



The Power of God For Salvation

A CORRECTIVE PRIMER

By Paris Murray

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Video narration by Paris Murray

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Introduction

This work was born out of the following concern: Have we, despite our best intentions, made it unnecessarily difficult for earnest seekers to reach the waters of baptism?

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Over the years, well-meaning Christians have introduced various practices to the introductory Bible Study process—extra steps, emotional tests, behavioral checklists—intended to prove sincerity and ensure readiness for baptism. Such requirements may include compiling a list of sins, accepting modern-day medical conjecture, meeting attendance quotas, reconciling relationships, demonstrating a satisfactory emotional response, performing arbitrary challenges as determined by the Bible study leaders, and so on.¹

¹ Such prerequisites are often imposed with the noble intention of bearing “fruit that will last,” which various faith traditions understand to mean *to remain faithful for life* (see John 15:16). However, between 1979 and 2002, the ICOC International Churches of Christ globally baptized 422,069 people yet 315,770 left during that same period (74.8%). Fast forward to 2020: the ICOC baptized 6638 globally and 4205 walked away (63.3%). *So much for our efforts to produce fruit that will last.* See David Pocka, *The Need for Church Building Teachers*. <https://www.teachicoc.org/the-need-for-church-building-teachers>.

Our primary concern is not with diligence, sincerity, or pastoral care, but with prerequisites to baptism that the Bible text does not support, and Church practices that suggest the Holy Spirit and the Gospel itself are somehow insufficient to save.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Romans 1:16)

Therefore, the purpose of this work is twofold:

1. To affirm that the gospel—the Good News—is the power of God for salvation. God’s power to set eternity in the human heart, His power over human understanding, His power to impart free will, and His power to grant repentance and belief are more than sufficient to save every person who earnestly seeks Him (*Jeremiah 29:13*).
2. To call for the rigorous exclusion of introductory Bible Study “add-ons”—that is, any and all prerequisites to baptism not attested to in Scripture, and which therefore *go beyond what is written* (*1 Corinthians 4:6*).

In the beginning, God brought forth the Created Order with great power from darkness, formlessness, and emptiness, to very good (*Genesis 1:1-31*). If you think about it, something similar happened to *you* when the Spirit of God, with great power, brought you from a life of darkness, formlessness, and emptiness, to very good (*cf. Ephesians 1:19*).

In the pages ahead, we will trace how God brings faith to life—awakening longing, granting understanding, imparting free will, and enabling repentance. And the journey will culminate in a summons to recover the apostolic pattern—conversion as God accomplishes it, and baptism as the apostles practiced it.

I. The Power to Set Eternity in Our Hearts

“...He has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

It is one of life's greatest mysteries. Deep in the heart of every man and woman is a spark of immortality. At some point in everyone's life, this divine spark compels a spiritual hunger, a thirst for meaning, a quest for significance. Ultimately, this longing brings you face to face with humanity's most desperate questions—questions so urgent, so pervasive, they've captivated the imaginations of the wisest men and women who've ever lived, including our greatest scientists, philosophers, poets, and theologians.

- *What is the meaning of life?*
- *Who am I?*
- *Why am I here?*
- *What am I capable of?*
- *What is my destiny?*

Yet left to ourselves, “no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end”. The only way to truly know what God has done from beginning to end is to experience a personal encounter with the One who *is* the Beginning and the End.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” (Revelation 21:6)

Just imagine: The same power that spoke the world into existence rouses eternity set within us. Intriguingly, God awakens longing before offering fulfillment. This thirst for the eternal is not a delusion to be remedied but a summons by the Holy Spirit. God graciously orchestrates the circumstances which draw us to Him: the right word, the right moment, the right friend or memory or prayer that turns our attention heavenward (*cf. John 6:44-45*).

II. The Power Over Understanding

“He [the Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:14–15)

God wields supreme power over human understanding. Meaning, God retains sovereign freedom to exercise a controlling influence over human understanding when and where He chooses. Spiritual truth is not discovered by reason but revealed by God, according to His will, to every person, in every culture, and in every age. This includes you and your friend or family member now studying God's Word.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is, perhaps, the most extraordinary expression of this power. In true Master Teacher fashion, Jesus summarizes the work of the Spirit in one colossal understatement: *“He will glorify me...”*. This is arguably the most explicit expression in Scripture of the Spirit's ultimate aim: to glorify Christ. Yet how is this to be accomplished? By taking what belongs to the Son—*“all that the Father has”*—and making it known to us. The magnitude of this declaration should stop every thoughtful believer in their tracks. All the Father possesses—all that God is, all *who* God is, and the totality of His divine wisdom and love—*this* is what the Spirit is entrusted to reveal to us. Consider: This implies you are on the receiving end of a message sent from the Father and the Son via the Holy Spirit—a proclamation of the holy Trinity, the most important communication act in the history of the cosmos. Yet via this declaration, we perceive not only great power but great love (*Ephesians 2:4*). God's desire is not to confuse or forsake, but rather that we understand and know Him (*Jeremiah 9:24*).

One of the most sensational examples of God's power over understanding is the Tower of Babel account, where God, in response to humanity going off the rails, *disables* the thought processes of the entire Earth population (*Genesis 11:1-9*). A similarly dramatic example is the Day of Pentecost, where God *enables* cosmopolitan Jews from every point of the compass to simultaneously hear of God's mighty works in their native tongues (*Acts 2:1-13*). Another is where God warns that idol-makers “know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes...and their hearts, so that they cannot understand” (*Isaiah 44:18*). Similarly, Jesus thanks the Father for hiding things from the wise while revealing the same to “little children” (*Matthew 11:25*). Clearly, God can disable and enable human understanding, *en masse* if necessary, when and where He chooses.

God's supreme power over human understanding knows no bounds; His methods of communication are extraordinary, even bizarre. They include supernatural messaging via the created order (*Romans 1:19-20*), the skies (*Psalms 19*), and the marketplace (*Proverbs 1:20-23*); via the toppling and raising of superpowers (*Ezekiel 30:20-26*); remote-influencing the most powerful men in the world (*2 Chronicles 36:23-23; Daniel 4:28-37*) and entire nations (*Isaiah 9:1-15*); directing witches (*1 Samuel 28:6-25*), pagan diviners (*Numbers 22:9-12*) and speech-enabled donkeys (*Numbers 22:27-34*); through archeo-astronomy (*Matthew 2:1-2*), dreams (*Matthew 1:20*), and visions (*Revelation 1:9-10*); and many, many instances of angelic visitation (e.g., *Daniel 8:16 et al*). The Bible even depicts this same power over celestial beings—e.g., God using the Church to make His wisdom known to forces of evil in the heavenly realms (*Ephesians 3:10*).

As you can see, God's power over understanding and His mastery over all modes of communication are in no way limited *to the mere reading of a Bible text*.

Above All Traditions, Systems, and Formulas

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

The Spirit's work cannot be confined to our methods, traditions, or formulas. Just as no two saints in the Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith” encountered God in the same way, no two conversions follow the same script. Each is a unique act of divine artistry—one-of-a-kind, never happened before, and never going to happen again.

This realization should humble all involved. Our task is to pray, to proclaim, to testify—not to trespass on the Spirit's domain. God alone opens hearts and illumines minds.

III. The Power to Impart Free Will

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat... Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them...” (Genesis 2:15-20)

In the Genesis account, God breathes life into the man and relocates him to the garden in Eden with the decree to work and to protect it. God then advises the man what to do, cautions him about what to avoid, and gives him the freedom to name and classify all species of animal life.

We may therefore conclude the following: Adam had the linguistic and cognitive ability to understand God and what God wanted. He also had the capacity for logic and reason—he could weigh pros, cons, and consider consequences for each course of action. He also had been granted free will—the freedom to choose—between each course of action. Take note: This was all *before* sin entered the world. Therefore, these qualities must be attributes of being made in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1:26-27*)—God-like qualities—and thus “very good” (*Genesis 1:31*).

As you know, sometime later, Adam is held accountable for making a very poor choice. If you think about it, holding Adam accountable for a universe-altering error doesn’t even make sense if he did not have free will. Had God sovereignly brought about humanity’s fall, then it could be regarded as unjust for Him to hold human beings accountable for it.

That God’s power is exemplified in imparting free will to humankind is also demonstrated in passages such as:

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life... (Deuteronomy 30:19)

There is no logical reason for God to present us with choices if we do not possess the capacity for reason and the freedom to choose. That we will all be called to account and judged according to what we have done is one of the strongest Biblical arguments in favor of free will.

What, pray tell, would be the point and purpose of judgment if all were predetermined and we had no freedom to choose? Where is the logic in rewarding us for doing good, better, or best? Or punishing us for doing bad, worse, or worst? Or rewarding or punishing anyone at all, for that matter?

For this reason, any dialogue—or debate—on THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD versus THE FREE WILL OF MAN must start where God Himself starts—in *the beginning*. If we start where God starts—instead of where our denomination or favorite theologian starts—we realize there is not so much to debate as there is mystery to ponder. Prayerful consideration reveals it is God Himself who sovereignly imparts free will to humankind.

This begs the question: *What role, if any, did I play in my own conversion? Was I involved, or was it totally God?* Stated otherwise: *Does humankind have free will—the power to choose? Or is God 100% in sovereign control of the entire process?*

Short answer: *Both.*

Human freedom, rightly understood, is one of the greatest proofs of divine power. It is God's glory reflected in the willing hearts of His image-bearers—creatures who, by grace, freely return the love by which they were made and by which we are rescued.

IV. The Power to Repent and Believe

Repentance is one of the most misunderstood works of grace in the Christian life. Too often, it is treated as a self-improvement project—a list of wrongs to correct, habits to reform, or deeds to prove sincerity. Yet Scripture presents repentance as something entirely different—a divine gift bestowed upon humanity.

“God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:31)

Significantly, the purpose of Christ's exaltation by God is *to give repentance and forgiveness*. This is the most explicit statement in all of Scripture that **repentance is something Christ gives**. First to Israel, and

"Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." (Acts 11:18)

God empowers the turning from sin—first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (cf. *Romans 1:16*). The directive to repent is addressed to human beings, yet is brought about by the Spirit.

"When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." (John 16:8)

Scripture is unmistakable: conviction of sin is inspired by the Spirit. Repentance is the *Spirit-led renewal of the heart and mind that turns us from sin to God*—a divine summons that awakens genuine sorrow for wrongdoing, heartfelt resolve to make amends, and turns the soul Godward.

"And we all...beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Repentance is the initiating moment of sanctification, the opening act in a Spirit-led renewal and lifelong transformation.

Faith and Repentance: Two Expressions of the Same Grace

"I did not shrink from declaring to you...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:20-21)

Paul summarizes his entire ministry in terms of repentance *toward* God and faith *in* Christ. Faith and repentance are two expressions of God's active favor and enabling power. Repentance is Spirit-led *turning from sin*; faith, Spirit-led *turning toward God*. The key insight is: one cannot occur without the other; turning toward Christ necessarily means turning away from sin and self.

For this reason, Scripture often mentions one when *both* are implied. And this is why the apostolic witness so often pairs or interchanges them:

“Repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

“A great number who believed turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)

“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10)

Repentance turns from sin, faith turns to Christ, and together they mark the soul’s Spirit-led return to God—faith implied in repentance, repentance implied in faith, and both manifest in all authentic conversions.

Against All Add-Ons

Nowhere in the New Testament is a convert required to observe moral probation, attend meetings, reconcile relationships, or prove sincerity before baptism. Repentance is not to be confused with the performance of religious tasks, the resolution of every life problem, or completing a spiritual obstacle course. Repentance is an inner turning, not external penance.

Distorting repentance into a human checklist shifts the burden of salvation from the Savior to the sinner. In doing so, we presume, by our actions, to bring about a change of heart and mind that can only be accomplished by the Spirit. And we imply, by our actions, *the power of the church for salvation*, not the power of God. As a result, we propagate the notion that the gospel is insufficient—that God’s power requires human scaffolding and supplementation. Inevitably, both baptism candidates and the Church begin to trust the *process* more than the *Person*.

It bears repeating: There is no text where an individual believes and repents, is ready for baptism, and an apostle or teacher postpones baptism to test sincerity or impose further moral reform. There is no instance of an apostolic teacher imposing prerequisites beyond repentance and faith. In every recorded case of genuine belief, baptism follows without delay. The conversions in *Acts*—the 3,000 at Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, Lydia, the Philippian jailer,

many Corinthians—all reveal the same immediacy of response. Once belief and repentance occur, baptism follows—often that very hour. In many instances, the time between hearing and obeying is measured in minutes, not months.

Acts also depicts conversions that unfold over days to weeks or more, including that of Apollos, the Bereans, the Thessalonians, the Athenians, and numerous Corinthians. In every case, however—without exception—once understanding dawns and faith is formed, baptism follows immediately. Whether due to the need for Scriptural investigation, rational inquiry, philosophical dialogue, or ongoing exposure to Paul's preaching, in every case the delay was circumstantial, providential, or educational, *never imposed as a requirement*.

When to Baptize

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

The question that remains after repentance and faith are awakened is the same one Ananias asked Saul: *“Why do you wait?”*

In every clear New Testament conversion account, baptism follows belief and repentance without delay. There is no hint of deeds to be done, challenges to accomplish, or stress-testing convictions to prove readiness.

“Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41)

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water... ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ ... and he baptized him.” (Acts 8:35–38)

“He took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.” (Acts 16:33)

“A great number who believed turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:21)

Thus, the proper time for baptism is when a person *believes* the gospel and *turns* to the Lord.

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believes and turns to the Lord.***

This is the consistent pattern of every conversion recorded in Acts.

Belief, repentance, and baptism embody a single, Spirit-enabled response to the gospel. When the heart turns to the Lord, the body follows into the water. The Scriptural pattern is clear: *those who believed were baptized* (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:33; 18:8). Baptism is not a graduation for the prepared but the immediate obedience of the one whom God has awakened. Therefore, *when a person believes the gospel and turns to Christ, that is the moment to rise and be baptized.*

Conclusion

This Primer has been written out of love for the gospel and deep concern for the Church. Its purpose is not to rebuke but to restore—to rekindle confidence in the all-sufficient, unassisted power of God. The same power that brought creation from chaos and life from dust now brings salvation to every soul who believes. The gospel itself *is* that power. It requires no reinforcements, no human refinement, no “add-ons.”

Despite our humble attempt to shed light on the mystery of God’s will (*see Ephesians 1:9*), we acknowledge the mystery. While the Scriptural evidence for *what* God says and what God does is abundant, as to *how* He manages to bring this all about, we feign no hypotheses. Yet, despite what may be too wonderful to know, we see a clear salvific arc:

I. The Power to Set Eternity in Our Hearts: God Himself awakens spiritual longing within us.

II. The Power Over Understanding: God grants Spirit-empowered understanding of divine truth.

III. The Power to Impart Free Will: God imparts the capacity to choose right or wrong as His image-bearers.

IV. The Power to Repent and Believe: God Himself grants repentance—a Spirit-led renewal of the heart and mind that turns us from sin to God.

All four share the following in common: each originates with God and comes from His hand. *Why does God do things this way?* Paul asserts it is to neutralize the human tendency to boast:

“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.” (Romans 3:27)

“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

No matter how we look at it, God is the One to whom we owe our faithfulness from beginning to end so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship...” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Every person who comes to Christ is the workmanship of God from beginning to end.

While we have attempted, for purposes of instruction, to prayerfully examine the power of God for salvation expressed in various ways, be aware you may encounter all in rapid succession or at the same time, like a rushing, mighty wind.

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

To the extent God our Savior desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, may you turn many to righteousness, and shine like stars into the ages of ages (*Daniel 12:3*).

Every praise to our heavenly Father who, by His mercy and grace, “...*has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:6).



Version	Date	Summary of Revisions
v1.0.1	November 2025	Initial publication of <i>The Power of God for Salvation: A Corrective Primer</i> . Future revisions and updates will be recorded here.

*This Primer and the associated **Power of God for Salvation Introductory Bible Study Series** is a living work. Updated editions will continue refining clarity, Scripture integration, and presentation while remaining faithful to the original purpose: to affirm the gospel as the power of God for salvation and to exclude unscriptural “add-ons.” Readers are encouraged to reference the latest available version.*

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