of choices have two basic features:

1. **Scripture.** A problem develops because scripture may not directly apply to our decision but only circumscribe the lawful possibilities facing us, leaving us with many possible correct or acceptable choices. What are we to do? Well David was a shepherd because that is what his father wanted until God change that. We do the acceptable until God shuts that door and opens another.
2. **God's prompting.** Without specific, but with only general scriptural direction, we are left to discern God's definitive direction through promptings and inclinations, open and closed doors, about which we seek a settled peace that says *go this way*. However, God's prompting is special, not the primary process and requires a strong prayer undergirding to break through the clutter of our lives. Even then, God doesn't steer a parked car. He can correct our course but we have to moving to do it. He will adjust your direction as necessary if you have one to begin with.

Packer admonishes that all choices are not of this type or do they have these two characteristics. He sees a serious problem with our proclivity to treat all of life as if it fit into these simplistic categories.

It is too easy to see everything in this prompting context which invariably leads to Scripture, rather than being studied and applied with wisdom and grace, developing our character and setting the context of our decisions, being used instead as a talisman or dousing tool since what we really want is to get right onto direct impressions from God. That is pretty dangerous stuff when we actively do that. I am not

## Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

talking about the legitimate voice of our conscience and the counsel of wisdom and common sense extolled in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but an “internal prompting” read as being the Holy Spirit leading us by inward promptings. That may indeed happen, but not because we demand it or expect it. That is abrogating our responsibility.

I have to be very careful to say here that God does lead us by a still small voice speaking to our hearts and prompting us, but rather than the rule, being the moment-by-moment steering gear of our lives, it is the exception, the only as needed and sometimes not even then occurrence. The very real danger is in making this the normative form of decision making. It is not for naught that Paul warns us to test every spirit to see if it be of God, since these still small voices are spiritual and not always from our heavenly father and he admonishes us to study to show our selves approved.

Even Paul, who was among the greatest and most sensitive of saints to the guidance of God, could say to the Philippians:

I don't know what to choose. I could keep on living and doing something useful. It is a hard choice to make. I want to die and be with Christ, because that would be much better. But I know that all of you still need me. [Philippians 2:22-24](#)

Let's be honest, Jesus never said this was going to be easy. However, I believe because we live in a culture that exemplifies 10 ways to succeed in life and 5 things you need to know in order to do anything, we want everything to be spelled out in a few easy steps that reduce the thinking load to the absolute minimum and make the decisions automatic. We want everything 1, 2, 3 so that we can also check off our compliance and be able to cover ourselves by arguing we did what we were told to do. That path eventually leads to either legalistic compliance or magical expectations. I becomes either I did it, why are you upset or I did it, why didn't it work out like it was supposed to?

Packer discusses the six common pitfalls we fall into when making decisions and admits that in the end there are no easy answers to the questions, noting that sometimes God's true guidance leads us *into* trouble not out of it, which for many seems paradoxical. While I am not going to cover all six of those pitfalls, I do want to look at the first one: unwillingness to think. Noting [Deuteronomy 32:28-29](#), Packer reminds us that God wants us to have plain good sense and to consider whether we are going astray. We need to think and Paul tells us in [Romans 12:1-2](#) that we must be transformed by renewing of our mind, which includes all of our thinking, reasoning, and discernment faculties. We do this, Paul says, so that we can know God's good and perfect will for us. Walla!

**Conclusion:** The processes of a renewed mind are essential to ascertaining God will and his essential guidance for our lives. Hey, our heavenly Father did not call us to come and reason with him for no purpose. ([Isaiah 1:18](#)).

This brings us to what for me is the real issue: trust. Sometimes we just have to make a choice based on everything we have available and trust God to take care of what follows. At that moment, when we work through our decision, I believe we are tested, not for the accuracy of our decision, but on the submission of our hearts. Our motives are weighed in the balance, since it is they who most greatly influence our decision points. We could make the right decision but for the wrong reasons or the wrong decision for the right reasons. In either case God looks upon and judges our hearts and at these moments we should be looking at what is really in the center of our decision process.

## **Chapter 21: These Inward Trials**

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**Today's theme: How easily we go off the narrow path and misapply the truth we have learned.**

**Scriptural background:** [Matthew 7:13-14](#) "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

[1 Corinthians 3:9-13](#) "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."

### **Quotes for the week**

"Partisanship is our great curse. We too readily assume that everything has two sides and that it is our duty to be on one or the other." James Harvey Robinson, American Historian.

"I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations." James Madison, 4<sup>th</sup> President of the US.

"You sell a company twice. First of all, you sell them the product, then you sell them the service." Richard Brock, founder, chairman and CEO of Brock Control Systems.

### **Concern: That we would want to stay children in the faith, protected and pampered**

"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food." [Hebrews 5:12](#)

1. Why is it so hard to grow up?

2. What is the best antidote against becoming Peter Pan (unable to leave childhood)?







## **Meditation on Chapter 21: These Inward Trials**

Packer opens this chapter with an indictment of those who, in the name of love and kindness, magnify grace and deemphasize sin and judgment. He says instead of being kind they are actually cruel. Now let's be perfectly clear, he is not talking about radical liberalism, which constantly attacks the historic view of sin and redemption and uniqueness and need of Christ's sacrifice. No, he is talking about otherwise doctrinally sound evangelical ministries and with that in mind, we need to consider his presentation with a discerning heart.

First, let me remind you book was originally written in 1973, and what Packer is focusing on in this chapter was a form of Christian triumphalism that argued those who held to the true faith would enter the Promised Land here and now where they would overcome every problem, including the world, the flesh, and the devil by living out their Christian faith. Those of us who lived through those years as new Christians can well remember what eventually came to be called the "prosperity" gospel. It was a faith-driven premise that said if you were not triumphant, it was because you lacked the required faith to live as a King's Kid and had failed to claim your birthright as a son of God. That was bad enough, but then you put down for being deceived by false teaching and the tricks of devil who had made you believe you had to suffer, be sick, or lack any need, especially financial. They did, as Packer noted:

"...leading young Christians to regard all experiences of frustration and perplexity as signs of substandard Christianity. It insists on diagnosing the struggle, which it equates with defeat, as a relapse caused by failure to maintain consecration and faith."

The question we need to address is not whether this chapter was important for that specific moment in the life of the Church, it was, but now do its arguments still address a need for correction in the contemporary life of the Church? Is God's grace, at times, a difficult correction he applies to our life and is his ongoing restitution of our lives under distortion and attack today as it was then? Remember, we are not talking about those heretics who are obviously aberrant to everyone, such as liberals supporting homosexuality and abortion while claiming to be within the banner of Christ. We are talking about those whose doctrine is otherwise apparently sound.

I would argue that we do have similar problems in the Church today, but rather than the issue being the prosperity gospel, it is the opposite, that while God loves you, he is not in total control of everything that happens in the world, so you might just be blindsided by something from which God has no resources to protect you from. I am speaking of the "[Open Theism](#)" movement within the Evangelical Church.

What I find interesting is that both of these problematic approaches to otherwise sound Christian doctrine find their primary inspiration within Pentecostalism. While it is true that the prosperity people found inspiration in Finney and other aspects of the Holiness movement, they applied a unique Pentecostal twist to those underpinnings. Open Theism's Pinnock, subtitles his instructive offering as *How the Pentecostal Theology of Experience is Changing Our Understanding of God*. So there we have it: experience versus the Word, subjective understanding versus revelation and the written record. The root of the Pentecostal experience of God, no matter what anyone in this context wants to argue, is the "rhema," called by Pentecostals God's living current word to us, coming in the form of prophecy, words of knowledge, and glossolalia (tongues) which give us immediate access to God in context. That is the key argument, access to God in context.

In this argument, direct access to God in real time is not considered something that is special and rare (as we see biblically), but normative and constant. It is expected and if you don't live that way, then there is something wrong with your faith. I must state here that I became a Christian and grew up early in my Christian life within this Pentecostal and later Charismatic milieu. I can personally attest to undeniable

## Chapter 21: These Inward Trials

physical miracles. I have personally experienced visions and transcendent moments that went well beyond anything my previous experiences in the drug culture or occult could duplicate. That said, I am now always skeptical and I attribute that skepticism to one thing, God's gracious gift of discernment. When I went through the "Life in the Spirit" class at my church, a necessity for joining the congregation and as such a necessity for my being married in the church, instead of asking for tongues or any of the other gift when hands were laid on me for such an impartation, I asked for discernment. Having come out of the drug and occult world, what was paramount to me was knowing the truth from error and deception. And to be honest, I got what I asked for. God undeniably touched me at that exact moment with a transcendent experience that forever made me call into question all later experiences, both of mine and others. God in essence "told" me all my past experiences had been a fraud, a substitute for the real thing, and this moment was the reality I had sought. It was also evident that I was to question everything from that moment on, since most of what was happening in the world was fraudulent. That he was "speaking" about inside as well as outside the Church was self-evident.

That was a seminal moment in my Christian existence. It was as if scales fell away from my eyes and what had once been a wonderful psychedelic landscape of Christian Godness, now became a pockmarked Christian landscape filled with black holes, bear traps, and con artists residing beside the undeniable light of Christ. It is not without reason Paul says to test every spirit to see if it be from God. It is also significant that the most noble of men were the Bereans, *who searched the scriptures in order to authenticate Paul's words and teachings.*

We live in dangerous times, both physically and spiritually. Christianity is under attack both from without (secular humanism, Islam, materialism, etc.) and from within (liberal Christianity and its embrace of homosexuality and abortion, scandal and moral turpitude in public and popular leaders, doctrinal drift, and cliff diving from the likes of Open Theism). What Packer has to say to us in this chapter is that right doctrine in the basics of the faith does not mean right doctrine in other areas, areas that can undermine the faith once delivered unto the saints in substantive ways. We all need to have Berean hearts that practice judicious discernment and be willing to step out and actively judge those who claim the faith (See my [Judge Not Is For Cowards](#)), while holding fast to compassionate righteousness and loving discernment ([Philippians 1:9-11](#)).

May God bless your day and may he grant you grace and peace and help in your time of need.









### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

often cannot protect us from sudden unexpected events. Packer will have none of that and neither should you and in the current chapter, *The Adequacy of God*, he uses Paul's Epistle to the Romans to drive the point home that God is sufficient for all our needs: past, present, and future.

Packer begins this final chapter with an assumption, stated clearly in the title: God is adequate. He bases his supporting arguments from the book of Romans. He starts out by asking a question, "What do you look for in the Bible?" Is it doctrine or life or the meaning of the Church or is it God's personal word to you? Whatever you are looking for, he says, you will find it in Romans. Packer asserts (I want to use a slight variation on a famous aphorism of the first century) that all roads lead to Romans and further in Romans all views of our faith can be most clearly seen. While I think that ends up being a little too pat, Romans does illustrate Packer's overriding hypothesis that God is adequate, sufficient in every way.

The good Dr. Packer wants us to consider that Paul's letter to the Romans is the high point of the Bible. If you accept that possibility, then the next logical question would be, "Is there any place within Romans that is the high point of the book?" He says yes and considers it to be Romans chapter 8. It *is* fair to say that everyone who studies the book considers this section of Romans to be the epitome of spiritual comfort and that it contains the foundational assertions of God's adequacy. [Romans 8](#) is the place where believers experiencing trial and tribulation return again and again to be comforted by its sweet assurances.

However, before we work through this chapter and deal with God's adequacy, we need to admit that there is a movement within the Church to recast this unalterable foundation with another view. It falls under the collective name of the Emergent or Emerging Church. There are some noble desires that spurred the beginning of this movement.

The emerging church originated in reaction to many perceived problems of the late 20th century Church: declining attendance of Protestant churches, particularly amongst Generation X, **concern over how the Church would adapt to post-modernity**, and increasing suspicion of the missiology of the market-driven mega-church and institutionalized Christianity. [Wikipedia](#) emphasis added

The concern is mixed within the mostly laudable goals. However, when you ask how the Church will adapt to something, rather than how it will address, deal with, or approach something you immediately place yourself on dangerous ground. Adapting implies change and while changing one's clothes (the outward presentation) is sometimes good (think of Hudson Taylor learning immaculate Chinese and then dressing and grooming himself as Chinese to present the Gospel directly to his audience without the initial problem of appearing to be a Westerner lording over the locals), changing the meaning of the message is not.

While I am far from an expert on both postmodernism and the Emergent/Emerging Church, I have been extensively researching the issue and have some informed opinions. From my perspective the problem is that change and adaptation, especially to the postmodern mindset, holds innumerable avenues of possible compromise, especially related to the accuracy, reliability, and overarching authority of the Scriptures, as well as the same issues related to all historic theology, doctrine, and dogma. This is because in the postmodern context narrative becomes the driving focus of Scripture, where the story of the faith, especially a self-interpreted version of that story, completely overshadows the faith (doctrines, creedal assertions, settled theology, and so forth) of the faith. Postmodernism is also a move away from the systematic theology ushered in wholesale by the Reformation, to narrative-based faith and not just in personal interaction or personal evangelism, but as the root of understanding of the Christian faith.

To use a small pun, one problem with postmodernism is that it is still emerging, considering itself an ongoing critique of modernism, which it believes it is/has superseded, beginning that rise in the 1960's

## Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 1

(I find the concurrent rise of the counter culture, free thought, free love, and drug induced discovery of “who I am” not inconsequential or incidental). However, within this ongoing critique “postmodernity” is characterized as an “incredulity toward metanarratives”, which in this case would include the Bible which is a fundamental metanarrative on the nature of God, man, and our ongoing relationship together.

Metanarratives by definition overarch all human understanding (a metanarrative is a grand overarching account, an all-encompassing story, which gives structure and order to history—at its root a narrative), while in the postmodern world local and subcultural narratives (ideologies, myths and stories) are given precedence over any external “truth” and are expected to override and define the former metanarratives. It is a reversal of the historic biblical understanding of itself where it sits in judgment of everything else. In postmodernism, everything else sits in judgment of the metanarrative (read here the Bible) and is allowed, even required to critique, reinterpret, recast, even strip and change the original in any way deemed fit by the local or subcultural group. So, in postmodernism the homosexual subculture’s redefining of the historic Christian metanarrative is valid and expected, because “their understanding is true for them.”

It doesn’t take long to see that going even a few steps down this road means no absolutes, no inalienable rights, no overarching anything. Everything is subjective, local, up for grabs by whoever wants to claim a narrative insight. Enter the Emerging/Emergent Church, whose initial mission was to find ways to evangelize the emerging postmodern world, the first fruits of which were seen as the Gen X generation. The following has been quoted as the foundation of the emerging church’s self-identity.

our faith is ancient. our faith is future. we’re old-fashioned. we’re new-fangled. we’re orthodox. we’re innovators. we’re postmodern Christians. (Note: usually attributed to Leonard Sweet, this reference is no longer available through normal online channels, and currently cannot be connected with Sweet, even by a denial. The [emergingchurch.org](http://emergingchurch.org) is closed down, so in essence much of what used to be used for critique is gone, but for the industrious is still available on the [WaybackMachine](http://www.waybackmachine.org)—Internet Archive.)

The lack of caps is more than stylistic, it is philosophical, since in postmodernism everything is equal/on the same level/equally valid and caps show “artificial” distinctions. This site goes on to explain:

because the church is organic (the living body of Christ), it needs evolution or re-formation to stay healthy and vibrant.

the **traditions of the church are treasure...** we are not starting from scratch... we can build upon the learnings of the first reformation as we surf the wild wave into the second.

today’s mission context provides the church with a chance to:

1. shake off any residual “leave it to beaver” orientation and begin swimming (even with a paddleboard) within the postmodern culture.
2. really trust the power of the gospel and learn to communicate it with authenticity, because for postmodern people, authenticity is primary.

the church should not fear Postmodernity, as it provides us with a new context, and thus a fresh opportunity to get real, to drink deep from our own wells, and **go back to our own future...** [emphasis added].

The fundamental problem with postmodern authenticity is that it is individually decided. The postmodern mind is in essence its own god, defining what is authentic. That means it is based on its own experiences of life, where one, to use the now almost trite example from Campus Crusade, sits on the

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

throne of one's life and authenticates what meets the narrative demands of one's own experience.

Where does this lead those who in the Church have begun to "swim" in the postmodern culture? A simple example can be taken from the journey of Charles Pinnock, a person on whom I relied heavily in the 70's and early 80's to address the prosperity distortion. He is now a proponent of Open Theism. One example of the change that Open Theism brings to historic Christian understanding of our relationship with God and directly impacts on this chapter's premise is in God's omniscience and control of the future.

Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known even by God. They are potential–yet to be realized but not yet actual. God can predict a great deal of what we will choose to do, **but not all of it**, because some of it remains **hidden in the mystery of human freedom**...The God of the Bible displays an openness to the future (i.e. ignorance of the future) that the **traditional view of omniscience simply cannot accommodate.**" Pinnock, Augustine to Arminius, p. 25-26 [emphasis added].

This "open" God is in many ways limited and as such there will occur situations where God will be surprised, unable to protect us from "the mystery of human freedom" and while he can assist us afterward, he will not be able to prevent evil from sometimes overtaking us. He is not entirely adequate and we may suffer and be beyond his ability to intercede in our behalf. He may be the first responder, but according to this belief system, that is often the best he can do.

That is only the beginning of the postmodern, emergent, Open Theism trap. Like a labyrinth of subtle invitations, it assaults us at every turn, challenges us at every truth. So, in the coming weeks we will look at chapter 22 and the adequacy of God as over an against this new postmodern siren call. This is no shallow exercise but goes to the heart of knowing God. Is he suddenly less than we thought? Are these new assertions, correct? Where does this leave "the faith once delivered unto the saints?"

May God grant you grace and peace as we wade into these deep and troubling waters. May you take solace in Paul's admonition that we "can do all things in him who gives us strength." ([Philippians 4:13](#))

## Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

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**Today's theme:** When God is for us, nothing can succeed against us.

**Scriptural background:** [Psalm 55:18](#) "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

[Psalm 46:1-3](#) "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."

### Quotes for the week

"I admire the serene assurance of those who have religious faith. It is wonderful to observe the calm confidence of a Christian with four aces. Mark Twain. Samuel Clemmons, author, newspaperman (1835-1910).

"It is not so much our friend's help that helps us as the confidence of their help." Epicurus (341 BC - 270 BC). Greek philosopher, poet.

"Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life." Sandra Carey. Author.

### Concern: We do not really believe that God is for us based on how we respond to the situation

While we often *say* we trust in God, our actions and our emotions often say different.

1. What does the modern scourge of anxiety say about our protestations of belief? Is anxiety a problem for you? Why?

2. Do you have anyone you truly trust? What might cause them to betray you?





### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

7. How does God deal with divided allegiance and how does that apply to this chapter? Think about [Hebrews 12](#) and the Father who did not spare His own Son. Think about the demands that loyalty places on us.

### **What to Do Next**

Read Chapter 22 through again and as you approach the last section think about the God with whom you have to do. Think about what He offers you and what, as a result, you should expect of yourself.

**Goal: To become a whole and complete Christian for whom the Greatest Commandment is a living guide to every moment of our lives**

God seeks real commitment, a true heart sold out for Him. This week, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about the places in your life where you hold back from God. Think about why you are holding back and what you can do about it based on this chapter.

### **Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2**

In Part I of our lesson on The Adequacy of God we looked at issues that were not central to the cultural milieu when Dr. Packer wrote *Knowing God*. What confront us today are issues such as Post Modernism in the larger world and the Emergent or Emerging Church in the Christian world, with its aligned theology of Open Theism, where we used Clark Pinnock as an illustrative example. In this lesson we will address how these issues affect Packer's claim of a wholly adequate God.

One of the problems for the modern mind with presentation of Scripture is that it was not written with us in mind. We, who come to the text with a scientifically preconditioned mindset, see things radically different from the audience to whom the biblical authors were writing.

In my Bible studies I often have heard the refrain, "Why didn't <insert biblical author here> just come out and say it?" Well, to be honest, he did, but his context and method of presentation were directed at his first century audience, not us.

## Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

Being reared in the age of science and technology (the water in which we swim), we are used to detailed questions and detailed answers, coupled with the formality of the scientific method of proving our thesis by objective testing and viewable and reproducible results. We expect repeatability, reliability, and measurability. So, if God is <insert godly attribute>, prove it.

That brings us to an obvious and fundamental question: Is God testable? If I postulate a premise about God, say that he is all-knowing, which would include his knowing the future (directly related to our chapter assertion), how would I test that premise. In historic Christianity you would search the Scriptures to see what they said about God's all-knowingness. For post-enlightenment, modern scientific minds, that is not the way things are done. You create an experiment to test and verify the claim.

In this we encounter a fundamental theological problem: who are we to question or test God? A whole book of the Bible was written about this very issue: the Book of Job. When responding to such an approach, God answers the questions about his actions or lack of them this way.

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? [Job 38:2](#)

and

Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it. [Job 40:2](#)

God then goes on to put our questions in their place.

Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowing of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud and bring him low and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you. [Job 40:8-14](#)

Job's response is instructive.

I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Job 42:2

Yet, we all want God to respond to us, but I think it is because we want him to demonstrate that we matter. This hidden agenda is more fundamental than wanting an answer to prayer. It is wanting to know that we are known and being known, that we are cared for and loved. We measure that caring and loving by demonstrable interaction and that is where the rub comes in. It is often difficult to see God acting demonstrably.

For Job (and his wife and friends) the problem was how could a loving God subject him to such trials if he was righteous? For Paul, it was after all I have been through why doesn't God remove this thorn that causes me such suffering? Job got no real answer other than "I am God." Paul was told his thorn was a gift to keep him humble. For both, the relevant texts are found in two places in Romans, in chapters 8 and 9.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:28, 31, 38-39](#)

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath

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and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? [Romans 9:20-24](#)

There is a difficult balance addressed here. On one hand we have the clay—Job. His wife, believing God had abandoned him, gave him what for and Job responded as clay should respond.

Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” But he wisely answered her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips. [Job 2:9-10](#)

On the other hand, we have Paul, who when his thorn is not taken away and he realizes it was given to him to protect him from sinning through pride, learns something fundamental. That is, when he is weak, he is really strong since in his weakness he turns to God for help and it is God who sustains him. Everything that is happening to him is working for his good and nothing, not this thorn or any of the other trials he has endured or will endure in the future, can separate him from the love or purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

In all things God is sufficient; he is adequate in both types of circumstances, whether we walk the path of Job or the way of Paul. The hard thing to grasp is that the issue is not God; it is us. It is how we respond to what happens. We can be like Job and Paul or we can be like Job’s wife and his counselors or like those who elevated themselves and belittled Paul because God allowed those trials to happen to him, claiming he was no apostle and not their equal.

The Old Testament saints knew the answer:

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? [Numbers 23:19](#)

God is reliable, trustworthy, and more than adequate, but he is also God. He decides, not us, what is best, not just for the moment, but for the entire sweep of history. There is a famous aphorism taken from the work of the 16th century Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto (*Orlando Furioso* ch. XLVI, 35), “Man proposes, and God disposes.” A similar thought came from the 8th century scholar and theologian, Alcuin who said, “Man thinks, God directs.”

So, I will say it again. We all want God to respond to us, to demonstrate that we matter to him. We are like children seeking the consolation of our parents. You must understand that God is not without compassion, but he wants something fundamental to our eternal relationship, he wants us to trust him, to respond to what Jesus told Thomas, the apostle, who needed to see to believe.

Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. [John 20:29](#)

So, as you think about God’s adequacy, remember Job and Paul and Thomas. Remember all the saints of God who have trod this path before you, trusting in their heavenly Father to meet all their needs. We need to learn as Paul learned, to be content in all things, or take to heart the more difficult lesson of Job, that we may not know why, but we are still expected to respond correctly.

May God grant you strength to meet your trials and tribulations, peace in the midst of your anguish, and grace to help in your time of need.

## Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3

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**Today's theme:** When God is for us, who will accuse us?

**Scriptural background:** [Revelation 12:10](#) "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down."

### Quotes for the week

"My spirit looks to God alone, My rock and refuge is His throne, In all my fears, in all my straits, My soul on His salvation waits. Isaac Watts (1674–1748), British hymn-writer. *"My spirit looks to God alone,"* l. 1-4, *Psalms of David* (1719).

The obligation of proof; as, "The *onus probandi* rests with the accuser." E. Cobham Brewer 1810–1897. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. 1898.

"From thence to heaven's bribeless hall, Where no corrupted voices brawl; No conscience molten into gold, No forged accuser bought or sold, No cause deferred, no vain-spent journey, For there Christ is the king's Attorney, Who pleads for all without degrees..." Sir Walter Raleigh (1552(?)–1618), *His Pilgrimage, English Poetry I: From Chaucer to Gray. The Harvard Classics*. 1909–14.

### Concern: That we will succumb to the accusations of the accuser, despite having received forgiveness from and in Christ Jesus our Lord

We confess our sins and say we believe we are forgiven, but our old man still feels the rebuke of conscience and won't let go ([Romans 7](#)).

1. Do you have *confessed and forgiven* sins that still plague your conscience? Why?

1. Do you think God will take back the forgiveness he has already given you? What makes you so sure? (Hint: See [1 John 1:9](#))

***Section Three: If God Be For Us...***

**Interacting with the text**

**Goal:** To accept forgiveness, lay hold of our birthright, and pull it all together into knowing God in Christ.

1. What, according to Packer, can never disinherit us? Why is this realization important?

2. Are you afraid (ever?) that God has or will reject you? Explain.

3. What does Paul, according to Packer, argue about our justified status before God?



### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

8. Packer argues that the essence of Christianity is found in what link?

9. What are distractions and what is the true priority for every one of us?

### **What to Do Next**

Think back on this section: *If God Be for Us...* and how Packer ended this study. What part of that phrase do you focus on? Too many people get mired in the "If" and lose their hope and trust, when they should be focusing on the last "God Be for Us," an exclamation of primary significance.

**Goal: To apprehend what it means to have God at our back, with our eternal well-being His faithful concern**

There is nothing more empowering than knowing God has your back. Think about it; revel in it; live up to it. Never forget: You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." *Psalm 27:8.*

### **Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3**

As we wind down this study, after a long journey through two introductions and twenty-two chapters, we come to the end of Packer's argument, what he has been building toward since we took the first steps along our journey as travelers, leaving behind the balconeurs. We have been a little like Bunyan's Pilgrim, leaving the doubters behind and stepping out on our voyage of discovery, our goal of knowing God himself. In order to reach that goal, we have had to deal with numerous obstacles along the way, but none more significant than our own need of fundamental transformation, without which our efforts will digress into an academic exercise, having the form of true religion and godliness while lacking its inherent power.

## Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3

[Hebrews 10:31](#) warns us that “It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God!” Our journey has never been a walk in the park, an idle adventure with no consequences. I said at the beginning that everyone who has completed this study with me has been changed by the end. It is unavoidable. There are too many decision points along the way, too many demands on our comfortable assumptions, and too many challenges to our half thought through understandings to allow us to be unaffected.

We now reach the final nexus point of our journey. Toward the end of this chapter Dr. Packer makes the following difficult assertion:

Now, if you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way [as Israel was in the greatest commandment [Matthew 22:37-38](#)]...The claim rests both on the right of creation and redemption, and it cannot be evaded. You know what kind of life it is that Christ call you, as his disciple, to live...You can be called to go through this life as a pilgrim, a mere temporary resident, traveling light, and willing, as Christ directs, to do what the rich young ruler refused to do: give up material wealth and the security it provides and live in a way that involves you in poverty and loss of possession. Having your treasure in heaven, you are not to budget for treasure on earth, nor for a high standard of living. You may well be required to forgo both. You are called to follow Christ, carrying your cross.

Tough words, words that demand being in the world, but not of the world; words that demand us not to be like the rest of humanity, but instead to be like Christ. In the end, the possessions, accomplishments, and glory of this world are not important and if we are not careful, they can be a dangerous trap. As Paul said to the Philippians:

But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ and to know that I belong to him... [Philippians 3:7-9a](#)

Paul goes on in Philippians to talk about his ability to meet every circumstance, whether high or low, in the power of Christ who sustains him. That is because his current state in this world is not the end all and be all of who he is; Christ is. Packer amplifies this thought using Paul’s statement in Romans, “he will give us all things.”

Paul is telling us there is no ultimate loss or irreparable impoverishment to be feared; if God denies us something, it is only in order to make room for one or other of the things he has in mind. Are we, perhaps, still assuming that a person’s life consists, partly at any rate, in the things he possesses? ...The meaning of “he will give us all things” can be put thus: one day we shall see that nothing literally nothing which could have increased our eternal happiness has been denied us, and that nothing literally nothing that could have reduced that happiness has been left to us. What higher assurance do we want than that?

That is our nexus point. After all of this study, after this long journey of discovery and challenge, we come to the final question: what do we want? Do we want what God in Christ wants for us? Is that good enough for us? Are we willing to say what Job said?

I am unworthy how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. [Job 40:4](#)

That requires total submission, bending the knee of our heart in total allegiance to God. It is interesting how in the end it comes back to the beginning and that all decisions boil down to one decision: will you submit to God; will you keep the first commandment as Jesus said?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [Matthew](#)

### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

[22:37](#)

I want to close this study mirroring the words that Joshua spoke on the bank of the Jordan river, at the end of one journey and the beginning of the next. We are ending this journey through the book ***Knowing God*** and everyone who has reached this point is beginning their next journey, as a continuing traveler on the path of discipleship. I have only one request: choose today whom you will serve. As for me and my family, we will serve the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Grace and peace be with now and forever more.







### **Section Three: If God Be For Us...**

7 How is trust an important factor in our meeting Christ's call? What isn't dependent on trust?

8 Have you made the heart of biblical religion a part of your own heart? Explain.

### **What to Do Next**

To borrow a phrase from a well-known Nike commercial, "Just do it!"

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power..." [2 Thessalonians 1:11](#)

**Our Final Goal: To know God, and His Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to keep our course straight and true to the end**

May the grace of God empower you; may the joy of God fill you, and may the peace of God give you rest for your soul. Amen. So be it.



### ***Section Three: If God Be For Us...***

3. What do you think is the most important thing you have to do to cause what you learned in this study become part of who you are (ingrained in your heart and expressed in what you do)?
  
4. What, for you, were the three most important things you learned during this study? Prioritize and explain their importance to you.

Do you think it would be useful to study this book again? Why or why not?

5. Where do you go from here?

### **In closing**

At long last we have come to Packer's initial challenge, that we should get off the balcony and get on the road with Christ, carrying our cross (whatever that may be) and persevering to the end. We cannot say we don't know God by now; our challenge is to live out what we now know demands of us.







The End