

#3 in “The Physics of Faith” series
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“Reversing the Irreversible”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ as we complete our three-part series about the relationship between **physics** and **faith**.

After watching the 2013 “**Man of Steel**” movie on TV several weeks ago, I thought it might be fun to go back and watch Christopher Reeves’ original **1978** version of “**Superman**” with that great John Williams music. However, the storyline and special effects don’t seem quite as impressive **now** as they were back when I first saw it at the **movie theater**, including the part where Lois Lane is driving through the desert when her car is swallowed up by an **earthquake**...but Superman can’t get there in time to **save** her! **SO**...Super**MAN** gets super **ANGRY** and starts flying around the earth at supersonic speed in order to **reverse time** by reversing the rotation of the **earth**, thus saving **Lois** from death.

Now, I realize that’s not based on very good **science**! For **one** thing, the earth rotates around its axis at about **1,000 mph**, so if Superman **had** done what he did, he may have saved **Lois**, but the entire planet would have died from **whiplash**! **Still**, it’s a cool **concept**!

But wouldn’t it be great if, **for example**, you were in a conversation and said something you wish you **hadn’t**, that you could simply **excuse** yourself, fly around the **earth** a few times, and pick up the conversation **PRIOR** to your **faux pas**? Or how about when **texting** really fast on your stupid “**smart phone**” and right after you **send** the text, you notice some embarrassing words your so-called “**autocorrect**” messed **up** for you. Oh, if you could only **correct** that with **SUPER SPEED** and **REVERSE time**!

However, you can’t always **UNDO** what you’ve **done**. Some things in life are **IRREVERSIBLE**. Many people have learned from personal experience that you can’t **undelete** certain documents or **retake** a camera shot when your subject’s already left the **room** or get “**do-overs**” when you play with certain golfers or **unbake** burnt cookies in the oven or **unrun** red lights with surveillance cameras. So also, some things in both **faith AND physics** simply are **NOT** reversible! But **today**, I’m the bearer of **GOOD NEWS**: We have a God Who’s in the **BUSINESS** of “**reversing the irreversible**”.

As I mentioned last week, when you read the **Gospels**, you discover that Jesus reversed entire **weather patterns** while boating on the Sea of Galilee with His frightened disciples. He reversed **blindness**. He reversed **paralysis**. And one Easter morning, He reversed **death itself!** In fact, in the Apostle Peter's **Pentecost** sermon in Acts 2:24, Peter says, "*But, God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was **IMPOSSIBLE** for death to keep its hold on Him.*" People tend to think of dying and coming back to life as being **IRREVERSIBLE**. Peter says the exact opposite! What's **impossible** was for **death** to keep its grip on Jesus, the One we call The Way, The Truth, and **The LIFE**, so that **now**, even **eternal** death is reversible for you and me!

"**Thermodynamics**" is the study of **energy** in all of its different forms. The 1st & 2nd **LAWS** of Thermodynamics describe the way the process **works**.

The **First** Law of Thermodynamics states that energy is **CONSERVED** and can't be created **OR** destroyed. It only can be **EXCHANGED**...for a different **KIND** of energy. For example, if you push a boulder off a **cliff**, you convert **gravitational** energy into **kinetic** energy... but it's still **ENERGY**. However, there's also **ANOTHER** law at work—the reason why your **ice cream melts** down your wrist on a **SUMMER** day but your cup of **coffee cools** on a **WINTER** day. It's the **SECOND** Law of Thermodynamics that introduces into the equation something called **ENTROPY**. "**ENTROPY**" basically states that, if left to its own **devices**, **everything** moves toward **DISORDER**. Old cars **rust**, toys **break**, and food **rots!** **And**—as **parents** can attest—in record time kid's bedrooms quickly acquire the smell of old **socks** and the decor of a **tornado** strike.

Now let me segue into a definition of **SIN** you won't find in **Luther's Small Catechism** (although it **should** be): **SIN** is basically **entropy**. **Sin** is a downward **slip**, **slide** or **surge** toward chaos and **disorder**.

Do you remember how St. Paul ended his first letter to the Thessalonians with a benediction that said, "*May God Himself **keep you HOLY** through and through, so that your **WHOLE** spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*"? Well, the word "**holy**" literally means to be "**SET apart**" from the sinful influences trying to **TEAR** us apart. **SIN** is the **opposite** of holiness—or for that matter, spiritual **WHOLENESS**. Instead, it's a **degradation** or **disintegration** process of becoming more and more **fragmented**. It drags us "**body and soul**" down toward chaos and disorder. And the end **result** of sin is a spiraling descent into a **meaningless existence**, leaving our moral **compasses** randomly **spinning!** That's why in 1 Cor. 14: 33 & 40, St. Paul had to castigate the constantly chaotic and clashing Corinthians to start doing "*all things decently and in **ORDER***" when they gathered

together, because he reminds them that *“God is not a God of **disorder** but of harmony and peace!”*

So how do we **overcome** spiritual entropy in our lives? Well, we **CAN’T!** That’s why Christ had to come and do it **FOR** us. But now that He calls us one of His **own** and empowers our lives with the Holy Spirit in our **Baptism**, I think the answer may lie in **Proverbs 29:18**, the famous passage that says, *“Without a **vision** the people **perish**.”* The word “**perish**” comes from a Hebrew word that legitimately might be translated “**entropy**”, because it refers to the process of deadly **DECAY**. Specifically, it’s used of perishable **food** that’s long past its “**use by**” date...**rotten** food!

While researching this topic, I came across a story by a fellow pastor who was illustrating the **USE** of this word. When he was in college, his grandmother sent him a homemade, **baked apple pie**—kind of like when I was in college and my folks would send **me** homemade goodies that I’d end up having to share with my mooching **dormmates!** Anyway, with the arrival of that **apple pie**, everyone in the dorm wanted to be his **friend** just to get even a **tiny** piece of that pie. And **yet, he also** wanted to save some of it for **himself**, so he hid the last piece of that pie safely under his **bed**...but then **FORGOT** about it!

A couple **months later**, he and his roommate started smelling a “**strange odor**” (which actually isn’t abnormal for a dorm room!). They finally looked far back under his bed to discover—“**the law of entropy**”—*“If an apple pie is left to its own devices for more than a month, it will become a greenish glob of fuzzy, moldy goo!”* But still being a very “**giving kind of guy**”, he then went **door-to-door**, offering his **last piece of pie** to everyone in his dorm.

Anyway, may I suggest that another translation of Proverbs 29:18 might be, *“Without a **vision** the people become a greenish glob of fuzzy, moldy **goo**”?* Here’s what happens if you don’t have a God-given **vision** of where **GOD** wants to lead you: **ENTROPY** will proceed to usurp its **place!**

It’s not exactly a **LAW**—only my personal **theory**—but aren’t most **sin** problems possibly **vision** problems? If we ask the Holy Spirit to instead **possess** us with a vision from God that **consumes** all of our thoughts **and** energy, we wouldn’t waste so much of our time and energy **SINNING**, would we?

Of course, by ignoring St. Paul’s warning in **Rom. 12:3** about *“**thinking more highly of ourselves than we OUGHT**”*, don’t we often convince ourselves that we’re able to **stop** sinning by just **deciding** to “**NOT** sin”? So, how’s **THAT** working out for us who have “**original sin**” embedded within our **DNA**? Yet, when our best of

intentions don't **work**, we still try even **harder** on our own to "**stop** sinning simply by **not** sinning".

What we need instead is an all-consuming, **divine** vision to **counter**, if not **replace**, that entropy...a vision from God that completely **consumes** our every thought, word, and **action** into the life God gave us in our **baptism** and now wants us to live out through the **Holy Spirit's** power rather than our **OWN!** Once your life has been literally **GIFTED** by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, I'm convinced that a vision for your life—**given** to us and empowering us by the Holy **Spirit**—is what can keep us from **devolving back** into spiritual entropy. If we don't live out God's vision by **HIS** power instead of our **own**, we **rot**, **rust**, and **recede** back into **SIN** and ultimately **perish in perdition**. But saturating our lives with **GOD'S Vision** is the perfect preservative for an entropy-free **FAITH**.

Now let me frame a "vision of **FAITH**" in terms of **physics** in which the counterpart of entropy is called **NEGENTROPY**. **NEGentropy** is the **INCREASE** of **ORDER**. So, if **sin** is **ENTROPY**, then **vision** is **NEGentropy!**

The only way to prevent **entropy** is to introduce some **outside** energy source that **counteracts** it. If you plug your refrigerator or freezer into an **outlet**, it produces cold air that keeps food from **rotting**. But when **PG&E** has another one of their surprise **power outages**—and if you can't afford a Generac generator—then **entropy** inevitably takes over...usually the day after you just went to the store and stocked up on groceries and freezer meats. (I don't know if that's called **classic entropy** as much as **cruel IRONY!**) But any time you disconnect that refrigerator from its energy **source**, entropy always takes **over** again.

That's what happens to us **SPIRITUALLY** when we get disconnected from **God**. **Entropy** takes **over** again in our lives. And the only way to overcome entropy is to plug back into **God** through renewed **Bible study** and **worship** and **prayer** and **Christian fellowship** and actively helping others know Jesus through our own words and actions.

When the Holy Spirit came into our hearts, He also came to **REVERSE** the **CURSE** of **spiritual entropy**...and on the Last Day, even **PHYSICAL** entropy! If you go all the way back to the beginning of time, you can see the introduction of entropy into a garden called **Eden**. Genesis 2:16 says, "*And God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely **DIE**.'*"

This is the first time the word "**die**" appears in Scripture. The Hebrew word for it literally means "**to die prematurely**." That **may** indicate that God intended Adam

and Eve to live **forever**, but Ezekiel 18:20 says, *“The soul that **sinneth**, it shall **DIE!**”* And so, **SIN** introduced the process of **decay** known in physics as **entropy**. Let me be even **more** specific.

Theologians often list **FIVE** different **areas** of entropy affecting even the lives of us **believers**—**spiritual, relational, emotional, intellectual**, and of course, **physical entropy**. But **ALL** of those different kinds of entropy still are the byproduct of one thing: **SIN!** And we can see those different varieties of entropy in what’s commonly called “the **CURSE**” in Genesis 3:14-18. God says to the **serpent**, *“I will put **enmity** between you and the woman.”* (That’s **spiritual** entropy.) He says to the **woman**, *“Your desire will be for your husband and he will **rule** over you.”* That’s **relational** entropy. He says to **Adam**, *“Cursed is the **ground** because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you **return** to the ground.”* That’s **physical** entropy. And then it says, *“For **dust** you are, and to **dust** you will **return**.”* If that isn’t **entropy**, I don’t know what is!

So, it was **sin** that introduced the law of **entropy**—the process of **decay, disorder, and disharmony** for all of mankind. **Romans 8:21** says that by **nature** we now are *“in **BONDAGE** to **decay**.”* In other words, the first **sin against God** made eternal entropy **inescapable**. **However**, Jesus came to “set the captives **free**”! Those wonderful theological terms I parsed and exegeted all through seminary days, like **redemption, justification, sanctification** and **glorification**, ultimately are all about only **one thing**—“**reversing the curse**”—reversing the **effects** of spiritual, relational, emotional, intellectual, and physical **entropy**!

In John 10:10, Jesus said, *“The **thief** comes to **kill, steal, and destroy**.”* That **thief** is simply another name for the ancient serpent, the **devil**, and he’s still doing **now** what he was doing back **then**—introducing **entropy** into any aspect of our lives he can slither **into**! But Jesus goes on to say, *“But I have come that you might have **LIFE** and have it more **abundantly**.”* Instead of consigning us to habitual **entropy**, He brings **NEGentropy**!

How? Where? When? Go to the final pages of your Bible where God finally and ultimately **reverses** the curse in **Revelation 21**. *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among His people, and God Himself will be **with** them and be their **God**.”*

This describes the **END** of **spiritual** entropy for us. V. 4 goes on to say, *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* It’s also the **end** of

emotional entropy—no more **crying** or **mourning**. It's the end of **relational** entropy. It's the end of **intellectual** entropy. 1 Cor. 13:12 says, *"Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."* And it's also the end of **physical** entropy. No more **death**. No more **pain**. And then **Rev. 21:5** is the nail in the **coffin** of **death**: *"He Who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'"*

That sure sounds like the end of entropy to **me!** God will **release** us from the Second Law of Thermodynamics. He will bring order **out** of chaos, just like He did in originally creating the world in **Gen. 1:2**.

God is in the business of **REVERSING** what quantum physics tells is **IRREVERSIBLE**. And the same Creator Who brought **order** out of **chaos** in **Genesis 1** is doing the same—today in the individual lives of His redeemed people. That is what the **empty tomb** represents.

But He doesn't just want to reverse physical entropy when you **die**. He wants to reverse the **emotional** and **intellectual** and **relational** and **spiritual** entropy in your life right **NOW!** St. John says in **John 6:47**, *"He who believes HAS eternal life."* You don't have to **DIE** first to start experiencing the benefits of eternal life! That life already began in you at your **baptism**, when the Holy Spirit drowned the **Old Adam**, adopted you into His **"Forever Family"**, came to dwell in you as His redeemed **child**, and promised He'd never leave you or forsake you!

Is there an area of your life that still seems to be **"perishing"** right now? Are there any **rotten apple pies** under your bed where you're still experiencing the decay of **sin**...where you're experiencing the **entropy** of **disorder** or **disharmony**?

Well, I **again** have good news for you: the physics of **science** always and ultimately bows to the physics of **FAITH**. Wherever that entropy is trying to **resurface** in your life is also where God is ready to **"reverse the curse"** and bring **order** out of **disorder**. All one has to do is **yield** to Him by claiming the vision He has for your life. When we hand over to Him our **ENTropic** life, He gives **us** His **NEGentropic** life...better known in Scripture as the **ABUNDANT** life.

Ultimate entropy for us sinners is **inevitable**... **UNLESS** some "outside force" intervenes to **mitigate** it. That's exactly what the Son of God **did** for us when He interjected Himself into our world by becoming **ONE** of us and then, with His sacrificial life, death, and **resurrection**, singlehandedly **reversed** our downward **spin** into **sin**... pointing us to a **NEW** vision and purpose for life, all orbiting around His amazing **GRACE**, *"...so that whoever believes in Him should NOT be damned by the Law of Entropy, but be saved through His Gospel of GRACE!"*

May God continue to grant this in **YOUR** life in our Savior's Name, **AMEN!**