

Use 2: Progressive Sanctification

Having looked at the major role which Christ's resurrection and kingship played in the way the first believers confronted the surrounding cultures by their rejection of, and separation from, paganism, and in their preaching of the gospel, I now turn to the part played by the resurrection and the kingdom in the progressive sanctification¹ of the first believers; as for the resurrection, I mean, of course, that of Christ himself, and of his people spiritually in him now and physically at his return.

So, how did the resurrection and the kingdom affect the early believer's progressive sanctification?

When writing to the Romans, having fully set out the doctrine of justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, on the basis of the grace of God alone (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21 – 5:21),² Paul turned to the believer's progressive sanctification. In speaking of its necessity, its motive, its spring and its power, he made it clear that the resurrection of Christ is absolutely fundamental to the biblical doctrine and experience of the believer's progressive sanctification:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been [spiritually] baptised into Christ Jesus were [spiritually] baptised into his death?³ We were buried therefore with him by [spiritual] baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if [that is, since] we have been

¹ That is, the believer's practical and actual growth in Christ likeness (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 10:14; 12:14; 2 Pet. 3:18, and so on). I will not deal with the necessity of this progressive sanctification here, having done so elsewhere – see my *Fivefold; Liberty*.

² He drew on it again in Rom. 8:1.

³ For my arguments justifying my claim that the baptism here is spiritual baptism (regeneration), not water baptism, see my *Baptist Sacramentalism; Infant; Hinge*.

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united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his... Now if [that is, since] we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 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. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace... You... have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God (Rom. 6:1-14; 7:4).

If [that is, since] the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you (Rom. 8:11).⁴

Clearly, Paul saw the resurrection as a major influence in progressive sanctification.

Similarly, when writing to the Corinthians about it, the apostle spoke of the resurrection and the kingdom:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

And:

⁴ For more on the passage, in addition to my *Hinge* and *Infant*, see my *Christ*.

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The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor. 5:4-17).

Addressing the Galatians, he had used the kingdom to press home his teaching on progressive sanctification:

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (Gal. 5:16-26).

Peter did the same:

The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:3-5).

And Paul used the resurrection and exaltation of Christ in praying for the Ephesians that, among other things, they might:

...know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he

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worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:18-20).

For what reason? Why all this talk of Christ's resurrection and kingdom, his rule, his governance? Surely, that believers might, by the felt experience of God's resurrection-power within them, live lives worthy of God:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them... (Eph. 5:1-11).

As Paul, when telling the Philippians about his conversion, explained, his desire – now converted⁵ – was:

...that I may gain Christ 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 – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings,

⁵ Paul moves from justification (and positional sanctification) to progressive sanctification. If 'that I may gain... 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' refers to progressive sanctification, what a direct contradiction of the position set out by Calvin and adopted by the Reformed – that the believer's progressive sanctification is by the law. See my *Christ*.

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becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:8-21).

Let me go back to the apostle's letter to the Ephesians; he declared:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages [that is, in the eternal kingdom of Christ] he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:1-10).

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And:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Eph. 4:1).

Clearly, Paul was arguing for the believer's progressive sanctification on the basis of the resurrection – Christ's and the believer's – especially the believer's present spiritual resurrection in Christ, his felt sense within him of Christ in his resurrection power. And that was not all. The relationship of Christ to the believer – one of master/slave, husband/wife – is a vital strand in the apostle's argument. The kingship of Christ plays a major role in all this.

And although the apostle's argument in Ephesians 4:7-16 – concerning life in the *ekklēsia* – is not strictly about progressive sanctification, since one of the main aims of *ekklēsia* life is the believer's progressive sanctification – the Ephesian passage carries great weight in this regard. The incarnate, crucified and risen Christ gives gifts to his children for their edification, and the exercise of those gifts forms an integral part of *ekklēsia* life. Let us remind ourselves of what we have already seen:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day [of judgment] drawing near (Heb. 10:24-25).

And that leads us straight to Ephesians 4:

[Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which

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it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:11-16).

Hence:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness... Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph. 4:17-24; 5:3-5).

Peter put *ekklēsia* life in light of the last day:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 4:7-11).

What is more, let us remember what God said about spiritual Israelites in the days of the old covenant:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the

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LORD and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him (Mal. 3:16-18).

Is this any less applicable to God's people – his special, precious chosen possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10) – in the days of the new covenant?

Consider Paul's letter to the believers at Colosse – do not miss the weight Paul gave to the resurrection and kingship of Christ:

And so, from the day we heard [of your conversion], we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:9-14).

And:

[Christ] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might be preeminent (Col. 1:18).

Do not miss the 'so that': Christ was raised in order that he might be preeminent in everything, he was raised in order to be chief and head of all things, he was raised in order to be declared to be the King, declared to be the Anointed, declared to be the Messiah, declared to be the Lord over all – especially over his people.

As Calvin put it in his *Commentary*:

He is the beginning because he is the first-born from the dead; for in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation, for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the

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first man. As, then, Christ in rising again had made a commencement of the kingdom of God, he is on good grounds called the beginning.

Having set out the glory of Christ, and his people's standing in him, on that basis, Paul went on to stir believers to progressive sanctification:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were... raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands (Col. 2:6-14).

And:

[Since] 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... seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (Col. 3:1-11).

In his earlier letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle had added an all-powerful motive and standard:

We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2:12).

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And, in his second letter:

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering (2 Thess. 1:3-5).

The apostle spoke of the day of judgment:

...when [Christ] comes... to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed... To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfil every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:10-12).

Again:

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word (2 Thess. 2:13-17).

As he told Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Peter wrote in the same vein to his readers:

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[God's] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-11).

James spoke of 'the perfect law, the law of liberty', 'the royal law' (Jas. 1:25; 2:8), as that which governs believers to their progressive sanctification. Now however this law is defined – it must surely be 'the law of Christ' (1 Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2) – at the very least we may say it is the royal law in the sense of being the King's law.

And then we have this much debated passage;⁶ whatever else it teaches, it clearly links Christ's resurrection with a believer's 'good conscience' – progressive sanctification, once again:

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him (1 Pet. 3:21-22).

And this must one of leading passages to make the point:

⁶ For my view – that the baptism is spiritual baptism, regeneration – see my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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The heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly... The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation... You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:7-18).

Moreover, since suffering is a part of progressive sanctification, believers must look on that in light of the coming kingdom:

I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus... (Rev. 1:9).

John Bunyan certainly saw it that way. In his *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Evangelist, warning Christian and Faithful as they are about to face the testing and suffering in the town Vanity, urged them:

Let the kingdom be always before you, and believe steadfastly concerning things that are invisible... You must, through many tribulations, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And the writer of Hebrews clearly set out the kingdom motive for progressive sanctification, which, as he said, is an absolute essential:

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Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord... Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:14,28).

This, too, is clinching:

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

Believers know that in the final day they will have to answer to Christ:

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matt. 12:36-37).⁷

While this must not be construed as teaching that a believer can be eternally condemned, nevertheless it does show that, in light of the return of Christ and the judgment, believers are conscious of the need for their daily walk with Christ to please and magnify their Redeemer:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done (Rev. 20:1-13).

Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done (Rev. 22:12).

⁷ As Calvin said in his *Commentary*: 'This is an argument from the less to the greater; for if every idle word is to be called in question, how would God spare the open blasphemies and sacrilegious insolence of those who bark against his glory?'

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Hence:

Brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:10-11).

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace... You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:14-18).⁸

It is beyond doubt: the first believers saw the resurrection of Christ – and their own present spiritual resurrection in him – coupled with his coming again in judgment as King – and their present elevation to be spiritual priests and kings in him – as mighty motives and motivators for their own progressive sanctification.

Let Spurgeon, with a salutary warning, bring this chapter to a close:

Instead of acting like kings, many who claim to be the sons of God act as basely as if they were scullions in the kitchen of Mammon!

What separation from the world, what exemplary holiness, what self-denial, what heavenly walking with God, ought to be seen in those who are chosen to be God's redeemed people, the representatives of God on earth!... O Lord, I know that in Christ Jesus, you have made me a king. Help me, then, to live a right royal life. Lay home to my conscience that question: 'What kind of person ought I to be?' And may I so answer it that I may live worthy of my high calling.⁹

⁸ I quoted these passages again because of their powerful resonance in what I am trying to say.

⁹ C.H. Spurgeon: *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden*.