

# *Understanding Scripture's Fallen-Condition Focus*

*by Straughn, Lark and Johnson*

Why is it that sometimes we read the Bible and feel like it was just a bunch of words on a page and then we feel guilty or unspiritual?

Why is it that sometimes we come to our Creator and Redeemer in his word and feel like we've really encountered him and have been transformed?

The way we approach Scripture may have something to do with it.

God inspired His word to address the needs of fallen people living in a fallen world. This is what Bryan Chapell calls the fallen condition focus (FCF) of Scripture. Chapell defines a fallen condition as *"the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or about whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage for God's people to glorify and enjoy him."* In other words, a fallen condition is an aspect of our brokenness and rebellion we share with the original audience that requires the redemptive work of Christ. Approaching this from a different direction, we might say that a fallen condition represents a particular way that Scripture describes our situation as both sinners and sufferers.

Sometimes the FCF of a passage is obvious. It might command us not to steal or to lust after what we don't have or, even closer to the problem, not to worship material possessions. But the FCF is not limited to our choices. It also addresses the fact that we live in a dark and broken world. We are not merely sinners. We also suffer. Our hearts are torn when a family member dies. Being part of this world means we are subject to disappointments, disease, tsunamis and tornados. Scripture addresses both who we are and the world in which we live.

But we often overlook the FCF of Scripture and fail to notice the deeper issues addressed by God. We miss God's intent to lead his people to their Savior as he exposes their need for him. In small ways, we tend to forget that God gave us His word to redeem us. And the passage we're reading degenerates into a history lesson or a list of rules.

Imagine you're deathly ill and go to see your doctor. However, while at the appointment, you have a lengthy conversation only about whether you should ask for 'paper' or 'plastic' at the check-out line. Even though you leave more confident about your choice to protect the environment, you've still not dealt with your health condition. So it is with us when we fail to keep the FCF in mind. We miss what God is telling us about ourselves and our need for him.

Understanding the FCF not only helps us study scripture well, it also draws us closer to God. By coming face to face with fallenness, we begin to realize the glory of our redemption through Christ. God, through the gospel, not only calls us to repent but also to believe. He requires our hearts, not just our behavior. He fashioned our hearts for himself. Thus, it is only in Jesus Christ that our desires are ultimately satisfied, our fears ultimately conquered, and our hopes ultimately met.

The FCF prepares and points us to the redemptive solution (RS)—that is, *the grace of Christ which we need as fallen people*. As Chapell explains, "The FCF exposes the necessity of a divine solution to the

human dilemma and necessarily makes God the hero of the text as he displays his redemptive provision for his people. God rescues his people from their broken nature and world by his grace alone in order for them to experience his goodness and express his glory.” *The FCF and the RS complement each other, reminding us that every page of Scripture God by his Spirit is revealing some aspect of our brokenness or rebellion and his grace.*

How do we point ourselves and others to the RS? In other words, is the right answer always Jesus?

One of the ways to think about the RS is to think about applying the resources of the *gospel* to our brokenness. That’s right, we need the gospel. “Come on” you say, “that’s not any different than saying the answer is Jesus”. Maybe, but in order to understand what resources we have in the gospel, it would be good to think for a minute about how you first experienced the gospel when you came to know Christ initially.

You experienced the purifying forgiveness of Christ. Like the woman in Luke 7 who was “forgiven much”, you also had the bitterness of sin replaced by the first taste of the sweet forgiveness of Christ. When you first believed, you also experienced the purifying power of Christ. The Holy Spirit came and took up residence in your life and raised you to new life in Christ. Next, you experienced the purifying promises of Christ. You truly were banking on the fact that Christ died for you and that He was able to give you eternal life if you simply took Him at His word. And finally, you experienced the purifying beauty of Christ. It wasn’t that you were only drawn to truths about Jesus, eternal life, heaven and hell. But, you saw something in Jesus that caused you to be attracted to him – in a way that you never saw before.

Even though you have now progressed in the Christian life beyond the simple truths of the basic message of the gospel, your need to experience the gospel afresh is greater than ever. In other words, as you peer into the pages of Scripture and see your brokenness and need, the solution isn’t far removed from what you experienced when you recognized your need and the gospel solution for the very first time.

There will be times when the Scripture exposes your sinfulness and the solution is that in a fresh way you are drawn to the unconditional and life-changing **forgiveness of Christ**. There will be other times when you recognize that you need the **power of the Spirit** to overcome stubborn sin in your life. Other times you recognize that your doubt, discouragement, and even lust need to be battled by banking on the **promises of God** – that “He will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5); that “he causes all things to work together for good for those that love God...” (Romans 8:28); and that “at his right hand are pleasures evermore” (Psalm 16:11). And finally, you may recognize that your heart just isn’t that inclined to Jesus and that the solution is to see the **beauty of Christ**. This is what Paul saw in 2 Corinthians 3:18 when he says, “and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

### **Examples:**

Sometimes the FCF is not real obvious and this is where the larger context of the passage or chapter really helps.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

<sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

- FCF: Our tendency to grieve as those without hope (v. 13).
- RS: The assurance that our Savior will return and that we will be joined to the ones we love. (Purifying Promise)

### Philippians 3:2-11

<sup>2</sup>Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup>though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. <sup>7</sup>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup>that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup>that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

- FCF: Our natural slide to place confidence in fleshly achievements. Paul is quite concerned about this as v.2 demonstrates.
- RS: The righteousness that alone comes through faith in Christ (While this may be a little veiled, this solution is banking on the purifying promises of Christ in the gospel – that righteousness is ours in the gospel and that there is nothing we can do to earn or lose it).

### 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- FCF: Habitual violations of love that rend the fabric of Christian community. (Paul's descriptions of what love is *not* serve to summarize what he has said elsewhere in the letter about what is wrong with their community.)

- RS: First, the solution may be to look to the purifying forgiveness of Christ – how we have come up short of this kind of love. Then, we can look to broader context. Look at what Paul says about the redemptive work of Christ elsewhere in the letter. As we do, we can see the purifying beauty of Christ in the gospel. We see in the broader context the kind of love Christ has for us – his church. Against this backdrop, love is not the result of self-effort. The agape love that Paul describes in C13 is the visible fruit of a life that has been (and is being!) redeemed by grace.

### 1 Corinthians 1:26-30

<sup>26</sup>For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup>God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- FCF: The Corinthians’ pride expressed in divisions and partisanship.
- RS: This solution may also start with the need to experience the purifying forgiveness of Christ – that, like the Corinthians, I tend to boast in my self-righteous pride. And then, the solution can turn to the purifying promises of Christ – that Jesus *is* our wisdom, He *is* our righteousness, and He *is* our sanctification and redemption. In other words, I can bank on these promises and as a result, I can cease from boasting in my wisdom, my self-righteousness, and my vain prideful attempts at sanctification and redemption.

### 1 Peter 4:13-16

<sup>13</sup>But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup>If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup>But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. <sup>16</sup>Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

- FCF: Christians are sufferings unjustly for their faith (not because of their poor choices or criminal actions).
- RS: As our last example, let’s look at how each of our gospel categories can each play a part in the solution in these verses:
  - First, do I need to be forgiven afresh for your grumblings in the face of suffering?
  - Next, can I turn to God to ask Him to fill me with His Spirit so that His “Spirit of glory” points me to a greater glory to come?
  - Next, what promises can I cling to: that there *will* be a greater glory to come. This isn’t all there is.
  - Finally, how can I see a beautiful Christ in this passage? He not only suffered, but He suffered for *me*. That kind of portrait can truly stir my affections for Him.