

Preconditions and Primary Elements of Renewal

Based on *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, by Richard Lovelace
Spring 2026 | Tim Blackmon

I. Preconditions of Renewal: Preparation for the Gospel

"The apprehension of God's presence is the ultimate core of genuine Christian experience, and the touchstone of its authenticity is the believer's vision of the character of God."

– Richard Lovelace

"Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But as these are connected by many ties, it is not easy to determine which of the two precedes and gives birth to the other." – John Calvin

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

–A.W. Tozer

"We truly live at the mercy of our ideas; this is never more true than with our ideas about God."

– Dallas Willard

Acceptance of Christ and appropriation of every element in redemption is conditional on awareness of God's holiness and conviction of the depth of our sin.

A. AWARENESS OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

- Awareness of God's justice:
- Isaiah 6:1–5 — In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

- Psalm 24:3–4 — Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

B. AWARENESS OF GOD'S LOVE

- Romans 8:15–16 — For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
- 1 John 3:1 — See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.
- Ephesians 3:17–19 — so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

D. AWARENESS OF THE DEPTH OF SIN

1) IN YOUR OWN LIFE

- **Psalm 51:5–6** — Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- **Romans 7:15–24** — For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

2) IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Daniel 9:4–19** — I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the

lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us, by bringing upon us a great calamity. For under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem. As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth. Therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us. Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”

- **1 Corinthians 5:1–2** — It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

II. Primary Element of Renewal: Depth Presentation of the Gospel

According to Lovelace, the primary elements of renewal involve a deeper understanding of the gospel. The depths of the gospel, understood, comprehended, and apprehended by the Christian, are the primary elements necessary for spiritual renewal.

This is why the gospel is not just for entrance into God’s kingdom, but is the warp and woof of the Christian’s daily life with God. Falling away from a full understanding of the gospel.

Lovelace explains that renewal is needed because Christians so easily fall away from a full understanding of the gospel into cheap grace, legalism, and moralism, or what can simply be described as "religion".

His perceptive claim that "only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives" remains a perpetual concern for Christian communities (101).

These markers are designed to be a sequence:

1. JUSTIFICATION

- You are accepted
- The doctrine of justification reminds us the believer that he is accepted.
- "Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther's platform: you are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance."
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Romans 4:4–5 — Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,
- Romans 3:21–26 — 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.

The Application: When a believer doesn't feel "accepted" apart from their work, they become "radically insecure." This insecurity manifests as pride, defensive criticism of others, and a fierce assertion of their own righteousness.

- I don't have to prove myself.
- Solves the "Sanctification Gap" where we rely on our performance for security.
- Another key insight from Lovelace is that many people try to rely on their sanctification for justification, instead of the other way around.

As Lovelace writes, "Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons" (212), and such insecurity can easily hamper progress in Christian living.

2. SANCTIFICATION

- Sanctification means you are free from bondage to sin. You are in the process of becoming holy.

- John 15:4–5 — Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.
- Romans 6:11–13 — So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.
- Colossians 3:1–6 — If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

The Application

- "You are delivered" (or "You are free")
- Solves Bondage; the belief that we are stuck in old patterns
- I don't have to stay this way.
- "The believer is not only accepted as righteous in Christ; he is also delivered from the reigning power of sin and is being progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ."

3. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

- Spiritual authority: this is the outward expression of an inward "vitality. Real authority comes from a soul being "re-enlivened" by the Holy Spirit.
- Matthew 28:18–20 — And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- Ephesians 6:10–20 — Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in

opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

The Application

- You have authority
- And the authority bestowed on God's child in spiritual conflict remind you that you are not powerless, but have authority in Christ in the spiritual realms.
- Solves Defeatism; the feeling that external or cultural forces are too strong.
- "The believer's authority is not based on his own merit or strength, but on his union with Christ, who has triumphed over all the powers of darkness."
- You are not powerless
- Authoritative: I can actually make a difference.

4. THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF GOD

- The indwelling Spirit of God in the Christian's heart assures that you are not alone.
- John 14:18–24 — "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

The Application

- "You are not alone."
- Solves Isolation; the burden of leading out of your own limited strength.
- "Renewal is not the result of our strenuous efforts to make ourselves better; it is the work of the Indwelling Spirit who empowers us to live out our new identity in Christ."
- Not Alone: I don't have to do it by myself.