



BIBLE LENS

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Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

Mortals and Immortals

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From the **Golden Text**

Galatians 3:3

Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Paul's letter to the Galatians represents a critical point in early Christian theology. Believers sometimes argued that Gentile converts should submit to the Judaic requirement of circumcision (for Jews, a sign of commitment to God). Paul's response is clear: Fleshly practices denote emphasis on the physical; Christianity celebrates the power of Spirit, which overcomes the flesh.

Epiteleō, the Greek verb rendered *made perfect* in this verse, encompasses accomplishment and completion. Spiritual maturity comes to the faithful only as they remain true to their "beginnings"—to Christ Jesus' teachings.

From the **Responsive Reading**

John 3:1–8

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

—Revised Standard Version

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus exemplifies the class of educated Jewish thinkers. Unlike his fellow religious leaders, though,

Nicodemus recognizes God as the source of Jesus’ healing ability—and his questions (see also v. 9) are apparently genuine. Here he assumes that Jesus is speaking literally, as shown by his query about someone entering “a second time into his mother’s womb.” But the Savior describes a God-impelled rebirth, not a bodily process.

Nicodemus is mentioned in just two more biblical accounts, both times in support of Jesus. He criticizes other officials’ efforts to arrest Jesus and, following the crucifixion, joins Joseph of Arimathea in preparing Jesus’ body for burial (see [John 7:50, 51; 19:38–42](#)).

from **Section 1**

1 | [Acts 17:24, 25, 28](#)

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; . . . for in him we live, and move, and have our being.

Paul is speaking to a group of Athenians after seeing their altar to “the unknown God.” Some of his listeners are Epicureans, materialists who hold that worship of gods (and temples for this purpose) is unnecessary to the pursuit of moral virtue or sensual pleasure. Others in the audience include Stoics, rationalists who seek to live in harmony with a world governed by fate. The apostle introduces them to the one God, knowable as the sovereign and benevolent Lord of all creation.

Worshipped is translated from the Greek term *therapeuō*. Rendered *served* in most versions of this text, it refers to the customs of sacrificing animals and making costly donations in pagan temples. Besides this instance, *therapeuō* signifies healing or cure in Scripture (see examples in [Matthew 4:23](#); [Luke 9:1](#)). It is the origin of the English word *therapy*.

2 | [Isaiah 43:1, 6, 7](#)

Now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. . . . Bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Translation

Family of Jacob, the LORD created you.

People of Israel, he formed you.

He says, “Do not be afraid.

I will set you free.

I will send for you by name.

You belong to me.

.

Bring my sons from far away.

*Bring my daughters from the farthest places on earth.
Bring back everyone who belongs to me.
I created them to bring glory to me.
I formed them and made them.”*

—New International Reader’s Version™

3 | Isaiah 49:22

Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people.

In ancient times, setting up a standard meant placing a pole with a banner high on a hill to summon people to gather or to alert troops to prepare for battle (see also 62:10, citation 21). A commentator suggests, “The sense is, that converts should come from every land—that the nations should flock to the standard of the Messiah.”

from Section 2

6 | Deuteronomy 4:23

Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the Lord thy God hath forbidden thee.

Translation

Be careful. Don’t forget the covenant the LORD your God made with you. Don’t make for yourselves a statue of any god at all. He has told you not to. So don’t do it.

—New International Reader’s Version™

7 | Galatians 5:17, 19–21

The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. . . . Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul’s catalog of vices isn’t mere counsel for improving behavior but a strong caution against practices opposed to the kingdom of God. For him, only Spirit brings freedom from fleshly desires and actions.

One scholar explains: “What makes the flesh . . . destructive is that it can become the norm by which people’s lives are lived. This world, with its measures of success and its rewards for hard work, absorbs all their interests and demands their full attention.” He adds, “Christians are called to entrust themselves to the Spirit, to God’s activity, and simply to follow his guidance.”

8 | I Corinthians 15:50, 53

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.. . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Translation

What I mean, friends, is that what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God’s Kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality. . . . For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die.

—Good News Translation

9 | James 1:23–25

If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Translation

If someone listens to God’s word but doesn’t do what it says, he is like a person who looks at his face in a mirror, studies his features, goes away, and immediately forgets what he looks like. However, the person who continues to study God’s perfect laws that make people free and who remains committed to them will be blessed. People like that don’t merely listen and forget; they actually do what God’s laws say.

—GOD’S WORD[®] Translation

from Section 3

10 | Psalms 130:1, 7, 8

Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. . . . for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.

And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Translation

From the depths of despair, O LORD

I call for your help.

.

for with the LORD there is unfailing love.

His redemption overflows.

He himself will redeem Israel

from every kind of sin.

—New Living Translation

11 | Isaiah 6:1–3, 5–7

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: . . . and one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. . . . Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

Mentioning the year of a ruler's death was a common way of indicating a point in time. King Uzziah reigned over Judah for about five decades during a largely prosperous period; now a new era is beginning.

Isaiah's prophetic commission is recounted here rather than in chapter 1. Some sources surmise that the first five chapters set the stage for a call to the people to repent. And by confessing his own shortcomings, Isaiah models the penitence they need in order to truly honor God. The fiery coal on his lips symbolizes the prophet's subsequent cleansing. (Jeremiah records the touching of his mouth during his call to prophecy as well; see [Jeremiah 1:9](#). And Ezekiel is given a scroll that is sweet in his mouth; see [Ezekiel 2:8–3:3](#).)

Like cherubim, seraphim were considered heavenly beings that attended God's presence. Their repetition of the word *holy* emphasizes His supreme glory and perfection. Centuries later, in an apocalyptic description of another heavenly throne room, the Revelator echoes Isaiah: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" ([Revelation 4:8](#)).

12 | Isaiah 43:14, 21

Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; . . . This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my

praise.

In the ancient Near East, redemption signified the humanly arranged rescue of someone from servitude or debt by a kinsman. Hebrew Bible usage represented divine deliverance from trouble or harm (see another example in [Psalms 106:10](#)).

By the New Testament period, redemption had further deepened in meaning to connote salvation from sin and death through Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of humanity. Paul writes, “God sent forth his Son . . . to redeem them that were under the law” ([Galatians 4:4, 5](#)).

13 | II Corinthians 3:18

We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Translation

. . . our faces are not covered. They show the bright glory of the Lord, as the Lord’s Spirit makes us more and more like our glorious Lord.

—Contemporary English Version

Paul contrasts an “open face” with Moses’ veiled face upon his return from Mount Sinai with the Commandments (see [vv. 13–15](#); [Exodus 34:29–35](#)). As the Israelites were unable to look at Moses’ radiant face, so nonbelievers are blind to the gospel of Christ. To receive the gospel is to remove the veil that obscures understanding.

“Beholding as in a glass” points to reflection and self-examination. Christly transformation—being “changed into the same image from glory to glory”—takes place as God’s glory is perceived as real and present.

from Section 4

14 | Isaiah 52:10

The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Translation

*The LORD has shown all nations
his mighty strength;*

*now everyone will see
the saving power of our God.*

—Contemporary English Version

16 | Mark 8:22–25

[Jesus] cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blindman by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clear.

Commentators view the placement of this story—the only biblical account in which Jesus’ cure is not instantaneous—as significant. Just before the blind man’s healing, Jesus reprimands the disciples for failing to understand him (see vv. 14–21). And shortly afterward, he rebukes Peter’s inability to discern the import of the Savior’s crucifixion and resurrection (see vv. 31–33). Taken together, the three texts convey the charge to move beyond a dim vision or partial comprehension of Jesus’ teachings. Spiritual ripening in his followers will be vital as the Master moves toward the culmination of his ministry.

A commercial center at the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida was not only the location of the feeding of the five thousand but also the hometown of apostles Peter, Andrew, and Philip (see Luke 9:10–17; John 1:44).

from Section 5

17 | II Timothy 1:2, 9, 10

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Translation

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace. . . . He saved us and called us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. He gave us this grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but now it has been revealed to us through the coming of our Savior, Christ Jesus. He has ended the power of death and through the gospel has revealed immortal life.

—Good News Translation

19 | Luke 7:11–16

It came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

Most widows in the classical world existed on the economic and cultural margins of society. Early Hebrew custom grouped them with orphans and strangers as the neediest in a community (see requirements for their provision in [Deuteronomy 24:17–22](#)). The large crowd accompanying this widow, whose circumstances have been greatly reduced by the death of her son, is evidence of communal care.

Jesus' cure of this young man recalls records of Elijah and Elisha raising sons from death (see [I Kings 17:17–24](#); [II Kings 4:18–37](#)). Here the people acknowledge the prophetic tradition in the Master's work.

from **Section 6**

21 | Isaiah 62:10–12

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord.

Translation

Go out through the gates!

Prepare the highway for my people to return!

Smooth out the road; pull out the boulders;

raise a flag for all the nations to see.

The LORD has sent this message to every land:

“Tell the people of Israel,

‘Look, your Savior is coming.

See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.’ ”

They will be called “The Holy People”

and “The People Redeemed by the LORD.”

—New Living Translation

I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

Translation

I will continue beholding Your face in righteousness (rightness, justice, and right standing with You); I shall be fully satisfied, when I awake [to find myself] beholding Your form [and having sweet communion with You].

—*Amplified*® Bible (AMPC)

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