



A Scientist's Journey through the Bible

Introduction to Biblical Doctrine

Gregory T. Maine, Ph.D., FAACC

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To Nancy, my wonderful wife and best friend

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Foreword

I was raised in the Catholic Church by my parents and always believed there was a God. As I grew older, it was hard to imagine the universe, let alone life, could be a mere accident or product of chance and time. There was one thing I had in common with the universe; we both had a beginning. Unless something came into existence without a cause, someone transcendent from the universe must have brought the universe and mankind into existence.

As a young man, I have always been interested in science. I would cajole my parents into allowing me to purchase science experiment kits and would perform experiments in the basement of their home. Thankfully, I never burned down the place. At one point, I was very interested in meteorology and wanted a complete weather station installed on the roof of our house so I could be like the meteorologist, Tom Skilling, on WGN-TV in Chicago. My parents drew the line there so I had to be content with a simple indoor/outdoor thermometer that would allow me to record the high and low temperatures of the day, along with an indoor barometer.

I carried my interest in science into college when I attended the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. I enjoyed organic chemistry, and in the second semester, was at the top of my organic chemistry class. I grew even more interested in the chemistry of life and graduated with High Distinction in Biochemistry, having completed a B.S. thesis in the field of serum lipoproteins. I then went on to graduate school at Cornell University and had the privilege of studying DNA replication in yeast in the laboratory of Prof. Bik-Kwoon Tye for my Ph.D. thesis in Biochemistry. It was during my tenure as a graduate student at Cornell that I was challenged to read the Bible for the first time in my life. Through the witness of a fellow graduate student and other members of The Faith Bible Church of Ithaca, I became a Christian. I have been both a Christian and a scientist for over 40 years and recently retired from the corporate laboratory a couple of years ago.

I have published scientific papers in peer-reviewed journals and am the holder of several United States and foreign patents in expression vectors and infectious disease diagnostics. I will always be a scientist; it is a part of the fabric of my life. I will also always be a Christian, convinced on the basis of evidence, that the Bible is a self-disclosure from the God who made the universe. Now that I am retired from the laboratory, the first project undertaken was the writing of this book. The template for this book has its origins in the doctrine notebook from the Faith Bible Church of Ithaca. I wish to thank the late Pastor Herman J. Eckelmann and all the authors who contributed to the doctrine notebook, many of whom were also scientists. They provided a systematic approach to the study of the Scriptures, which I have rewritten and expanded upon.

This is a book about my journey through the Scriptures and what I have learned about God over the past 40 years, both as a scientist and a Christian, from His word and from experience. Just like data in the laboratory, the Bible contains data about God, man and the world we live in. I am not a theologian, nor do I subscribe to various theological and denominational approaches to understanding the Scriptures. I simply have pulled together the relevant passages of Scripture in a systematic manner to help the reader better understand what the entire Bible has to say about its main doctrinal teachings.

The Scriptures assume, as we read and study them, that we will have a clear understanding of the doctrines taught therein. The goal of this book is to aid in the study of biblical doctrines by organizing the relevant passages of Scripture according to the key doctrinal teachings of the Bible. The unique approach of this work is to maximize Scriptural passages in the text (40-50%) with a minimal human commentary. In a sense, it is like a systematic study Bible with the caveat that the entire Bible is not presented. Passages of Scripture are usually set apart in quoted bold italics to distinguish God's word from the commentary. Since the relevant passages of Scripture are extensively quoted, this will aid the reader in forming their own conclusions on what the Bible actually teaches through study and prayer. My commentary and stories only serve to help guide and inspire the reader to "learn and own" their biblical doctrine personally. After all, we are called by the Scriptures to make a ready defense to anyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that is within us (*1 Peter 3:15*). So have a go of it and may God bless your study of His precious Scriptures and all the wonderful doctrines. Your life may not be the same after this because the goal is to be conformed more to the image of Christ and less to the world that is passing away!

Gregory T. Maine
Queen Creek, AZ
October 14, 2020

1. Doctrine

Memory verses: *John 14:21, 2 Timothy 2:15*

1.1 What is doctrine?

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines the English word "doctrine" as "teaching, instruction, something that is taught" and "a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or a system of belief."

The Greek word *didaskalia* is translated in the New American Standard Bible (NASB) as "doctrine" in several New Testament (NT) passages. See, for example: *Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 6:1,3; Titus 1:9, 2:1*. In keeping with the NT usage of *didaskalia*, doctrine is a body of teaching or instruction.

Proverbs 4:1-9

"Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, for I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and said to me, let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will guard you; love her and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is: acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a garland of grace; she will present you with a crown of beauty."

In this passage, we see the father's advice to his son is to acquire understanding from sound teaching and instruction (doctrine). The son is exhorted to keep the commandments and acquire wisdom and understanding. Wisdom comes through the acquisition and living application of biblical doctrine. This wisdom will "*honor you*" and place "*a garland of grace*" and a "*crown of beauty*" upon your head. We have a choice to either study and embrace God's word for holy and fruitful living or continue to use man's fallen wisdom to our own destruction (*Hosea 4:6, Proverbs 14:12*). The wisdom we obtain from the Scriptures will serve us well in decision making the rest of our lives.

1 Corinthians 8:1-2

"Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know."

The Scriptural admonition that “*knowledge makes arrogant (puffs up), but love edifies*” is an important consideration as we embark on our study of biblical doctrine. A true understanding of Scripture will lead to humility. Our goal should be to live biblical doctrine in a loving way before a fallen world.

Romans 12:1-2

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul’s Epistle to the Romans in the first eleven chapters contains several key biblical doctrines, including soteriology (God’s salvation through Christ), man’s condition, justification, sanctification, election, predestination and perseverance of the saints. Paul’s conclusion (note the “therefore” in v. 1) after eleven chapters of doctrine is “*present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*” Worship of God is not confined to a local gathering in a church at a weekly service. Our lives, as lived according to the Scriptures, are our worship of God. Hence, it is important that we know what God requires of us so we can worship Him in spirit and in truth as we serve (*John 4:24*).

1.2 Why study doctrine?

We study doctrine so we can love God and people

John 14:21

“He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose myself to him.”

Real love for God does not consist only of feelings; it is demonstrated by obedience to the Lord’s commands. How can we love God if we do not know His commands? Knowing God comes through the study of His Word.

A Pharisaic lawyer asked Jesus a question:

Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’”

Here Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament (OT) passages *Deuteronomy 6:5* and *Leviticus 19:18* and summarizing the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses, see *Exodus 20:1-17*.

1 John 5:2-3

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

In this passage, we know we love our Christian brothers and sisters when we love God and obey His commandments. His Word instructs us how to live with our neighbor, both believer and non-believer.

Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

Biblical obedience to the Lord covers all commandments. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for tithing mint, dill and cummin, while neglecting the weightier provisions of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus says they should have done the latter while keeping the former.

Hosea 6:1-6

“Come let us return to the LORD. For he has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day that we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud, and like the dew which goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

This is a challenge to press on and know the Lord. He will come to us like the spring rain watering the earth. He delights more in our loyalty to Him and knowledge of Him than in sacrifices and burnt offerings. The bottom line is that God wants your heart, without which external obedience is meaningless.

The study of doctrine enables us to become wise and discerning Christians

Proverbs 3:1-18

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you. Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body, and refreshment to your bones. Honor the LORD from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine. My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD; or loath His reproof, for whom the LORD loves He reproves, even as a father the son in whom he delights. How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.”

This extended passage reveals a number of blessings that come from living the commandments and wisdom of the Scriptures. The list includes:

- v. 2 and 16, length of days, life, peace
- v. 14, profit better than silver or gold
- v. 17, pleasant ways
- v. 18, tree of life, happiness

Proverbs 14:12

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

In contrast to God’s wisdom, which leads to life, man’s wisdom leads to death.

Psalms 119:98-100

“Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever mine. I have more insight than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, because I have observed Thy precepts.”

The psalmist here exclaims that the commandments make him wiser than his enemies; he has more insight than all his teachers and understands more than older people because he observes the commandments.

The late Dr. Allan MacRae, a former seminary professor from Biblical Seminary and OT scholar, was quoted as praying before his class the following prayer:

“Lord, teach us to learn from your word rather than by the painful way of experience.”

We can learn from experience and growing older, but there is no substitute from learning and obeying God’s word.

The Apostle Paul gave the following exhortation to Timothy, applicable to all Christians:

2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

The Apostle Paul encourages believers to diligently study the word of God. We not only need to know and live the word of God, we also need to be able handle it accurately, by understanding all verses in their proper context and in relation to the entire Bible. Less clear verses are understood by the more clear. The Scriptures warn us of future apostasy:

1 Timothy 4:1-6

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude: for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

We need to know the Scriptures and be discerning of people who distort Biblical doctrine and teach false and demonic doctrines to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16).

1.3 Where do we study doctrine?

We study and learn to live doctrine in the local church

1 Timothy 3:14-15

“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

The local church is the pillar and support of the truth, not the seminary, online videos or sermons. The statement *“I am writing these things”* refers to the qualifications of elders and deacons mentioned in *1 Timothy 3:1-13*. Elders are men of character that meet the qualifications stated in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1* and are responsible to be:

Titus 1:9

“Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.”

The elders are responsible for the doctrine of the church and to be sure it is kept pure, defended, taught, and lived by the congregation they shepherd.

1 Peter 5:1-3

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

The elders of the church are exhorted to *“shepherd the flock of God”* while *“proving to be examples to the flock.”* As we learn doctrines from God’s word, the elders of the church are to be examples to us of holy living; hence, the importance of the character qualifications of an elder. Oftentimes, learning God’s commandments is the easier part. Putting God’s word into our daily lives is so much more difficult. The church body needs godly men to teach the Scriptures and then live by example.

Hebrews 13:7

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith.”

The Scriptures teach us to remember those who taught God’s word to us. Depending on the outcome of their way of life, we should imitate their faith. A healthy local church should contain, in addition to elders, godly men and women who can be examples of faith to us.

Hebrews 10:23-25

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

Here the brethren are exhorted *“to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.”* Believers in a local church support healthy disciple making and building.

Small groups in local churches today provide a venue for building disciples and holding one another accountable.

1.4 Where does the church get its truth?

The one and only source of truth comes from the Holy Scriptures

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The Scriptures are both necessary and sufficient for our lives; nothing should be added, changed or subtracted. Some religions twist, add or subtract from the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16) or elevate church tradition as equal in authority to the Scripture. The last chapter of the book of Revelation warns us about these forbidden practices (Revelation 22:18-19).

When the Apostle Paul and Silas taught the congregation in the synagogue in Berea, the congregation was considered *“more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see if these things were so”* (Acts 17:11).

It is the responsibility of every believer to search the Scriptures daily to be sure every teaching, every sermon and every Bible study conforms to the word of God. The congregation in Berea did this even though all they had were scrolls of the OT that were kept in the synagogue.

Joshua 1:8

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

The Lord exhorted Joshua to keep God’s word on his mouth and meditate on it both day and night so that Joshua would be careful to follow it. This way, Joshua and his people would be prosperous and successful. Daily Bible reading accompanied by prayerful meditation is essential for believers to lead fruitful and prosperous lives.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

“Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left; in order that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel.”

The future king of Israel was instructed to make a copy of the Law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. This copy was to be kept by the king and read on a regular basis, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God. This would ensure that the king would rule well and remain humble so that he and his sons would continue long in the kingdom.

Isaiah 8:19-20

“And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.”

We should consult the word of God instead of mediums, wizards and anybody else who claims god told them this or that, as the Bible is the only authority in our lives for faith and conduct. This will ensure we are adults in our faith and not tossed by false teaching.

Ephesians 4:14

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”

1.5 Summary

The Scriptures are the manufacturer’s handbook on how to live and love both God and your neighbor. We cannot rely on common sense or on our way of doing things because we are fallen and live in a fallen world. True wisdom and holiness are alien concepts to us, and thankfully, God has chosen to reveal Himself through the Scriptures. Knowing Him will help us know His will for our lives. Restoration from our fallen state before God, and the reunion of heaven and earth became possible through God’s redemptive plan revealed through the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The local church is where we learn, study and apply biblical doctrine in our lives. The Bible is our textbook and the source of truth about God and the world He created. It is to be studied, lived and obeyed. May God bless the study of His word. Amen.

2. The Scriptures

Memory Verse: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

2.1 The Scriptures are the source of truth

The Bible contains the evidence of fulfilled prophecy, indicating that it comes from the one true God

After Jesus was arrested and brought to Pilate by the Jews, a very interesting conversation occurred between Jesus and Pilate:

John 18:36-38

Jesus: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

Pilate: “So You are a king?”

Jesus: “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Pilate: “What is truth?”

Pilate asks a great question. “*What is truth?*” This question is asked in the context of Jesus’ discussion of His truth and kingdom. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ (*John 1:17*).

Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines the English word “truth” as: “The state of being the case, fact; the body of real things, events, and facts; a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality.” How do we determine if something is true or not? How can we be sure what Jesus said is true?

How people determine truth today is influenced by the world we live in. Steve Cornell, senior pastor Millersville Bible Church, shares the following perspective in an article entitled “What Does Postmodern Mean?” in an article written in 2006 and posted on www.summit.org (accessed 1/29/19). A brief summary is presented on the next page:

Pre-modern world: Religion was the source of truth and reality.

Modern world: Science became the source for truth and reality beyond the individual. Religion and morality were arbitrarily demoted to the subjective realm.

Post-modern world: Personal history, social class, gender, culture, language and religion individually shape truth and reality. This view does not allow any single defining source for truth or reality.

Steve Cornell goes on to write “What is the lie? It is the wholesale rejection of universal reason and absolute truth. It is the delusional mindset that there is no objective goodness and rightness. These prevailing opinions have led to the dismissal of an absolute deity.”

The post-modern worldview is similar in ways to the thinking of the people in the time of Judges where “*everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (Judges 21:25).

Regardless of an individual’s worldview, cosmologists tell us that the universe had a beginning. We also know that we will all die someday. There are many different religions and philosophies today with different approaches to the origin of the universe and the ultimate destiny of man after death. Rather than reject absolute truth and universal reason, a more rational approach is needed in our quest for finding absolute truth.

Finding truth in science

In science, we propose a testable hypothesis and then confirm by experimentation. We look for facts and data. Cosmologists are in agreement that the universe had a beginning but cannot determine the first cause behind the origin of the universe. Scientists will only admit a natural cause for the universe. Under this scenario, something must come from nothing, contrary to what we observe in a cause and effect observable universe. Robert Jastrow in his book “God and the Astronomers” (Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, New York: Warner Books, 1978, pp. 105-106) makes the following observation:

“...at this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

Science is at a dead end in the search for truth about man’s origin and destiny. It is simply beyond the realm of science as there is no known natural first cause of the origin of the universe that science can uncover.

Finding truth in religion

Today, there are over 1,000 religions that exist. Many children initially follow the religious beliefs of their parents. If you grew up in a Mormon home, you will likely become a Mormon, in a Catholic home a Catholic, in a Muslim home a Muslim, a Christian home a Christian, etc. Once a child enters adolescence and moves toward adulthood, the individual has to “own” their faith and determine whether to continue in the faith of their parents, choose an alternate faith or abandon faith altogether. The high school and college years are a time when faith decisions are made or abandoned.

Another faith decision point can occur when a couple begins a family and has to decide on a religion in which to raise their children. Even if they have no belief system, many parents feel obligated to bring their children to church to expose them to religion so as to give the children an opportunity to choose faith for themselves.

It is during these faith decision moments, and soon after, that doubts or truths about faith can occur for any variety of reasons. In today’s post-modern world, self-experience often determines what is truth. A belief system that is true for one person may not be true for another. There is no such thing as a true religion, as all religions can be equally valid.

As a scientist from my point of view, let’s assume, for the sake of argument, that there is a true religion. How would it be possible to sort through the world’s religions to determine if any are true based upon facts and data? Or, stated differently, is there a more objective way to determine truth in religion?

Strategy for sorting through the world’s religions

Do not investigate those religions that say it doesn’t matter what you believe. If you are wrong, it does not matter.

Do not investigate those religions that say you have many lives to decide how to worship God. If you are wrong, you can correct it later.

Do not investigate those religions that say there is no evidence for their truth. Many cults want you to trust in a subjective experience.

Investigate those religions which say it makes a difference what you believe, which say you have only this life to decide, and which offer evidence for their spiritual claims.

The Biblical religion is such a religion, as it claims it matters what you believe, you only have this life to decide, and provides evidence for its veracity.

Acts 17:30-31

“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Luke 12:4-5

“And I say to you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: Fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”

What assurance do we have that these claims are true? We only have this life to decide. Some people, when confronted with these claims, will say show me heaven and hell and then I will repent. This is not possible, as the Bible says we must come to God by faith and not by sight (*Hebrews 11:6*). And yet, we read earlier in this same passage of Scripture:

Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

This is a very interesting statement. It would appear that biblical faith is not blind faith but has some level of assurance to the veracity of what is not seen—“*of things hoped for*.” Is this simply a subjective experience or is there some reliable evidence to know that faith in the God of the Bible is trustworthy, i.e., that what the Bible says about faith in God is true regardless of whether I embrace that faith or not. This is important, as simply believing something does not make it true.

In our quest for truth, does the Bible have any evidence for its spiritual claims? Judgment day, along with heaven and hell, remain future events to us. Does the Bible have the ability to predict the future in ways we can test today?

The challenge of Isaiah

Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom, Judah, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (*Isaiah 1:1*). His ministry was directed to a nation of rebels, caught up in religious rituals and idols, their heart being far from the Lord. The prophet Isaiah issues a challenge to the heathen gods and idols that so ensnared Judah.

Isaiah 41:21-24

“‘Present your case,’ the LORD says. ‘Bring forward your strong arguments,’ the King of Jacob says. ‘Let them bring forth and declare to us what is going to take place; as for the former events, declare what they were, that we may consider them and know their outcome; or announce to us what is coming. Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods; indeed, do good or evil, that we

may anxiously look about us and fear together. Behold, you are of no account, and your work amounts to nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.’”

Isaiah challenges the heathen gods of his time to give history and prophecy and goes on to say that they are nothing. They are unable to speak let alone give history or prophecy. So, Isaiah has proposed a challenge to know the true God from a false god—predict the future.

The Bible goes on to say that a prophet of the true God makes predictions that are 100% accurate:

Deuteronomy 18:20-22

“‘But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And you may say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ ‘When the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing, which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.’”

In addition, anyone who makes a prediction and it comes true, if they tell you to follow after other gods, they are not to be feared:

Deuteronomy 13:1-5

“If a prophet or dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.”

What biblical evidence do we have from Isaiah and other biblical prophets of their ability to predict the future? Even though the Bible contains many prophecies about peoples, places, and world events, let’s briefly examine some of the OT Messianic prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah.

Stoner and Newman, in their book entitled “Science Speaks” (Peter W. Stoner, Robert C. Newman, RC *Science Speaks* Moody Press: Chicago, 1976, pp. 99-107.) considered the fulfillment of eight OT prophecies by Jesus Christ using the well-known principle of

probability. Conservative estimates were used for the likelihood of fulfillment of all eight prophecies by a single man as shown below:

- a) *Micah 5:2*- Messiah to be born in Bethlehem = 1 in 280,000
- b) *Malachi 3:1*- Forerunner for the Messiah = 1 in 1,000
- c) *Zechariah 9:9*- Entered Jerusalem as a ruler on a donkey = 1 in 100
- d) *Zechariah 13:6*- Betrayed and wounded in the hands = 1 in 1,000
- e) *Zechariah 11:12*- Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver = 1 in 1,000
- f) *Zechariah 11:13*- Betrayer returns the bribe = 1 in 100,000
- g) *Isaiah 53:7*- Accused and not guilty but silent = 1 in 1,000
- h) *Psalms 22:16*- Crucifixion = 1 in 10,000
- i) The product of a-h) is $\sim 1 \times 10^{28}$. This number represents the probability that one man in how many men could have fulfilled all eight prophecies. Our next step is to determine the probability that any man, since these prophecies were made to the present time, were fulfilled. This requires we divide this number by the total number of people who have lived since the prophecies were made. Stoner and Newman estimate the number to be approximately eighty-eight billion people, or 8.8×10^{10} . In order to simplify the calculation, we will round up to one hundred billion people or 1×10^{11} .

Probability calculation: 8 prophecies $\sim 1 \times 10^{28} / 1 \times 10^{11} = 1 \text{ in } 10^{17}$.

The probability that any man could have fulfilled all eight of these prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} . That is a very small number. To put this number in perspective, take 10^{17} silver dollars, and place them on the great state of Texas. The great state of Texas would be two feet deep in silver dollars. Next, mark one silver dollar and stir the entire pile of silver dollars. Then blindfold a man, drop him off in Texas and tell him to go look for the marked silver dollar. The probability of the man finding the one marked silver dollar is the same as one man fulfilling all eight Messianic prophecies, assuming the prophets wrote using their own wisdom. The proof God inspired the Scriptures through the prophets lacks certainty or absolute proof only by 1 in 10^{17} . In this example we looked at only eight prophecies and many more could be considered to calculate an even smaller chance of being wrong. Review of this evidence makes it easier to exercise faith in Christ, as our faith is based on evidence—fulfilled prophecy. Faith then jumps the gap from probability to certainty.

Even Jesus, who fulfilled many of the Messianic prophecies when He was alive on earth, died on a cross and rose from the dead, provides evidence, e.g. miracles, to prove He was who He claimed to be:

Mark 2:1-12

“And when He had come back from Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. And being unable to get to Him on account of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’ But here were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven; or to say, arise, and take up your pallet and walk? But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.’ And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’”

Jesus healed a paralytic so that the people would know He had authority on earth to forgive sins. Jesus demonstrated He could do something they could not see, i.e., the removal of their sins, by healing the paralytic, which was something they could see. Other religions have no evidence and base their veracity on a mere subjective experience. The Bible contains evidence, fulfilled prophecy, to substantiate spiritual claims. It really matters what you believe, and you only have this life to decide. Therefore, we must take seriously our sin and our need for Jesus Christ to take away our sins, in light of the coming Judgment day that lies beyond the grave.

2.2 The Bible is a reliable disclosure from God

The initiative for writing the Bible is from God and not man

Exodus 17:14

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this in a book as a memorial, and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’”

Moses is commanded by the Lord to write, in a book, a memorial regarding Amalek and recite it to Joshua.

Exodus 20:1-17, 24:12, 31:18, 32:15-16, 34:1, Deuteronomy 10:1-5

This series of passages describes the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses. The finger of God wrote these commandments on tablets of stone. Moses deposited the Decalogue in the Ark of the Covenant under the Lord's command.

Exodus 34:27

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’”

God tells Moses to write down these words of the covenant with Israel.

Jeremiah 1:9

“Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.’”

The Lord touches Jeremiah's mouth and puts His words in the mouth of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 30:1-2

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.’”

The Lord commands Jeremiah to write in a book all the words God spoke to him.

Jeremiah 36:1-4

“And it came about in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel, and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin.’ Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which He had spoken to him on a scroll.”

The Lord commands Jeremiah to write the words He has spoken to Jeremiah on a scroll. Baruch then wrote, at the dictation of Jeremiah, the word of the Lord spoken to Jeremiah.

Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:7

“Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. (On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him.)”

“But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.”

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel, and he was commanded by the Lord to speak His word to the sons of Israel.

Habakkuk 2:1-2

“I will stand by my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved. Then the LORD answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run.’”

Habakkuk, the prophet, is commanded by the Lord to record the vision on tablets.

Revelation 1:11

“Saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’”

The Lord tells the Apostle John to write in a book what he sees and to send it to the seven churches.

Revelation 10:4

“And when the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.’”

The Apostle John is told not to record what he has heard from the seven peals of thunder. In this passage, “divine editing” is taking place by the “voice from heaven.”

The Bible is divinely inspired, “God-breathed,” and the author is the Holy Spirit

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In this passage, Paul exhorts Timothy to continue living what he has learned from “*the sacred writings*,” a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul then goes on to say that all Scripture, both Old and New Testament, is “*inspired by God*” or literally, in Greek, “*God-breathed*.” The Holy Spirit, working through human authors and their style

of writing has communicated God's revelation to us. The Scripture is both necessary and sufficient to lead a godly life by following God's word.

2 Samuel 23:2

"The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue."

David, the son of Jesse, states the Holy Spirit spoke by him.

2 Peter 1:20-21

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of the human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

The Greek word that is usually translated "*interpretation*" is better translated "*origination*," based upon the context of this passage. The Scripture is not an act of the human will, but men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Zechariah 7:12

"And they made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts."

When the people of Israel would not listen to the prophets, they hardened themselves against "*the words, which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets.*" The Holy Spirit worked through the prophets so that the very words spoken were those of God.

John 14:26, 16:13-15

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of mine, and shall disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said, that He takes of Mine, and will disclose it to you."

Jesus promises His apostles at the Last Supper that the Holy Spirit will teach them all things, and that they will remember all of His commands and teachings. The apostles were given the promise of direct revelation from God and are authorized by Jesus to be His authoritative witnesses and teachers. The apostles, or those under apostolic authority, wrote the New Testament Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:1-2

“This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.”

Peter says he writes to them so that they will remember the words of the prophets and “the commandment of the Lord and Savior by the apostles.” The apostles taught the commandments of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 14:37-38

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

Paul asserts here that what he wrote to the Corinthians was “the Lord’s commandment.” A person who was not willing to acknowledge this fact was not to be recognized as spiritual.

2 Peter 3:14-18

“Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things that are hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

Peter mentions certain untaught and unstable men who distort Paul’s writings “as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” Peter recognized what Paul wrote was Scripture, the author of which was ultimately God (2 Pet. 1:20-21). These men do this to “their own destruction.” The verse 2 Peter 3:17 warns us to be on our guard so that we do not fall into this same error.

The Scriptures had no error in the original manuscripts

Our present Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts (from which our English Bible is a translation) are not the original manuscripts penned by the prophets and apostles themselves but are copies of those original manuscripts. In the course of being copied many times, scribal errors have crept into the manuscripts we have available today. Different generations of manuscripts can be compared, and only minor variations are

found to exist between them. Certainly, the manuscripts we have today are excellent copies of those original manuscripts. It is important to remember that no major Christian doctrine is dependent upon a questionable passage or variant reading. By carefully comparing manuscript with manuscript, and Scripture with Scripture, we can confidently proclaim God's truth as such.

John 10:35

“If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),”

In defending Himself against a charge of blasphemy, Jesus appealed to the First Testament Scriptures. Jesus then testified to the inerrancy, infallibility and authority of Scripture by saying the “*Scripture cannot be broken.*” It is unlikely there were any original manuscripts from the Old Testament present during the time Jesus walked the earth. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in the Qumran caves and dated to c. 100 B.C. (See Section 2.3), must have been very good copies of the Old Testament for Jesus to make this statement.

John 17:17

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”

Jesus states in His high-priestly prayer to God the Father “*Thy word is truth.*”

Proverbs 22:19-21

“So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer to him who sent you?”

The excellent counsels and knowledge in the Scriptures have been written to us so that we may “*know the certainty of the words of truth.*”

The Scriptures are not exhaustive

The Bible is God's revelation to man, revealing Himself to us as our Creator and Redeemer. Even though all that is in the Bible is true and factual, not all facts about our life, world and the life of Jesus are found in the Bible. For example, the laws of physics are not documented in the Scriptures. Scriptural revelation is limited.

John 20:30-31

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Here the Apostle John states that many other signs Jesus performed are not recorded in this gospel. John goes on to say, *“but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”* Rather than give an exhaustive history of the life of Jesus, John’s gospel focused on the teachings and events in Jesus’ life that bring the gospel message to a lost world. To at least this extent, the Bible teaches itself to be limited—not limited in accuracy but limited in scope.

John 21:25

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written.”

A complete revelation of the life of Jesus in detail would be too large for even the world to contain the books in John’s time. The printing press would not be invented for another 1400 years.

The Scriptures are sufficient

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

The Bible is both necessary and sufficient to lead a godly life. There is no need for additional revelation as God speaks to us through His word. He has revealed to us what we need to know. Daily reading of the Scriptures and praying them into our lives keeps us in touch with the Lord.

The Scriptures are harmonious

Since God is the author of the Scriptures, it necessarily follows that the Bible is internally consistent and harmonious. Scripture should be treated as a harmonious book, each part agreeing with and complementing the rest of Scripture. The best way to understand Scripture is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. When a difficult passage is encountered, which has more than one possible meaning based upon context and language, the most likely interpretation is determined by the clearer teachings found in the rest of the Bible.

In order to follow this important principle of let Scripture interpret Scripture, daily Bible reading and study throughout the entire Bible will help acquaint you with all the Scriptures. Another helpful technique would be to keep an index card listing all the key

doctrines of Scripture and one key memory verse associated with each key doctrine. Subsequently, annotate each key Bible verse in the margin of your Bible with several other cognate verses. That way, when looking up a particular doctrine of Scripture, you can immediately locate the important verses and key passages of Scripture associated with that doctrine. This will facilitate your ability to make a defense of your faith when someone asks you (*1 Peter 3:15*).

The Scriptures are the source of knowledge that imparts eternal life

John 20:30-31

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

John states the purpose for writing his gospel account that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and thus have eternal life in His name.

2 Timothy 3:15

“And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Paul writes to Timothy and reminds him that from childhood the sacred writings, which impart wisdom, lead to salvation through faith, which is in Christ Jesus. The reference to the sacred writings is a clear reference to the Old Testament, which in the next verse (*2 Timothy 3:16*) Paul calls Scripture.

John 5:38-40

“And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”

Jesus admonishes the Jews who search the Scriptures in order to find eternal life. He admonishes them not for their search, but for their refusal to come to Him for eternal life, since the Scriptures testify of Him. Again, we see the teaching that the Scriptures inform a person that salvation is through Jesus Christ. The Jews’ refusal to come to Jesus for eternal life is illustrative of the fact that mere intellectual assent to the facts cannot impart eternal life. Unless knowledge of the Scriptures is coupled with repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, such knowledge is of no saving value before the Lord (*James 2:19*). The Jews must abide in the word of God and come to Jesus to have their sins forgiven for eternal life.

The Scriptures are authoritative

The Scriptures speak of themselves as the final authority, the absolute standard against which all other claims to knowledge are measured.

Isaiah 8:19-20

“And when they say to you, ‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.”

Rather than consulting dead mediums or wizards, people should consult the living God. Anyone who suggests seeking truth anywhere but in the Bible, has no understanding at all.

1 John 5:9

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for the witness of God is this, that He has borne witness concerning His Son.”

The witness of God is greater than the witness of men. God’s word is to be listened above men’s words; it is the final authority.

Summary

We find that there is one book that claims to be the product of Divine authorship, which also gives evidence to back up that claim. In trying to decide whether or not the Bible is reliable, this very important objective material is not subject to the whims and flows of emotions or feelings. The evidence presented is objective support to the Bible’s claim that what Scripture teaches does correspond to objective reality in the universe in which we live. This evidence supports the Bible’s assertion that as it is studied, learned, taken to heart, believed and obeyed; great blessings are bestowed from the Lord both in this life and forever.

2.3 The books of the Bible

Manuscript evidence

The Bible we have today contains 66 books: 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. The manuscript evidence supporting faithful transmission of the Old and New Testament is staggering. According to Josh McDowell (McDowell, JD The Bibliographic Test <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Bibliographical-Test-Update-02.14.16.pdf>, accessed 3/25/19), the following is a bibliographical summary of Biblical Manuscripts, Scrolls and Translations:

New Testament Greek Manuscripts	5,838
New Testament Early Translations	18,524
Old Testament Scrolls, Codices	42,000
Total Biblical Manuscript Evidences	66,362

By contrast, we have fewer manuscripts from classical writings:

Homer <i>Iliad</i>	1,800+
Caesar <i>Gallic Wars</i>	251
Plato <i>Tetralogies</i>	210

Another important consideration is time gap between the earliest extant manuscripts we have relative to the original manuscripts that were penned. According to Prof. F.F. Bruce (F.F. Bruce *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, reprinted 1978), the New Testament was complete or substantially complete around 100 A.D., with the majority of the writings complete 20-40 years before this. The majority of scholars place the dates for the four Gospels as follows:

<i>Matthew</i>	c. 85-90 A.D.
<i>Mark</i>	c. 65 A.D.
<i>Luke</i>	c. 80-85 A.D.
<i>John</i>	c. 90-100 A.D.

Listed below is a brief summary of the earliest extant New Testament manuscripts that exist today (Norman L. Geisler, William E. Nix *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1968, pp. 268-274):

The P52 John Rylands Fragment (c.117-138 A.D.)

This is the earliest known copy of any portion of the New Testament, contains five verses from the gospel of *John 18:31-33, 37-38*. The fact that this fragment was found in Egypt, and that John reportedly was in Ephesus around 90 A.D., demonstrates the early popularity and rapid spread of the Gospel accounts throughout the Roman Empire.

P45, 46, 47 Chester Beatty Papyri (c. 250 A.D.)

These papyri contain most of the New Testament and include the four gospels and *Acts*, *Paul's letters to the churches*, *Hebrews*, and *Revelation*.

P66, 72, 75 Bodmer Papyri (c. 175-225 A.D.)

Contains most of the gospel of John and earliest copies of *Luke, 1 and 2 Peter* and *Jude*.

The Codex Vaticanus (c. 325-350 A.D.)

Contains most of the Old Testament Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT (LXX)) and the New Testament in Greek and Apocrypha.

The Codex Sinaiticus (c. 340 A.D.)

Contains over half of the Old Testament (LXX) and all of the New Testament in Greek, with the exception of *Mark 16:9-20* and *John 7:53-8:11* and Apocrypha.

We have New Testament manuscripts that date very close to the time when they were originally penned. The P52 John Rylands Fragment dates within 50 years of the original autograph penned by the Apostle John. As an example, from other ancient historical works, consider Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. The original manuscript was penned between 58-50 B.C. and the earliest extant manuscript we have is dated 900 years later.

F.F. Bruce quotes the late Sir Frederic Kenyon, a scholar on ancient manuscripts, about the New Testament manuscript evidence:

“The interval then between the dates of the original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they have been written has now been removed. Both the *authenticity* and *general integrity* of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.” (F.F. Bruce, 1978, p. 20)

The Old Testament Scriptures were originally penned over a period of >1,000 years. The earliest books of the Bible, Job and the Pentateuch, were likely written in the period of 1400-1500 B.C. The Minor Prophets, e.g. *Malachi*, and some of the Historical Books, e.g. *Nehemiah* and *Esther*, were written between 400-500 B.C. Listed below is a brief summary of the earliest extant Old Testament manuscripts that exist today (N. L. Geisler, W. E. Nix, 1968, pp. 249-266):

The Cairo Codex (c. 895 A.D.)

Oldest known Masoretic manuscript of the Prophets and includes both the Former Prophets (*Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings*) and the Latter Prophets (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 12 Minor Prophets*).

The Leningrad Codex of the Prophets (c. 916 A.D.)

This manuscript contains only the Latter Prophets.

The Leningrad Codex (c. 1008 A.D.)

This is the largest and only complete manuscript of the Old Testament.

Unlike the New Testament manuscripts, where we have many early manuscripts and some copies within fifty years, the Old Testament manuscripts are fewer and much further removed from the original autographs. The Hebrew Bible is based upon only four manuscripts and primarily based upon the Leningrad Codex. The Leningrad Codex is

removed from the original autographs by 1,500 to 2,000 years. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint (LXX), was translated from the Hebrew Scriptures in Egypt around 250 B.C. Even though copies of the Old Testament were available to translators back then, these copies have not survived antiquity. The Septuagint confirms the fidelity of the Masoretic text and was quoted by Jesus and the apostles.

This large gap between the earliest extant Hebrew manuscripts and the original autographs was significantly closed by the discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran caves:

The Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 100 B.C.)

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible with the exception of Esther (<https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/home>, accessed 4/20/19). These manuscripts are in substantial agreement with the Masoretic text, even though they are 1,000 years older. For example, the text of Isaiah 53 contains 166 words. Comparison of the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah 53 with the Masoretic text found only one word (3 letters) in question after 1,000 years of transmission. This word in question does not change the meaning of the passage (N. L. Geisler, W. E. Nix, 1968, p. 263). The Dead Sea Scrolls confirm the dependability of the Old Testament text and narrow the gap from original autographs to extant copies to 300-1,400 years.

Canonicity

The word “canon” literally means measuring rod, a standard against which other things are compared. The Canon of Scripture refers to the books of the Bible, which were given to us by the Lord by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Prophets and the Apostles. God determines the canon and is the superintendent of the Scriptures. The Church recognizes the canon. The testimony of Christ is the key to canonicity (N. L. Geisler and W. E. Nix, 1968, pp. 134-135).

The testimony of Jesus Christ to the Old Testament Canon:

Matthew 5:18

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished.”

According to Jesus, the smallest letter of the Law will not pass away until all is fulfilled.

Matthew 12:39-40

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF A SEA-MONSTER; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

Jesus authenticates the narrative of Jonah and the whale.

Matthew 19:4-5

“And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, and said ‘FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.’”

Jesus quotes *Genesis 2:24* from the scene in the Garden of Eden and states what God has joined together let no man separate.

Matthew 24:15

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing IN THE HOLY PLACE (let the reader understand),”

Jesus quotes Daniel the prophet.

Mark 7:10-13

“For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER;’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH;’ but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, anything of mine you might have been helped by is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down; and you do many such things as that.”

Jesus quotes Moses in *Exodus 20:12* and *Leviticus 20:9* as the word of God.

Mark 12:36

“David himself said in the Holy Spirit, ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT THINE ENEMIES BENEATH THY FEET.’”

Jesus quotes *Psalms 110:1* and refers to David as having spoken in the Holy Spirit.

Luke 4:16-21

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, ‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE DOWNTRODDEN, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.’ And He closed the book, and gave it to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Jesus reads from the book of *Isaiah 61:1-2* in the synagogue and said, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Luke 11:51

“From the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the House of God, yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.”

Jesus describes the shedding of prophetic blood since the foundation of the world. Abel’s death was recorded in the book of Genesis (*Gen. 4:8*) and Zechariah’s death in the book of 2 Chronicles (*2 Chr. 24:21*). In the Hebrew Old Testament, Genesis was the first book and 2 Chronicles was the last book. Jesus defines here the limits of the OT canon as Genesis to 2 Chronicles, which is the same as saying Genesis to Malachi in our current English translation of the Old Testament.

Luke 16:16-17

“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”

Jesus mentions that the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John.

Luke 17:26-29

“And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man; they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.”

Jesus describes people eating, drinking and marrying in the days of Noah and the flood, and in the days of Lot and Sodom, thus authenticating the OT narratives.

Luke 24:44

“Now He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’”

Jesus says what was written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

John 10:35

“If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),”

Jesus says, “*the Scripture cannot be broken.*” What was considered Scripture in the days of Jesus the Christ, around 30 A.D.? Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, provides some interesting insight into the divine Scriptures preserved by the Jews. This is quoted from “Against Apion, Book I, chapter 7-8” (F. Josephus *The Works of Josephus*, translated by W. Whiston, Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, 1985 Fifth printing, p. 609):

“... they being only prophets that have written the original and earliest accounts of things learned them of God himself by inspiration; and others have written what hath happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also. For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them, five belong to Moses, which contain his laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes, very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willing to die for them.”

Josephus mentions 22 “divine” books that were held to contain “divine doctrines” and that this body of literature was distinct from other historical writings like, for example, the Apocrypha, which was written during the inter-testament period. The 22 “divine” books mentioned by Josephus were never to be added to, changed, or abridged in any manner. These 22 books are identical to the 39 books present in our current Old Testament when counted as follows:

Books of Moses (5):

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Prophetic Books (13):

Joshua
Judges/Ruth
1,2 Samuel
1,2 Kings
1,2 Chronicles
Ezra/Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Isaiah
Jeremiah/Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

Minor Prophets: *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum,*
Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Hymns of God and Precepts (4):

Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

Josephus Book Count: 22

Current OT Book Count: 39

The Old Testament Canon was preserved by the Jews, affirmed by Jesus Christ, and received into the early church.

The Testimony of Jesus Christ to the New Testament Canon:

John 14:25-26

“These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

John 16:12-13

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

These statements were made to the apostles at the Last Supper. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit, through the apostles and apostolic authority, ultimately inspired the New Testament canon that was recognized by the early church. The early church was in a position that we are not in today, namely, they could ask the apostles if this book or letter was Scripture. The councils of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.) recognized as canonical the 27 books that are present in our New Testament today (N. L. Geisler, W. E. Nix, 1968, p. 192). Given the fact that apostolic authority establishes canonicity, after the death of the apostles the canon was closed. Any modern-day attempt to add, subtract or change the canon, for example, Joseph Smith of the church of Latter Day Saints and his book of Mormon, are to be rejected.

2.4 Summary

Praise to the Lord God Almighty, who through inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, has revealed Himself to us. We can have peace knowing that the Scriptures we have today are the same that came through the Holy Spirit in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, many years ago. Jesus Christ has given us this assurance through His testimony to the OT canon and development of the NT canon, backed by extensive manuscript evidence.

3. The Attributes of God

Memory verses: *Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 37:28*

What is God like?

Our ability to develop a relationship with someone requires us to spend time with that person to get to know him or her. A friend of mine, who grew up in Brazil, told me that in Brazil there is a saying that you really do not know a person until you have eaten a bag of salt together. It would take a lot of time with someone to consume enough chips and salsa to add up to a bag of salt. It also requires that each person be willing to disclose himself or herself to the other person. Thankfully, God the Father has made it possible to know Him as He has disclosed Himself through the Scriptures and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, the view of God most people have is shaped by the fallen world we live in. Many have made God in their own image, which may be shaped by their culture and life experience thus far. I have traveled extensively on business throughout Asia and Japan and it is not uncommon to observe people worshipping at various shrines. These very sincere people bow down, offering prayers and incense to their gods of wood, stone or gold.

I attended a scientific conference in Bangkok, Thailand at one of the most beautiful hotels I have ever stayed at—the Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok. The Erawan Shrine is located at the northwest corner of the hotel property. This shrine contains a gold statue of Brahma, the Hindu god of creation. According to www.tripsavvy.com (accessed 7/22/20) and according to local lore, this shrine was constructed to appease spirits potentially displaced by the construction of the hotel. Apparently, this solved some of the problems associated with the construction of the original hotel that was built in 1956. There was almost a carnival-like atmosphere surrounding this shrine at a crowded busy intersection, as people worship this statue. Street vendors with their tiny carts line the sidewalk selling incense, flowers, candles, food and other items that can be offered at the shrine. The thick smell of incense permeates the hot steamy air of Bangkok. It was quite astonishing to me to observe even Westerners bowing down to this idol in addition to the local people of Thailand. I felt like Dorothy in Wizard of Oz when she said, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

In contrast to pagan gods that may need to be appeased, the God of the Bible is a God of love and has chosen to disclose Himself to us through the Scriptures. We know this disclosure to be true based upon the evidence we have reviewed thus far. As we discuss God’s attributes, the word attribute is defined as a quality or aspect of the character or personality of someone. So let us spend time to get to know our Lord better as we review

the passages in the Bible that describes the qualities of God. Get out the chips and salsa and prepare to consume a bag of salt during this chapter.

3.1 Only one God who made the universe

The following passages in Isaiah provide the most extensive assertion of this truth.

Isaiah 43:10-11

“You are My witnesses, declares the LORD, and My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides Me.”

Our Lord is the only God and Savior. There was no God before our Lord and there will be none after. Our God and Savior has always existed (See Section 3.4).

Isaiah 45:5-12

“I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming the light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. Drip down, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds pour down righteousness; let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, and righteousness spring up with it. I the LORD have created it. Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—an earthenware vessel among the vessels of the earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands’? Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What are you begetting?’ Or to a woman, ‘To what are you giving birth?’ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: ‘Ask me about the things to come concerning my sons, and you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands, and I ordained all their host.’”

Our Lord is the only true God who made man and the universe, and He is sovereign.

Isaiah 45:18-22

“For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, (He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited): I am the LORD and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in some dark land; I did not say to the offspring of Jacob, ‘Seek me in a waste place’: I, the LORD, speak righteousness declaring things that are upright. Gather yourselves and come; draw near together, you fugitives of the nations; they have no knowledge, who carry about their wooden idol, and pray to a god who cannot save. Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of

old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”

Our Lord created the heavens and earth, including the elements used to fashion an idol. The idols cannot save.

Isaiah 46:9-11

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.”

Only the Lord can declare the end from the beginning because He plans it and does it. Man, and his idols, cannot do this.

3.2 The Trinity

The Bible teaches that our Lord is one God in three distinct persons. The term “Trinity” is only a theological term coined by theologians to express this concept. The following passages from the Scriptures support this assertion.

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God (Elohim) created (he created) the heavens and the earth.”

The Hebrew word for God used here is *Elohim*, a plural noun. In this passage, *Elohim* is used with a singular verb, literally “he created.” *Elohim* is also used in the OT to describe the false gods.

Genesis 1:26

“Then God (Elohim) said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps over the earth.’”

Genesis 3:22

“Then the LORD God said (Yahweh Elohim), ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.’”

Here, we see when God (Yahweh, Elohim) speaks of Himself, the plural pronouns “us” and “our” are used.

Deuteronomy 6:4

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD (Yahweh) is our God (Elohenu), the LORD (Yahweh) is one (echad).!”

In this passage we see the proper name of God, *Yahweh*, and the name *Elohenu*, which literally means “our Gods” linked to the Hebrew word for one, *echad*. The Hebrew word *echad*, as used in the OT, has a plural sense of unity but not in the sense of a literal number. Here are a few examples of the use of *echad* in the OT:

Genesis 2:24

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one (echad) flesh.”

Husband and wife come together as one, yet they remain separate persons.

Ezra 2:64

“The whole assembly numbered (echad) 42,360.”

Observe there is one assembly with many people.

Ezekiel 37:16-17

“And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.’ Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one (echad) in your hand.”

Two sticks are joined together in the hand of the prophet to be one stick, a plural unity.

Zechariah 14:9

“And the LORD (Yahweh) will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD (Yahweh) will be the only one (echad), and His name the only one (echad).”

Again we see the reference to the proper name of God as the only one, using the plural unity term *echad*.

There is a Hebrew word *yachid*, which means an absolute unity, as opposed to a plural unity, and is typically translated “only” or “one” in English. Here are a couple of examples of the use of *yachid* in the OT:

Genesis 22:2

“And He said, ‘Take now your son, your only (yachid) son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I tell you.’”

Abraham was asked by God to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. This is the only son of the promise (see *Genesis 17, Galatians 4:22-23*).

Judges 11:34

“When Jephthah came to his house at Mitzpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one (yachid) and only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.”

Jephthah had only one daughter.

The clearest OT reference to the Trinity is found in this startling passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 48:12-16

“Listen to me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first and I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand together. Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall carry his good pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and he will make his ways successful. Come near to Me and listen to this: from the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place I was there. And now the LORD God has sent Me, and His Spirit.”

The person speaking in this passage is the Lord God. This can be shown in two ways. First, the speaker claims to have founded the earth and spread out the heavens. Second, the speaker refers to himself as *“the first and I am also the last.”* This same terminology is used to refer to the Lord, the King of Israel in *Isaiah 44:6*. But then, in v. 16, the person speaking says, *“the LORD God has sent Me and His Spirit.”* So the Lord God has sent the Lord God and His Spirit, i.e., the Spirit of the Lord God. There are three persons described here, and it appears that the person speaking, the Lord God, is the Servant of the Lord spoken throughout *Isaiah 40-53*, that is Jesus the Messiah, the King. God the Father, the other Lord God, has sent Jesus, the Messiah, and the other Lord God, the Holy Spirit. Here we catch a glimpse of the mystery of three persons in one God that is described in the OT.

The clearest NT reference to the Trinity is found during the baptism of Jesus:

Matthew 3:16-17

“And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him; and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

This passage clearly distinguishes the three persons in the Godhead appearing simultaneously together.

3.3 God is a living spirit

Some people are willing to admit there is a “God”, but what they mean by “God” are the laws of nature. This is where the term “Mother Nature” comes from. The Bible is abundantly clear in saying that God is not a blind force, but that He lives (is able to interact with His creation) and is a person.

Genesis 1:1-5

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and morning, one day.”

The Spirit of God acts independently of His creation.

Jeremiah 10:10

“But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.”

John 4:24

“God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.”

Our God is a living Spirit in contrast to the heathen gods, which are made of wood or stone. From *Luke 24:39* we know that a spirit is a non-material, yet personal being.

3.4 God is eternal

Unlike us, our eternal God has always existed, and God the Word was the agent, the first cause, of the creation:

Psalms 90:2

“Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.”

John 1:1-3

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

3.5 God is completely self-sufficient

Acts 17:24-25

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things.”

During the Apostle Paul’s address to the Athenians, Paul makes it clear that God does not need us. On the contrary, we depend on Him for everything. Our very bodies, the earth we live on, the air we breathe, the food we eat, and the clothes we wear all come from His hand.

3.6 God is almighty

There are several categories that can be used to describe God’s power.

All-powerful (Omnipotent)

This means that God can do anything that infinite power can do. This does not mean logical impossibilities or that God can do anything, for example, evil.

Revelation 19:6

“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.’”

Psalms 19:1

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His Hands.”

Jeremiah 32:17

“Ah Lord God! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee.”

Romans 1:20

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

The creation of our world and the universe proclaim the majesty and power of our God. God created the universe *ex nihilo*, from nothing (*John 1:1-3*).

Job 42:1-2

“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, ‘I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted.’”

No purpose of all mighty God can be thwarted.

John 10:27-29

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

These reassuring words of Jesus bring us peace, knowing that God’s omnipotence protects us, preserves us, and gives us the assurance of our salvation.

Everywhere present (Omnipresent)

Psalms 139:7-12

“Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to Thee, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to Thee.”

2 Chronicles 16:9

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

Jeremiah 23:23-24

“‘Am I a God who is near’, declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far off’? Can a man hide himself in hiding places, so I do not see him’? Declares the LORD. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth’? Declares the LORD.”

The Lord is everywhere present in His creation, yet distinct from it. Buswell has coined the term “everything in His presence” as an aid to understanding this concept. (James O. Buswell *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1962, pp. 38-39.) Buswell writes:

“I find it helpful to express the omnipresence of God by the thought that everything in the entire universe is immediately in His presence. As I work at my desk, everything on the desk is immediately in my presence. Of course, there are space relationships. I reach for my pen; I arrange papers; but for all practical purposes space is no problem—it is all in my presence.”

Is God in hell? This is a question that comes up when discussing the omnipresence of God. The Scriptures teach that God is everywhere present, as we have seen above. Consider the following two passages:

Revelation 14:8-10

“And another angel, a second one, followed them saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.’ And another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he will also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.’”

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10

“And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.”

Clearly God, in a spatial sense, is present in both heaven and hell, but the manifestation of His presence is very different. In hell, God’s wrath and justice are being administered to the unbelievers. In heaven, God’s blessings are bestowed upon the saints.

The prophet, Jonah, did not fully grasp this doctrine. When he was called by God to preach to Nineveh, the great city, Jonah decided to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord (*Jonah 1:3*). He was not successful. God is everywhere present, which should be a great comfort to us in good times and in difficult times.

Finally, a Christian bookstore employed the knowledge of this doctrine to discourage those who might be tempted to shoplift by posting the following sign in plain view: “We are not watching, but God is.”

All wise (Omniscient)

Proverbs 21:30

“There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD.”

There is no wisdom that can stand against the Lord; He is all knowing.

Hosea 7:1-2

“When I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, and the evil deeds of Samaria, for they deal falsely; the thief enters in, bandits raid outside, and they do not consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness. Now all their deeds are all around them; they are before My face.”

God knows all, and nothing will escape the Divine bar of justice.

Isaiah 40:12-17

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills on a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, and informed Him of the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from the bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless.”

Man cannot measure the size of the universe, or measure the dust of the earth, or weigh the mountains and hills in a scale. The wisdom of man and the nations of the world are as nothing before Him.

Psalms 147:4-5

“He counts the number of stars; He gives names to all of them. Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite.”

According to NASA (https://helios.gsfc.nasa.gov/qa_star.html#howmany accessed 7/5/19) there is estimated to be ten billion galaxies in the observable universe. Assuming an average of one hundred billion stars per galaxy, our galaxy, the Milky Way and our neighbor, the Andromeda galaxy, both contain this number of stars, the estimated number of stars in our observable universe is one thousand billion billion stars (10^{21} total). Our great and wonderful Lord has created and named all the stars.

Romans 11:33-36

“Oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

After 11 chapters of biblical doctrine, the Apostle Paul makes this inescapable conclusion. *Soli Deo Gloria, Amen.*

Transcendent and Immanent

Transcendent means that God stands outside His creation and is distinct from it. He is not bound within it, nor is He subject to its constraints. Immanent means that God is actively involved in His creation.

Psalm 102:25-27

“Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of your hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end.”

The universe will wear out without God’s intervention. This passage states that God created and upholds the universe and sustains it, but He remains the same. Scientists speculate that the earth will become an uninhabitable hot cinder someday, due to the expansion of the radius our sun, when it burns up its finite supply of hydrogen fuel. The above passage states that God has the power to intervene according to His will. God’s will is never limited by the physical laws He has created. He can bring new hydrogen/energy into the universe anytime because our God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

1 Kings 19:9-12

“Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ And he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’ So He said, ‘Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of gentle blowing.”

God appears to Elijah to encourage him. God is clearly distinct from His creation, yet He interacts with it.

Job 12:10

“In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?”

Acts 17:24-28

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the

earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring.’”

Ephesians 4:4-6

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Colossians 1:13-17

“For He 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. And He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Hebrews 1:1-4

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; having inherited a more excellent name than they.”

God is the Creator of all things, including life, and upholds all things by His power.

Sovereign

The Lord alone rules the universe. He alone decrees what will happen as shown below from the Lord’s message through Jeremiah the prophet to the kings of the nations:

Jeremiah 27:1-5

“In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying—thus says the LORD to me—‘Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck, and send word to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the sons of Ammon, to the king of Tyre, and to the king of Sidon by the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. And command them to go to their masters, saying ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, thus you shall say to your masters: ‘I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.’”’”

In the next passage, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, previously had made an unholy alliance with Ahab, king of Israel. King Jehoshaphat visits King Ahab who desires King Jehoshaphat to join him in battle against Ramoth-gilead. The false prophets before them are saying to go forward in battle, whereas King Jehoshaphat asks that they inquire of a prophet of the Lord. King Ahab suggests Micaiah, son of Imla, whom King Ahab hates because he never prophecies good concerning King Ahab. King Jehoshaphat prevails in the matter, and Micaiah the prophet is brought before both kings.

2 Chronicles 18:18-22

“And Micaiah said, ‘Therefore hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right and on His left. ‘And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this and another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ And the LORD said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ The He said, ‘You are to entice him and prevail also. Go and do so.’” Now therefore, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; for the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you.”

As predicted later in the passage by Micaiah, King Ahab is killed in battle. This passage vividly and clearly demonstrates the sovereignty of God, in both the material and spirit world.

Job 1:6-12

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’ And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.’ Then Satan answered the LORD, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’ So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.”

God has complete power over Satan and can limit the evil one as He chooses. The narrative continues through Job chapter two, where the Lord permits Satan to afflict Job with boils. The problem of evil in the world continues to be a vexing problem for both the believer and the non-believer. People will ask if a loving God is in control, then why is there so much evil, and why is God not the blameworthy cause of all the evil we see around us? To answer this, we first need to consider God’s will.

God's will(s):

Preceptive will of God: Characterized by His precepts or laws (perfect will). This does not take into account man's sinful nature.

Ezekiel 33:11

"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"

2 Peter 3:9

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Permissive will of God: That which God allows to happen outside of His preceptive will. This does take into account man's sinful nature.

Matthew 11:20-26

"Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall DESCEND TO HADES; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which had occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.' At that time Jesus answered and said, 'I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to the babes. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.'"

Matthew 19:3-8

"And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?' And He answered and said, 'Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE', and said, 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? Consequently they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE AND DIVORCE HER?' He said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.'"

In *Matthew 19* we see the distinction God's preceptive and permissive wills. God's preceptive will is marriage for a lifetime. God's permissive will is that divorce is allowed due to hardness of heart.

Decretive Will of God: All that happens and all, which will glorify the Lord.

Isaiah 14:24-27

"The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, 'Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, to break Assyria in My land, and I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?'"

Psalms 76:10

"For the wrath of man shall praise Thee; with a remnant of wrath Thou shalt gird Thyself."

Proverbs 16:1-4

"The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the LORD weighs the motives. Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established. The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Romans 9:22-24

"What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

The above passages make it clear that God has chosen to tolerate evil for a season in order to bring salvation to man. The Lord is in absolute control but has permitted some people to have their own way within the limits He has placed. God's final judgment of this evil and rebellion will glorify Him. The reason there is so much evil in the world is that mankind has chosen to sin and rebel against God. God made man; man chose to sin. The blameworthy cause of evil solely falls upon man, not God. Rather than judge the entire human race after the Fall of man, God has endured the evil of man and the vessels of wrath so that He can show the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy. What is absolutely amazing is that anyone can be saved, as we all rightfully deserve His wrath and judgment. It was only through our Lord Jesus Christ, who took God's wrath and

judgment on the cross, as He bore our sins on His body, and through His resurrection, that salvation became possible to man. Amen!

3.7 God is absolute (does not change)

Malachi 3:6

“For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

1 Samuel 15:29

“And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.”

Numbers 23:19

“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

We can trust the Lord, for He, unlike sinful man, does not ever lie or change His mind. Our assurance of salvation rests squarely on this aspect of God’s faithfulness. If God has said it, then we can depend on it. Here are a couple of other verses to encourage us as we near the end of our lives:

Isaiah 46:3-4

“Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, you who have been borne by Me from birth, and have been carried from the womb; even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.”

Psalms 37:25

“I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, or his descendants begging bread.”

There is a passage of Scripture where it states that God changed His mind, for example:

Exodus 32:14

“So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.”

In this passage (*Exodus 32:9-14*), God tells Moses that He is going to destroy Israel and form a nation from Moses’ descendants. Moses entreats the Lord and recalls God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Israel. Moses was concerned that it would appear to the Egyptians that God delivered the nation Israel out of Egypt, only to destroy them in the mountains. In light of *Malachi 3:6* and *1 Samuel 15:29*, God is merely testing Moses with this offer and has no intention of changing His plan. Perhaps this was used of the

Lord to remind Moses of His promise to the patriarchs, as tougher times lie ahead when God's people rebel against the Lord in the wilderness. Testing Moses with this offer does not mean that God changes.

That God keeps His promises was shown to Israel after they took possession of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua:

Joshua 21:43-45

“So the LORD gave Israel all the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they possessed it and lived in it. And the LORD gave rest on every side, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers, and no one of all their enemies stood before them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hand. Not one of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; all came to pass.”

God has shown before that He keeps His promises. Looking to the future of our redemption in Christ, which the Holy Spirit sealed, we can be confident that God will keep His promise to redeem us when the day approaches. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ (*Romans 8:31-39*).

3.8 God is the final judge

Ezekiel 18:29-30

“But the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you.”

When life does not go our way, faultfinding with others and particularly with God is common. The problem is not with me, but it is with God and His laws. We must not judge God as the Israelites did; we must accept Him as He is and repent, for it does not help us to be stubborn and play the blame game.

Psalms 37:28

“For the LORD loves justice, and does not forsake His godly ones; they are preserved forever; but the seed of the wicked will be cut off.”

Galatians 6:7

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”

Hebrews 10:31

“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Justice is something that we only seem to understand when it decides in our favor. The fact that God is just is both fearful and comforting, knowing that evil will be judged and not prevail in the end.

3.9 God is holy

The word translated holy in English from the Hebrew and Greek words means set apart from evil and defilement, sacred.

Isaiah 6:1-5

“In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood before Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to the other and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.’”

In this epic throne room scene, God’s holiness and glory is on full display. Evil has no place in God’s holy temple. Isaiah notes God’s holiness exposes the evil present in Isaiah and his people.

Holiness is God’s central attribute; He cannot look upon evil:

Habakkuk 1:13

“Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallowed up those more righteous than they?”

God is holy, and we cannot enter His presence without holiness:

Hebrews 12:14

“Pursue after peace with all men, and after the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”

We cannot be with Christ forever in heaven unless we are holy. God’s redemptive plan includes both justification and sanctification. God is already preparing us for heaven while we are here on earth:

Malachi 3:2-4

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.”

God will purify the Levites. He will also purify us:

Hebrews 12:1-11

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not resisted to the point of shedding blood, in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

God is refining us now so we can partake of His holiness. The Fall in Adam was so catastrophic that God sent His Son to redeem us and His Holy Spirit to sanctify us, without which we would never see the Lord in heaven. The time spent in this life is to prepare us to share in His wonderful holiness in eternity. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us:

Hebrews 12:28-29

“Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.”

As we prepare to meet the Lord in the kingdom of heaven, clothed with the righteousness of Christ and the holiness of God, let us strive to give of our best to the Master.

3.10 God is perfect

Deuteronomy 32:1-4

“Give ear, oh heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the droplets on the fresh grass and as the showers on the herb. For I proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.”

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR, AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you; in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same? And if greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

His faithfulness, justice, righteousness, and uprightness demonstrate God’s perfect character. This character is demonstrated by loving all people. God calls us to be perfect as He is perfect, by loving our neighbor and our enemies. The following passages below extend how we can be perfect, as He is perfect, by being faithful to the Lord at work:

Daniel 6:3-5

“Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. Then these men said, ‘We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.’”

Daniel’s faithful work ethic was extraordinary, and unlike other public officials, he refused to let power corrupt him. He played by the rules, and the only hope they had to trap Daniel was in relation to God’s laws.

Colossians 3:23-24

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Unlike your boss at work, your boss in heaven sees everything you say, do and think. Remember, you work for a Jewish carpenter; give Him your best and He will reward you.

3.11 God is righteous

God is righteous, not only because He is actively opposed to all evil, but also because He actively embraces good as defined by the Scriptures.

Psalm 33:4-5

“For the word of the LORD is upright; and all His work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the LORD.”

Psalm 45:6-7

“Thy throne, O God, is forever and forever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows.”

The above passage is quoted in *Hebrews 1:8-9* and applied to the Son, Jesus Christ. The gospel is a clear demonstration of the Lord’s righteousness imputed to man as described in the passage below:

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”

3.12 God is love

The wonderful love of God is demonstrated by sending His precious Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected for our justification. God’s love for us is more than feelings. His love is sacrificial at the core and totally undeserved to lost sinners:

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

Romans 5:6-8

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

The following passage states that “God is love,” and that we should love another as God has loved us. Love from God is a gift to us:

1 John 4:7-11

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and every one who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

3.13 God is light

It is impossible to see objects without light. Unless the object glows or is illuminated with a light source, it cannot be seen. This can be easily demonstrated by working inside a photographic darkroom, which is sealed to prevent any light from outside to enter the room. Prior to the advent of digital photography, virtually all photographs were taken with film cameras. The film would be subsequently developed and printed in a dark room to prevent exposure of the film to ambient light. It is very strange to work in a darkroom, as no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot see anything. You work by feel and hopefully remember where the developer, fixer and water bath are before you turn the light off and open the film cassette.

Light is often used as a metaphor for God’s truth in the Scriptures, as shown below. God’s word illumines a dark and sinful world desperately in need of redemption:

1 John 1:5-8

“And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

John 1:1-5

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it.”

John 8:12

“Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life.’”

Ephesians 5:13-14

“But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘AWAKE, SLEEPER, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST WILL SHINE ON YOU.’”

James 1:17

“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”

There is also a literal association of light with God as seen below:

Exodus 13:21

“And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.”

Psalms 104:1-2

“Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, Thou art very great. Thou art clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Thyself with light as a cloak, stretching out heaven like a tent curtain.”

1 Timothy 6:13-16

“I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate; that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”

Matthew 17:1-2

“And six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light.”

Revelation 22:5

“And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.”

Finally, the last two Scripture verses quoted from the Psalms speak of the majesty of God’s creation:

Psalms 8:3

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and stars, which Thou hast ordained;”

Psalms 19:1

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands.”

It is possible to see approximately two thousand stars on a clear evening with the naked eye. The advent of powerful telescopes has enabled astronomers to see deep into space, where billions of galaxies with billions of stars can be seen. Our God has created an enormous amount of light emitting stars in a vast universe. Light seems very central to His being. He has created many lights. *Soli Deo Gloria*, Amen!

3.14 God is gracious and merciful

The Lord reminds us that He is gracious:

Exodus 34:6-7

“Then the LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’”

Ezekiel 33:10-11

“Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus you have spoken, saying, ‘Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?’” ‘Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the LORD God,

‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

Here, we see the balance of God’s mercy and justice: for those who repent, God has paid the penalty that justice requires so that He can be gracious; for those who will not, God lets them have their own way so that they receive the just punishment that they deserve.

Jesus considered mercy a most important attribute. He admonished the Pharisees, because they missed this quality of God, and thus failed to develop it in themselves:

Matthew 12:1-7

“At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grain fields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, ‘Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”

3.15 God is wonderful and to be praised

The Lord hears our prayers, cries and concerns and always has our back. We should honor Him always.

Psalm 116

***“I love the LORD, because He hears my voice and my supplications.
Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore, I shall call upon Him as long as I live.
The cords of death encompassed me, and the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow.
Then I called upon the name of the LORD: ‘O LORD, I beseech Thee, save my life!’
Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes our God is compassionate. The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and he saved me.
Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.***

*For Thou hast rescued my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.
 I shall walk before the LORD in the land of the living.
 I believed when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted.'
 I said in my alarm, 'All men are liars.'
 What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?
 I shall lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.
 I shall pay my vows to the LORD, Oh may it be in the presence of all His people.
 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.
 O LORD, surely I am Thy servant, I am Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaid, Thou has loosed my bonds.
 To Thee I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the LORD.
 I shall pay my vows to the LORD; Oh may it be in the presence of all His people.
 In the courts of the LORD's house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
 Praise the LORD!"*

Romans 11:33-36

"Oh the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

3.16 Summary

We now have a glimpse of who God is and what He is like. Continued study of the Scriptures will help us better understand God. We live in a fallen world and sometimes this world can be pretty tough, especially when we take a stand to live for the Lord and for righteousness. The Apostle Paul writes:

2 Timothy 3:10-12

"But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

All Christians who desire to live godly lives will experience persecution in their lives. This should not come as a surprise to us. Knowing God through His word and having a personal relationship with Him will help you through the difficult times. I have found the following Scriptures to be helpful:

Psalm 84:11-12

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

O LORD of hosts, How blessed is the man who trusts in Thee!”

This is a verse to take to heart. If we trust Him, and turn from sin, He promises to withhold no truly good thing from us.

It is great to know the Lord, and in light of all His promises to us, remember, when we do not obtain the things we desire, it may be that God has something better in store for us.

Romans 8:28-31

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”

For those who are saved, God is on our side; He is molding us and training us up to share in His holiness and righteousness (*Hebrews 12:5-11*). Since God is for us nothing can be against us to thwart His will in our lives. The instant that things get rough in our life, we tend to forget that the LORD is still in control and is shaping these events so we can grow. Read and consider the following passages:

Romans 5:1-10

Isaiah 41:10

Psalm 73:21-24

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Psalm 113

The God who really lives is a truly great God! The most sensible thing that we can do is to seek Him, trust Him, repent from our wicked ways, and obey Him.

3.17 Appendix: God’s disposition towards evil

As we saw in section 3.12, God is love. Most people like to think of God as love and this is certainly true (*John 3:16, 1 John 4:7-21*). Unfortunately, the Scriptural teaching of God’s love can be misunderstood so that the unsaved world views the God of the Bible as a soft, almost sentimental person. Obviously, this is dangerous, because it gives people the impression that they can live as they please now, and on Judgment day God will forgive them.

We also saw in sections 3.8 and 3.11 that God is the final and righteous judge. In addition to God's amazing love, He is also opposed to all evil. All evil and evildoers will be judged. The following verses are intended to help us see how the Lord views evil and evildoers.

Psalm 110:1

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'"

Who are the Lord's enemies?

Those who do wickedness

Psalm 45:6-7

"Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Thy Kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of joy above Thy fellows."

Satan and his angels

Revelation 12:7-12

"And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.'"

Friends of the world

James 4:4

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Fleshly-minded (pleasure-centered people)

Romans 8:5-8

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

All unsaved people (even people prior to their conversion to Christ)

Colossians 1:21-23

“And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I Paul was made a minister.”

Romans 5:8-10

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

John 3:36

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Ephesians 2:1-5

“And you were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we dead in our transgressions, made us alive together in Christ (by grace you have been saved),”

God’s wrath is upon sinners and not just their sin. Because of His great mercy, His wrath, for the most part, remains in abeyance until sinners are converted to Him. It is taken away by the wrath averting sacrifice of the Son, or fully expressed, when sinners finally reject Him and are punished in hell for eternity upon their demise.

What is God's attitude towards evildoers?

Psalm 5:4-6

“For Thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with thee. The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity. Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

Psalm 11:5

“The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.”

Leviticus 20:23

“Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I shall drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them.”

Proverbs 6:16-19

“There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.”

Deuteronomy 18:12

“For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you.”

John 3:36

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

What is God's intent concerning His enemies?

They should be made Christ's footstool

Psalm 110:1

“The LORD says to My Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.”

Destruction and suffering under His wrath

Psalm 5:6

“Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.”

Revelation 20:10

“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Isaiah 66:24

“Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.”

Isaiah 63:3-4

“I have trodden the wine trough alone, and from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath; and their life blood is sprinkled on My garments, and I stained all My raiment. For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and My year of redemption has come.”

No mercy toward those who continue to reject the Lord and provoke Him to anger

Ezekiel 8:16-18

“Then He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house. And behold, at the entrance of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs to the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east; and they were prostrating themselves eastward toward the sun. And he said to me, ‘Do you see this, son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations, which they have committed here, that they have filled the land with violence and provoked Me repeatedly? For behold, they are putting a twig to their nose. Therefore, I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them.’”

What chance is there to escape?

Repentance

Acts 3:19

“Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”

Believing that He died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of

first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

Romans 5:1

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are at peace through faith, otherwise, we remain at war with Him (*John 3:36, Matt. 12:30*). There is no middle ground.

Conclusion

God abhors evil and evildoers, and yet, at the same time, loves sinners and desires that they not perish, but come to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Sinners have only this life to decide to repent and live. Choose life that you may live through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

4. Jesus Christ of Nazareth

Memory verses: *Isaiah 9:6, John 8:24, 58*

Who is Jesus Christ? Was he God incarnate or just another spiritual teacher? Was he just a role model or a Savior from our sins? Was he just another god or a member of the triune Godhead?

Many different religions embrace Jesus and some of his teachings; some believe he was a good man, while others believe he was a prophet. Many would claim that he was nothing more than a Jewish rabbi.

Rather than seek opinions from many about Jesus, conduct Google searches over the Internet, or create Jesus in our own image, we must go directly to God's revelation to man, the Bible, to truly understand the person of Jesus Christ. We saw from Section 2.1 that Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. In this section, we take a deeper dive into the most fascinating individual who walked the earth over 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

4.1 The Word of God

John 1:1-17

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

This opening passage from the gospel of John reveals an interesting person named “the Word”. The Word was with God and the Word was God. There are two distinct persons mentioned in this passage—God and the Word who is also God. As long as God has existed, so has the Word. Thus, the Word is co-eternal with God. The Word has created the universe, shines in the darkness and illumines every man. Finally, we learn the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. This interesting person named the Word is Jesus Christ.

4.2 Second person of the Trinity

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

In this passage we observe the harmonious work of the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. See also section 3.2.

4.3 God the Son

Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Godhead, has the particular role of God the Son in the harmonious work of the Trinity. Being of the same nature as the other two members of the Godhead, the Second Person assumed the role of an obedient son to God the Father. Recall that God the Father sent both God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to earth to perform the Father’s will (*Isaiah 48:12-16* and Section 3.2).

Matthew 3:16-17

“And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him; and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

Matthew 17:1-5

“And six days later Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was

still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear Him!’”

During the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father calls Jesus His Son.

Psalm 2:7

“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee.’”

The Lord says to the one addressed by Him that He is the Lord’s Son and that the Lord has begotten Him. When did this occur?

Acts 13:32-33

“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE.’”

Two important facts are disclosed in this passage from Acts:

The person addressed in *Psalm 2:7* is Jesus. The Lord called Jesus His Son.

It is at the resurrection of Jesus that He is said to be begotten by the Lord in *Psalm 2:7*. The term “begotten” as used in the context of *Psalm 2:7* and *Acts 13:32-33* does not mean that the Lord brought Jesus into existence, but that God the Father raised God the Son from the dead.

John 5:15-19

“The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’ For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. Jesus therefore answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”

The Father declared Jesus His Son (*Psalm 2:7, Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 17:1-5*), which is then affirmed by Jesus in this passage, where Jesus calls God His Father. The Sonship of Christ is declared by the Father and affirmed by the Son.

After Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He healed on the Sabbath and called God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

Jesus states that He and the Father are both working, and that Jesus does what the Father does. If they are going to accuse Jesus of Sabbath-breaking, then they must also accuse the Father. Jesus' line of argumentation has put the Jews in a box. How can the Jews accuse God the Father of breaking the Sabbath?

The inspired commentary in verse 18 states clearly that, in calling God His Father, Jesus was making Himself equal with God. The full impact of Jesus' claim was unmistakable to anyone in the Hebrew culture. In our American culture, we view sons as inferior to their fathers. On the human level this is true in that their fathers bring sons into existence. But in the Jewish culture, a son was thought to be equal to his father—of equal importance and standing before others. Certainly, it is true that a son has the same human nature as his father.

We have previously seen that the Father did not bring the Son, Jesus Christ, into existence. Jesus was in the beginning with God. So, in saying to the Jews that God is His Father, Jesus was saying to them that He is of the same Divine nature, importance, and standing before others as God Himself. For this, the Jews sought to stone Him for blasphemy.

We also see Jesus' obedience and subjection to the will of the Father. Having taken on the position of the Son, Jesus will only do those things which are proper to that position. But observe that these obedient works are the prerogatives of God:

Jesus gives life to those He wishes:

John 5:21

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.”

Isaiah 43:11

“I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides Me.”

Jesus has all judgment committed to Him:

John 5:22

“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son.”

Hebrews 12:22-24

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator

of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

All must honor the Son, even as they honor the Father:

John 5:23

“In order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

Isaiah 42:8

“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.”

Hebrews 1:8-9

“But of the Son He says, ‘THY THRONE O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD HATH ANOINTED THEE WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY COMPANIONS.’”

God Himself calls the Son “God”, which literally in the Greek is “the God.” God Himself equates Jesus’ being the Son to Jesus’ being God. The passage in Isaiah states that the Lord “will not give My glory to another.” Therefore, Jesus is also the Lord.

4.4 Jesus is the promised Messiah

Isaiah 7:14

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

Isaiah 9:6

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

Daniel 9:25-26

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.”

Micah 5:2

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

Isaiah 53:4-6

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

Matthew 1:18-23

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL;’ which translated means ‘GOD WITH US.’”

John 1:40-42

“One of the two who heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He found first his own brother Simon, and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas’ (which translated means Peter).”

In these verses we see that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah that God promised would come to earth.

Matthew 16:13-16

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

Peter's confession of Jesus as the "*Christ, the Son of the living God*" makes it clear that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and is equal to God. Peter's confession is also interesting in that he uses the term "Son of the living God." This draws a clear contrast to the non-living gods of the other nations, which are dead idols.

Acts 3:18-20

"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you."

Peter again confesses Jesus as the Christ during his sermon. God will send Jesus for those who repent and return to the Lord.

4.5 Jesus is the Creator of all things

He made all things

John 1:1-3

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."

The Greek text in verse 3 is emphatic and literally states, "Without Him was not one thing made that has been made." Jesus made the universe, filled with billions of galaxies containing billions of stars, and all the elements *ex nihilo*, from nothing. He made our bodies, which contain trillions of cells. He wrote the genetic code into our DNA using billions of nucleotides. He is the Creator, Designer, and Master Builder. It follows that Jesus has always existed and was never created, as He created all things.

All things were made for Him

Colossians 1:16

"For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him."

Jesus created all things for Himself. By His rights as the Creator, Jesus has a claim on every created being, because He made them for Himself and for His own pleasure. We all belong to Jesus, our Creator and Redeemer.

He holds all things together

Colossians 1:17

“And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

Physicists describe the gravitational forces that hold us to the ground, they describe electromagnetic forces that hold opposite electrical charges together, and they describe the strong and weak nuclear forces that hold the atomic nucleus together. But, they do not know what makes these forces work or what is their source. *Colossians 1:17* tells us that these forces are a manifestation of Jesus’ power, as He “*holds all things together.*” Without His power sustaining the universe, all things would disintegrate.

4.6 Jesus is both fully God and fully man

John 1:1-17

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John. He came for a witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even those who believe in His name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

In this passage, we see that the Word who was God became flesh and dwelt upon the earth. Jesus did not merely put on flesh but became flesh and walked among us. Jesus, as God, became fully man while remaining fully God. Manhood became part of Jesus’ nature upon the incarnation.

Colossians 2:8-9

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”

When Jesus became flesh, His Deity (state of being God the Word) was not reduced in any manner, as He remained fully God in bodily form.

Hebrews 1:1-3

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

This passage complements the *Colossians* 2:8-9 passage, as it states the Son is “*the exact representation of His nature*,” that is, the exact representation of the Father’s nature. The Greek word *charaktēr*, which is translated “*exact representation*,” is an engraving term used in coinage and means the Son bears the very stamp of God. John Calvin, quoting from his commentary on the book of Hebrews (John Calvin *Calvin’s Commentaries*, volume XXII, translator, ed. John Owen, Baker Book House Company: Grand Rapids, reprinted 1984, p. 36), states the following:

“By the second word we are reminded that God is truly and really known in Christ; for he is not his obscure or shadowy image, but his impress which resembles him, as money the impress of the die with which it is stamped. But the apostle indeed says what is more than this, even that the substance of the Father is in a manner engraven on the Son.”

Furthermore, Jesus makes the following point to Philip, consistent with both the *Colossians* and *Hebrews* passages cited above:

John 14:8-9

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.’”

Therefore, it is through Christ, God the Son, that we see God the Father.

Exodus 3:13-14

“Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them? And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

John 8:56-59

“Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad.’ The Jews therefore said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.”

Jesus claimed to be Yahweh by calling Himself by the divine proper name “I AM,” which God revealed Himself to Moses back in the *Exodus 3:13-14* passage. The Jews clearly saw this and picked up stones to kill Jesus for blasphemy, as He was claiming to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Great I AM.

Revelation 1:12-18

“And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breasts with a golden girdle. And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire; and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.’”

Isaiah 44:6

“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the LORD of hosts; ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.’”

The Book of Revelation opens with the glorious introduction of the risen Christ who was dead but now alive forever more. Christ, in this passage, refers to Himself as “the first and the last,” a direct reference to Yahweh (LORD) in the Isaiah passage. Jesus claimed to be Yahweh.

Philippians 2:5-11

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

During the incarnation, Christ existed in the form of God. Jesus retained all the attributes of Deity (see also *Colossians 2:8-9*, *Hebrews 1:1-3* above) when He assumed the attributes of humanity. Jesus laid aside the equality of His position with the Father, not His nature, when He humbly submitted to the Father's will and became a bondservant to purchase the redemption of mankind. The term "emptied Himself" in the context does not mean He emptied Himself of divine attributes to become a man, as advocated by the kenosis theory. Rather, He "emptied Himself" of His exalted position as God and humbled Himself to become a man and die on a cross for our sins. Jesus took on a lowly position on our behalf to be our Savior and Lord. What is so amazing about the love of Christ is that He did this while we were yet sinners, as it is written:

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus assumed a lowly position so we could assume the lofty position as His redeemed sons and daughters of the Most High God. *Soli Deo Gloria*, Amen!

Luke 2:51-52

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."

Jesus increased in wisdom and stature as He grew older. Jesus limited the exercise of His divine powers so that He could learn from experience what it was like to grow up to be a man. Jesus did call upon His divine powers from time to time. For example, Jesus tells Nathaniel where he was standing before he met Jesus (*John 1:50*) and raises Lazarus from the dead (*John 11:38-45*).

A humble position to be held for all eternity

Jesus took on a humbler position than His nature required, even humbling Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (*Philippians 2:8*). The humility of Jesus will last forever, and was not only when He was here on earth:

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. FOR HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, 'All things are put

in subjection,’ it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the one who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.”

When Jesus laid aside the equality of His position with the Father so that He could die on a cross and rise from the dead to save us, He assumed an eternal position of humility before God the Father. We should be so ever grateful that our Savior humbled Himself so that we can become children of God. Praise be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary

Luke 1:30-35

“And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end.’ And Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.’”

Matthew 1:18-25

“Now the birth of Jesus was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL’; which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’ And Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took her as his wife; and kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

The virgin birth of Jesus had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (*Isaiah 7:14*) and took place in fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit and not through human sexual relations. Mary remained a virgin until after the birth of Jesus.

Jesus was sinless in birth and life

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

1 Peter 1:17-19

“And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

In these passages above we see that Christ was sinless, unblemished and spotless, so that He could bear our sin. This is very important to satisfy God’s holiness, as we also saw in the Old Testament sacrifices that the sin and burnt offerings had to be without defect to be acceptable to God (*Leviticus 9:2-3*).

Hebrews 4:14-16

“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Because Jesus suffered and was subject to the same problems and temptations as we are, yet without sin, He can comfort us and provide grace in time of need to help us survive life’s challenges. We can approach His throne of grace at any time and at any place, with full confidence that He can meet our every need.

Psalms 55:22

“Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

The Lord has our back; He lives to sustain us even when the earth trembles.

4.7 Jesus died and rose from the dead

Jesus died voluntarily on the cross

John 10:14-18

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one Shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”

Jesus planned purposefully and willfully to give His life to purchase the redemption of those who would repent and put their trust in Him. Jesus did this in obedience to the Father.

Jesus rose from the dead in victory over sin and death

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even has Christ been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain; your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave, as observed by over 500 eyewitnesses. His physical bodily resurrection was absolutely essential for forgiveness of our sins. Without His resurrection, we would still be in our sins. Recall that Jesus bore our sins on his body on the cross and died. His resurrection proves that He was able to pay for our sins and satisfy the requirements of the law that sin must be atoned for in order to secure forgiveness. Because Christ was raised, so we, who have put our faith in Christ, will also be raised (*1 Corinthians 15:50-58*).

4.8 Jesus Christ is the only mediator

John 14:5-6

“Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.’”

Acts 4:8-12

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED BY YOU, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.’”

1 Timothy 2:5

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

There is one and only one way to God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, who died and rose on our behalf. We cannot approach God the Father without the forgiveness of sins atoned for by Jesus Christ. Hence, when we pray to God our Father in Heaven, we pray in the name above all names, Jesus Christ our Lord.

4.9 Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior

Philippians 2:5-11

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the

name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus has lordship over everyone.

John 20:24-28

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

The story of Thomas, the skeptic, illustrates the Lord’s patience with those who do not believe. Jesus addressed Thomas’ doubts directly by allowing Thomas to put his finger where the nails were and put his hand in the side of Jesus that was pierced by the Roman sword. Thomas then declares that Jesus is his Lord and God.

4.10 Summary

Jesus, fully God and fully man, created the universe and everything in it. He worked many miracles and fulfilled the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament to provide evidence for a sound faith in Him. He died for sins on the cross and rose from the dead. Through these evidences we can be assured God’s word is true and that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Savior. If you have not done so already, repent and come to Jesus now for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

5. The Holy Spirit

Memory verses: *1 John 4:1, Galatians 5:22-23*

Who is the Holy Spirit? What role does He play in my life? It is fashionable today among charismatic organizations and even adherents to the Mormon religion, to claim that God told me to do or believe this or that. Is that really how the Holy Spirit operates today? The Book of Mormon contains the following passage from Moroni 10:4:

“And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

In our personal encounter with the Mormon elders, they attempted to proselytize us and insisted we pray this prayer from Moroni 10:4. We kindly explained to them that praying about something does not make something true. We are never asked in the Bible to pray about something to make it true. The Mormon elders refused to speak with us further after we declined their “prayer of truth” exercise. It can be easily shown that the Mormon religion, based upon their prophet Joseph Smith, is a false religion. Joseph Smith taught that there are many gods. The Bible warns us to test the spirits to see if they are from God (*1 John 4:1*). The Bible also warns us that we should have nothing to do with anyone who wants us to follow other gods (see *Deuteronomy 13:1-4*). Joseph Smith was a false prophet, as he had counseled rebellion against the Lord (*Deuteronomy 13:5*). Therefore, we must only rely on what can be proven with testable evidence, and not trust in experiences or feelings that cannot be validated (*Isaiah 8:20, 1 Corinthians 14:37-38*).

5.1 The attributes of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is omnipresent (everywhere present)

Psalm 139:7-10

“Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me, and Thy right hand will lay hold of me.”

The Holy Spirit is with us wherever we may be, whether in a spacecraft to Mars, or in a submarine to the bottom of the ocean. At times when you feel lonely, isolated, or left out, the Holy Spirit is always present to minister to you. If you feel alone, ask yourself a question. Who is hiding? He is always there to lead and hold you, regardless how you may think or feel, as He is omnipresent. That is a very comforting truth from *Psalm 139*.

The Holy Spirit is omniscient (all-knowing)

Isaiah 40:13-14

“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding?”

There is no one who can inform the Holy Spirit, as He is by His very nature, all-knowing. Scientists have made exciting discoveries about the world we live in, from the discovery of General Relativity to DNA, the genetic material that contains the code of life. Scientists simply discover what the Holy Spirit already knows.

Isaiah 11:1-2

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the LORD.”

In this Messianic passage, we see the Spirit of the Lord resting on the Messiah. Here we see the attributes of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength and knowledge.

The Holy Spirit is omnipotent (all-powerful)

Job 33:4

“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Psalms 104:30

“Thou dost send forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou dost renew the face of the ground.”

The power of the Holy Spirit is shown in His involvement in the creation of living animals and sea creatures.

The Holy Spirit is eternal

Hebrews 9:13-14

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

This verse simply states that Jesus offered Himself through the eternal Spirit. The Holy Spirit is eternal, i.e., always existed, never created.

The Holy Spirit has self-will

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

In this passage, we see that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to Christians as He wills. The Holy Spirit is not merely a messenger from God, like the angels, but rather, actually decides which gifts to distribute to individual Christians.

The Holy Spirit is a person

John 16:13-14

“But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.”

Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit through the use of the pronoun “He”. The consistent use of the pronoun “He”, when referring to the Holy Spirit, is strong evidence that the Holy Spirit is a person and not a blind force. The personhood of the Holy Spirit is further supported with His self-will as shown above. In addition, the Holy Spirit can be grieved and quenched by the sinfulness of man as shown below.

Isaiah 63:10

“But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy, He fought against them.”

Israel’s sinful rebellion not only grieved the Holy Spirit, but also resulted in the Holy Spirit becoming their enemy.

Ephesians 4:30

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

1 Thessalonians 5:19

“Do not quench the Spirit.”

We would be wise to follow and obey the Scriptures lest we be found to be quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God

Acts 5:1-4

“But a certain man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife’s full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.’”

As can be seen in the above passage, lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God.

2 Corinthians 6:16

“Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.’”

1 Corinthians 6:19

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”

These passages teach that the body of a Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. The Apostle Paul is quoting the Old Testament, probably from *Leviticus 26* and/or *Ezekiel 37*, as shown below.

Leviticus 26:11-13

“Moreover, I will make My dwelling among you, and My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that you should not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.”

Ezekiel 37:24-28

“And My servant David will be king over them, and they will have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it

will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”

In both these passages, the LORD (Yahweh) is speaking as the person who will dwell among His people. The Holy Spirit indwelling Christians has fulfilled Yahweh’s promise, according to the Apostle Paul. For this to be true, the Holy Spirit is Yahweh.

2 Corinthians 3:15-18

“But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; BUT WHENEVER A MAN TURNS TO THE LORD, THE VEIL IS TAKEN AWAY. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

The Apostle Paul’s assertion that the “Lord is the Spirit” is a clear statement that the Holy Spirit is God.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity

Isaiah 48:12-16

“Listen to me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first and I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together. Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall carry his good pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be against the Chaldeans. I, even I, have spoken; indeed I have called him, I have brought him, and he will make his ways successful. Come near to Me and listen to this: from the first I have not spoken in secret, from the time it took place I was there. And now the LORD God has sent Me, and His Spirit.”

The person speaking in this passage is the Lord God. This can be shown in two ways. First, the speaker claims to have founded the earth and spread out the heavens. Second, the speaker refers to himself as “the first and I am also the last.” This same terminology is used to refer to the Lord, the King of Israel in *Isaiah 44:6*. But then, in v. 16, the person speaking says, “*the LORD God has sent Me and His Spirit.*” So the Lord God has sent the Lord God and His Spirit, i.e., the Spirit of the Lord God. There are three persons described here, and it appears that the person speaking, the Lord God, is the Servant of the Lord spoken throughout *Isaiah 40-53*, that is Jesus the Messiah, the King. God the Father, the other Lord God, has sent Jesus, the Messiah, and the other Lord God, the Holy Spirit. Here we catch a glimpse of the mystery of three persons in one God that is described in the OT.

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Jesus instructs His disciples to baptize “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” In this instruction, we see the co-equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit should be believed in, loved, obeyed and worshipped.

2 Corinthians 13:14

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

1 Peter 1:1-2

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

These passages give us a glimpse of how the three persons of the Trinity work in the life of a believer. Specifically, in the Peter passage, believers are chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father, sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. In other words, the Father is the Elector, the Son is the Savior and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier.

5.2 The Holy Spirit authored the Scriptures

2 Peter 1:20-21

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Greek word that is usually translated “*interpretation*” is better translated “*origination*,” based upon the context of this passage, see verse 21. The Scripture is not an act of the human will, but men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Zechariah 7:12

“And they made their hearts like flint so that they could not hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets; therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.”

When the people of Israel would not listen to the prophets, they hardened themselves against “*the words, which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets.*” The Holy Spirit worked through the prophets so that the very words spoken were those of God. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 2:9-13

“But just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ For to us God revealed them through His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”

The Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God and communicates to us through the Scriptures. That is why it is important to be in God’s word daily.

5.3 The Holy Spirit’s ministry in the world

Limits Satan

Matthew 12:28

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Jesus uses the power of the Holy Spirit to cast out demons.

1 John 4:1-4

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer is greater than Satan in the world. The Holy Spirit enables the believer to overcome the false spirits and prophets in the world.

Convicts men of sin

John 16:7-11

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.”

2 Timothy 2:24-26

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

The Holy Spirit grants people repentance through the conviction of their sin and God’s righteousness and judgment. Our mission, as believers, is to share the gospel in a loving manner and avoid quarrels. My wife and I recall sharing Christ with her father many years ago, on many occasions. On this particular occasion, he remarked that the gospel was a “crutch.” We simply let his remark go and realized that was as far as we could go with the gospel on that day. Others have trivialized the gospel by stating, “If I don’t get the ticket, I do not go to heaven.” Our best advice is to let go of these comments, knowing full well that only the Holy Spirit, and not our skill in presenting the gospel, leads people to repentance and faith in Jesus.

We did later ask our Pastor how he might reply to someone who considers the gospel a “crutch.” Our Pastor replied, “If it is a crutch, you’d better get one.” The world has many names for the gospel. The Bible calls it the “good news.”

2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

Even though the salvation of men is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to be diligent in handling the word accurately, as we witness to people. We should study God’s word in order to bring the good news, in the most accurate manner, to a lost world. God will use your witness to further His kingdom.

Testifies of Jesus

John 15:26-27

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

John 16:12-14

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.”

Jesus made these statements to the apostles at the Last Supper. The Holy Spirit bears witness of Jesus and glorifies Him.

5.4 The Holy Spirit’s ministry to believers in Jesus

The Holy Spirit indwells believers

Romans 5:3-5

“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations; knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint; because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Romans 8:9-11

“However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if 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 indwells you.”

2 Timothy 1:14

“Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

These passages teach the amazing truth that God, the Holy Spirit, lives in the body of a Christian. The Holy Spirit indwells us. God is always near, as He now lives within us to minister to us. We should live to glorify God with our bodies, calling upon the Helper to strengthen our faith in the midst of life's trials.

The Holy Spirit was received by faith when we believed in Jesus

Acts 2:36-38

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Galatians 3:13-14

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERY ONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Ephesians 1:13-14

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Ephesians 4:30

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”

The verses above clearly state that the Holy Spirit indwells a believer upon their conversion through repentance and faith. No “second blessing” is necessary to have the Holy Spirit; He seals us as a pledge of our inheritance from God until the day of redemption.

God’s anointing and sealing of believers signifies that God is assuring us that we will make it through to the day of redemption without being lost along the way. The power of perseverance of the saints is a gift from God and is not due to some innate power within us. Our security in Christ is solely due to His great love, power, mercy, grace and

election. God seals us with His Spirit, so that we can be safe and secure until the day of redemption. A true believer in Christ can never lose their salvation.

Romans 8:9

“However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.”

The Apostle Paul here emphatically teaches that you do not belong to Jesus unless you have the Holy Spirit. It is not possible to be a Christian and not have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit rescues us from the sinful flesh, a lifelong battle.

The Holy Spirit accomplishes the election and sanctification of believers

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

“But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Believers, having been elected by God the Father, are now gathered into the Kingdom of God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Titus 3:3-7

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

By the mercy of God, lost sinners are washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. This is the work of God and not man. Jesus Christ provides the blood atoning sacrifice to take away our sins.

1 Peter 1:1-2

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, whom are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

Here we see the work of the Trinity in the redemption of mankind. God the Father is the Elector, choosing those who will inherit salvation. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and

Savior, sprinkling the elect with His blood. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, sanctifying and securing the salvation of the elect.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”

Lost sinners are washed, sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. This is the amazing grace of God.

The Holy Spirit comforts the believers

John 14:16-17

“And I will ask of the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Helper” (Greek, (Gk.) *Paracletos*), which is an intercessor, one called alongside to help. Regardless of how difficult life becomes, when trials come, the Holy Spirit is always there to help you. Jesus also makes the comment that the Holy Spirit “*may be with you forever.*” The Holy Spirit forever indwells us.

How does the Holy Spirit comfort and help us?

He prays for us

Romans 8:26-28

“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, when we do not know how to pray, as we should. In addition to having believers praying for you, the Holy Spirit is also praying for us. This work of the Holy Spirit drives the wonderful promise in verse 28, where God works all things together for good to those who love Him. He can do this because He is God and

the Holy Spirit is right there interceding for us. It is great to be in the hands of a loving and merciful God!

He gives us wisdom

Luke 12:11-12

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your defense, or what you should say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

There is no substitute for knowing and handling accurately the word of truth (see 2 Timothy 2:15). Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit gives us the wisdom to speak when we find ourselves in a difficult situation. Paul’s defense before King Agrippa is a good example of the Holy Spirit in action, working through the Apostle Paul (see Acts 26:1ff).

He strengthens us

Ephesians 3:13-21

“Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are for your glory. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and all that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

The Apostle Paul prays for believers not to lose heart over the tribulations of this life. He exhorts them prayerfully to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to live a faithful life, grounded and filled with the love of Christ.

He leads us with the Scriptures as our guide

Romans 8:12-14

“So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

It is the Holy Spirit of God who enables us to repent, to put away our sinful deeds of the body and walk according to the Spirit. This is a lifelong struggle for all believers. This particular passage does not specify the means of the leading of the Holy Spirit, but this can be shown by the following passages:

Psalm 119:9-11

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.”

Psalm 119:103-105

“How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth! From Thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.”

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2 Peter 1:20-21

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of the human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Scriptures, given to us by the Holy Spirit, are both necessary and sufficient for training in righteousness. The Bible is the Manufacturer’s Handbook on how to live for God and put to death the deeds of the flesh. Our conscience alone is a poor guide, as we still have the sinful nature within us in this life.

Galatians 5:16-26

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you that those who practice such things shall 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. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

This passage clearly lists the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. True biblical repentance replaces the deeds of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. This is an active,

lifelong process. Please see Section 9.3 and review *Ephesians Chapters 4-6* for the biblical teaching on the “Replacement Principle.” It is not enough to simply stop sinning. We need to replace our sinful, fleshly habits with spiritual, godly habits.

The Holy Spirit bestows special gifts

Exodus 31:1-6

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I commanded you.’”

It is unlikely that Bezalel was a farmer who woke up one day and suddenly became a master craftsman. More likely, God gifted Bezalel with these skills and talents, which he developed over time, as he learned the trade. Bezalel had no idea what glorious task in the future awaited him to build the temple. Bezalel was ready to serve the Lord. We should wait upon the Lord and prayerfully discover and develop those gifts and talents the Holy Spirit has given us. Then we can serve in the local body of believers (church) and in the local community to build up the body of Christ and win people to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

In this passage we observe that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts to individuals as He wills, not as we decide. Some of these gifts can be developed further (wisdom, knowledge, faith through the study of the Scriptures) whereas others are given miraculously and are not learned (prophecy, tongues, healing). These gifts are given for the “common good” to the glory of God and not man. Since no single individual has all the gifts, the church is essential to gather believers together with their range of gifts and talents to help one another further the kingdom of God (*1 Corinthians 12:12-31*).

At the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 12, the Apostle Paul exhorts us as follows:

1 Corinthians 12:31

“But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.”

The Apostle Paul states that he is going to show a more excellent way on how the gifts of the Spirit should be used in *1 Corinthians 13*. At the end of this passage he states:

1 Corinthians 13:13

“But now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

The Apostle Paul exhorts us to deploy the gifts of the Spirit in faith, hope and love. Most importantly, the use of our gifts should be done in love. Without love, it is nothing.

Finally, here is a word of caution regarding gifts. Jesus said the kingdom of God was comparable to a man who went out on a journey, called his slaves and entrusted his possessions to them in the Parable of the Talents (see *Matthew 25:14ff*). In this parable, Jesus is the slave owner and we are the slaves, entrusted with a differing number of talents based upon our abilities. Upon the master’s return, the slaves were held to account. The Lord has entrusted all of us with His gifts. Everything we are and own belongs to Him. God has provided us with gifts, talents and good works that we should walk in them (*Ephesians 2:10*). He will hold us to account as it is written:

2 Corinthians 5:9-11

“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

As you reflect on your life at this point, what will you hear the Master say? Will he say *“Well done, good and faithful slave, you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your Master?”* (*Matthew 25:21*) Or will he say something else? Have you taken your life, gifts and talents and surrendered them in the service of the Lord? Or have you wasted your life on your own selfish ambitions and indolence? Now is the time to take stock of your life and make the necessary changes to serve the Lord with a whole heart. God loves you and wants your heart.

5.5 True spirituality

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”

True spirituality is a life displaying the fruits of a Spirit-filled life, which includes using spiritual gifts in love—the more excellent way.

1 Timothy 4:13-16

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

2 Timothy 2:15

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”

True spirituality is also a life devoted to the reading and studying the Scriptures, followed by constantly monitoring our lives and our teaching to ensure they comply with God’s word.

5.6 Summary

Ephesians 5:15-20

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you; with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

God’s will for us is to be filled with the Spirit and have the word of Christ dwell within us. We should teach and speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with a thankful heart. Hence, there is a need for believers to be in fellowship in a local church, caring and admonishing one another in the fear of Christ.

Philippians 4:6-9

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.”

Formulas for the Spirit-filled life

Philippians 4:6-9

Prayer + Thanksgiving – Anxiety = Peace

	True
	Honorable
	Right
	Pure
Whatever is:	Lovely + Dwell on and practice these things = God of peace with you
	Good repute
	Excellence
	Praise

We can have peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

6. Satan

Memory verses: *1 Peter 5:8-9*

The belief that there is a spiritual world inhabited by a personal being named Satan and his demons is considered by many to be superstitious, anti-intellectual and unscientific. Unfortunately, in the modern secular world, folklore tales of Satan exist. Some have portrayed the devil as wearing red leotards with horns on his head, a pointed tail and pitchfork in his hand. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

We have seen earlier that the Bible provides evidence that it is from God, and all that it contains is trustworthy. The Bible clearly teaches that Satan and his demons exist, contrary to the deceived world. It is incumbent upon all Christians to learn from God's word about this powerful adversary and be prepared, with God's armor, to resist the evil one.

6.1 Satan is a created being

In the Scriptures, God is the only personal being who is described as having existed from eternity:

Psalm 90:2

“Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.”

Isaiah 43:10-11

“You are my witnesses, declares the LORD, and My servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me. I, even I, am the LORD; and there is no savior besides Me.”

Isaiah 46:9-11

“Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.”

John 1:1-3

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”

It necessarily follows from these passages of Scripture that Satan was a created being by God.

6.2 Satan is a personal being and a powerful enemy

John 8:42-49

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on my own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe in Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.’ The Jews answered and said to Him, ‘Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?’ Jesus answered, ‘I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me.’”

Jesus reveals Satan’s heart in this passage. Satan has desires and is referred to by Jesus using the personal pronouns “he” and “him”, indicating that Satan is a person and not a blind force. What kind of a person is Satan?

A murderer from the beginning—see the Fall in *Genesis 3:1ff*

No truth in him—only lies and evil

Liar by nature—his mission is to deceive others to lie and hate the truth

Father of lies—the source of falsehood

The passage above shows the devil’s works in action among the Jews. Jesus is here on earth to bring the glorious gospel, and the Jews have the audacity to accuse the Son of God of having a demon. What a stinging insult and falsehood that shows the depths of depravity of man and deceit of the evil one. I cannot imagine how our precious Jesus and Lord felt, as both man and God, to be so insulted. Satan is both despicable and harmful. We must resist the evil one and the temptations he brings lest we become a tool of Satan.

Satan's power to do evil is always limited by God; he can only do that evil which God permits

Job 1:6-12

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’ And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.’ Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’ So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.”

Job 2:1-6

“Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ Then Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.’ And the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.’ And Satan answered the LORD and said, ‘Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face.’ So the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your power only spare his life.’”

In these two passages, we see the evil of Satan wanting to destroy Job, a faithful man to the Lord, his family, and all that he has. Thankfully, the Lord limits the evil that Satan can do to Job. It is also clear that Satan is actively roaming about the earth, even walking upon it, looking to cause evil and destruction. Can you imagine what the world would be like if the Lord did not restrain evil? That day will come (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12).

Satan has the power to harm one's body and possessions

Job 1:13-19

“Now it happened on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, that a messenger came to Job and said, ‘The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.’ While he was still speaking another also came and

said, ‘The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them; and I alone have escaped to tell you.’ While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.’ While he was still speaking, another also came and said, ‘Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died; and I alone have escaped to tell you.’”

Job 2:7-8

“Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.”

Satan inflicted great destruction, death and disease upon the household of Job. Servants were murdered, livestock were stolen and killed, and his children were destroyed by a great wind. Job remained faithful to the Lord and did not blame God.

Luke 13:10-16

“And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again, and began glorifying God. And the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, ‘There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.’ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’”

Jesus, the Great Physician, heals a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years and asserts that Satan was the cause of her infirmity. Again, we can see how wicked and sadistic Satan is.

Satan has the power to test Christians

This was seen earlier in the passages from chapters 1 and 2 of Job. Satan had limited power over Job, his family and possessions. This can be seen also from the NT passage on the next page:

Luke 22:31-32

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Satan had to ask permission before he could sift Peter like wheat. Jesus said he prayed for Peter, that his faith might not fail. God’s provision for us in facing trials is sufficient for us to come through them triumphantly, and prayer is a powerful tool to limit the work of Satan.

When we go through trials in this world, please keep in mind the following verses:

1 Corinthians 10:13

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.”

God is faithful, and, when He permits trials in this life, He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our limits. This passage states that, with the temptation, He will provide the way of escape. As you look back to previous temptations, do you recall the fork in the road, the path to righteousness that you ignored, when you fell into sin? Pray and look for the way of escape, the way of righteousness, when you are under temptation or trial.

Romans 8:26-28

“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

True believers in Jesus Christ have the confidence that all things will work together for their final good, including trials inflicted upon them by Satan. It is a great encouragement to know this and also to know the Holy Spirit is praying for us (*Romans 8:26*) in addition to our brothers and sisters in Christ. In case anyone should doubt that they love God enough for this great and precious promise to apply to them, the Lord further explains that it applies to *“those who are called according to His purpose.”* Any true believer must remember that he has been called by God to inherit eternal life, and thus, he can expect this loving, providential protection by the God of his salvation.

But how can affliction work for good in the life of a believer?

Hebrews 12:1-11

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not resisted to the point of shedding blood, in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, ‘MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.’ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

Regardless how difficult the discipline is that the Lord brings our way, we can take Him at His word that the outcome will be a positive one, that is, the “*peaceful fruit of righteousness*.” It is part of our training program to be conformed to the image of Christ. This life is preparation for the next life in heaven for eternity.

James 1:1-4

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

1 Peter 1:6-7

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Lord works in our lives to build faith that endures and gives Him glory. Marathon runners train for several months before a race, gradually increasing their distance during each run, to build the endurance required to run the 26.2-mile race. Our life as a believer

is like training for a marathon race. As we grow older, we encounter various trials that strengthen our faith and prepare us for the future challenges like the next marathon. Raising a family according to the Scriptures is a good example of this.

Satan has the power to foil our soul-winning efforts

Mark 4:13-15

“And He said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them.’”

From the parable of the sower, Jesus taught that Satan could come and take away the word of God that you have just shared with a non-Christian. When we are sharing our faith with others, we should pray that the Lord would not allow Satan to take away the word sown and continue to follow up with that person until they accept Christ into their lives. In my experience, very few people accept Christ the first time when they hear the gospel. Hence, there is a need for prayerful follow up with people.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

We are truly blessed to be free from the snare of the devil. Unfortunately, all non-Christians are held captive by the devil, and, therefore, we must be patient and gentle as we share our faith. Ultimately, God has to grant them repentance to come to the knowledge of the truth. Hence, all glory to God and none to man when a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We are merely the messengers, the ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Satan has the power to entice us to commit sins

1 Chronicles 21:1-8

“Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, ‘Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan, and bring me word that I may know their number.’ And Joab said, ‘May the Lord add to His people a hundred times as many as they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord’s servants? Why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt to Israel?’ Nevertheless, the king’s word prevailed against Joab. Therefore, Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the number of the census of all the people to David. And all of Israel were

1,100,000 men who drew the sword; and Judah was 470,000 men who drew the sword. But he did not number Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab. And God was displeased with this thing, so He struck Israel. And David said to God, 'I have sinned greatly, in that I have done this thing. But now, please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly.'"

David was tempted by Satan to number Israel, and God was displeased with David. Joab confronted David about this, but the king's sinful command nevertheless prevailed. Satan appealed to David's lust to exalt himself with military manpower rather than rest in the loving protection of Almighty God.

James 1:13-15

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

Temptation is not the implanting of evil desire within a person, but rather, it is the person's own lusts that foment sin. When Satan entices us to sin, he is not overtaking us and forcing us to sin against our wills. Satan is simply suggesting to us that we follow our own unclean desires and lusts. We have to resist the appeal Satan still has toward our fallen nature, which is now being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. How can we resist the evil one? One way this can be accomplished is by bringing to mind the Scriptures that bear on the issue at hand.

Psalms 119:9-11

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee."

Satan's temptation of Jesus is an example where the evil one quotes Scripture out of context, and Jesus responds by quoting Scripture in its proper context.
(See *Matthew 4:1-11*)

Satan has the freedom to accuse believers before the Lord

Revelation 12:7-10

"And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the

kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Satan is the accuser of the brethren before God, day and night. In the future, Satan and his angels will be thrown out of heaven and down to earth. God will remove our accuser from heaven.

Zechariah 3:1-5

“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?’ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, ‘Remove the filthy garments from him.’ Again he said to him, ‘See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.’ Then I said, ‘Let them put a clean turban on his head.’ So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the LORD was standing by.”

The Lord rebukes Satan the accuser. The Lord has taken the iniquity of Joshua away. The following redemption-golden pipeline passage (also reviewed in Section 10.3) is a source of great encouragement to all believers who are accused by Satan:

Romans 8:31-39

“What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The argument presented here states that no one can bring charges to God against a true Christian, because it is Jesus Christ, both Savior and Judge, who intercedes on our behalf. The blood of the risen Lamb of God has redeemed us. Because of the amazing love of Christ and His purchase of our redemption, Satan’s accusations have no merit. Nobody, not even Satan, can separate us from the love of Christ. We belong to Christ forever, Amen!

Satan is the leader of an extensive array of demons

Luke 8:26-39

“And they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And when He had come out onto the land, a certain man from the city met Him who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, ‘What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.’ For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and yet he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the deserts. And Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion’; for many demons had entered him. And they were entreating Him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now there was a herd of many swine feeding there on the mountain; and the demons entreated Him to permit them to enter the swine. And He gave them permission. And the demons came out from the man and entered the swine; and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned. And when those who tended them saw what had happened, they ran away and reported it in the city and out in the country. And the people went out to see what had happened; and they came to Jesus, and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting down at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind; and they became frightened. And those who had seen it reported to them how the man who was demon-possessed had been made well. And all the people of the country of the Gerasenes and the surrounding district asked Him to depart from them; for they were gripped with great fear; and He got into a boat, and returned. But the man from whom the demons had gone out was begging Him that He might accompany Him; but He sent him away saying, ‘Return to your house and describe what great things God has done for you.’ And he departed, proclaiming throughout the whole city what great things Jesus had done for him.”

Demon possession is a very real and serious matter, and here we see a man who was possessed by many demons. The name of the demon was “Legion.” A legion of soldiers in a Roman army would consist of 3,000 to 6,000 men, according to www.Dictionary.com (accessed 2/4/20). The demons entered this man and took control of his mind and his body so that he would sin and act insane. When he spoke, it was the demon speaking. He also possessed extraordinary power and was able to burst his fetters. Jesus had the power over the demons and was able to cast them out of this man. After the demons left the man at the command of Jesus, the man was clothed and in his right mind. It is worth noting that demon possession is different than temptation. The man had no self-control during demon possession. He was not able to make a choice. After the demons departed, he had control over his mind and body and was in his right mind.

Luke 10:17-18

“And the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.’”

The seventy disciples were given the power by Jesus to cast out demons. Jesus reminded them that they should rejoice their names are recorded in heaven and not over casting out demons. Eternal life in heaven with our Lord is precious, glorious and forever. Let us rejoice in this as we share our faith with a fallen world!

Matthew 9:32-33

“And as they were going out, behold a dumb man demon-possessed was brought to Him. And after the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the multitudes marveled, saying, ‘Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel.’”

The demon-possessed man was unable to speak because of the demon. Again, the power of Jesus was sufficient to cast out the demon.

Satan has the power and the freedom to deceive the nations

Revelation 12:7-10

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.’”

Satan can deceive “*the whole world*,” not only those who choose to follow after him. Believers must be very careful, as they can be deceived also by the evil one.

Revelation 20:6-10

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came upon the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown

into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Satan will be bound during the millennial reign of Christ and His saints. During this time men will see a truly righteous government. Even so, sinful man will once again succumb to the temptation and deception of Satan. After the millennial reign of Christ, Satan will be released to deceive the nations. A massive army will come forward to attack the saints and their beloved city. Fire from heaven will destroy those armies, and the great deceiver will be subsequently thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. The power and freedom that Satan has to deceive the nations, will finally be defeated for all eternity. We can rejoice in the victory of Christ over Satan. By His great mercy, love, and grace, we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Amen!

2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

“And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”

This passage describes an evil person, the lawless one, the antichrist, whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan. This person will have the power to perform signs and false wonders to deceive people. Those who ultimately are deceived are those who did not love the truth so as to be saved. Merely knowing the gospel cannot save you. One must love the truth of the gospel and accept the good news—repent and receive Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Those who do not will be fooled into believing the deception and the consequences that follow.

It should also be noted that the mere presentation of signs and wonders is not sufficient to prove that the person performing them is a servant of God. So how do we determine when a sign, miracle or wonder performed is from a servant of God?

Deuteronomy 13:1-5

“If a prophet or dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you.”

We must assess the teachings of that so-called prophet or dreamer of dreams, as the mere performance of these activities does not necessarily mean the person represents the Lord. Even if the sign or wonder comes true, if the person counsels rebellion against the Lord, we are not to listen to that person. The punishment in the OT times for this false prophet or dreamer of dreams was death by stoning—capital punishment. The Lord is testing believers by this false prophet or dreamer of dreams to see if they love the Lord and keep His commandments. A solid love for the Lord and His commandments coupled with a heart that wants to know and act on the truth is the only sure defense against being deceived by Satan and his henchmen.

By contrast, look at the response Jesus gave to the disciples of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, while in prison, sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the Coming One, or should we look for someone else:

Matthew 11:1-6

“And it came about that when Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, ‘Are You the Coming One, or shall we look for someone else?’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John the things which you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED to them. And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me.’”

Jesus confessed the signs and wonders, and also proclaimed the gospel to the poor. It is only when miracles are performed in conjunction with doctrinally sound preaching and teaching, that we have any Biblical basis for saying that they are truly from the Lord.

What are some of Satan’s strategies and tactics?

Satan typically acts anonymously. As we saw in the story of Job, Job did not know that Satan was behind all the mischief, destruction and sorrow. In the absence of divine revelation, we can never be certain about Satan’s direct involvement in evil. Our focus should be to oppose all evil and ask the Lord for His strength and protection to endure the trial.

Satan and his demons can assume the appearance of righteous servants

2 Corinthians 11:12-15

“But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of

light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.”

It should not surprise us that counterfeit Christianity has existed for centuries. The Bible warns us of this practice in the above passage. Satan is very shrewd and would never print three-dollar bills. Satan has counterfeited the true gospel. Counterfeit Christianity can be found among adherents to the teachings of the Mormon religion (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), Jehovah’s Witnesses, liberal protestant churches and even the Roman Catholic Church. Many adherents to these false religions are morally upright people, but they embrace a false gospel, a false Christ, and a false righteousness. Rather than accept the free gift of salvation through repentance and faith in Christ, these deceitful workers believe and teach that you have to earn your way to heaven. Some false teachings effectively say that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was necessary but not sufficient to take away sins. They claim there is the need for good works plus faith in order to be saved. Others teach that Jesus Christ was a god but not the Lord God, a lesser god. These false teachings and the denial of the true gospel will result in eternal punishment. The Scriptures are and must always be the immediate rule for faith and conduct. The Apostle Peter warns us of those who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:14-16).

1 Corinthians 10:14-21

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing, which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No; but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”

Paul exhorts the church at Corinth to flee idolatry. He states that the Gentile sacrifices to idols were sacrifices to demons. We must not be sharers with them and their sacrifices. A church may look devout, but unless they embrace sound doctrine and worship God according to the Scriptures, they may be worshipping a false god and demons.

1 Timothy 4:1-6

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude: for it is sanctified by

means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

The Holy Spirit has revealed, through the Apostle Paul, that in later times some will fall away from the faith and pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. Interestingly, a characteristic of this apostate group will be to forbid marriage and abstain from certain foods. This passage does not say that everyone in this group must abstain from marriage and foods.

Soon after the death of the Apostle Paul, various gnostic sects arose that abstained from marriage and/or the eating of certain foods (Tatianists, Catharists, Monatus, Manichaeans). These signs of apostasy are still present today in the Roman Catholic Church, as seen in the celibacy of the priesthood and the abstinence from meat on Fridays or during Lent. A close examination of Roman Catholic doctrine reveals a defective soteriology, a false gospel; the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is necessary but not sufficient for salvation. Faith plus works are required in order to obtain eternal life. Catholic dogma mandates that salvation comes through the Roman Catholic Church. This requires Catholics to keep the commandments and the sacraments (sacerdotalism) for salvation and absolution of sin by the Roman Catholic priest. Even though some would regard the Catholic Church to be a Christian Church, the Catholic Church teaches a false way of salvation, doctrines of demons (*1 Timothy 4:1*). The Apostle Paul earlier warned us that Satan’s servants could disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

Finally, there are some people who claim to be both Catholics and Christians, who regularly attend the Catholic Church, and who embrace the true gospel despite the teachings of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, many others are lost and present to us a great opportunity to share the true gospel with them.

Satan can hinder real missionary and pastoral work

1 Thessalonians 2:18

“For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan thwarted us.”

Satan is a very real enemy of the gospel and prevented Paul from ministering to the Thessalonians more than once. As ambassadors of Christ reconciling men to God, we can expect resistance from Satan. Nevertheless, we have to press on in God’s name and not let Satan deter us from our task.

6.3 Satan's future

Revelation 20:1-3

“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.”

Satan will be bound for a thousand years by an angel of the Lord. Satan can only operate within those bounds set by the Lord. Satan is bound so that Christ and the believers can peacefully rule the earth during the Millennium.

Revelation 20:7-10

“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Satan is then released to deceive the nations to attack the believers and the holy city. Please note that Satan did not escape, he was released. The Lord destroys Satan and his army. Satan is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, to be tormented forever and ever. As we continue to see evil and terrorism in the world, we must not let our confidence in the Lord be shaken. Our Lord is good and just and, ultimately, Satan will be eternally damned for his wicked pleasure on earth.

Matthew 25:41-46

“Then He will say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in; naked and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

This passage is a vivid reminder that those who die without Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will suffer the same fate as the devil and his angels—eternal punishment in the lake of fire and brimstone. Hence, we must be about the Master’s business, helping people and sharing our faith in love to rescue as many as we can and take them to heaven with us. The motivation to do so comes from the Christ’s commands and commission (*Matthew 22:36-40, Matthew 28:18-20*):

Greatest commandment:	Love God
Second greatest commandment:	Love people
Great Commission:	Make disciples, baptize and teach them

6.4 Our relationship to Satan

True believers are to be aware of Satan

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment, which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

The Apostle Paul warns us not to be ignorant of the devil’s schemes. The devil is the father of lies and murderer from the beginning (*John 8:44*). We should study the Scriptures carefully and use them wisely to resist the evil one. Recall, during the temptation of Jesus by the devil in the wilderness, that Jesus used Scripture to resist the tempter.

Satan is to be taken seriously by believers and resisted

1 Peter 5:6-11

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls like a roaring lion,

seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Satan is a very dangerous adversary, as he would seek to devour believers like a roaring lion. We must be on guard, ready to resist him while remaining strong in our faith. God promises to strengthen us through these trials brought on by the evil one. The victory is the Lord's, and we rest in His amazing grace to help us in our time of need.

James 4:5-7

“Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the spirit which He has made to dwell in us?’ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.’ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

In humility before God, we are to submit to the Lord and resist the devil. The devil will flee because it is God's grace that enables us to resist temptation. As we look for the way of escape from temptation (*1 Corinthians 10:13*), humbly relying on God's grace is one way. We resist temptation in the strength of God and not man.

Jude 8, 9

“Yet in the same manner these men also by dreaming defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘THE LORD REBUKE YOU.’”

Using an argument from the greater to the lesser, if Michael, the archangel, did not even dare pronounce a judgment against Satan, neither should we. We should leave all judgment to the Lord.

The Lord has given believers special protection against Satan and his demons

1 John 4:1-4

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”

Because God is greater than Satan, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers protects us from the evil one. This protection, however, comes in the context of Christians discerning the spirits, as many false prophets have gone out in the world. We need to know our Scriptures, exercise spiritual discernment, and put on God's armor to resist the evil one. God expects us to be discerning and wearing His armor daily (*Ephesians 6:10-20*).

Matthew 12:28-30

“But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

Jesus argues that before one can enter a strong man's house to carry off his property, one must first bind the strong man. Jesus bound the strong man (Satan), by the Holy Spirit, so that He could plunder his house and cast out the demons. Clearly, the Holy Spirit is the stronger man, and so Satan was bound and his house was plundered, ushering in the kingdom of God.

Now that the kingdom of God has come upon us, the strong man in the world now is God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the strong man indwelling the believer and the house is the believer's body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the stronger man, as demonstrated by Jesus casting out demons, Satan cannot enter God's temple and bind the Holy Spirit in order to possess us.

We belong to Jesus and are sealed until the day of redemption by the Holy Spirit that indwells us (*Ephesians 4:30*). Our responsibility is to remain spiritually discerning, wear God's armor, and gather with Jesus by sharing our faith with others.

Satan can be resisted if we wear God's armor.

Ephesians 6:10-20

“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this view, be on the alert with all perseverance and

petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

God’s Armor:

Gird your loins with God’s word—Knowing and loving the truth is real protection from the evil one (*2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10*).

Breastplate of righteousness—We must live the truth we know, in love and faith, to stay alert and sober for Christ (*1 Thessalonians 5:8*).

Gospel feet—Being an active, mobile and prepared witness for Christ helps us to stand against Satan.

Shield of faith—Confidence in the Lord and in His promises keeps us from wavering and weakening when under attack.

Helmet of salvation—The hope of salvation is a firm confidence that we belong to the Lord and will be redeemed when the battle is over (*1 Thessalonians 5:8*).

Sword of the Spirit—The word of God is our offensive weapon against all evil.

Prayer warriors—Staying alert, praying for the saints at all times in the Spirit, that we would proclaim the gospel with boldness.

As soldiers for the Lord, we should be experts in the use of the armor and the sword. There is no room for passive Christian soldiers, sleeping in the barracks. We need to be active Christian soldiers on the battlefield, serving the Lord, loving people, sharing our faith and resisting the evil one.

Special protection from Satan is given to Christians through membership in a local church

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind that does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst.”

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for tolerating immorality in the church. This incestuous man should be excommunicated from the church until he repents.

1 Corinthians 5:5

“I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

Removal from the church is to be done so that the man may be delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved. Apparently, by being a member of the local church, this sinful man was protected from Satan’s schemes. The Apostle Paul commands his removal from the church so that Satan’s attacks would lead to his repentance and restoration back into the church.

In addition to putting on the full armor of God as a soldier in God’s army, believers should also become active members of a local assembly of believers. The church provides another level of protection from Satan, who continues to prowl about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us (*1 Peter 5:8*).

6.5 Summary

1 John 2:12-17

“I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world, nor the things of the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

The will of God is revealed in the Bible. We are to love God and not the world. We are to overcome the evil one by studying and obeying God’s word, putting on the armor of God, sharing our faith in love, and becoming active members in a local church. There are

times when life can be difficult and trials come. The following words of Jesus are comforting as we live in these evil times:

John 16:33

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

7. The Condition of Man

Memory verses: *Psalms 14:1-3*

When a patient goes to the doctor for a consultation, there is always a bit of uneasiness associated with the visit. Sometimes the visit is a routine wellness physical exam where the patient hopes that all is good, and they will be able to continue to live life as it is. Alternatively, the patient may go to the doctor presenting clinical symptoms in need of treatment and healing. Regardless of the reason for the visit to the doctor, after the initial clinical examination, the doctor will sometimes order additional laboratory tests to help complete the clinical picture of the patient. After the test results are in from the laboratory, the doctor will complete the consultation with the patient, present the clinical findings and determine the clinical course of action. For most patients, all is good and life continues as before. For others, however, there can be some serious health issues that require significant medical intervention.

Many years ago, we knew of a gentleman in our church with a large family. He participated in a community blood drive by rolling up sleeves and donating a unit of blood to the local blood bank. Unfortunately, he received a call from a physician regarding his donation. The laboratory found that his white cell count was elevated and the physician directed him to see his personal physician immediately for further clinical follow up. This man was subsequently diagnosed with leukemia and required chemotherapy followed up by a bone marrow transplantation. After a difficult year of treatment, surgery and recovery, by the grace of God, this man survived his cancer. Even though this man was asymptomatic at the time of his blood donation, the clinical laboratory was able to determine that he had a life-threatening disease. From this man's perspective, all was good until the call came from the physician regarding his blood donation.

The majority of people would say that man is basically good even though some men are prone to evil at times. This evil behavior may be due to a whole host of reasons, including a poor upbringing, broken family, dangerous drug abuse environment, etc. Man's view of himself is generally positive, and some would even say that God sees the good of man that outweighs the bad, and expect a favorable ruling from Him at the end of their lives.

We have learned earlier in this journey what God is like. We found that He is good, loving, holy, and merciful, and at the same time, righteous and just. He is the Judge and Ruler over all creation. Regardless of how good we might think we are, what matters is where do you stand in relation to this glorious God? What do you think God would say to you if He were to call you about your spiritual health? What is the state of man's condition before a holy and just God?

The answer to this very important question does not lie with the philosophers of this age. The only answer to this question can be found in the Holy Scriptures—the source of truth about God and man.

In this chapter, the answers to the following questions will be addressed:

What is man's condition as he stands on his own before God?

Why is man the way he is?

How does man's condition affect his relations with other men, and more importantly, with God?

7.1 Man is condemned before God

How can this be? Isn't there some good in the world? Surely people do good things that are pleasing to God?

Isaiah 64:6-7

“For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. And there is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; for Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, and hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities.”

The Hebrew word *iddah*, which is translated as filthy in English, literally means “menstruous discharge.” A better translation of the above passage would be “...our righteous deeds are like a garment soiled with menstruous discharge.” (C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament, Isaiah Volume 7* James Martin, translator Hendrickson Publishers: Peabody, 1989, p. 470). Regardless of how virtuous we may feel about our righteous deeds, they are nothing more than a soiled, unclean garment before the Lord. According to God's standard of absolute perfection, our righteous deeds are repulsive to Him. Unfortunately, our good deeds are tainted with ulterior motives and iniquity. The Lord knows what is in our heart and what is behind all we do and say. Our righteous deeds are less than perfect and are unacceptable before Him.

The above passage also states that no one calls upon the Lord. People would rather justify themselves before God with righteous deeds.

John 3:16-18

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He

who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the only begotten Son of God.”

Between these two verses, it is clear that the only path forward to eternal life and avoiding judgment is to believe in Him. We simply cannot please Him with our righteous deeds. Are we willing to face the truth?

Men are corrupt

Psalm 14:1-3

“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Earlier the question was posed, “What do you think God would say if He called you regarding your spiritual health?” This passage would likely be His answer. While man claims to be good, the Bible says man is not good and has become corrupt. Corruption is seen here to express itself as atheism (cf. *Romans 1:18-21*). Man is so corrupt that he rejects submission to God by simply saying there is no God. The turning aside of men from seeking God implies knowing what is true and abandoning it. From God’s perspective, all men have willfully rejected what they knew to be right in their heart. This passage of Scripture completely contradicts the thinking of modern man—that man is basically good. Man is not good; man is evil.

Romans 3:9-18

***“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,
‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE THAT DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’
‘THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,’
‘THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS;’
‘WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS;’
‘THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN.’
‘THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.’”***

This Scripture is an indictment of the entire human race from the Divine Judge. Look at what corruption entails:

Stench
Deceit
Poisonous words that hurt and bite
Bloodshed
Destruction
Misery
No peace
No fear of God

Far from realizing the stench and horror of these evils and turning to God for mercy, people refuse to seek Him for forgiveness. No one seeks for God.

The heart of man is filled with evil, sin and deceit

Genesis 6:5

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Jeremiah 17:1

“The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus; with a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars.”

Jeremiah 17:9-10

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.”

Proverbs 21:2

“Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weights the hearts.”

The heart of man is not only sinful and sick; it is deceitful about it. From man’s perspective, all is good. Only the Lord can weigh our hearts and present the accurate diagnosis. Recall the gentleman in our church who received a diagnosis of leukemia. From the man’s perspective all was good. He was healthy enough to donate a unit of blood. He had a wonderful wife and family. Life was good. And yet, he had no idea his body was filled with cancer. Thankfully, he heeded the advice of his physician and entered clinical treatment; otherwise, he would not be alive today. Even though from man’s perspective, all is good today, men are deceived. God says that all men have a heart that is deceitful and sick. God has provided a physician to repair your heart. His name is Jesus, the Great Physician, Lord and Savior, who died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead (*John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8*).

Men are wholly inclined to evil from the beginning

Romans 1:18-32

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteous of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those that practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

Astronomers have shown us the vastness of the universe, estimated to contain one thousand billion billion (10^{21}) stars arrayed in over ten billion beautiful galaxies. Molecular biologists have demonstrated the complexity of life in a single cell at the molecular level. God has clearly revealed Himself to all men through the creation of the world. And yet, men have suppressed the truth of God’s creation with unrighteousness by choosing the path of idolatry and sin. Men are without excuse and are culpable for their blindness and failure to give the glory to God.

Psalms 51:1-5

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. And cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”

This is King David's psalm of contrition, after he sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba. David looks back on his life, after having committed the sins of murder and adultery, and realizes that he was sinful long before the incident with Bathsheba. He traces his sinful proclivity all the way back to the beginning, at conception.

Psalms 58:1-3

“Do you indeed speak righteousness, O gods? Do you judge uprightly, O sons of men? No, in your heart you work unrighteousness; on earth you weigh out the violence of your hands. The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.”

Again, we see that men are sinful from the beginning. Anyone who has raised a family has observed this. Children know how to do wrong without being taught; it is their nature. A classic example of this is when a mother noticed that one of her children wrote words on the wall of the house with a crayon. She asked her four-year old daughter if she wrote on the wall. Her daughter said no and blamed her younger brother. Her younger brother was only eighteen months old. Who taught her to lie? Nobody! Parents have to work to teach their children righteousness and use discipline to enforce it.

Man justly deserves eternal condemnation in hell

Romans 3:19-20

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may be accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

Man has God's Law and is unable to keep it. Generally speaking, it is not that man does not know what is right and therefore must be educated; man knows generally what is right but chooses to do what is wrong. Man knows it is wrong to steal and commit murder. Even so, the riots, looting and shootings continue across American cities following the death of George Floyd in 2020. God will hold man accountable for breaking His Law. The Law was never intended to justify anyone before God. The purpose of the Law was to reveal man's sin against a holy and just God.

Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

A car bumper sticker captured the essence of this verse as follows: “Despite inflation, the wages of sin are still the same.” Physical death and eternal spiritual death in the lake of fire (*Matthew 25:41-46, Revelation 20:11-15*) are the inevitable returns for sin.

Ephesians 2:1-3

“And you were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

The Scriptures teach that, prior to our conversion to Christ, we were “*by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*” Man’s nature deserves God’s wrath, as it is dead in sin.

Man needs to be regenerated by a spiritual birth

Isaiah 26:10

“Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; he deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, and does not perceive the majesty of the LORD.”

Jeremiah 13:23

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to do evil.”

Even under good circumstances, the wicked continue to sin and do not learn righteousness. Wicked people accustomed to evil cannot do righteousness.

John 3:1-8

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’”

Since the very nature of man is dead, Jesus says man needs to be born again. A spiritual birth is necessary for man to enter the kingdom of God.

Titus 3:3-7

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He

saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

It is the merciful work of God that leads to eternal life. Man cannot save himself with his deeds. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to regenerate and renew the sinful nature. This ministry makes it possible for man to repent, by turning away from sin, and turning to Jesus Christ by faith for the forgiveness of sins. Since no one seeks for God, this is the only path forward to reconciliation with God. God seeks us at a great cost to Himself. Therefore, salvation is the gift of God and all glory to God and not to man.

7.2 Man is in a corrupt state

Man is in this dismal condition because of his sinful nature. Where did this nature come from?

The sinful nature was inherited from Adam

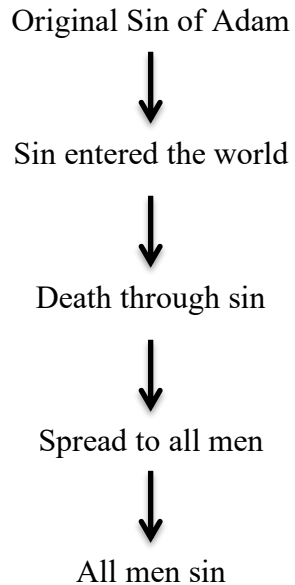
Romans 5:12-21

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’s offense, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift of grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men; even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

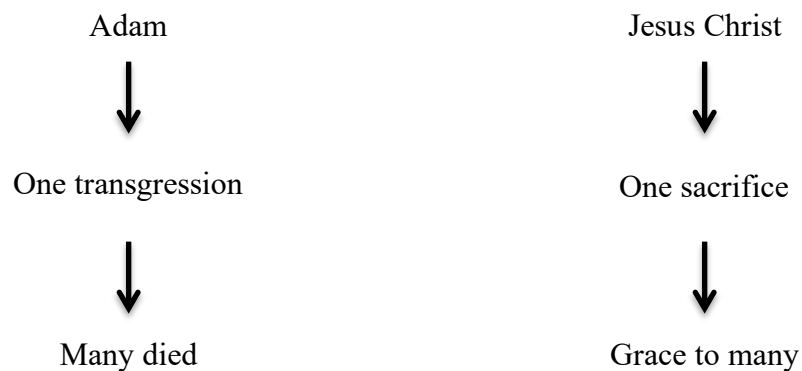
Sin entered the world through Adam’s transgression and death entered the world through sin. Because all die, this implies all sin. Sin entered the world universally, making every man a sinner and condemned before God. The corruption of our human nature has been passed on to us from Adam. Theologians have coined the phrase “original sin” to refer to

this corruption of our human nature from Adam. A series of diagrams below annotate the biblical text and the contrast between Adam and Christ and the analogy between the original sin of Adam and the atonement of Christ.

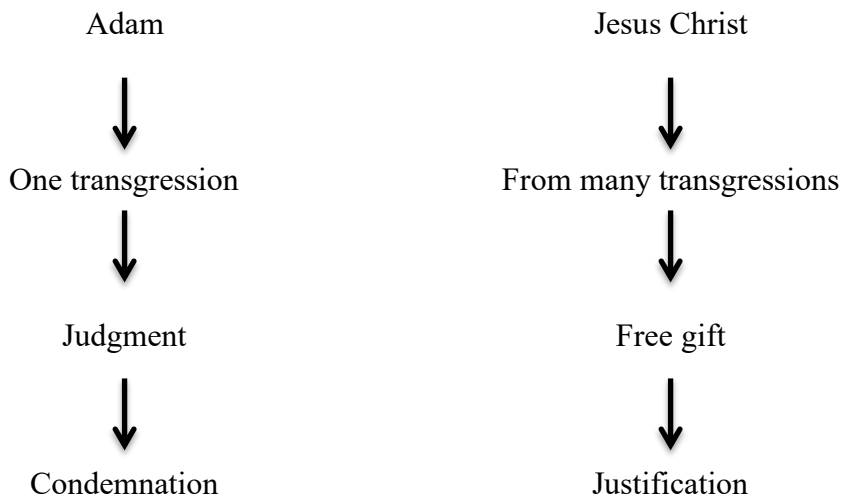
Romans 5:12-14



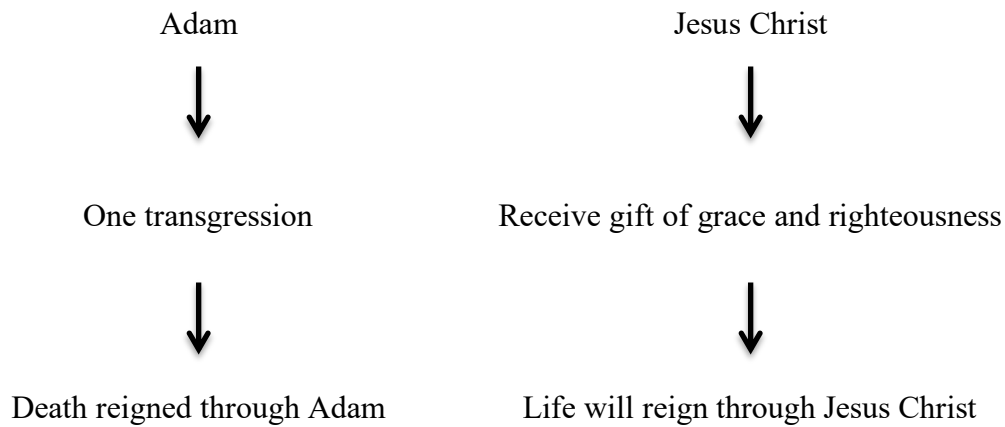
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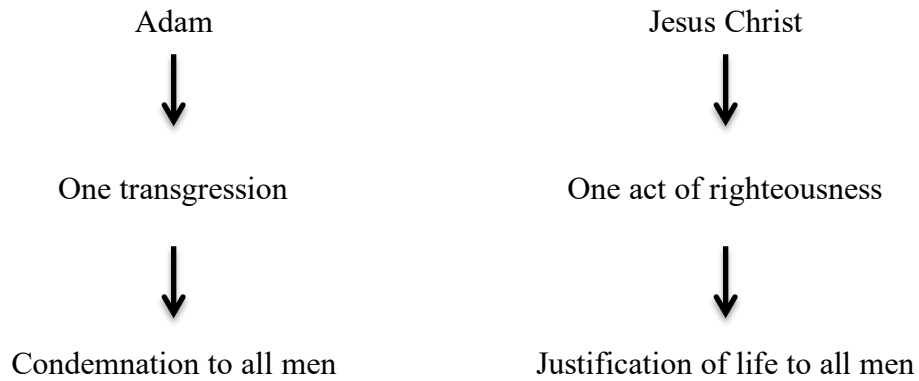
Romans 5:16



Romans 5:17



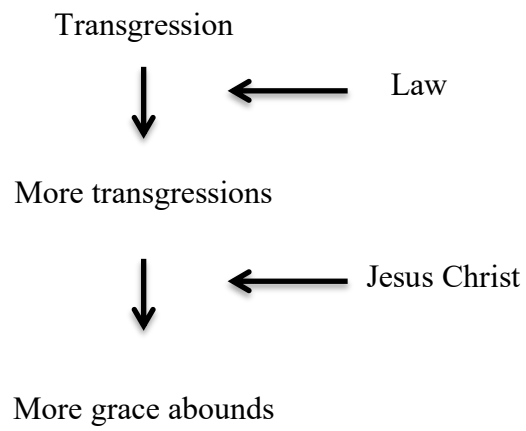
Romans 5:18



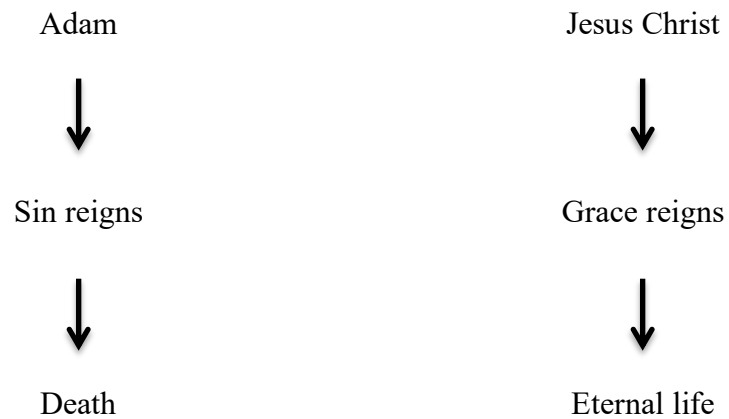
Romans 5:19



Romans 5:20



Romans 5:21



Adam's sin was eating the forbidden fruit, as shown from the book of Genesis.

Genesis 3:1-12

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.’” And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And he said, ‘I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.’ And He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ And the man said, ‘The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate.’ Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

Note that Adam sinned as an exercise of his own free will and later tried to blame the woman for it. In what sense does God hold us in judgement for Adam's sin? Looking back over the passage in Romans chapter five, we can see that Adam was the federal head of the human race. Ultimately, the choices that Adam made would impact us; just like some of the decisions our parents made before we were born impacted us. This analogy does not follow exactly, as our parent's decisions may or may not have corrupted us. Adam's decision did. Support for this line of reasoning can be seen in the passage of Hebrews, regarding the payment of tithes by Levi to Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:9-10

“And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”

The argument presented here is that when Abraham paid tithes to the priest Melchizedek, Levi (one of Abraham's unborn descendants) also paid tithes to Melchizedek. In the same sense in which Levi was involved in Abraham's payment of tithes to Melchizedek, we are involved in Adam's transgression and its guilt, as we were in the loins of Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit. People will argue that is not fair for us to be charged with the guilt of Adam's sin. After all, we did not sin in the garden, but he did. One way to at least make this reasonable is that if we were given the same opportunity in the

garden, the outcome would not have been different. We would have sinned too. Having said that, the passage in Romans chapter five offers great hope to exchange our sinful federal head, Adam, for a righteous Lord and Savior in Jesus Christ.

As this book is being written, the world is in the midst of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic from a novel Coronavirus. There is some anecdotal evidence that the drug, hydroxychloroquine, may reduce disease morbidity and mortality when administered early in infection. Let's consider, for example, that you have clinical symptoms of fever and cough and you test positive for the Coronavirus. The doctor offers this drug as a possible cure for treating your infection, and it may keep you out of the hospital. Would you accept the treatment? Would you instead argue with the doctor and say that it is not fair that you got this disease and refuse the treatment? Unfortunately, some who refuse the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ use this line of reasoning. There is no point in arguing with God. He has provided the diagnosis and the treatment. Are you willing to accept God's cure for your sinful nature? The treatment has been paid in full on your behalf and is totally efficacious. This choice should be obvious but, unfortunately, many refuse God's diagnosis and cure.

Every man has chosen to sin

Ecclesiastes 7:20

"Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins."

Isaiah 53:6

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

Romans 3:23

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

The verdict is in from the Divine bar; we have all sinned by our own free will.

1 John 3:3-4

"And every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Every one who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness."

Sin is defined as lawlessness. This is what we naturally do. We reject God's laws and follow our own way, each doing what we think is right. This is best summed up by the final verse in the book of Judges:

Judges 21:25

"In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

God created us and provided us with the Bible, which instructs us how to live. Unfortunately, each of us has turned to our own way. His condemnation of us is just.

7.3 The natural man is an enemy of God

Matthew 12:22-30

“Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man who was blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed, and began to say, ‘This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?’ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.’ And knowing their thoughts He said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan is divided against Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.’”

There is no middle ground between allegiance to God or Satan. We are either on the Lord’s side or Satan’s side. We are either a friend of God or an enemy of God.

James 4:4

“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

Like adultery, the Christian’s friendship with the world is a betrayal to God; it means we have left our relationship with God and have become hostile toward Him. We have become His enemy when we love the world and all of its lusts.

Romans 8:5-8

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace; because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those in the flesh cannot please God.”

According to the Scriptures, there are two kinds of people: those who set their minds on the flesh (death) and those who set their minds on the Spirit (life and peace). People whose minds are set on the flesh are hostile toward God, cannot please God, and cannot even subject themselves to the Law of God.

Ephesians 2:1-3

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Prior to our conversion to Christ, we were like everybody else. We were children of wrath, living by the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. Thankfully, God had mercy on us as shown below:

Ephesians 2:4-10

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Through God’s great love, amazing mercy and marvelous grace, we are able to escape the lusts of the mind and the flesh and enter into a personal relationship with our Savior and Creator. It is God, not man, that defines the terms of this relationship. Salvation is a free gift, not of works of man, but it is the work of God.

Unfortunately, there are those who will argue that, even though there are evil people in the world, there are also a lot of good people. These people do not seem to be wicked at all. They love their families and co-workers, are generous with their time and money and would seem to be keeping God’s commandments. Many go to church or another house of worship on a regular basis. How can these people be an enemy of God when they love their neighbor as themselves?

There was a famous entertainer who used to go to Southeast Asia and put on shows year after year for our troops who fought the war there. This entertainer was quoted as saying that after all he has done for people, surely, he will be going to heaven. In the world’s eyes, he was a very good and generous person who loved our troops.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to *“LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND”* (Matthew 22:37). Unless men come to God on His terms, through repentance and faith, this commandment continues to be broken. Regardless of how good men appear, all men have sinned against a holy, loving and just God. It is the height of arrogance for a person to think that, because they

have been a good person from their point of view, on that basis God should forgive them. Men doing good works is commendable but not as a basis for justification before God. All men have broken God's law and must face the consequences for their transgressions.

Even in a human court of law, conviction of a crime cannot be commuted by a good reputation. Breaking the laws of a country or state has consequences. Breaking God's law has very serious consequences. God has served the penalty of sin we deserve through His atoning sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead. We can only come to Him on His terms: repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Until then, men remain an enemy of God even with all their good works.

7.4 Our relationship with the natural man

We are not to trust the natural man

Jeremiah 17:5-8

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in the stony wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.’”

Whom will you trust? Will you trust in the Lord or trust in man? Trusting in man will result in a heart turned away from God. It is like living in a desert. The desert is very hot in summer, like a furnace. The sun is also very intense. It is impossible to survive without water and shade. But there is none.

By contrast, the man whose trust is in the Lord is a well-watered tree, able to withstand heat and drought and still bear fruit. Do you want to live in a land of salt or in a land by the river, nourished by the Holy Spirit?

John 2:23-25

“Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man.”

Jesus, being fully God and fully man, knew what men were like. He knows the heart of every man. He did not entrust Himself to them. People can claim to believe in Christ, only later to fall away from the faith. Unfortunately, we can only witness the actions of men; we cannot read their minds. So, we have to be careful whom we trust, and, certainly, the natural man born of the flesh cannot be trusted.

We are not to fear the natural man

Proverbs 29:25

“The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.”

Fear of man brings entanglement and anxiety. Before you know it, you have lost control of your life as you are now controlled by fear. By contrast, putting your faith in God releases you to live fearlessly, knowing that God is in control of all things. All He asks us to do is trust Him. He will lift you up.

Luke 12:4-5

“And I say to you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: Fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”

Over the centuries, many Christians have been persecuted and martyred for their faith in Christ. In spite of the grave dangers and perils they faced, they feared the Lord and not man. They knew this world was not their home, and that God had prepared a better place for them in heaven.

Martin Luther, the leader of the Great Reformation in Europe, was in constant danger. Nevertheless, he pushed forward, proclaimed the truth of the gospel, published many theological works, and then translated the Bible into German. Many Christians died at the stake for their faith during this period. Martin was fortunate enough to escape and continue God’s work until he finally died. Our goal in this life is simple. Live for the Lord, trusting in Him always. DO NOT FEAR MAN. When God is finished with us on earth, He will call us home to heaven. Because God is in control, we can fear Him and not man.

A dangerous and highly contagious RNA Coronavirus named COVID-19 has ravaged the world. Many have been infected, and so far, over 200,000 people in the United States have died (October 2020). The U.S. government has asked that we remain at home as much as possible to prevent the spread of this disease. Public events were cancelled, and many businesses were closed. The fear and panic among people was evident. Early in the pandemic, grocery store shelves were bare, and toilet paper was nowhere to be found. In the midst of all this fear and anxiety, the words of Jesus are a great comfort:

Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart; AND YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”

God is our provider and sustainer. Put your trust in Him, and do not fear man or the Coronavirus. Fear God!

We are not to admire the natural man

Psalm 49:10-20

“For he sees that even wise men die; the stupid and the senseless alike perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is, that their houses are forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they have called their lands after their own names. But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the way of those who are foolish, and of those after them who approve their words. As sheep are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; and the upright shall rule over them in the morning; and their form shall be for Sheol to consume, so that they have no habitation. But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol; for He will receive me. Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not descend after him. Though while he lives he congratulates himself—and though men praise you when you do well for yourself—he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see the light. Man in his pomp, yet without understanding, is like the beasts that perish.”

It is common in our culture to admire sports figures, movie stars and wealthy businessmen and investors. These people have everything the world has to offer: money, multiple homes, private jets, private yachts, etc. Sadly, most of these people are lost and act as if they can take their riches with them after they die. Death comes to all men because all have sinned. In some ways, death is the great equalizer, as the rich man and the poor man have the same in common at death: no possessions, fame or fortune. Everything stays here. We are not to fear or admire the natural man, as he is a fool. He is lost. For when the coffin lid slams shut, reality comes. The reality of a life lived apart from God is eternity in hell. The riches of this life last for a season; the riches of heaven last for all eternity. Our mission is to bring the good news to them.

We are not to be like the natural man

Psalm 1

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates both day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

The life of a righteous man is different than that of the natural man. The righteous man delights in God’s word. Meditation on God’s word brings forth fruit in the life of a Christian. The believer is firmly planted and nourished by God’s word.

The natural man delights in the way of the wicked and is tossed by the wind. He pursues the lusts of the flesh and the mind. There is no place for God in his life. He will perish.

We are not to be bound to the natural man

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. THEREFORE, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE, SAYS THE LORD. AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; AND I WILL WELCOME YOU. AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE SONS AND DAUGHTERS TO ME, SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY.’”

Upon our conversion to Christ, we repent of our sins and leave behind a life of willful sinning and idolatry. Nevertheless, we remain in a world with the natural man. The Apostle Paul calls us out to be separated from the world and all uncleanness. Our relationship with the natural man has to change, as we are now sons and daughters of the living God. We must separate from the natural man, as we can no longer be partners with them and their sins. Therefore, any relationship with the natural man, which binds a believer to a non-believer in sinful activities, must not be consummated. This passage has an obvious application to marriage—a Christian should only marry another Christian. There may be other areas of application in the world of business. This does not mean we cannot have friends that are non-Christians. We need to build friendships with non-Christians, as we should always love our neighbor as ourselves. Relationships also provide the opportunity to share our faith. But these relationships cannot bind us to participate in their sins.

2 Chronicles 19:1-2

“Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, ‘Should you help the wicked and love those that hate the LORD and so bring wrath on yourself from the LORD?’”

In the chapter before this verse we read the story of Jehoshaphat’s unholy alliance with King Ahab. Ahab was a wicked and idolatrous king. We read in *1 Kings 16:30* that Ahab “...*did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him.*” Ahab married Jezebel, worshipped Baal, erected an altar for Baal and made the Asherah. King Jehoshaphat should have had nothing to do with the evil King Ahab.

Nevertheless, King Jehoshaphat allied himself in battle with king Ahab against the Syrians. It was God’s intent that Ahab should fall in this battle. Unfortunately, King

Jehoshaphat was being used by King Ahab and almost lost his life in this battle. King Jehoshaphat brought God's wrath upon himself, and, thankfully, God was merciful and spared his life. It is the duty of every Christian to refrain from any unholy alliances with the natural man.

7.5 Summary

The condition of man is that he stands condemned before God. The Fall of man in the Garden of Eden has corrupted all mankind. This corruption is so bad that man thinks he is good and does not even seek for God. He has become the enemy of God. As dark as the condition of man is, there is hope in the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. The next chapter discusses the solution to the condition of man and his fallen relationship with God. How can a man be accounted righteous before God even though he is not? What is it that man has to do in order to be accounted righteous before God? What will be the price paid for the redemption of the soul of man?

8. The Doctrine of Justification

Memory verses: *Romans 1:16-17, 1 Peter 2:24-25, Ephesians 2:8-10*

In the previous chapter on the condition of man, we saw that the Scripture teaches that man is steeped in idolatry and full of sin and iniquity. He stands condemned before a holy, righteous and loving God. It is only because God chose to communicate this information to us that we are aware of our dire situation. Like the doctor that called our friend from church regarding his blood donation with an elevated white cell count, God has placed a call to planet earth to inform mankind of the consequences of their sin and their need for a Savior. My friend heeded the call from the physician and sought clinical treatment for his life-threatening leukemia. Unfortunately, mankind has rejected God and has no interest in God's solution to the sin problem. Many deny the problem even exists. Some think they can get well by their own spiritual health plan or another religion. All are lost for all eternity.

In the midst of all this great darkness, God speaks:

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

The Scriptures teach that God has provided a solution to the sin problem through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This solution requires “believing” in Jesus Christ. In this chapter, the following questions will be addressed:

How can a man be accounted righteous before God even though he is not?

What is it that man has to do in order to be accounted righteous before God?

What will be the price paid for the redemption of the soul of man?

Our journey begins as we take a walk through the first four chapters of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The student should read Romans chapters 1-4 beforehand.

8.1 God's wrath

We saw, in the previous chapter, man's lost estate before God. In Romans chapters 1-4, the Apostle Paul, in this tractate Epistle, presents a series of theological arguments for the gospel and faith as a solution to the sin problem. By way of background, the book of Romans was composed around 57 A.D at Corinth, while Paul was on his third missionary journey. Paul had been church planting for approximately 25 years. An apostle did not

found the church at Rome. Jewish Christians who returned to Rome, after their conversion following Pentecost, likely founded the church. The church began with a Jewish majority that was later replaced by a Gentile majority when the Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.) expelled the Jews from Rome. When the Jews returned, tensions developed between the Jews and Gentiles over issues related to the OT law.

Paul opens his Epistle to the Romans with his salutation, followed by his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome:

Romans 1:11-15

“For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith, both yours and mine. And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. I am under obligation both to the Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.”

The Epistle of Paul to the Romans is like a symphony. Paul will begin to mention various concepts early in his Epistle and then develop them later. The first two concepts mentioned here are faith and the gospel, concepts that the believers in the church at Rome were obviously familiar with. So, after the first movement of the symphony, we have:

**Faith
Gospel**

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”

After the second movement of the symphony, we have:

**Faith
Gospel
God’s power—Salvation
God’s righteousness revealed—Faith
Righteous man—Lives by Faith**

We see why Paul was eager to preach the gospel, for it is the power of God, not man, for salvation. Paul will later develop this concept of faith, how a man can have the righteousness of God imputed to him instead of his sin. The way of life is radically

different for the righteous man versus the natural man. The righteous man possesses a way of life by faith. This “righteous” status granted by God is appropriated by faith. The greatest reformation the world has ever witnessed since the apostolic revival was ignited when a German monk named Martin Luther realized this truth of the gospel.

The Apostle Paul then suddenly pivots to the third movement of his symphonic Epistle by answering the question, why does the righteous man live by his faith?

Romans 1:18-20

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteous of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

After the third movement of the symphony, we have:

Faith
Gospel
God’s power—Salvation
God’s righteousness revealed—Faith
Righteous man—Lives by faith
God’s wrath—Sin of men

The Apostle Paul states that men continue to suppress the truth about God’s revelation in creation with all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Paul also pivots here from special revelation (God’s word) to general revelation (God’s creation) and that this general revelation of God’s creation is sufficient to condemn men. Faith is needed because men suppress the truth and have no righteousness of their own to offer to God.

The field of science can be involved with truth suppression. Dr. Max Perutz, a Nobel Prize winning scientist who elucidated the three dimensional structure of hemoglobin, the oxygen carrying molecule in the blood, commented on the comparison of hemoglobin molecules from various species. Dr. Perutz said, “This illustrates once again the astounding inventiveness of nature even on the molecular scale” (Perutz, M (1990) *Nature* **348**:583-584). This personification of nature lies inside the idolatrous hearts of sinful men.

God’s wrath is directed against this ungodliness and unrighteousness of men suppressing the truth. Clearly, God is angry at sin. Is God angry with sinners?

Some systematic theologians have made the distinction between the sinner and their sinful act, and then assume that the wrath of God is only vented against the sinner’s sin.

Perhaps you have heard the colloquial expression “God loves the sinner but hates the sin.” The following passages make it clear that God’s wrath is leveled against the sinful creature:

Psalm 5:5

“The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes; Thou dost hate all who do iniquity.”

Psalm 11:5

“The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates.”

John 3:36

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Ultimately, God’s wrath is directed toward the sinner. This wrath is abiding but may not be currently expressed because of God’s love, patience and common grace. It would appear that God has the ability to love and hate the sinner simultaneously, while remaining fully just, righteous, and holy.

Who is under the wrath of God?

The first concept the Apostle Paul fully develops in his Epistle to Romans is the application of God’s wrath.

Part I of God’s wrath: Immoral people

Romans 1:21-32

“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those that practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.”

We see in this passage that the sin of idolatry leads to the sins of immorality. Men are not accountable to God, and, hence, they weave their own standards of behavior. This passage clearly condemns homosexual behavior as it exchanges the natural function for the unnatural. Today, same sex couples can be married legally in many states. God gives people over to their lusts when they refuse to acknowledge Him. The conclusion is that the immoral people are under God’s wrath and need the righteousness of God, appropriated by faith.

Can you imagine a moral person’s response to these types of behavior? They may conclude these immoral people deserve God’s wrath. Many years ago, there was a circus-like atmosphere surrounding the execution of a serial killer named Ted Bundy in Florida. A sign at a local hotel stated, “Let him burn in hell.”

What about the moral people, are they under God’s wrath?

Part II of God’s wrath: Moral people

Romans 2:1-3

“Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

The reference to “same things” in this passage refers back to the sins of immorality in the previous chapter. Paul is turning the argument against those who condemn others because they practice the sins of others that they condemn doing. How is this so? Listen to the words of Jesus:

Matthew 5:27-28

“You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY;’ but I say to you that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Immoral people commit the outward act; moral people commit the inward act. It is sinful behavior in both cases and neither the immoral or moral person will escape the judgment of God.

Romans 2:4-16

“Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. For when the Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternatively accusing or else defending themselves, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

In this passage, the Apostle Paul introduces another concept:

Faith
Gospel
God’s power—Salvation
God’s righteousness revealed—Faith
Righteous man—Lives by faith
God’s wrath—Sin of men
Repentance—Granted by God

Repentance is mentioned here as a way to avoid God’s wrath. The Apostle Paul also writes in his Second Epistle to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:24-26

“And the Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

Repentance is granted as a gift from the Lord that leads to knowledge of the true gospel. Unfortunately, the self-righteous moral person claims to have no need of it. The moralist makes the relativistic argument that they are better than the immoral person and have no

need of repentance, i.e., no need to turn away from their sinful thoughts. The moralist justifies himself before God by saying in their heart, “I thought it but I did not do it.”

Paul is setting up a straw argument with the moralist, only to shoot it down later. Paul seems to be suggesting that salvation could be based upon keeping the Law. This is certainly a formal possibility. There is no sin if none of God’s Laws are broken. As we saw in the Matthew chapter 5 quotation of Jesus, the requirements of the law dig deep into the hearts of men. Lustful thoughts, even if not acted upon, are sinful. The Apostle Paul is arguing that it is **not** those who hear the law, it is **not** those who are Jews that have the written Law, and it is **not** those who judge others who will be justified. Only **doers** of the law will be justified. The moralist is claiming that intent to keep the law is sufficient to be justified by law before God. Paul is arguing that intent is not sufficient, and the moralist who argues that is storing up wrath in the future.

Regardless of the good intentions of men, the mere thought of sin is sufficient to condemn. The formal possibility of justification by works is impossible as all are under the power of sin, as we shall see later in Romans chapter 3. The conclusion is that the moral people are really not moral, and are under God’s wrath and need the righteousness of God, appropriated by faith.

Part III of God’s wrath: The Jews

The Apostle Paul now turns to the Jewish people. Certainly, the Jews were different; after all, they were God’s chosen people. They were given God’s Laws, God’s prophets and God’s covenant promises. Are the Jews under the wrath of God?

Romans 2:17-24

“But if you bear the name Jew, and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth; you therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For ‘THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,’ just as it is written.”

The Apostle Paul clearly points out that knowledge of the true God and possession of His Law is not sufficient to avoid God’s wrath. Only doers of the Law will be justified, as we saw earlier. Paul mentions that the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews. This interesting quotation from the OT in the above passage comes from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 52:4-5

“For thus says the Lord God, ‘My people went down at the first into Egypt to reside there, then the Assyrian oppressed them without cause. Now therefore, what do I have here,’ declares the Lord, ‘seeing that My people have been taken away without cause?’ Again the Lord declares, ‘Those who rule over them howl, and My name is continually blasphemed all day long.’”

How is it that the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles? When an enemy conquered a country, both that nation and their god were conquered, hence, the Gentiles blasphemed both the nation and their god. The Assyrians conquered Israel because of their failure to remain faithful to God and keep His commandments. The name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the Jews’ failure to keep God’s Law.

This failure to keep God’s Law resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. The priest and prophet, Ezekiel, vividly writes about God’s wrath upon the house of Israel for their sins while in exile in Babylon:

Ezekiel 22:17-22

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; all of them are bronze and tin and iron and lead in the furnace; they are the dross of silver. Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘Because all of you have become dross, therefore, behold, I am going to gather you in the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin into the furnace to blow fire on it to melt it, so I shall gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I shall lay you there and melt you. And I shall gather you and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you will be melted in the midst of it. As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you.’”

Clearly, God’s wrath was upon the exiles for their failure to keep God’s Law. The Apostle Paul then addresses the value of circumcision:

Romans 2:25-29

“For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision become circumcision? And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the Letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

In this passage, the Apostle Paul introduces another concept:

Faith
Gospel
God's power—Salvation
God's righteousness revealed—Faith
Righteous man—Lives by faith
God's wrath—Sin of men
Repentance—Granted by God
Circumcision of the heart—By the Spirit

Paul introduces the concept of circumcision of the heart, also mentioned in the OT (*Deuteronomy 10:16*). Circumcision of the flesh was how a Jew gained entrance to the Mosaic covenant, a covenant of Law. Paul argues that circumcision of the flesh is of no value if you do not practice the Law; hence, the need for a new covenant, a covenant of grace through circumcision of the heart (*Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 7:22*). Even though the Jews had the Mosaic covenant, the Law, the promises and the blessings of the God of Israel, yet because they broke the Law, they were no different than the Gentiles, as far as being under the wrath of God.

Paul has established that, through transgression of the Law by the Jews, their circumcision has become uncircumcision. He then argues that if an uncircumcised Gentile keeps the Law, will not his uncircumcision become circumcision? Paul's point, to be developed later, is that the uncircumcised Gentiles will meet God's demand for keeping the Law through faith in Christ by circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit. Hence, an uncircumcised Gentile could be a full member of God's chosen people, the Jews. Whereas, the Jews may have thought that they would sit in judgment over the Gentiles because they had God's Law, Paul turns this completely around by saying that an uncircumcised Gentile will sit in judgment over the circumcised Jew. This is a radical statement for sure, but the point Paul is making is that both Jew and Gentile need the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit. The real Jew, the real believer, regardless of ethnic background, is one who has a circumcised heart by the Spirit. The conclusion is that the privileged status of being born a Jew is not a distinction, as far as the wrath of God is concerned; the Jews are under God's wrath and need the righteousness of God, appropriated by faith. Then, what advantage does the Jew have?

Romans 3:1-2

"Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

There were several advantages to being born a Jew and having been given the Scriptures:

1. The Jews knew the true God, and thus could obtain forgiveness of sins and salvation. The Gentiles were constantly making idols and trying to appease a plethora of false gods.
2. The Jews knew that their lives were a part of God's divine plan and not a product of chance.
3. The Jews could know the future through the prophets and their writings. In some cases, direct inquiry to God could be made through the prophets, e.g., Hezekiah to Isaiah (*2 Kings 19:1-7*) or through the High Priest with Urim and Thummin, e.g., David to Abiathar (*1 Samuel 23:9-12*).
4. The Jews were given the blessings and curses, as well as the Promised Land, which they lost because of their unfaithfulness.
5. The Jews had the Mosaic Law, which guided them on how to live. This included the Levitical laws on personal hygiene and cleanliness, including the quarantine of a person with a communicable disease, e.g. leprosy (*Leviticus 13, 14*). This was written long before the germ theory of disease was discovered and the implementation of modern quarantine procedures, as currently seen in the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

All in all, these advantages could never be fully realized except by faith in and obedience to the God of Israel. Unfortunately, many Jews were not faithful to God, and as a nation, their enemies conquered them.

The Apostle Paul now deals with a series of objections, through an interlocutor, regarding the Jews, God's chosen people, being under the wrath of God.

Romans 3:3-4

“What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, ‘THAT THOU MIGHTIEST BE JUSTIFIED IN THY WORDS, AND MIGHTIEST PREVAIL WHEN THOU ART JUDGED.’”

The Apostle Paul, in the above passage, quotes Psalm 51, where David confesses his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. The point Paul is making is that God deals with people as individuals. God remains faithful to His promises regardless of the choices people make. The Jews who were Jews inwardly, received the promises of God, whereas those who were unfaithful received judgment. God's faithfulness is not nullified when He deals with the Jews as individuals. Simply being born Jewish and circumcised in the flesh did

not guarantee the promises because they broke God's Law, and the Gentiles blasphemed God because of it. Circumcision of the heart under the New Covenant was required.

This passage reminds me of a High School classmate of mine who graduated near the top of our graduating class. We both graduated and then attended the same university. If we both met the requirements of our degree programs at the university four years later, we would both graduate. Unfortunately, my classmate got involved in drugs, dropped out of school and did not graduate. I met the requirements for my degree program and graduated from the university. His failure to graduate from the university did not impact me because the university treated us as individuals. The university was not unfaithful to him as he failed to meet the requirements of the university. The same is true of God. Those Jews who became Jews inwardly received the promises of God, and those who did not and were unfaithful, received His judgment. The interlocutor is arguing that simply being born a Jew, they should receive the promises of God. Paul argued previously that circumcision of the heart by the Spirit was needed to receive the promises of God.

Romans 3:5-6

“But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) May it never be! For otherwise how will God judge the world?”

The interlocutor raises another objection. If our sin magnifies God's righteousness, isn't that unfair to be under His wrath? After all, we are making God look righteous. Paul strikes it down since God will judge impartially (*Romans 2:11*) and is righteous regardless what men say or do. God could not judge the world if He was unrighteous.

Romans 3:7-8

“But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and some affirm we say), ‘Let us do evil that good may come’? Their condemnation is just.”

The interlocutor raises a final objection. If one does not have to keep the Law in order to receive the promises, the more one sins, the better God's glory. Why am I judged for magnifying the truth of God to His glory?

Apparently, the false teaching was circulated that, since Paul teaches righteousness apart from the Law, the more one sins, the more God's grace will be shown. The interlocutor is arguing that since one cannot keep the Law to obtain the promises, why bother to keep any of it? Just do evil that good will come, i.e., the promises! This is a total distortion of the gospel, as the point of receiving forgiveness of sins from God is to repent from sin and lead a life pleasing to the Lord. Paul says that those who distort the gospel receive a just condemnation.

Part IV of God's wrath: All under the power of sin

Romans 3:9-18

***“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,
‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE THAT DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’
‘THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,’
‘THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS;’
‘WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS;’
‘THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN.’
‘THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.’”***

Paul's conclusion to this section is that all are under the power of sin, both Jew and Gentile, and, therefore, all are under the wrath of God. How can the wrath of God be avoided? How can this righteousness of God be obtained? Who will pay the price for the sins of men?

8.2 Gospel and faith

We just learned that what really matters, as far as the righteousness of God is concerned, is being a Jew inwardly by circumcision of the heart by the Spirit. The Apostle Paul now presents the formal doctrine of justification by faith.

Romans 3:19-20

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.”

The Law refers to the entire OT canon, as the quotations above were from the book of Psalms and Isaiah in *Romans 3:10-18*. The entire world, both Jew and Gentile, are judged guilty before the Divine bar of God, as all have broken God's law. There is no discussion, no objection, and no pleas to be entered, or defense to be made before God. All that remains is the sentencing of the wrath of God. Paul goes on to argue that the Law was never intended to justify anyone before God. The Law was to inform man of

his sinful fallen nature. The righteousness of God does not come through obedience to the Law, as nobody can keep it perfectly.

In the midst of this dark and vexing drama before the Divine bar, a ray of hope emerges.

Romans 3:21

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets;”

This is great news! Since the Law could only condemn us, another path to the righteousness of God was needed. Paul indicates this path has already been revealed in the OT Law and prophets.

Excursus: OT passages reveal righteousness of God through faith

Genesis 12:1-3

“Now the LORD said to Abram, go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

In this passage, the promise is made to Abram that all families, including both Jews and Gentiles, will be blessed in Abram. This is a reference to Abram’s seed, the Messiah. Paul quotes this passage in Galatians:

Galatians 3:8

“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.’”

The gospel and faith have their deep roots in the OT Scriptures, that is, the righteousness of God apart from works of the Law. The Law was never intended to save anyone.

Genesis 15:1-6

“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision saying, ‘Do not fear Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great.’ And Abram said, ‘O Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So

shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Abraham believed God’s promise, and it was accounted to him as righteousness. God’s promise was obtained by believing, not doing.

Job 19:25-26

“And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God.”

Job speaks of His Redeemer, who will come to earth, and of seeing God in the resurrection.

Isaiah 7:14

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

Isaiah 9:6-7

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.”

Isaiah 53:5-6

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

Isaiah 53:10-12

“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in his hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”

This series of passages in Isaiah reveal the coming of the Son of God, the Messiah and Redeemer, who will bear the iniquities of men. He will die through piercing, a Roman form of execution, and will be resurrected from the dead. He will make intercession for

the transgressors (imperfect Hebrew tense in *Isaiah 53:12*) through His death and resurrection.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”

Jeremiah introduces the new covenant, a covenant of grace, whereby the Lord by the Spirit, will circumcise the hearts of men and forgive their sins.

Habakkuk 2:4

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”

Paul quoted this passage in *Romans 1:17*, in which the righteousness of God is revealed by faith. Paul is now going to fully develop this concept of the righteousness of God imputed to man by faith through the redemption in Christ.

Righteousness of God through faith

Romans 3:22-23

“Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

Salvation, the righteousness of God imputed to the believer in Christ through faith, is open to all who believe. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and are under the wrath of God. What exactly does the individual have to believe about Jesus Christ, the object of faith, for forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of God? What did Jesus do to pay the penalty for sin?

Romans 3:24-26

“Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the

sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Justification, the state of being declared righteous and now in possession of the righteousness of God, is connected to the redemption, rescue through ransom, in Christ Jesus. This is a gift by His grace, and, therefore, not earned by the works of men. This redemption was made possible by the propitiation—the bloody, atoning and wrath removing sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is the blood atonement of Jesus that takes away our sins and removes the wrath of God. It is important, therefore, by faith in Jesus Christ, to believe that Jesus takes away your sin by shedding His blood on the cross for you. Jesus rescued you from your sins by His shed blood on the cross as a ransom payment for sin. Why was a blood sacrifice by Jesus necessary?

Leviticus 17:11

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.”

Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

Hebrews 9:22

“And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”

1 Peter 2:20-24

“For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats; but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.”

In God’s Law, there was no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. Jesus actually bore your sins on His body and then paid the penalty for sins by shedding His blood and giving His life for you. Jesus died in your place so that you could have eternal life. Jesus could do this because He was God and led a sinless life. By faith in Jesus He gave you His sinless life and righteous standing before God in exchange for your sinful life and condemnation from God. Theologians use the term “substitutionary atonement” to describe this process.

Paul mentions the demonstration of God's righteousness. God's righteousness was demonstrated in that a price had to be paid for sin in order for sinners to receive forgiveness. Therefore, God is just (penalty must be paid for sin) and the justifier (God decided to pay for sins through His Precious Son, the Lord Jesus). This is very similar to our criminal justice system. If an individual is found guilty of a crime, the judge gives an appropriate sentence. The same is true here for the crime of breaking God's Law. Either the sinner accepts payment for sins by the Judge, or else the wrath of God remains on the sinner, who will later appear before the Judge where sentence to the lake of fire will be given.

Lastly, the Apostle Paul also makes the comment *"in the forbearance of God He passed over sins previously committed."* God passed over the sins of people who put their faith in the Messiah prior to His coming to die on the cross for their sins. The OT believers secured forgiveness, e.g., the Passover of God's wrath. Their faith looked forward to the sacrifice that was promised by God to take away their sins. Our faith looks backward to the finished work of the atonement.

Romans 3:27-31

"Where then is their boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also—if indeed God is one—and He will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."

There is no boasting allowed, as any person who has been justified by faith apart from works of the law has done nothing to merit salvation. All glory to God and none to man. God is both God of the Jews and of the Gentiles, a point consistent with the fact that salvation is apart from the works of the law, as the Gentile believers were not circumcised. Since faith does not nullify the Law, there is a continuing role of the Law in our lives. The Law now governs how we should live, love God, and love one another.

John 15:9-12

"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

Romans 13:10

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is fulfillment of the law."

The law of faith results in love, which fulfills the law. We do not keep the commandments to be justified; we keep the commandments to love God and people.

Love is the fruit of faith and is the work of the Holy Spirit, as we will see later in the chapter on the Doctrine of Sanctification.

Abraham: The paradigm for justification by faith

The Apostle Paul now introduces the legendary man of faith, Abraham, the father of many nations. Abraham will be used as a paradigm of faith in both chapter 4 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans and chapter 3 of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

The introduction of the patriarch Abraham sets the stage for Paul to refute first century Judaism, which believed that Abraham was a model of obedience to the Law as his basis for justification. So, perfect was Abraham's obedience that the Jews believed that being descended from this great man and keeping the Law, though not as perfectly as Abraham, was sufficient grounds for justification by works of the Law. A couple of passages in the NT Scriptures capture the Pharisaic attitude toward Abraham.

Matthew 3:1-9

"Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!' Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father;' for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.'"

The Pharisees and Sadducees were relying on their descent from Abraham to shield them from the wrath of God. Their justification could be simply stated as salvation through Abraham and the Law. John the Baptist exhorts them to repent from sin and bear fruit.

John 8:31-44

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's offspring, and have never been enslaved to any one; how is it that You say, 'You shall become free?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is the slave of sin. And the slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham's offspring; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things

which you have heard from your father.’ They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and come from God, for I have not come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar and the father of lies.’”

The Jews first claim that Abraham is their father, and Jesus exhorts them to do the deeds of Abraham. They then claim God is their Father, while trying to kill Jesus. Jesus says, *“If God were your Father you would love Me.”* Since neither Abraham nor God is their father, based upon their deeds, Jesus concludes the devil is their father. We see again that the Jews are relying on father Abraham for justification. If anyone earned his way to heaven, Abraham did.

Romans 4:1-3

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’”

Abraham cannot boast before God because he was not justified by works as shown by quoting the passage from *Genesis 15:6*. Abraham was justified by faith, by believing the promise God made to him. When Abraham believed, he received the righteousness of God.

Romans 4:4-5

“Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

Paul uses an example from the working world. When you accept a job, you agree to perform the work in exchange for the salary from the employer. This is an earned wage and not a gift. Paul argues that the person who does not work, yet receives compensation, does not earn a wage but receives a gift. Righteousness by faith operates this way. To the ungodly and unrighteous person, who believes that God will give him righteousness he cannot earn or deserve, his faith in God is reckoned as righteousness. His faith appropriates the righteous standing before God, even though he is not righteous.

Paul then takes an example from the life of King David:

Romans 4:6-8

“Just as David speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

‘BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.’”

This is a quotation from Psalm 32 where King David confesses his sin before God. He offers God nothing except the sin of his soul. Righteousness apart from works of the law is imputed when God forgives the sinner and removes the guilt of their sin.

Repentance—the sinner asks forgiveness from God and turns from their sin.

Faith—the sinner places their hope in the shed blood of Christ and His resurrection

Righteousness—imputed to the sinner who repents and places their faith in Christ

There are no works of men involved. It is all the work of God through the atonement and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 4:9-12

“Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.”

Abraham’s faith was reckoned as righteousness long before Abraham was physically circumcised (see *Genesis 15:6* and *Genesis 17:23-24*, an interval of at least 13 years). Circumcision, in particular, and works of the Law in general, do not impute righteousness to either a circumcised Jew or uncircumcised Gentile. Circumcision, as a sign, foreshadowed the removal of guilt and sin from the soul. Circumcision, as a seal, was God’s guarantee to Abraham that He would fulfill the promise of the Messiah who would atone for the sin of all nations. The key point is that Abraham is the paradigm for justification by faith for all who would believe, both Jew and Gentile. Through faith in Christ, the barrier of the dividing wall is removed between Jew and Gentile (*Ephesians 2:11-22*).

An objection could be raised to Paul's doctrine of justification, namely, that Abraham was justified by faith apart from works of the Law, because the Law had yet to be given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Did the imputation of righteousness change after the Law was given to Moses? In the above passage, it is implied that the formal giving of the Mosaic Law never changed the righteousness of God through faith. Abraham is the father of all who believe, both Jew and Gentile, and Romans was written long after the Mosaic Law (ca. 57 A.D.). The Apostle Paul explicitly deals with this objection in his polemic Epistle to the Galatians.

Excursus: The Galatian Heresy

In Galatia, the Jews were circulating a false gospel that you had to be circumcised in order to receive the righteousness of God. In other words, faith plus circumcision was required for justification. The argument would be made that circumcision is a part of faith. Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved. The Apostle Paul argues that this is a false gospel.

Galatians 3:1-18

***“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Even so ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith that are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham saying, ‘ALL THE NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED IN YOU.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERY ONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.’ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘AND TO SEEDS,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘AND TO YOUR SEED,’ that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.*”**

For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.”

All who have faith are sons of Abraham, according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. *“The Law is not of faith”* and was never a part of Abraham’s faith. Recall Abraham was a believer long before he was circumcised. God will never add conditions to faith apart from works of the Law. The Law, which came later, never changed the promise God made to Abraham, the believer. The covenant of grace remains, and still is, a covenant of justification by faith apart from works of the Law.

The Apostle Paul further adds:

Galatians 3:19-26

“Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise has been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one. Is the Law contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith, which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

The Law was our tutor to lead us to Christ, having brought to us the knowledge of sin. The Law never was intended to save anyone. The Apostle Paul later issues a stern warning:

Galatians 5:1-4

“It was for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by Law; you have fallen from grace.

Paul concludes that if you believe a false gospel, a gospel that includes faith plus circumcision, you are not a Christian. God will never add any conditions to the covenant of grace and neither should anyone else. Unfortunately, various religious organizations

add conditions to the covenant of grace, either by adding works to faith or considering the works a part of faith. The teachings of the Church of Christ require water baptism for salvation. The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church require the obedience to various sacraments for salvation. It is important when speaking with adherents to these and other religions, to understand their personal faith in the Lord Jesus. Abraham, the father of all believers, was declared righteous prior to circumcision. He simply believed God's promise without any added human works. Paul now writes in Romans:

Romans 4:13-17

“For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, ‘A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU’) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.”

The Law brings wrath because no one is able to keep it. Therefore, the promise is based upon God's righteousness obtained through faith and not works of the law, a gift of God's grace. Abraham is father of many nations of believers.

Romans 4:18-22

“In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which he had spoken, ‘SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.’ And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able to perform. Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

God promised to Abraham that Sarah would bear the child of promise (*Genesis 15:1-6, Genesis 18:9-15*). Abraham was about hundred years old, and Sarah's womb was dead (Gk. *nekrōsis*), as she was beyond her childbearing years (*Genesis 18:11*). Nevertheless, Abraham grew strong in faith, and his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness. This passage gives an “operational” definition of the word faith as practiced by Abraham:

Faith—the state of being fully assured that what God has promised He is able to perform.

In the book of Hebrews a similar definition is given:

Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Faith is not a mere wish or hope without any assurance. It is not a “knock on wood” or “cross your fingers” exercise. Faith is not fickle. Biblical faith has an assurance grounded in the fact that God is able and will keep His promises. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe who is omnipotent, holy, righteous and loving. Any doubts that are experienced by us from time to time do not change God’s promises. He will never leave us or forsake us as it is written:

Hebrews 13:5-6

“Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said ‘I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,’ so that we confidently say, ‘THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT SHALL MAN DO TO ME.’”

The Apostle Paul now concludes his discourse on justification by faith.

Romans 4:23-25

“Now not for his sake only was it written, that ‘IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM,’ but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, Him who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

Paul concludes that what was written about Abraham and his faith was also written for our sake. Faith apart from works of the Law is taught in the OT, and Abraham is the paradigm for saving faith. Paul also points out that the doctrine of justification requires the belief that Jesus Christ was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead. His death on the cross was proof that He bore our sins on His body. His resurrection was proof that our sins were covered and paid for. The glorious truth about the gospel is that we obtain the righteousness of God. We have the standing of Jesus Christ before the Father as a free gift of His grace. Therefore, upon our death, Jesus will welcome us into heaven with eternal life. *Soli Deo Gloria*, Amen!

8.3 Living faith

When people are young adults, very few trips are made to the doctor. But as you get older and cross the half-century year-old mark, things begin to go wrong and you find yourself in the doctor's office. In my experience, in virtually every doctor's office I have visited, the medical doctor's credentials are on display. Typically, the medical degree diploma is proudly displayed on the office wall, along with certificates denoting board certification in their medical specialty, and additional fellowships they have completed. This provides some level of comfort to the patient, anxiously awaiting their fate before the doctor. It certainly brings more comfort than the famous commercial Holiday Inn used to run on television, promoting the good night's sleep associated with their hotels. For example, a man has had an accident on the side of the road with his trail bike, and is in obvious pain with a broken leg. A Good Samaritan motorist pulls over and gets out to provide medical assistance. It seems like the motorist is a medical doctor attending to his wounds. The wounded bike rider asks the Good Samaritan, "Are you a medical doctor?" To which the Good Samaritan replies, "No, but I had a good night's stay at the Holiday Inn!"

Medical students in the United States go through rigorous training to obtain their diplomas and board certification. My nephew is a board certified orthopedic surgeon with a fellowship in high-speed trauma. He spent four years in undergraduate education, four years in medical school, five years in orthopedic residency, and an additional year in a high-speed trauma fellowship. He passed his boards and has to repeat that at regular intervals to maintain his board certification in orthopedics. He has quite an impressive CV. He has all the credentials and training required to practice medicine. It is one thing to display a medical school diploma on the wall; it is another thing to assemble a surgical team in the middle of a night to treat car accident victims of high-speed trauma.

The Apostle Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, eloquently proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith. Paul uses the term "justification" in the forensic or legal sense; what I believe with respect to Christ. As a Christian, you have the certificate on the wall that you are saved by the grace of God. A question to be asked is this: if I am a Christian in the forensic or legal sense, how do I practice my faith in the pragmatic sense? Am I like my nephew with his medical school diploma on the wall, practicing medicine in the emergency trauma unit? Am I a Christian actively practicing my Christian faith?

The Apostle Paul made it abundantly clear that a man is saved apart from works of the law. What, then, is the relation between faith and works? Works cannot save one, but can one really claim they have faith with no works? Can one claim to be a Christian with no works? This issue is addressed in the Epistle of James.

The justification paradox

The Epistle of James is a book in the Bible that even caused Martin Luther some consternation. He considered it a “straw epistle” and put it in the back of the German Bible he translated. Here are the passages of Scripture in James’ Epistle that are alleged to be in contradiction to Paul’s Epistle to the Romans:

James 2:21

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?”

James 2:26

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

These verses appear to be in contradiction to the verse below in Paul’s Epistle to Romans:

Romans 3:28

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

There are at least four possible solutions to this apparent contradiction:

1. The Bible is full of contradictions and this is just another example (The reprobate solution).
2. The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and James’ Epistle are harmonious, but are viewing faith and justification from different perspectives (The Orthodox solution).
3. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans was written after James’ Epistle, and is correcting the errors in James’ Epistle (The error correction solution).
4. The Epistle of James supplements what is lacking in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, namely, works (The false gospel solution).

Addressing the justification paradox will require that we utilize our hermeneutical toolbox (principles of Scripture interpretation) to come to solution number two, which is mutually exclusive to the other three.

The hermeneutical toolbox

In dealing with problem passages and alleged contradictions or discrepancies in the Scriptures, here are the tools needed from the hermeneutical toolbox:

1. Pray for wisdom, as the Scripture twisters are crafty. Remember Nehemiah shot up a prayer to God in the heat of the moment (*Nehemiah 2:4*).
2. Understand verses in their historical context from immediate chapter to entire book.
3. Understand quoted passages from other parts of the Bible in their context.
4. Pay attention to the range of meaning of words in English, Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic.
5. Determine what the problem passage does not say, in context.
6. Let Scripture interpret Scripture where possible. Less clear passages are understood by the more clear.

If you are helping someone and are unable to help him or her, or you find yourself confused, it is ok to admit that you need to study it more and will get back to him or her. After all, only God is all knowing, and there are plenty of resources and godly leaders in your local church who can assist.

Be a doer of the word

After a moment of prayer, let's get out the tools and review the Epistle of James. The Epistle of James opens with believers undergoing trials and observing faith in action:

James 1:2-8

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James 1:12

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

James is clearly viewing faith very differently than Paul in Romans. He is talking about the quality of faith in a pragmatic sense. Faith can grow through trials as it is tested, and faith should not doubt God. The quality of the man's faith is in focus here as demonstrated in action. Those who persevere through trials will receive a crown of life. There is no salvation mentioned here, as it is assumed the man has saving faith, which will persevere under trials.

James 1:17-25

“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be as it were the first fruits among His creatures. This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourself doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.”

This stretch of the Epistle of James is the thematic passage that sets up the context for faith and works in the next chapter. James wants believers to put aside sin and receive the gospel that can save your souls. He goes even further and says that believers should prove *“to be doers of the word.”* God expects believers, who have repented of their sins and put their faith in Christ, to behave like Jesus Christ. When you look into the mirror, do you see Jesus? If someone spends time with you, have they spent time with Jesus? Whereas faith in Romans was focused on what you **believe** about Christ, faith in James is focused on how you **behave** like Christ. Just like an orthopedic surgeon with a medical school diploma on the wall can perform life-saving surgery, God expects believers with their diploma of faith on the wall to practice their faith as effectual doers of the word of truth.

James 2:14

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can that faith save him?”

James has in view the person who is a hearer but not a doer of the word. James is examining the quality of faith as viewed through the lens of works. The question implies that faith alone saves.

James 2:15-17

“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled’; and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body; what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”

The hearer, but not a doer of the word, hears the need but does nothing other than lip service. The bottom line is that a living faith does the word, and a dead faith does not. Jesus warns us of those with dead faith, as it really is no faith at all:

Matthew 25:31-46

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and cloth You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not cloth Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The sober words of Jesus are a warning to those who are hearers but not doers of the word. Their lives are probably no different than the non-Christian, i.e., they are not practicing their faith.

James 2:18-20

“But someone may well say, ‘You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”

James is arguing that works can show a man's faith, and that faith and works are inseparable. A man's behavior should reflect what they believe. James is looking at faith from a pragmatic perspective. Mere intellectual assent to Scriptural truths does not necessarily mean a person is a believer, as demons also believe things about God. So it is possible to believe biblical truths about God and not actually be converted.

Consider the following illustration about faith and works. Many years ago a man strung a high wire connecting the tops of the two former World Trade Center buildings in New York City. For the sake of illustration, let's pretend you're on the top of one of these buildings. You admire the man who fearlessly crosses the high wire. The high wire man then takes a special wheelbarrow across the wire and back again. You can hardly believe your eyes as he performs this amazing feat. He asks you, "Do you believe I can take the wheelbarrow across the wire again?" To which you reply, "Sure, you just did it before." There is faith involved in believing he can do it a second time but no works. You are a mere spectator. The high wire man then asks you, "How about getting in the wheelbarrow, and I'll take you for a ride across the high wire?"

If you say no, your faith is dead. If you say yes, you are exercising a faith with works, in that you get into the wheelbarrow and trust the man to see you safely across the high wire. Men can say they believe in Jesus, but if they do not show their faith with works, their faith is dead. This is a point that James will make when he considers the faith of Abraham.

James 2:21-24

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."

Abraham is a key example of being justified by works according to James. What does James mean when he states, "*justified by works?*" The immediate context of *James 2:18* and the larger context of the Epistle of James give us a contextual basis for understanding the word "justified" to mean that Abraham's faith was shown by his works as opposed to his faith being obtained by works. A brief review of the life of Abraham can demonstrate that this is the case.

As we saw earlier in Romans:

Romans 4:1-3

"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.'"

Abraham cannot boast before God because he was not justified by works as shown by quoting the passage from *Genesis 15:6*. Abraham was justified by faith by believing the promise God made to him. Because Abraham believed, he received the righteousness of God.

The Apostle Paul is using the word “justify” in the book of Romans in the forensic or legal sense. Abraham was a believer as noted in *Genesis 15:6*. At this point in Abraham’s life, Isaac was not born. Years later, after Isaac was born to Abraham in his old age (*Genesis 21:1-5*), Abraham offered Isaac on the altar on Mount Moriah as recorded below.

Genesis 22:1-14

“Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I tell you.’ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he spilt wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you.’ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. And Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am my son.’ And he said, ‘Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.’ So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.’ Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went back and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, ‘In the mount of the LORD it will be provided.’”

This event is also captured in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:17-19

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘IN

ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED.’ He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.”

God tested Abraham’s faith, and Abraham demonstrated that faith with works by offering up Isaac on the altar. At the time, Abraham believed he was going to slay Isaac but that God would raise him from the dead in order to fulfill the promise. Abraham’s faith in God was shown to be genuine back in *Genesis 15* by the works that followed his faith in *Genesis 22*. Even though Abraham’s faith was perfected in *Genesis 22*, Abraham already was a believer in *Genesis 15*. Works help faith to grow and demonstrate whether a person is a true believer—one who possesses a faith with works, a living faith. When James states, *“a man is justified by works and not by faith alone,”* he is stating that the only way we can know if a person has a right standing with God is to see the works that follow faith. Faith and works are inseparable, and the relationship of faith and works is union (come together) without fusion (but separate). This is a living faith. Justified by faith (accounted righteous by God) is shown to be true faith by also being justified by works (shown to be righteous). Works demonstrate that justification by faith apart from works of the law is real and not mere intellectual assent. The words of Jesus remind us of this important truth:

Matthew 7:20-21

“So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.”

James concludes his discussion of faith and works with another person named Rahab.

James 2:25-26

“And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

One might argue that some of us may not have faith as strong as father Abraham. He was even willing to offer his only son in obedience to God. What about the rest of us, trying to live for the Lord? In the above passage, James mentions the faith and works of a Gentile prostitute named Rahab. The account of Rahab in the OT is shown below:

Joshua 2:1-16

“Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, ‘Go, view the land, especially Jericho.’ So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, ‘Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.’ And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out the land.’ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, ‘Yes, the men

came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.’ But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate. Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.’ So the men said to her, ‘Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.’ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. And she said to them, ‘Go to the hill country, lest the pursuers happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days, until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.’”

Rahab heard of the mighty acts of the God of Israel. Rahab confessed her faith that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Her faith was shown to be genuine by her works, namely, as she received the spies and hid them so that they could return safely to Joshua. Rahab risked her life so that she could preserve her life and the life of her family. Even though the Scriptures are silent about her sordid past and the lying she performed to protect the spies, she is mentioned in the Hall of Faith chapter in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:31

“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”

She was a woman of faith and works: justified by faith (accounted righteous) and justified by works (shown righteous). God spared the life of her and her family.

James compares faith without works to a corpse. *“Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.”* I vividly recall an experience I had after my Dad passed away a few years ago. He was a wonderful Dad, full of life and good times, and near the end of his life he trusted Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. I was living in Illinois at the time and saw him in Arizona, in a hospital bed, one week before he passed

away. He was in a weakened state at the time, being 87 years old and the survivor of two heart bypass operations. He was still full of life and always retained his sense of humor. After I returned to Illinois, a few days later, he passed into glory. I received the call from my Mom that he had passed on a Sunday morning and flew to Arizona that day. Upon arrival, my younger sister and I were helping my Mom make the final arrangements for his cremation and the funeral home asked if we wanted to see my Dad's body one last time before he was cremated. I said yes without hesitation, and my sister and I saw my Dad's body one last time. He was laid on a table wrapped in a white linen sheet. There was my wonderful Dad I had known all my life, gone to glory. He was lifeless and cold to the touch.

James tells us that faith without works is no different than my lifeless Dad lying dead in a funeral home. God calls us to a living faith, a faith with works. We can only be justified by faith before God as a gift of His grace. We cannot earn, merit or deserve salvation by offering good works for the salvation of our soul. Jesus paid it all at Calvary and rose from the dead. After we put our faith in Christ, the good works follow faith in obedience to God's word. They have no merit but demonstrate genuine faith, as we love God and our neighbor by keeping God's commandments. Do not be a fool and think you can pray the sinner's prayer and continue your life as before. God wants your heart, surrendered to Him, and He wants to be on the throne of your life. If you have dead faith, faith without works, you are no different than the demons. Repent, and turn your life over to the Lord and live in obedience to Him. Come to living faith in Jesus Christ.

8.4 Summary

By God's marvelous grace, the amazing sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection, we can be accounted righteous before God by repentance and faith in Christ. Jesus paid for all of our sins and now calls us to a life of obedience to Him—a living faith full of good works. Faith and works are inseparable, union without fusion. The same is true about the doctrines of justification by faith and sanctification by the Holy Spirit—union (come together) without fusion (but separate). Having been justified by faith before God, how now should we live? The next chapter describes the Spirit filled life God expects of all believers and how to live it.

9. The Doctrine of Sanctification

Memory verses: *Romans 8:14, 1 Peter 2:24-25, 1 Corinthians 10:13*

The doctrine of justification by faith enables us to have forgiveness of sins and peace with God. The peace that Jesus gives us is not like the peace of the world (*John 14:27*). The COVID-19 pandemic is a vivid reminder to us that the world we live in is, at times, uncertain and not peaceful. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the hope the world needs in these uncertain times. Over 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ proclaimed the gospel, died on the cross for our sins, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Shortly thereafter, the apostles of Jesus took up His mantle and led the apostolic revival, by proclaiming the good news to a dying world. After the healing of a lame beggar in the temple, the Apostle Peter proclaims the good news to the Jews:

Acts 3:11-26

“And while he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, ‘Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, —a fact to which we are witnesses. And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus, which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith, which comes through Him, has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things, which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM AMONG YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED IN EVERYTHING HE SAYS TO YOU. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL THAT DOES NOT HEED THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.’ And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant, which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”

Here we see the power of faith that comes through Christ in action, not only taking away the sins of the lame beggar, but also rendering him no longer a lame man. The Apostle Peter exhorts his audience to turn from their wicked ways, repent and put their faith in Jesus, that their sins may be washed away.

The word “repent” in Greek means a change of heart or mind, with a view to transformation. Think about this for a moment. Prior to your conversion to Christ, you lived your whole life up to that point in sin and in a sinful world. Now you repent and put your faith in Christ. Now what happens? What has changed? You have begun to change and be transformed by the renewing of your mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. The lost world has not changed and continues business as usual in sin. All the temptations are still out there that you previously enjoyed. Your friends want you to go out and party hard and wonder why you no longer want to party. You feel a struggle, a tug from the world to go back to sin, and another tug from the Spirit to refrain from sin. This is not easy, as you find yourself in a battle that might start tearing you in pieces. Who do you please, men or God?

You are not alone. The Apostle Paul describes his struggle with sin:

Romans 7:14-25

“For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

Even though Paul admits sin is a struggle, we need to put sin behind us:

Romans 6:1-2

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

We are to be dead to sin. That is easy to say and hard to do. We still have our sinful flesh in a world filled with sin. The flesh only wants to sin; our minds want to do the

things of the Spirit, namely, love God and keep His commands. Hence, the struggle we experience in our lives, between the flesh and the Spirit. What behavior does God expect from believers? What is God's will for us? After all, we are His children, bearing His name. Do we bear His name or do we bear our shame? That is the question.

9.1 God's will: Your sanctification

Sometimes, the discussion about God's will centers on personal decision-making. For example, who does God want me to marry, what college should I attend, should I be a pastor or engineer? These are important decisions to be made, and the Scriptures provide wisdom to guide you. However, the Scriptures are very clear on what God's will is for all believers.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, as you have received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

God's will for all believers is their personal sanctification, that is, being set apart from sexual immorality, lust, passion and impurity, and to possess one's vessel in honor.

1 Peter 1:13-16

"Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.'"

Believers should put off lust and put on God's holiness. We are to be holy as God is holy. Sanctification is the process whereby believers are set apart from their former manner of sinful life and become conformed to the holiness of God. Whereas justification by faith occurs instantly upon believing, sanctification by the Spirit is a lifelong process, becoming more conformed to the image of Christ.

After having lived a sinful life for a long time, how soon should this transformation process occur? The following passage sheds some light on God's expectations:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”

This Scripture indicates that those who practice these sins are not Christians. These are behaviors that do not characterize a believer. Hence, as a practice, God expects repentance from these sins promptly. If a person becomes a Christian and is still struggling in these areas that is different than someone continuing to willfully practice these sins. It was reported in the news that a woman professing Christ “strips for Jesus” at the local strip club. That is simply not possible and is an example of someone who is continuing to willfully sin.

The good news from this passage is that there were saints in Corinth, prior to their conversion, who practiced these sins. God is more powerful than any sinful temptation and delivered them. What is also interesting is to see that justification through Christ and sanctification through the Holy Spirit work together in the life of a believer. In other words, like faith and works, these two doctrines work together in our lives, union (come together) without fusion (but separate). There is simply no such thing as justification without sanctification and a faith without works.

1 Peter 4:1-3

“Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desires of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.”

The days of partying hard are over. Believers are now to live for God’s will, putting off the deeds of the flesh and being willing to suffer in the flesh to cease from sin.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The old man has died; the new man in Christ has been born again. This new man lives for God under the control of His love.

Ephesians 2:4-10

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Through God’s great love, amazing mercy and marvelous grace, we are able to escape the lusts of the mind and the flesh and enter into a personal relationship with our Savior and Creator. It is God, not man, who defines the terms of this relationship. Salvation is a free gift, not of works of man, but it is the work of God. God has prepared good works for us to discover and walk in.

Romans 12:1-2

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Worship of God is living your life according to the Scriptures. Hence, it is important we know what God requires of us so we can worship Him in spirit and truth as we serve (*John 4:24*).

Hebrews 13:15-16

“Through Him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

As we praise the Lord and give thanks to His name, God is pleased when we share our gifts and talents sacrificially with others in God’s name.

Where does the power come from to lead a holy life in service to others?

9.2 God's Helper: The Holy Spirit

John 14:16-17

“And I will ask of the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”

We are not on our own in our quest for holy living. God has given the Holy Spirit to us to be our Helper and indwell us forever. The Holy Spirit has authored the Bible and empowers us for holy living.

The Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture

2 Peter 1:20-21

“But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

The Greek word that is usually translated “*interpretation*” is better translated “*origination*,” based upon the context of this passage. The Scripture is not an act of the human will, but men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The Scriptures are sufficient for holy living

Psalms 119:9

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word.”

Psalms 119:105

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path.”

The Scriptures are the manufacturer's handbook and provide the path to holy living.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

In this passage, Paul exhorts Timothy to continue living what he has learned from “*the sacred writings*,” a reference to the OT Scriptures. The Holy Spirit, working through

human authors and their style of writing, has communicated God's revelation to us. The Scripture is both necessary and sufficient to lead a godly life by following God's word.

God has not only given us the Scriptures on how to live, He has also given us the power to live through the Helper, the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit indwells believers

Romans 5:1-5

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations; knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint; because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

Having escaped the wrath of God by the grace of God through justification by faith, the believer has peace through Christ. We are blessed because now God has poured His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which indwells us. We are not alone, as God has drawn near to us and filled us with Himself.

Nobody likes going through hard times. We usually try to avoid or escape them as much as possible. Something is now different; we have been changed. We can now exult in our tribulations, knowing that God will use them to build our perseverance, character and hope. God is shaping our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit, as He conforms us to His Son. God is on our side. He loves us. He is preparing us for heaven, a holy place.

Romans 8:9-11

“However you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if 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 indwells you.”

All Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit. How do I know if I have the Holy Spirit? Listen to the words of Jesus:

Matthew 7:20-21

“So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.”

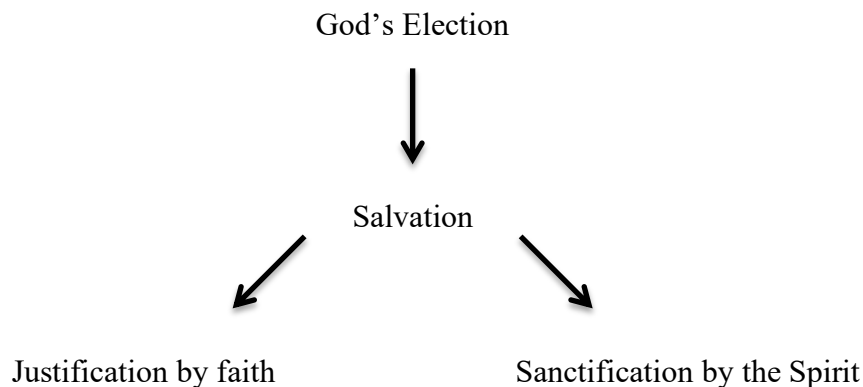
Regardless of what a person professes to believe, the only way we can know if a person is a Christian is by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification is tightly linked with justification by faith:

Romans 8:28-31

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?”

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

“But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”



God's salvation plan includes both justification by faith and sanctification by the Spirit. It has always been God's plan to redeem and sanctify the elect:

Hebrews 12:14

“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”

It is a clear statement that we cannot see the Lord without becoming holy by His grace.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

The Holy Spirit indwells us. God is always near, as He now lives within us to minister to us. We should live to glorify God in our bodies, calling upon the Helper to strengthen our faith in the midst of life’s trials.

Titus 3:3-7

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

By the mercy of God, lost sinners are saved, washed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. This is the work of God and not man. Nevertheless, this is not a passive process where we sit back and do nothing. God has given us a strategy, whereby we are active participants in the process of sanctification—the replacement principle.

9.3 God’s strategy: The replacement principle

In our modern society, the car was a wonderful invention, enabling us to travel long distances across the country with virtually no effort. Once the roads were built and the ubiquitous gas stations around the country were in place, away we went!

Unfortunately, cars do not last forever. Sooner or later, repairs are needed to keep your car roadworthy. After enough wear and tear, the car has to either undergo an expensive restoration process, or the car is sold for parts to the local junkyard and a new vehicle is purchased. There is nothing like a new car and the new car smell, so most people opt for the latter rather than the former approach to remain on the road.

As it turns out, God, in His rich mercy, has decided to buy us as is and not send us to the junkyard. After God buys us, we are no better than an old rusty jalopy, not worth keeping, much less restoring. However, He loves us and wants to restore us. He wants to make us brand new, never to need a repair again. A lot of new parts are needed to replace the old and worn out ones. The engine needs to be rebuilt, and the body needs a lot of restorative work and a new paint job. God hands us over to the Holy Spirit, who is now in charge of this task. His strategy is the replacement principle. This car is the same person, but soon to be fully restored like new, with one exception. The Holy Spirit will be living in the car from now on, during the restoration process.

The replacement principle lies at the heart of God's strategy for biblical holiness. The concept of holiness seems, at times, like an elephant; it is difficult to get our arms around it. We all know we should be holy but wonder how to do it. It is not as simple as walking around with a large cross hanging from your neck to remind you not to sin. But remember, the Holy Spirit lives within you and works with you in this process of restoration.

Step 1: No longer walk like the Gentiles

Ephesians 4:17-19

“This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

The first step requires you to stop living in the past, prior to your conversion. In case you have forgotten your former manner of life, the Apostle Paul's list reminds us:

Futility of your mind—You do not realize that what you are doing will lead you where you do not want to go.

Darkened in understanding—You are going to do it your way, suppressing God's truth in the process.

Ignorance—It has never entered your mind that maybe God knows what's better for you than you know yourself.

Hardness of heart—Nobody is going to tell you how to run your life, you're in charge.

Callous—Beyond feeling, you do not care what God thinks or says, or others for that matter.

Sensuous—If it feels good, you do it, end of discussion.

Impurity with greed—Your lust can never be satisfied.

Upon review of this list it is clear that, in your former life, you were on the throne of your life. You called all the shots. You decided what was good or not good and really did not care what God or others thought.

Step 2: Lay aside the old self; put on the new self

Ephesians 4:20-24

“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as the truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

The reason why you do not walk as the Gentiles walk is because you are no longer a Gentile. The old person died when the Holy Spirit made you alive in Christ. You are to leave the old carcass behind when you put Christ on the throne of your life. There is no turning back. A glorious renewal is underway.

Step 3: Practice the replacement principle

The path to holiness is not just to stop sinning but also to replace sinful habits with godly habits. The Apostle Paul provides us with a series of exhortations:

Ephesians 4:25

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH, EACH ONE of you, WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.”

The first exhortation for the list comes from The Ten Commandments, number nine:

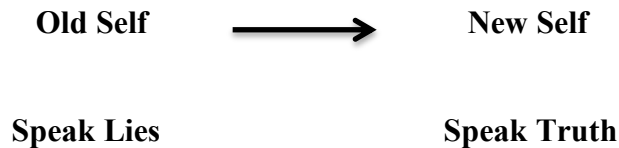
Exodus 20:16

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

In the context of Ephesians, the term “neighbor” means believers, as “*we are members of one another*,” i.e., the church. Lying is a grievous evil, capable of destroying otherwise healthy churches. Satan is the father of lies (*John 8:44*), providing ample support to those desirous of their former life.

Many years ago, a church we attended had a wealthy investor who gave money and equipment to the church. Several members of our church invested money with this man’s financial services company. This company was able to provide monthly, not yearly, returns as high as 4-5% of the money invested. As it turned out, it was a fraudulent investment scheme. The wealthy man was arrested, and several members of our church lost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The court appointed receiver, and their attorneys, came after the church to recover the money and equipment donated to the church. The church was able to settle with the attorneys by paying a large lump sum settlement and return of the equipment. By God’s grace, special fund donations were able to meet the settlement amount. This was especially difficult, as many members of the church had

already lost substantial amounts of money. The church was able to survive this ordeal and move forward. The church is the body of Christ, and lies and deception among members can inflict pain on everyone.



Ephesians 4:26-27

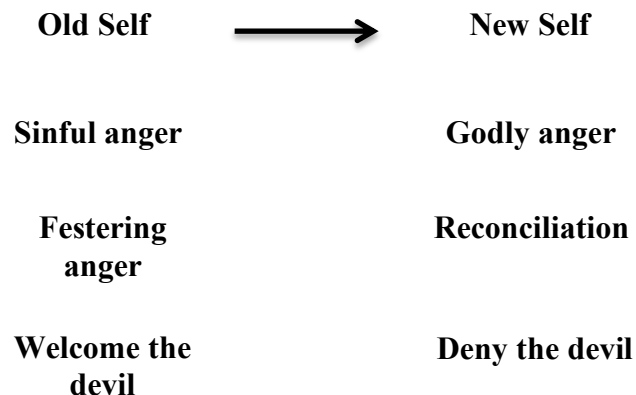
“BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

Do not mix anger and sin, and do not go to bed angry. The devil is looking for an opportunity to sow discord and division when there is anger present. Seek reconciliation as soon as possible, lest your anger fester and turn into sin. Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:23-24

“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Jesus wants us to make peace with our neighbor before bringing an offering to God. He wants offerings from a pure heart. If something is unresolved with your neighbor, you may put yourself or him or her at risk of going to bed angry.



Ephesians 4:28

“Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.”

This exhortation for the list comes from The Ten Commandments, number eight:

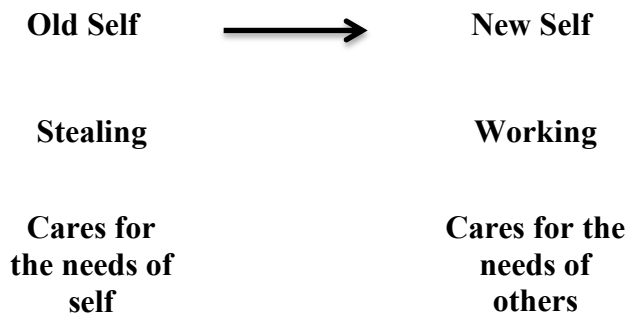
Exodus 20:15

“You shall not steal.”

This exhortation recommends replacing stealing with working. When we labor with our hands, we should save money to help meet needs of others, not just our own. By working instead of stealing, we can help others in need and possibly prevent them from having to steal to obtain food or clothing. The early church reached out to the needs of others:

Acts 2:44-45

“And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing with them all, as anyone might have need.”



Ephesians 4:29

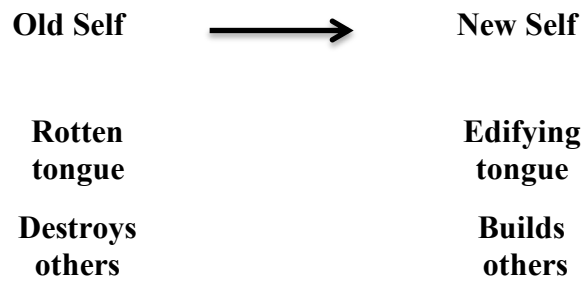
“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

The word “unwholesome” literally means “rotten” in Greek. The Scriptures warn us about the “rotten” tongue in the Epistle of James:

James 3:8-10

“But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”

Taming the tongue is one of the great challenges we face as believers. Having spent enough time in the world with all the rotten language, coarse jokes and sexual innuendo, this is a terrible habit in need of reformation. Remember the exhortation of Jesus who said, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39). Ask yourself if you would like what you just said to someone to be said to you? Instead of tearing others down with your tongue, bless others with your tongue and be a vehicle of God’s grace towards them.



Ephesians 4:30

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Think about this for a moment. You live in a beautiful, well-kept house, which is always clean and smells good. You enjoy living in your house, as you have worked hard to maintain it. For some reason, the house itself decides it doesn’t like you anymore and decides to start filling itself with rotten, stinking garbage. No matter how hard you work, the garbage continues to pile up in your house and the smell is horrible. How can this be? You took good care of the house, and now it doesn’t like you? You are deeply saddened and grieved by this turn of events.

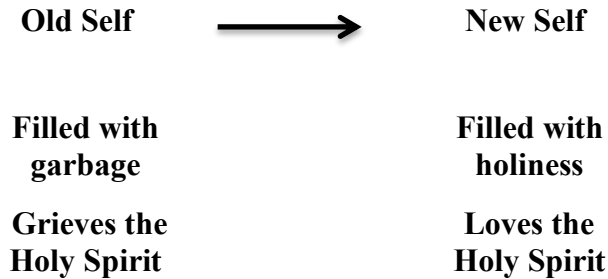
So is the Holy Spirit when believers go off script or rogue, and start filling their lives with garbage instead of more of Him. Remember this important Scripture:

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her? For He says, ‘THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH.’ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that

you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

Our bodies are holy and filled with the Holy Spirit. Do not fill it with garbage but rather, be filled with the Holy Spirit and empty the garbage. Do not even think of bringing garbage into the temple of God.



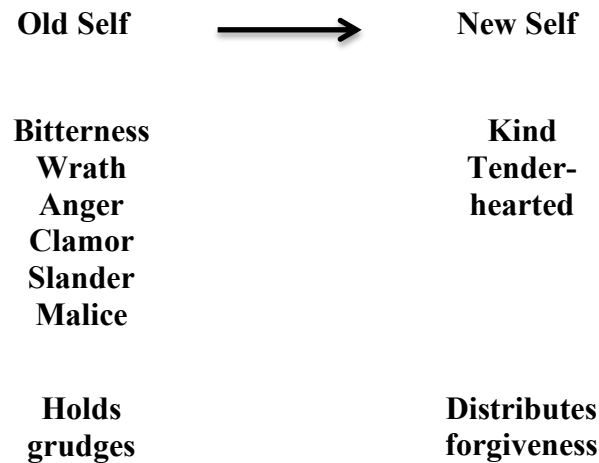
Ephesians 4:31-32

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

The world is filled with bitter and angry people. Approximately half of all marriages end in divorce, which is the source of some of this anger and malice. But the world is our mission and ministry field. I recall an incident many years ago that I will never forget.

I had the privilege to serve as an elder of a church for many years. One of the key tasks elders do in a church is shepherd the flock. A woman approached me in our church who was a professional counselor. She had counseled a couple for many sessions and had simply hit a roadblock. The couple she was counseling was clearly headed for divorce. She asked me to join her for a home counseling visit, which I was glad to do. After entering this couple’s home, it was a clear a war had been going on for some time. Unfortunately, the love in this marriage had long departed and all that was left was a series of mean-spirited accusations and language. This continued to go on during our time when I decided it was time to intervene. I told them I understood their grievances toward one another but strongly recommended that they needed God’s help to rescue their marriage. I invited both of them to accept Christ as Lord and Savior. The husband wanted nothing to do with God or with Jesus Christ. He simply wanted to escape the marriage by ending it. His wife, on the other hand, prayed with us to accept Christ. I never knew what happened after that but prayerfully placed the situation in God’s hands.

Several years later, a person from our church came up to me and said, “A woman is here to see you.” It was the woman who trusted Christ at our counseling session years ago. She came back to my church to thank me for helping her. Unfortunately, her former marriage ended in divorce, but she later re-married a godly man and was attending a local church nearby. I saw, first hand, the transformation of a person from death to life. This person left a life of anger and bitterness to begin a new life filled with the Holy Spirit. The only reason this process, called the replacement principle, works is because the Holy Spirit is the author of it and resides in us to renew our hearts.




The Apostle Paul, in the following passage from the Epistle to the Colossians, summarizes the transformative process of the replacement principle:

Colossians 3:1-17

“If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him, —a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just

as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you; with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

Old Self		New Self
Earthly minded		Heavenly minded
Immorality		Compassion
Impurity		Kindness
Passion		Humility
Evil desire		Gentleness
Greed		Patience
Idolatry		Forgiveness
Anger		Love
Wrath		Unity
Malice		Thankful
Slander		Peace of Christ
Abusive speech		Word of Christ
Lying		Do all in the name of Jesus

Step 4: Be imitators of God

Learning by example is one of the best ways to learn. Thankfully, the Lord Jesus Christ, when He walked on the earth, taught us by example how to love God and people, the two greatest commandments. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians chapter 5, continues with another series of exhortations and examples designed to drive us toward holiness.

Ephesians 5:1-2

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.”

In the Scriptures, love is more than feelings. A hallmark of God’s love for us is that it is sacrificial. Biblical love wants to sacrifice and give, not only receive as shown by Jesus Christ:

Philippians 2:1-11

“If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Jesus laid aside the equality of His position with the Father, not His nature, when He humbly submitted to the Father’s will and became a bondservant to purchase the redemption of mankind. He humbled Himself to become a man and die on a cross for our sins. Jesus took on a lowly position on our behalf to be our Savior and Lord. The Apostle Paul is telling us that we should humble ourselves and be sacrificial in our love toward others.

Old Self	→	New Self
Imitators of the world		Imitators of God
Live for myself		An offering toward others
Proud of myself		Humble toward others
Selfish		Considerate
Lover of self		Lover of God and others

Now that we have God's strategy in place in our lives for holiness, the Apostle Paul warns us that the world still remains a temptation for believers.

Ephesians 5:3-6

“But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among the saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an 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.”

Paul's warning is to be taken very seriously. If you behave as a Gentile, you are a Gentile and not a Christian. The practice of these sins is characteristic of a non-believer who worships himself or a different god. The great deceiver, Satan, is prowling around looking for a weak spot in your armor. He will often use your non-Christian friends to deceive you with their 101 reasons why it is still okay to indulge with them in various sins. You simply have to walk away from this darkness and not be partakers with them.

Ephesians 5:7-12

“Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.”

This passage teaches that in order for us to maintain our integrity as believers and loyalty to Christ, believers must not be partakers with those individuals who are actively drawing us into sin. Even though the world is our ministry field, there are times when we have to separate from non-believers.

Many years ago there was a gentleman who came to our church and became a Christian. His wife was not a Christian and she refused to attend church with him. Nevertheless, he remained with his wife and tried to do all he could to be a godly, loving husband. However, there was a problem. Prior to his conversion they regularly smoked marijuana together, which at the time was illegal. When he became a Christian, he refused to smoke marijuana with her anymore. Unfortunately, she filed for divorce and cited him as having “become a radical Christian,” and she could no longer continue in the marriage. The divorce was finalized because he became a Christian.

There was a woman who was an executive secretary who became a Christian. One of her job responsibilities was to lie for her boss. After becoming a Christian she decided that she could no longer lie for her boss. She was fired.

There is a cost to following Christ. Sometimes it may cost you your job, relationships with friends and family, or even your marriage. The road to holiness can sometimes be a rocky road filled with difficulties along the way. However, the Lord is good and will see you through it. Remember the gentleman who was divorced by his wife because he became a Christian? As it turns out, a few years later this gentleman met a godly woman and remarried. God had something better planned for him (*Romans 8:28*).

Old Self	→	New Self
Living in darkness		Walking in the light
Fruit of darkness:		Fruit of light:
Immorality		Goodness
Impurity		Righteousness
Greed		Truth
Covetous		

Ephesians 5:13-21

“But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, ‘AWAKE, SLEEPER AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST WILL SHINE ON YOU.’ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

Old Self	→	New Self
Foolish		Understand God’s will
Drunk with wine		Filled with the Spirit
Wasting time		Making the most of your time
Never thankful to God		Always thankful to God

As believers walk in the light, they expose the darkness in the world and in the lives of people. Unfortunately, the world does not like being exposed or being told that its deeds are wrong or sinful. John the Baptist counseled King Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife, as this was the sin of adultery, one of Ten Commandments, number seven (*Exodus 20:14*).

Mark 6:17-20

“For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him; and could not do so; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.”

It appears John the Baptist had a good relationship with King Herod, and he likely shared the gospel with him. It is probably in the context of John the Baptist sharing the gospel that the issue of the adulterous relationship with Herodias came up. Unfortunately for John the Baptist, on King Herod's birthday, Herodias made an astonishing request:

Mark 6:21-29

“And a strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you.’ And he swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half my kingdom.’ And she went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ And she said, ‘The head of John the Baptist.’ And immediately she came in haste before the king and asked, saying, ‘I want you to give me right away the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.”

This tragic story of the martyrdom of John the Baptist illustrates the contempt the world has for the truth. There is also a real cost to following Jesus. John the Baptist heralded the coming of Jesus Christ, the coming of the Messiah. He was Elijah who was to come, according to Jesus (*Matthew 11:14*). He was faithful to the end and proclaimed the good news—repent and believe the gospel.

It is not likely many of us will die for our faith, but we should be prepared to stand for our faith when called by God:

1 Peter 3:13-17

“And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but SANCTIFY Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”

When I was a young scientist working for a company, I encountered a thorny human resources situation that needed to be resolved. One of the junior female scientists in the laboratory became very irritable and bitter. Apparently, she had made a play for my colleague, and he was not interested in any relationship with her outside of work. As each day went by, people in the research group were waiting for the next explosion to go off from this rejected paramour. She was very hard to deal with and visibly displayed her anger on a regular basis. Nobody, including her boss, was willing to confront her about her behavior. (Some of the people in the laboratory saw it as sordid entertainment.) In order to perform an experiment, I asked her for some materials she prepared in the laboratory. This was not an unusual request, as people in the laboratory share the materials they make for the company. After all, it is company property and technology. She went ballistic on me over this request and would not cooperate. I asked her to sit down so we could talk it over. She told me harshly to sit down. I then proceeded to tell her that her behavior towards me was inappropriate. She asked me what was wrong with her behavior? I told her that her behavior was “sinning against God and me.” Needless to say, that got a response, and she ran to my boss and told him what I said. My boss talked to me afterwards and warned me about getting “religious” in the workplace. Her behavior improved after that encounter, and I was able to obtain the materials I needed for the experiment.

Everyone knew, from that day onward, that I was a Christian. I think they were thankful that I dealt with the problem in my own unique way. Shortly after this incident, someone brought in a dozen donuts for the laboratory workers to eat. They were wondering if I might “bless the donuts” before consuming them. People behave in unique ways toward you once they know who you are a follower of Christ. I am no better than anyone else, just forgiven.

God’s strategy for the sanctification of believers is the replacement principle, a practice that will continue for a lifetime. It is a process whereby the believer actively works with the help of the Holy Spirit to put off the old self and put on the new self. What is God’s expectation of us? What will be the metric by which God will measure our progress in this effort?

9.4 God's expectation: Fruit of the Spirit

Gardeners labor tirelessly in their flower gardens to cultivate their plants. This is done to ensure a full presentation of beautiful flowers. The beauty and yield of the flowers depends on how well the garden is managed.

One of our neighbors is an avid gardener of roses. She maintains them year around in her Arizona garden through a careful combination of watering, pruning and fertilizing. In January, she brought us the most brilliant and fragrant bouquet of roses we had ever seen. The fragrance was so strong that you thought someone had sprayed a bottle of perfume in the room. The fragrance and the roses lasted a long time. We were blessed by her hard work, which ensured such beautiful fragrant flowers.

The Lord has sent the master gardener, the Holy Spirit, to cultivate our lives for His glory. All gardeners that work hard at cultivating their gardens have an expectation for their work—a reward for their labor. Our neighbor was rewarded with beautiful, fragrant roses. As it turns out, the Lord also has an expectation for us to bear fruit.

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word, which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you. By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”

God expects us to bear much fruit, and a key component for that success is to abide in Christ. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing. Our Father will do the pruning of the branches that bear fruit (living faith) and will cut off those that do not (dead faith). The pruning activity is done to stimulate more fruit. The absence of fruit reveals a person who is not a believer, as we saw previously.

Matthew 7:20-21

“So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.”

Regardless of what a person professes to believe, the only way we can know if a person is a Christian is by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification is tightly linked with justification by faith.

As Christians, we are to bear much fruit. The Scriptures guide us on the nature and quality of the fruit God demands:

Galatians 5:16-26

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall 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. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.”

In this passage we can see the contrast between the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. Our ability to bear the fruit of the Spirit requires that we put to death the deeds of the flesh, as we saw through the replacement principle. This, of course, requires us to drink deeply from the vine of Christ and from the Holy Scriptures.

Old Self	→	New Self
Deeds of the flesh		Fruit of the Spirit
Immorality		Love
Impurity		Joy
Sensuality		Peace
Idolatry		Patience
Sorcery		Kindness
Enmities		Goodness
Strife		Faithfulness
Jealousy		Gentleness
Outbursts of anger		Self-control
Disputes		
Dissensions		
Factions		
Envyings		
Drunkenness		
Carousing		

The process of sanctification requires a cessation of the deeds of the flesh so that fruit bearing can occur. People come to Christ from many different walks of life and from different fields of sin. Children who grew up in a non-Christian home may have plumbed the depths of sin deeper than those who grew up in a Christian home prior to their conversion. Children that grow up in a Christian home also have unique challenges of owning their own faith apart from their parents.

Some people may have more garbage to empty out of their lives than others. This is likely to be true for people that become Christians much later in their lives. Regardless of how deep a hole of sin you find yourself in, with God's Holy Spirit, you can climb out of the hole of iniquity and bear much fruit. God expects all Christians, regardless of their past, to practice the replacement principle. In fact, His expectation of us goes even further than this, as shown in the following passage:

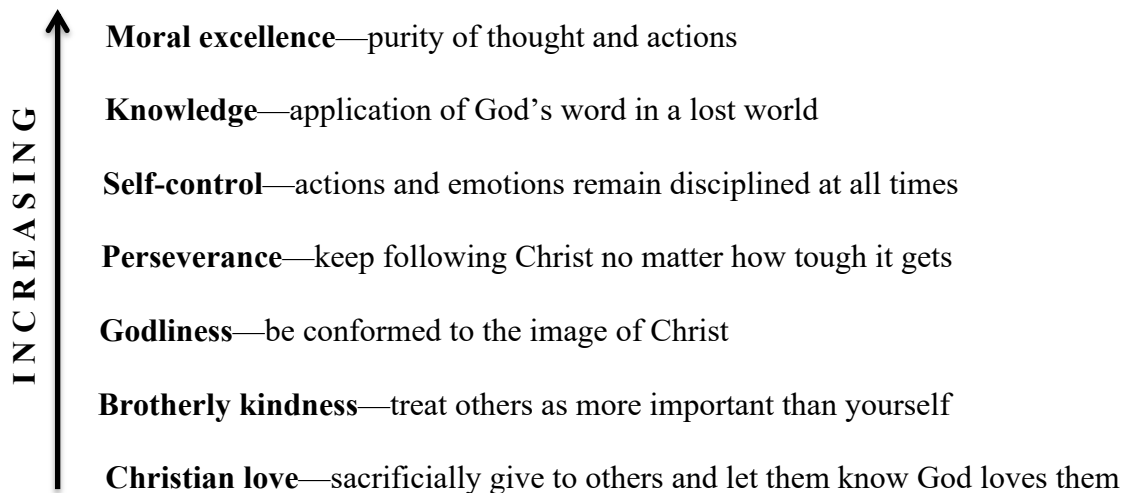
2 Peter 1:1-11

“Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our

Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

Sanctification by the Spirit is a restorative process, whereby those made in the image of God can become partakers of His divine nature, having escaped the corruption of sin. By God’s grace, we can share in His divine and holy nature, while remaining human beings. We do not become partakers of His divine being or essence (theosis). Our role in this process is to diligently build these seven virtues into our faith. This is an active, not a passive process. Furthermore, these qualities in our lives should be increasing, not decreasing, as we grow in grace. As our lives reflect these qualities in increasing measure, we can take comfort in the certainty of our election.

Supply to your faith



The Apostle Peter warns us that we are blind if these qualities are lacking in our lives; we have forgotten who we are and have returned to the old self. Indolent believers can experience a downturn in their lives if they do not remain diligent in growing their faith in the Lord. Sin will always be a struggle in our lives, as we battle the flesh by the Spirit. When we do mess up, we need to confess our sins to the Lord and others we have wronged.

1 John 1:5-10

“And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

1 John 2:1-2

“My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

James 5:16

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

The good news is that we can always come to the throne of grace for forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is interesting to note that if we confess our sins, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. In other words, if we confess the sins we are aware of, He cleanses us of all sin. It is almost impossible to know of every sin we commit let alone confess every sin. As the Holy Spirit washes and cleanses our hearts and minds, our eyes are opened to other areas of sin in our lives, of which we were completely unaware previously. Early in my walk with Christ, other believers took me aside privately in a loving way, and pointed out areas of my life that needed improvement. Even today, I am still a work in progress, repenting of sin, asking for forgiveness, and continuing to walk in the Spirit. We will never achieve a perfect, sinless life while here on earth. That is waiting for us in heaven, where our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ is ready to welcome us home!

9.5 Summary

We have a lot of work to do. It is nice to know that every day we wake up, we have been blessed to be given another day to be alive. Thanks to Jesus, we can start each day with a clean slate; the previous day's sins have been cleansed. Daily Bible reading, prayer and active attendance at a local church are essential to help grow in Christ. An accountability partner is also very helpful to keep you on the narrow way.

As the years roll by, I am still amazed how the Holy Spirit continues to open our eyes to the Scriptures. A few years ago I had the privilege to lead our former church to plant a new church. This was both a wonderful and challenging time in my life. Periodically, the pastor of the new church plant would ask me to come preach in the pulpit. I cannot tell you what a wonderful and sacred privilege it is to proclaim the word of God. Even though I have enjoyed research in the life sciences and have given research seminars for over 40 years, it pales in comparison to preaching God's word. On this one particular invitation, I was asked to continue preaching the next passage in the book of Philippians where the pastor had been preaching. As I was preparing the sermon, I came across this verse of Scripture I had read many times before:

Philippians 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

For some reason, this verse spoke to my sinful heart more than ever before. Here I am preaching this verse to others, and I had to ask myself, am I living for Christ? Or am I living a lie? How would I know? I began to search the Scriptures in my quest to determine how one knows they are living for Christ. Perhaps others, and myself, are actually living for ourselves disguised with Christian veneer.

This search had led to an epiphany in my personal life, as I was able to distill down the Christian walk to three basic elements:

Love God

Love People

Take as many people to heaven with you as you can

It all boils down to living the first and second greatest commandments and the Great Commission:

Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is

like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'"

Matthew 28:18-20

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

Go in the power of the Holy Spirit and live the "Big Three." People need the Lord.
Amen.

10. The Doctrine of Predestination

Memory verses: *Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-5*

It is a blessed life to be a Christian, knowing that my sins are forgiven and heaven is waiting there for me upon leaving my earthly dwelling. I will be eternally grateful and thankful for all the Lord Jesus Christ has done for me. My life forever changed on a cool November night on the campus of Cornell University, when I surrendered my life to Christ. I was a graduate student at the time, working to complete a doctoral degree in Biochemistry. Even though I went to Cornell to complete a graduate degree, God had much bigger plans for me. It was that evening in November, back in 1979, when the Holy Spirit moved my heart to repent and believe the gospel.

Unfortunately, it seems so few people come to know the Lord. The Lord has been so good to me; I cannot imagine why more people do not accept Him. I have peace and joy in my life that I never had prior to coming to Christ. I was afraid to die not knowing what happens next, and over time, I knew I could never earn my way to heaven. God has made my life complete and given me a purpose to live through His amazing love, mercy and grace towards me.

Nevertheless, my observation and the Scriptures are consistent with the view that most people reject the gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

Matthew 7:13-14

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small and the way narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”

How, then, is it possible for someone to become a Christian? Why do some choose to believe the gospel and others reject it? The answers to these questions will be probed deeper as we consider the teachings in the Bible about predestination.

10.1 Predestination and God’s sovereignty

The difficulty some people have with the concept of predestination lies at the root of God’s absolute and total sovereignty over the universe He has created. As we read in the prophet Isaiah, God has total control over the nations:

Isaiah 14:24-27

“The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, ‘Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand, to break Assyria in My land, and

I will trample him on My mountains. Then his yoke will be removed from them, and his burden removed from their shoulder. This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"

Isaiah 46:10-11

"Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."

We can make plans, but unlike God, we do not have total control over our world. The world around us is filled with choices we make on a daily basis. What clothes do I wear to work? What do I do when I get to work? Who should we hire to manage the new project? What would be the best living situation for our aging parents? Where should we go on vacation? Where should we attend church after a long interstate move? We should all be thankful that, living in the United States, we have freedom. And we have freedom to make choices within the lawful bounds of the State we live in. So where does predestination exactly fit in here?

German chocolate cake and motorcycles

Let me give you a human example. My wife makes me the absolutely best tasting German chocolate cake for my birthday every year. Do you want to know how I know this? There are 365 days between birthdays and 366 days if in a leap year. That is a long time to wait for my next installment of my wife's German chocolate cake. So, periodically, I will splurge on a slice of this cake from our local Safeway store. The cake is very good, of course, but a little too sweet and heavy compared to my wife's version. My wife's cake is almost addictive, as it is lower in sugar and fat, but still retains all the flavors German chocolate cake lovers enjoy. A normal diet of cake, for me, is two heaping slices with copious amounts of vanilla ice cream. At this point, self-control kicks in before I over indulge, knowing that tomorrow more will be eaten.

Making a German chocolate cake is a serious two-day experience in the kitchen. Using a well-honed recipe, my wife assembles all the ingredients to make the cake and the frosting. This recipe includes the staples of olive oil, brown sugar, three flours, eggs, coconut, chocolate and a few other ingredients. She is the owner of the ingredients and can do with the ingredients however she pleases. She is sovereign over the ingredients and their final destiny. None of the ingredients have objected to her use of them in the cake. The leftover ingredients had no objection to not being included in the cake. Everyone is happy, including me, who gets to enjoy the cake, the final destiny of which is my stomach.

Regardless of the amount of resistance people express toward the subject of predestination, practically speaking, everyone practices predestination that makes or plans something.

Here is another example. A scientist used to work for me whose brother worked at the Harley Davidson motorcycle factory in Milwaukee. To earn money on the side, he would build custom bikes by ordering parts from the Harley Davidson catalogue and assemble the bikes in his garage. Believe it or not, he built two very expensive custom bikes for the Sultan of Brunei! The parts in the catalogue had no say in the matter, but the builder foreordained which parts would complete these two custom bikes for the Sultan.

As you look around the world you live in, you will notice that the tall city skyscrapers, the beautiful bridges, and the shining aircraft that whisk us to our destination, all had human architects, engineers and builders foreordaining the destiny of the bill of materials they ordered. Since we are in the image of God, it should not surprise us that God foreordains things as we do too. Our practice of predestination is limited; God's is absolute.

Our struggle with predestination

The problem some have with predestination is when we are not in charge. In God's providence, and from our perspective, we are making choices. However, from God's perspective, He is sovereign over all, and whatever happens in His universe is either by His decree or permission. This can be easily shown by the following passages from Scripture:

Acts 2:22-24

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

Acts 4:27-28

“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy Servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.”

Some Jews, during the time of Jesus Christ's appearance on earth, were hoping He would deliver them from the Roman occupation of the land God gave to Abraham. The death of Christ was a blow to their political ambitions, as they were looking for a Savior to deliver them from the Roman government. On the other hand, the Pharisees were pleased to get rid of Jesus, as He threatened their religious system of works. Still others looked for the coming of the promised Messiah in Jesus.

In fulfillment of many prophecies in the OT regarding the coming of the Messiah (see Chapter 2, p. 24 for a short list), Jesus came, died and rose from the dead to deliver people from their sins. From the perspective of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Jews and Gentiles, it was their decision to put Jesus to death. However, God had planned it all from the beginning. Taking advantage of the fallen sinful human nature of mankind, they put Jesus to death on the cross. In the choices they made, they fulfilled the purpose and predestined plan of God. The Apostle Paul has a very interesting commentary on this:

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, ‘THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND WHICH HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.’ For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.”

If the rulers of this age, who put Jesus to death on the cross, understood the hidden wisdom of God, they would not have crucified Jesus. And yet, it was God’s plan all along that Jesus would bear the sins of mankind on the cross. Thus, in the absence of these conspirators understanding the hidden wisdom of God, these individuals, by an act of their own free will, put Jesus to death. The apostles and others, to whom God revealed His hidden wisdom by the Spirit of God, witnessed His death and resurrection. This hidden wisdom was predestined before the ages.

Do you remember the story of Joseph and his brothers back in the book of Genesis? Because of the sinful jealousy of Joseph’s brothers and his father’s favoritism toward Joseph, his brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite-Midianite traders who brought Joseph to Egypt (*Genesis 37:18-36*). God used this sinful act to position Joseph in Egypt to relieve the world’s famine. After Jacob passed away, his brothers were really worried that Joseph would bear a grudge, and payback time would ensue. They confessed their sin to Joseph, who wept, and then surrendered themselves to Joseph as his servants.

Genesis 50:19-20

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.’”

God had a plan to preserve people from the famine and used the sinful acts of Joseph’s brothers to accomplish it. The brothers had the choice to accept Joseph as the favored son. Instead, through jealousy and hatred, they sold Joseph into slavery and lied to Jacob

that a wild animal killed him. God used their evil to bring good. This, in no way, made God the author of evil or sin.

Regardless of the good times and difficult times we experience, remember the suffering of Job and His response to that suffering after he lost his family, servants and wealth:

Job 1:20-22

“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.’ Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”

God later restored Job’s fortunes two-fold after he prayed for his friends, and was blessed with a new family. Sometimes there is a happy ending to a tragic story and sometimes there is not. The great news is that we are deeply loved by our heavenly Father and Creator, who is the sovereign Lord of the Universe (*John 3:16, Isaiah 45:18-22, Isaiah 46:9-11*). He is the potter; we are the clay (*Isaiah 64:8*). We are in good hands. Keep this in mind and review the Attributes of God, Chapter 3, as we explore the doctrine of predestination as it pertains to the salvation of men.

10.2 Predestination and man’s condition

Why is it that some people repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and others do not? I remember a Christian man who had a real gift of evangelism when I was in college. He seemed to have a real knack and passion for sharing his faith, which he did on a regular basis. I once asked him how he did it? He, of course, knew God was in it at all times but simply saw it as a numbers game. “The more people you witness to, the more that will come to Christ,” he said. He put the probability at 1%. Now, it is possible the other 99% may accept Christ later in their lives. I did not accept Christ the first time I heard the gospel, and have seen some people, years later, accept Christ, after repeated attempts of sharing the gospel with them.

Nevertheless, the reality is that those who accept Christ will live forever in heaven with Him. Those that perish without Christ will not, and their final destination will be the lake of fire in hell. This is a hard truth but it is what Jesus taught in the Parable of the Dives:

Luke 16:19-31

“Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted

up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those that wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

The rich man is in torment while Lazarus is in heaven. All of a sudden, the rich man is concerned for others and asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them of this place of torment. In this parable, Father Abraham says his brothers should listen to Moses and the Prophets to be persuaded to avoid the flames. Unfortunately, the rich man never listened to Moses and the Prophets when he had the chance on earth and his fate was sealed for all eternity. The rich man’s destiny was a free choice, and he was not punished because he did not hear the gospel. He was punished for his sins.

Sinful man is dead spiritually

The rich man represents all of us who have ignored God and gone our own way. As we saw in the chapter on Man’s Condition, all of us were corrupted with Adam’s sinful nature by Adam, our federal head, and have chosen by our own free will to sin:

Romans 5:12-21

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’s offense, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift of grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men; even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many

were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Sin entered the world through Adam’s transgression, and death entered the world through sin. Because all die, this implies all sin. Apart from the imputation of Adam’s sin, all of us have also personally sinned by our own free will:

Romans 3:9-18

***“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,
‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;
THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;
ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;
THERE IS NONE THAT DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.’
‘THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE,
WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,’
‘THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS;’
‘WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS;’
‘THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,
DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,
AND THE PATH OF PEACE HAVE THEY NOT KNOWN.’
‘THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.’”***

There has been an enormous lawless rebellion by sinful people against a holy, righteous and loving God. God’s justice system requires holding men accountable for their sin. To make matters worse, not only has man chosen to sin, he also does not have the ability to seek after God. Man is dead spiritually. Man cannot choose to be reconciled to God and will only choose evil. In this present situation, man cannot, on his own, seek after God, repent, and believe the gospel.

Since God is the Sovereign Lord and Creator of the Universe, God can choose to do whatever is pleasing in His sight. God is merciful and just:

Exodus 34:6-7

“Then the LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’”

Because God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the world, God desires to save people from their sins. This is clearly stated in the following verses:

John 3:16-18

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the only begotten Son of God.”

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

1 Timothy 2:1-4

“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The context of the 1 Timothy 2 passage, when referring to “all men,” is specifically referring to kings and those in authority. God desires all kinds of men to be saved regardless of distinction of position, authority or race.

God’s options

From our human perspective, one can formulate at least three possible options the Lord could choose for man who rebelled against Him:

- 1) Choose to save no one and let them all perish
- 2) Choose to save everyone and let none perish
- 3) Choose to save some and let others perish

Our Lord would be perfectly just if He willed that all should pay the penalty for their sins for all eternity in hell (option 1). This would be letting everyone maintain his or her free will to sin, as no one seeks for God. The fallen angels were not offered salvation and were given option 1 (2 Peter 2:4). Our Lord would be perfectly just if He willed to save everyone, given the fact that He has provided a sacrifice for the atonement of sins through the death on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection from the dead (option 2). He would also be equally just if He willed to save some and let others perish (option 3).

From our human perspective, it appears that the Lord is executing option 3. God, in His infinite wisdom and providence, has chosen to save some people and let the others remain in their sins as a choice of their own free will. Therefore, in order for God to save some, it requires His intervention in their lives to turn them against their own chosen will and turn them towards Him.

10.3 Predestination and God's election

My parents were the youngest siblings in their respective families and, as a consequence, all of my cousins were much older than me. As a young man I attended several weddings and enjoyed the ceremonies and the birth of new families. Thankfully, I met the Lord while a graduate student at Cornell and met a wonderful girl at our local Bible church that became my wife. We definitely married for love, as we both loved the Lord Jesus and, at the time, I was only making \$400 per month on a graduate student stipend. We were blessed with a wonderful wedding paid for by her parents and were thankful for all the gifts we received. We had next to nothing apart from what our parents and friends provided. We were content in the Lord and trusted Him for our future.

Most weddings, including our own, were planned. A wedding invitation list is drawn up, the invitations go out and then a myriad of wedding plans are drafted and executed, from the church service to the wedding reception, photographer, menu, wedding cake, and honeymoon, etc. The wedding was beautiful, and our Pastor gave us a challenging sermon. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I could never stop smiling.

God has drawn up a wedding invitation list for the marriage between His Son and the bride of Christ. Only the bride of Christ will be invited to the wedding, as recorded in the Lamb's book of life.

Lamb's book of life

God views His relationship with His people as a marriage. In the book of Hosea, we see in the OT that unfaithfulness to God was likened to harlotry (*Hosea 1-3*). Paul writes to the church in Corinth and Ephesus:

2 Corinthians 11:2-3

"For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

Ephesians 5:22-32

"Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their

husbands in everything. Husbands, love you wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church."

The church is the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. Another very interesting passage explains how it is possible that the marriage with Christ and His church can be consummated:

Romans 7:1-4

"Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then if, while her husband is living, she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress, though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we may bear fruit for God."

The key point here is that believers in Christ have been widowed to the law, hence, free to marry Christ. Believers having died to the law are now joined to the body of Christ in an eternal marriage with Him. At the end of this world, the Scriptures, in the book of Revelation, talk about the future marriage feast with the Lamb of God:

Revelation 19:6-9

"And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

The bride of Christ will be clothed in fine linen, having been covered by the blood of Christ, for this glorious marriage between Christ and His church. More glorious details emerge:

Revelation 21:1-4

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain: the first things have passed away.’”

Here, we see the glorious bride of Christ, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Heaven and earth are once again united. The Scriptures go on to describe the city and the wedding invitation from the Lord God Almighty contained in the book of life.

Those who will be invited to the wedding:

Revelation 21:22-27

“And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of the Lord has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it. And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there) its gates shall never be closed; and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

The Lamb’s book of life contains the names of those God has chosen for eternal life in heaven. They are invited to the wedding. The Apostle Paul references this book:

Philippians 4:3

“Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Paul, walking by faith, knew that the names of those who were serving the Lord with him were in the book of life, even though Paul had never seen the book. The prophet, Daniel, as he is revealing the events during the end times on earth, also references this book:

Daniel 12:1

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.”

This prophetic passage talks about the time of Jacob's distress (*Jeremiah 30:7*), the Great Tribulation, and the rescue of those whose names are written in the book. This passage is a great encouragement to Christians, knowing that when the time for testing comes near the end times, our God will rescue us. We will be preserved because our names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Those who will be not invited to the wedding:

Revelation 20:11-15

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 21:8

“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

Unbelievers will inhabit the lake of fire for all eternity. Their names were not written in the book of life. This is a mystery to us and was God's plan as it is written:

Proverbs 16:4

“The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

In God's Sovereignty, He has chosen some and has written their names in the book of life. This, again, is a mystery and a great blessing to those of us who are believers. He knew us from eternity past. Are you in God's book?

For me, personally, I am, because I have repented of my sins and put my faith in my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I became a Christian over 40 years ago, and since that time, I have known it is there. I have not seen the book of life or my name in it. I do not have to. I know by faith it is there. And I am really looking forward to the dwelling place that God has prepared for me (*John 14:2*). Best of all, I will see Jesus for the first time, face to face!

God's predestination of men to eternal life in heaven has been recorded in a book in eternity past. Since man is totally unable to seek for God, His direct intervention in our lives was necessary to turn us away from sin and towards Him. The following section reviews this process of election, a work of God and not man.

The Process of Election: Ephesians 1

As we saw earlier, the Triune Godhead is at work accomplishing the salvation of the elect. The Apostle Peter writes:

1 Peter 1:1-2

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

Here, we see the work of the Trinity in the redemption of mankind. God the Father is the Elector, choosing those who will inherit salvation. Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and Savior, sprinkling the elect with His blood. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier, sanctifying and securing the salvation of the elect. Each person in the Godhead has a role to play in bringing the elect out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 1:1-14

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Here are the ten Key Points (KP1-KP10) from this passage:

KP1: “Chose us in Him before the foundation of the world”—Father God, the Elector, before the creation of the world, in eternity past, chose us in Christ and wrote our names in the book of life. All glory to God and none to man, as this election was determined before anyone was born. The choice was of God and not of man.

KP2: “We should be holy and blameless before Him”—The choice of God also includes a holy transformation of our lives by God from our fallen state. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who indwells us.

KP3: “In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself”—By God’s amazing mercy, grace and love, we have been adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. By God’s grace, we are sons and daughters of the king, the Lord Jesus. By virtue of our adoption, we are now princes and princesses of the Most High God. This is further amplified in the following passage:

1 Peter 2:9-10

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you were once NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.”

Think about it: A chosen race, a royal priesthood, called out of darkness. We deserved His wrath, and now we are part of His family serving in a royal priesthood. We will testify of Him and His great love. We are so blessed to know Him by His grace.

KP4: “Freely bestowed on us in the Beloved”—By His grace, God gave to us His free gift of salvation in Christ.

KP5: “Redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of our trespasses”—In order for God to be just, sin had to be paid for. At a huge cost to Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ paid it all at Calvary and rose from the dead. God’s law required the shedding of blood for the remission of sins and our redemption (*Hebrews 9:22*).

KP6: “The riches of His grace, which He lavished on us”—The sacrifice of Christ paid for our sins in full. This is called **GRACE**—getting what you don’t deserve.

God’s
Riches
At
Christ’s
Expense

KP7: “He made known to us the mystery of His will”—He has chosen Gentiles to be fellow heirs in Christ (*Ephesians 3:3-7*).

KP8: “We have obtained an inheritance having been predestined”—Unlike an earthly inheritance, which may be here today and gone tomorrow, God has already prepared an inheritance for us, eternal in the heavens. This inheritance was planned before the foundation of the world. Jesus states:

John 14:1-4

“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going.”

The Apostle Paul also writes:

Romans 8:16-18

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

We are fellow-heirs with Christ because we are His children. He has prepared a place for us in the heavens. Be prepared to meet Jesus when He calls you home.

KP9: “Sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise”—God’s anointing and sealing of believers signifies that God is assuring us that we will make it through to the day of redemption without losing our inheritance. The power of perseverance of the saints is a gift from God and is not due to some innate power within us. Our security in Christ is solely due to His great love, power, mercy, grace and election. God seals us with His Spirit so we can be safe and secure until our day of redemption. A true believer in Christ can never lose their salvation.

What about those who profess Christ and then later leave the faith?

1 John 2:19

“They went out from us, but they really were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”

The bottom line is that God's elect can never be lost. Those that leave the faith and die, having never returned, were never really saved in the first place and were not a part of His elect. Jesus said:

John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

We are secure in God's hands.

KP10: “The redemption of God's own possession”—We belong to God only because of His grace, as we were dead in our sins and helpless.

Romans 5:6-8

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for a good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

This passage comes after Romans chapters 1-4, where Paul completed his discussion on justification by faith. In the first verse of Romans Chapter 5 we read:

Romans 5:1

“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The context of Romans 5 is believers, and the phrase “Christ died for the ungodly” is a reference to God's elect, prior to their conversion. Even though the atonement of Christ is capable of covering the sins of the entire human race, the predestination context of Ephesians 1 and believer's context of Romans 5 would suggest that the atonement is limited in application to God's elect. From a human perspective, it is difficult to see why Jesus would die for the non-elect, people God the Father never intended to save.

Summary of Ephesians 1:1-14 and ten key points

The election of the saints of God was a gift of His grace before the foundation of the world. Having been dead in trespasses and sins, like every human being, God chose us in Him and provided a Savior through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to draw us to Him and transform our lives. The Holy Spirit has sealed us, never to be lost, until the day of redemption when we meet Jesus and receive the inheritance He promised to us. This is all the work of God, and, therefore, all glory to God and none to man. We are saved by God's gracious choice, not our choice. Our choice was the path of sin. Our response

should be one of eternal humility and gratitude, knowing that, except for the grace of God and being chosen as one of God's elect, we would have been left to our own sinful ways and eternal punishment for our sins. Thank you Lord, for saving me.

A word of assurance: Romans 8

The Apostle Paul opens Romans Chapter 8 with a word of encouragement for believers:

Romans 8:1-4

“There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Christ has kept the law on our behalf, and His righteousness has been imputed to us. This is great news, as the Devil and Satan continues to accuse us before God:

Revelation 12:9-10

“And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God both day and night.’”

Since we are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation, period. Nevertheless, the evil one is out there causing trouble and wreaking havoc. The Apostle Peter warns us:

1 Peter 5:6-11

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

We are to be on our alert with the armor of God, firm in faith, resisting the evil one. There may be difficult times ahead. The devil is relentless in his deception:

Matthew 24:24

“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”

This is why it is so important to know the Scriptures and be prepared for battle. Our adversary should never be taken lightly. He will do all he can to either neutralize you or even try to call you back into darkness. The elect are fair game.

One of the weaknesses that the evil one can exploit is your faith, introducing doubt or unbelief. You begin to doubt your faith and whether you are a Christian. This can happen when under extreme duress or when you are transitioning from adolescence and into adulthood. It can happen anytime in your life.

In my early years as a Christian, I was involved in a Bible study at a local nursing home. The Cornell University college campus has over 25,000 students, all within ten years of one another. There are very few older people around, and those are usually the distinguished faculty members. Visiting a nursing home every Saturday was quite an eye-opening experience. All you see are old people nearing the end of their lives. The care level increased with the floor number. People on the first floor were in good shape. People on the third floor were in rough shape. You also see very few men—they simply do not make it this far. You see, first hand, the toll of age on people’s lives. It is rather shocking in some ways, but I grew to love older people. They are very wise and can tell you stories you could never dream up yourself.

We met a wonderful 91-year-old saint named Mrs. Heathcock. She told us the story of how her father would require the entire family to kneel before the dinner table to pray before eating. She also told us that her father served in the Civil War! We did the math and figured out that her father was a teenager at the time. She had been a Christian since childhood and had been living her faith for probably 80+ years.

We spent time with the residents, after the Bible study, to minister and pray with them. Mrs. Heathcock was sharp as a tack, and it was a joy to talk to her. One day she just came out and said, “I don’t know if I am saved.” How was this possible? Since I knew she was by the way she spoke and lived her life, I decided to humor her a bit.

I said, “You haven’t started worshipping idols lately, have you?” She replied, “No.” I replied, “I think you are fine.” After that exchange, and a few words of encouragement, she was good to go.

The take home lesson is that doubts can happen anytime in your life, even at the end, when you are ready to go home to be with Jesus. Since God chooses the elect, He will see that you will persevere to the end, as shown below.

The Redemption-Golden Pipeline and God's Plan: Romans 8:28-39

Perseverance is a virtue that God builds into us over time. As your faith grows and strengthens through God's grace, you have an increased ability to navigate the challenges of this world. The Apostle Paul writes:

Romans 8:28-30

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

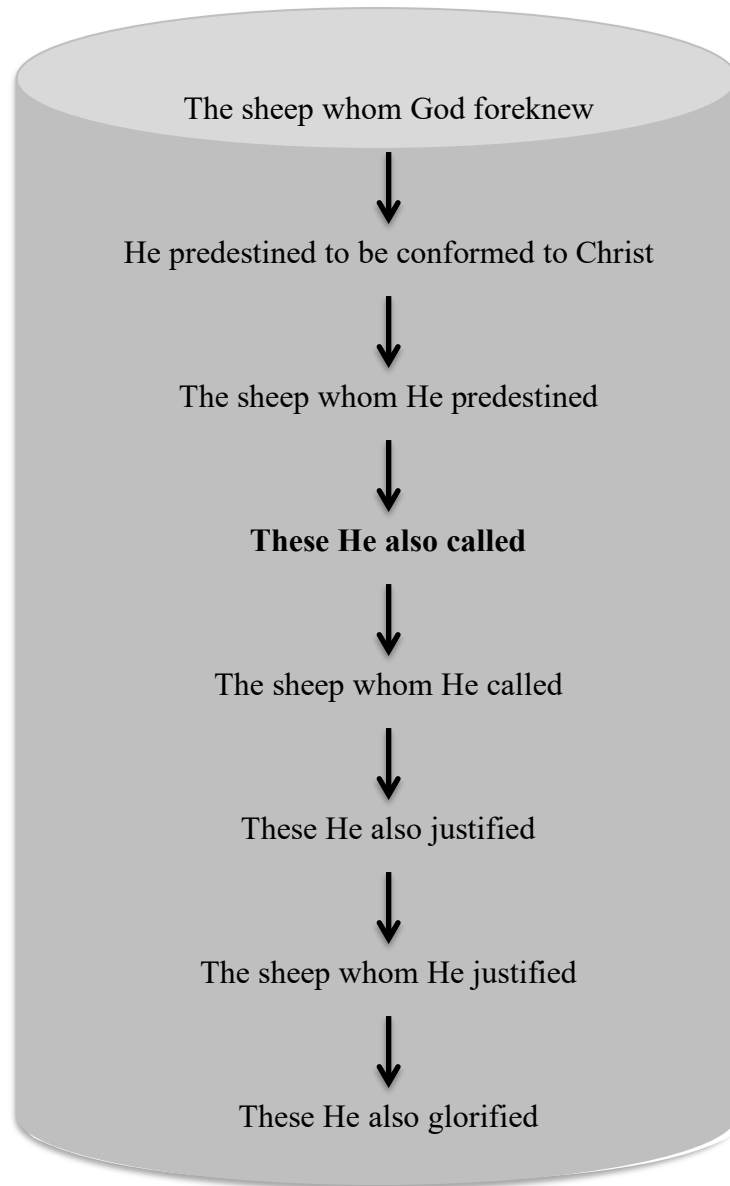
The Sovereign Lord plans and controls the future. Part of His plan is to cause things to work together for good to those who love Him, those who are specifically called by Him. God's gracious calling is efficacious, as stated by Jesus:

John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

Nobody can resist God's calling His sheep. God's calling is embedded in the redemption-golden pipeline, such that God's elected sheep can never be lost, as shown on the next page.

The Redemption-Golden Pipeline



God's process of salvation includes all the elements (election, calling, justification, sanctification), which are both necessary and sufficient to bring the elect sheep to glory. Everyone in the Lamb's book of life will enter eternal glory forever and ever. Even

though as sheep, we are prone to wander in this life, God's elect sheep are secured in God's pipeline to glory. This is a comforting truth in a lost and chaotic world.

The Apostle Paul then asks a series of rhetorical questions, using an *a fortiori* argument (argument from the stronger):

Romans 8:31-32

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

We can make promises and commitments, but sometimes our plans fail because of weather, illness or other unforeseen circumstances. For many, the year of 2020 and the Coronavirus Pandemic have led to vacations being canceled, scientific conferences postponed, and school being conducted online at home.

Since God is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, whatever is His good pleasure will happen. He has no such limitations. The great news is that God is for us. Some people may be for us and others may be against us. But it does not matter as far as God's eternal plan is concerned. Nobody can thwart the sovereign will of God—not even Satan.

As promised in the OT, God the Father said that He would send God the Son, the Messiah, to purchase the redemption of mankind. Jesus died and rose on our behalf. He did this without reservation. In fact, we read in the Scriptures:

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

It was joyful for the Lord Jesus to die for us. God has kept His promise joyfully! It goes without saying, as joint-heirs with Christ, He will freely give us what He has promised. After all, He gave us Jesus. He can do this because He is sovereign, righteous, just, merciful, and always keeps His promises.

Romans 8:33-34

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

All of us have sinned and can be charged for all our transgressions. We are guilty as charged. It does not matter because the one who justifies is Jesus. He has satisfied the

Divine bar of justice on our behalf. He paid for our sins and led the sinless life we could not lead. His perfect life has been imputed to us as believers.

Satan has condemned believers because he is the accuser of the brethren (*Revelation 12:10*). And with every accusation that Satan makes before the throne of Almighty God, Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, intercedes on our behalf. Jesus is always there for us, defending us against one accusation after another. We have a living Savior seated in the heavens. Praise the Lord!

Here comes the final *a fortiori* argument: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Romans 8:35-39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, not things present, not things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The Apostle Paul suffered many of these hardships first hand:

2 Corinthians 11:23-27

“Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

Paul is writing, from first hand experience in 2 Corinthians, what it is like to suffer as a Christian. Suffering will never separate us from the love of Christ, but, on the contrary, through Him we can conquer these things. Suffering can actually be used for good in our lives, as we know all things work together for our good. Instead of suffering driving us away from the Lord, it actually strengthens our bond with the Lord.

The early church suffered a lot of persecution:

Acts 5:40-42

“And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”

The persecution of the early church only emboldened them to preach Jesus as the Christ. They were more than conquerors. Thousands upon thousands of people came to Christ during the apostolic revival. They rejoiced in their suffering, as nothing could separate them from the love of Christ.

Summary of Romans 8:31-39

The redemption-golden pipeline and the majestic assurances of our salvation are a great comfort to us. God not only elects and calls believers, He justifies and sanctifies them and ensures that they remain faithful to the end. The redemption-golden pipeline to glory will carry us home to be with Jesus forevermore. We are secure in Him, and nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

10.4 Predestination and reprobation

The Lamb’s book of life contains the names of the elect—those chosen by God before the foundation of the world to salvation. From our perspective, God is exercising option 3—He chose to save some and let the others perish. God would have been completely righteous and just to exercise option 1 and let everyone remain in their chosen way of sin and then be judged for their sins. Because our God is loving, gracious and merciful, He has chosen to save some. There is nothing man can do to be saved, because man does not seek for God. Unless God acts positively, as we saw through the redemption-golden pipeline, all would perish. Because God has made a choice to save some, it clearly implies that others were excluded, i.e. the reprobates, those predestined to an eternity in hell.

This is a hard truth. Let’s explore this further. As far as reprobates are concerned, is it merely a passive choice on the part of God, simply excluding others by letting them have their own way? Or, is it possible that God actively secured their reprobation and degree of judgment? Regardless of the passions we feel inside ourselves, we must go to the Scriptures to see what God has to say.

We briefly touched on this passage before:

Proverbs 16:4

“The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

The wicked have a purpose in God’s plan. Clearly, Christ would not have been crucified if there were no wicked people. Since God is Sovereign, He knows and searches the thoughts and hearts of man as shown below:

Jeremiah 17:9-10

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.”

God knows the state of our hearts and the deeds that follow.

2 Chronicles 16:9

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

King Asa, king of Judah, made a strategic error in relying on the king of Aram instead of the Lord to help him win his battle with Baasha, king of Israel. He bribed the king of Aram with silver and gold from the treasuries of the house of the Lord, so that King Aram would break his treaty with King Baasha. The bribe worked, the treaty was broken and King Baasha ceased operations. Hanani, the seer, rebuked King Asa for this decision, and the seer was put in prison.

God knows our hearts. King Asa had a divided heart. And even though we are all dead in trespasses and sins, the nature of our hearts and the level of depravity vary among individuals. We see this in a statement Jesus made about His miracles:

Matthew 11:20-24

“Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ‘Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon, which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless, I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall DESCEND TO HADES; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom, which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you.’”

Jesus performed many miracles on earth, which were used to provide proof that He was who He claimed to be, namely, God the Son, the promised Messiah. Those miracles were performed alongside of the gospel that Jesus preached. Not everyone who saw Jesus perform miracles believed. Perhaps, surprisingly, many rejected Him and His gospel, including the Pharisees.

It was interesting that Jesus stated that if His miracles were performed in Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, Tyre and Sidon would have repented and Sodom would still be here. It seems that the level of depravity was lower for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom than for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. The outcome would have been the same in Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. If He did not perform miracles there, they would not have repented. Yet, He performed miracles in those cities that He knew would not repent, and, at the same time, withheld those same miracles from other cities that would have repented.

It seems that God did not just passively let reprobates have their own way, as He knows the relative depravity in their hearts, and dispenses grace to them as He wills. He determined the severity of judgment of the people in those cities, knowing their resistance to the miracles. He performed miracles in those cities where He knew the people would not repent. He chose not to overcome their resistance. He also chose not to perform those same miracles in cities where He knew the people would repent. All cities continued on their path to judgment for their sins as an act of their own free will. A consequence for this is that judgment will be more severe for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum than for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Ultimately, the Sovereign Lord of the universe secured their eternal destiny and severity of judgment for the people of those cities. God is under no obligation to perform miracles or to overcome the resistance of people to the gospel; people who have freely chosen the path of sin and rebellion.

God's mercy and heart hardening: Romans 9-11

In this section of Romans chapters 9-11, the Apostle Paul is dealing with the issue of the Jews' rejection of Christ and his desire to see them saved. Paul observes that there is a nation Israel, and within that nation, a "spiritual Israel", those Jews who repent and ultimately come to accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah. With this background in mind, we will turn to Romans chapter 9, as we observe the choices of God.

Romans 9:9-16

"For this is a word of promise: 'AT THIS TIME I WILL COME, AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON.' And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.' Just as it is written, 'JACOB I LOVED BUT ESAU I HATED.' What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it

never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

Hate is the opposite of love. The love and hate expressed in this passage quoted from *Malachi 1:1-4* is not an emotional statement. It simply reflects God’s sovereign choice between Jacob being blessed as the child of promise, with the inheritance of God, and Esau being given an earthly inheritance, which was made into desolation. God’s choice was determined before they were born. God chose to have mercy on Jacob and not on Esau. God was entirely just in His decision.

Romans 9:17-18

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”

Paul is quoting *Exodus 9:16*, which requires a review of the Exodus narrative and the plagues, to aid in our understanding of why God hardens someone.

Exodus 4:21

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.’”

Exodus 7:3

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.”

The point of God hardening Pharaoh’s heart is to set the stage for an escalating set of miracles demonstrating God’s power. The miracles now begin, and here is the narrative for each miracle as shown on the next page.

Miracle	Passage	Narrative
Serpent	Ex. 7:9-13	Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Nile turned to blood	Ex. 7:20-22	Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Frogs	Ex. 8:1-15	Pharaoh hardened his heart
Gnats	Ex. 8:16-19	Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Swarms of insects	Ex. 8:20-32	Pharaoh hardened his heart
Pestilence on animals	Ex. 9:1-7	Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Boils on man, beast	Ex. 9:8-12	The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart
Hail	Ex. 9:13-35	Pharaoh's heart was hardened
Locusts	Ex. 10:1-20	The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart
Darkness	Ex. 10:21-29	The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart
Firstborn slain	Ex. 11-14	The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart
Red Sea divided	Ex. 14	The Lord hardened the hearts of Pharaoh's Army

In this series of miracles we see that Pharaoh hardened his heart six times before the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart. At the end, Pharaoh hardened his heart only one more time whereas the Lord hardened his heart three more times. After the people of Israel departed Egypt, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart again and the hearts of Pharaoh's Army. This led to the destruction of the Egyptian army that pursued the Israelites through the parted Red Sea. The Lord was actively involved, through hardening Pharaoh's heart and the army's heart, in the destruction of the Egyptian army. The purpose of God's hardening the hearts of the Egyptians was to make His power known.

Another pagan king suffered the same fate as Pharaoh, as recorded by Moses:

Deuteronomy 2:26-30

"So I sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace saying, 'Let me pass through your land, I will travel only on the highway; I will not turn aside to the right or to the left. You will sell me food for

money so that I may eat, and give me water for money so that I may drink, only let me pass through on foot, just as the sons of Esau who live in Seir and the Moabites who live in Ar, did for me, until I cross over the Jordan into the land which the LORD our God is giving us.’ But Sihon king of Heshbon was not willing for us to pass through his land; for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as he is today. And the LORD said to me, ‘See, I have begun to deliver Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to occupy, that you may possess the land.’”

Moses was content to simply pass through Sihon king of Heshbon’s land. Sihon refused their peaceful passage. God hardened the king’s heart to deliver the king and all its inhabitants into Israel’s hands, as this land was part of the Promised Land. All the cities were captured, and all the inhabitants were destroyed (*Deuteronomy 2:34*). The purpose of God’s hardening the king’s heart was to establish Israel in the Promised Land.

Returning to Romans chapter 9, the interlocutor raises an objection to God’s hardening:

Romans 9:19

“You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’”

The interlocutor is arguing that since God is hardening people, and who can resist His will, why does God still find fault? Keep in mind that those who were hardened (Pharaoh and his army) had already been in rebellion against God and were still responsible for their previous sins. Paul then answers this objection:

Romans 9:20-24

“On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this’, will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? What if God, although willing to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.”

Rather than address the tension between God’s hardening and man’s free will, Paul simply states that God is the potter and that the clay has no right to ask such a question. The potter owns the clay and can do as He pleases with it. Just as the potter has a right to fashion a pot for honorable use and a pot for common use from the same lump, so can God take this lump of fallen mankind and fashion a pot for the elect and fashion a pot for the reprobate. Furthermore, not only will God call Jews for salvation, He will also call Gentiles.

Paul continues, in his Epistle to the Romans, to discuss his desire for God's chosen people to return to the Lord and be saved:

Romans 11:1-12

“I say then, God has not rejected His people has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ‘Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED THY PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN THINE ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE.’ But what is the divine response to him? ‘I HAVE KEPT FOR MYSELF SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL.’ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, ‘GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY.’ And David says, ‘LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE and a trap, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER.’ I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!”

God's grace has preserved a remnant of Jewish believers. As shown in the passage above, hardening by God prevents people from seeing and hearing the truth, so as not to turn to the Lord. The rejection of the Messiah by Jews has led to salvation coming to the Gentiles, making the Jews jealous. The Apostle Paul later on writes:

Romans 11:25-26

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.’”

This partial hardening of the Jewish people will be reversed when the fullness of Gentiles has come into the kingdom. This hardening is not absolute, as Jewish people do come to Christ for salvation even today. The timing of this reversal is unknown, but most likely will occur near the end times. It is clear that it will happen as prophesied by the prophet Zechariah:

Zechariah 12:10

“And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born.”

God’s grace and mercy accomplishes the election of His people. Man can harden his own heart. Pharaoh hardened his own heart multiple times before God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. God’s mercy reverses hardening, whether self-inflicted or from the Lord. God’s partial hardening of the Jews will be fully reversed once the fullness of Gentiles has come in.

Jesus performed many miracles while on earth. During his last public discourse before the Passover, Jesus said:

John 12:34-41

“The multitude therefore answered Him, ‘We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; how can You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’ Jesus therefore said to them, ‘For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light.’ These things Jesus spoke, and He departed and hid Himself from them. But though He performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, ‘LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED? For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, ‘HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES, AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART; LEST THEY SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED, AND I HEAL THEM.’ These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.”

The partial hardening of Israel played out when Jesus was on earth, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. They could not believe because God hardened their hearts, so that they would not be converted in response to the light. This was God’s plan. God’s hardening ensured they would not believe, and thereby secured their reprobation. God is just, as He punishes sinners because they sinned, not because they did not hear or respond to the gospel. Some theologians refer to election and reprobation as “double predestination.” This is a very difficult concept to accept, but it is here in the Scriptures. We have to keep in mind that God owes salvation to no one. It is a wonder that, at great cost to our Savior, He chose to save some of us to be His children forever in heaven. We all deserve His judgment, and in all humility, we need to be grateful for all the Lord has done for us.

10.5 Predestination and the gospel

After wading through the mystery of the doctrine of predestination, a likely question comes up—why preach the gospel and do evangelism? After all, God has predestined it all from the beginning? What can I do to change people’s minds?

Taking the last question first, the goal of evangelism and preaching the gospel is not for one to change people’s minds. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to obey God’s commandments, as Christ is both our Lord and Savior. Jesus said:

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

We are in the Lord’s army, and He has commanded us to go make disciples of all nations. That is why we preach the gospel and do evangelism. What I have found very interesting is that God has a role for us to play in the salvation of the elect:

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

We are ambassadors for King Jesus, reconciling men to God. That is our job. We represent Christ and His gospel message to a dying world. We are not ambassadors for an earthly nation, but rather, we are ambassadors for the eternal new Jerusalem. Before we were born He had good works planned for us:

Ephesians 2:4-10

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, 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, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in

Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

It would be a great misunderstanding of the doctrine of predestination to think we are just robots on earth. God expects us to use the Scriptures with our brains and gifts to discover what works He has planned and what He wants us to do.

In God’s providence, He has not revealed the Lamb’s book of life to us. We have no idea if the people we share our faith with will ever come to Christ. Our mission is to go forth and share the love of Christ with all people God puts in our path.

The Apostle Paul had this strategy for evangelism:

1 Corinthians 9:19-24

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those under the Law; to those who are without the law, as without the law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.”

Paul’s strategy is to know the people and the times they are living in and bring them the gospel in that context. Paul applied this strategy in Athens:

Acts 17:22-23

“And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.”

I remember reading a roadside billboard, advertising a local church in Oklahoma. Underneath the name of the church the sign read, “Geared to the times but anchored to the Rock.” We have the freedom in Christ to try various approaches in reaching our communities with the gospel. In my experience, the personal touch is always best. Build a relationship with people you know and listen to what they have to say. As you build

their trust, they will more likely listen to you. There is no right or wrong way. If one approach does not work, try another. Simply love these people as best you can. The more people you witness to, the more will come to Christ. Be prayerful for opportunities to share your faith. Your prayers and your witness are all part of God's plan.

It is also interesting to note, after Paul preached in Athens, he went on to Corinth where he experienced resistance against the gospel by the Jews. We read in the book of Acts:

Acts 18:4-10

“And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word; solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads, I am clean; from now on I shall go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’”

Paul's life was in danger during his ministry, and, at times, preaching the gospel was tough, especially when the Jews were resisting the gospel and others wanted to harm him. The Lord encouraged Paul by letting him know that He was going to protect him and that there were many of God's elect in the city of Corinth to be reached.

God has a real purpose for us in evangelism: to be a witness for Christ as ambassadors, reconciling men to God. Since we do not have the Lamb's book of life or a vision from God, we press on to share Christ with all people and hope to see some fruit among God's elect—known to Him and unknown to us. My policy is to keep sharing my faith, never giving up. On a regular basis, the Mormon elders visit us and we listen to them and make sure they listen to us. For some of these lost people, it may be the first time they have heard a clear presentation of the gospel. As long as people are alive, there is hope for salvation. I continue to pray for opportunities to share my faith. The doctrine of predestination is actually an encouragement, knowing that when we have tried our best, the outcome of our witness is in the hands of our Sovereign Lord.

10.6 Predestination and prayer

After wading through the mystery of the doctrine of predestination, another likely question comes up—why pray? After all, God has predestined it all from the beginning.

God encourages us to pray

1 Thessalonians 5:17

“Pray without ceasing;”

We should be prayerful at all times, asking God’s blessings on our efforts and on people in our lives.

Colossians 4:2

“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping an alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;”

Always be thankful in prayer.

Daniel 6:10

“Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before His God, as he had been doing previously.”

Daniel had regular intervals of prayer in his daily life. How about you?

God answers prayers

I grew up in the Catholic Church and was familiar with prayer as far as The Lord’s Prayer and Hail Mary’s were concerned. After I became a Christian, I realized that prayer is personal; you can talk directly to God in Jesus’ name in prayer and He actually listens to you. You can actually have a personal relationship with the God who created the universe. This is very helpful for a scientist.

One of the big transitions for a scientist is when you move from taking academic courses in the laboratory to doing original basic research. In laboratory courses, there is an expected outcome. I recall, in an organic chemistry laboratory course, that each person was given a different unknown compound that we each had to identify. The graduate student teaching assistant knew the identity of the compounds we were given and occasionally would provide “hints” on what to do to discover the identity of the compound if we got stuck. I was given a vial containing 50g of a white, crystalline powder. After performing spectral analysis and the synthesis of a derivative of my unknown, my unknown was a salt of oxalic acid.

In original basic research, there are no right or wrong answers. There are no expected outcomes, unless, of course, your research has progressed to the point of confirming a model or hypothesis. Compared to a laboratory course, original basic scientific research is significantly more difficult.

Early in my Christian walk, I was greatly encouraged by the following verse of Scripture:

James 1:2-8

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Here, the Scripture clearly teaches that if you lack wisdom, ask God who gives generously. So I began on a regular basis to pray for wisdom regarding my experiments in the laboratory, that God would guide my thinking and direction.

My Ph.D. thesis advisor was absolutely brilliant, and I owe her a great debt of gratitude in training me to be a scientist. She had conceived a comprehensive research program studying DNA replication in yeast. Yeast is a lower eukaryote and has linear chromosomes just like our cells do. Studying DNA replication in yeast is a model system for studying DNA replication in higher eukaryotic cells, like human cells. We know that defects in the regulation of DNA replication in mammalian cells can result in oncogenesis and the development of cancer.

One of the key advances in my Ph.D. thesis research project was to construct *in vitro* circular minichromosomes. A circular minichromosome in yeast requires a gene with selectable marker, an origin of replication and a centromere. We had genes for selectable markers and several putative origins of replication, but no centromere. Centromeres are sequences of DNA that ensure stable transmission of each copy of the chromosome to each cell following cell division. One laboratory, at the time, had succeeded in cloning a centromere from yeast using a very specific method. I developed a more general method for cloning centromeres from the yeast genome and obtained a cloned sequence of DNA that contained “centromeric” activity. The proof that this was an actual centromere would be to genetically map a region of the cloned DNA sequence, adjacent to the putative centromere, to one of the known 17 chromosomes of yeast. I had to prove that this cloned DNA sequence was linked to a known centromere-linked gene. By God’s grace, and, in answer to prayer, I was able to rapidly identify the cloned DNA sequence as the centromere from chromosome V of yeast (Maine, G.T., Surosky, R.T., and Tye,

B.-K. (1984) *Molecular and Cellular Biology* **4**, p. 86-91). After this advance in my research, my research thesis project took off.

Through the use of these minichromosomes, I was able to obtain mutations in a number of yeast genetic loci, the genes of which were later characterized by others in the laboratory as being involved in yeast DNA replication. Before my graduation, I was able to clone and study an essential gene called *MCM1* that was required for maintenance of the minichromosome. One of the key tasks geneticists do when they identify a new gene is to map that gene to a chromosome. At the time this was an arduous task that would require performing a series of genetic crosses and experiments that could take 4-5 months to accomplish. So I prayed to the Lord for wisdom and began the arduous task of seeking to map the genomic location of *MCM1*.

In answer to my prayers I was able, in a single genetic cross, to map the *MCM1* gene on the right arm of chromosome XIII near *LYS7* (Passmore, S, Maine, G.T., Eble, R., Christ, C., and Tye, B.-K. (1988) *J. Molecular Biology* **204**, p. 593-606). I accomplished this task in two weeks instead of 4-5 months. My Ph.D. thesis advisor was astonished and could not believe I did it in a single genetic cross. I told her I prayed about my experiments. The incredulous look on her face after I said that was priceless. God controls the future, including the results of scientists. In response to my prayers, God aided my mapping of the *MCM1* gene to chromosome XIII of yeast and compressed the time to do so. He also guided me to graduation and a long and challenging career in science. I am blessed and forever thankful.

These were some examples among many answered prayers in my life, over the past forty years, both as a Christian and as a scientist. How does predestination and prayer work together?

Predestined prayers and God's sovereign plan

In God's sovereign plan, the prayers of the saints, are also embedded within God's predestined plan. This can be shown from the following passages of Scripture:

Genesis 20:1-7

“Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, ‘She is my sister.’ So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, ‘Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.’ Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, ‘Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even though blameless? Did he not himself say to me, ‘She is my sister?’ And she herself said, ‘He is my brother.’ In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this.’ Then God said to him in the dream, ‘Yes, I know in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let

you touch her. Now therefore restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.'"

Abraham called Sarah his sister, even though she was the daughter of his father but not his mother. He did this to protect his life. He was afraid that, if he called Sarah his wife, they would kill him. God spoke to Abimelech in a dream, warning him that Sarah was married and that he should restore Sarah to Abraham. God mentions that Abraham will pray for Abimelech, upon restoring Sarah to him. We read later in the same passage:

Genesis 20:17-18

"And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife."

As mentioned to Abimelech by God in a dream, Abraham later prayed to God after Sarah was restored to him. God answered prayer and opened the wombs of Abimelech's household. The prayer of Abraham was part of God's predestined plan.

Job 42:7-10

"And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, then the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.' So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job. And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends, and the LORD increased all that Job had twofold."

After the long discourse between Job, God, and his three friends, the Lord mentions that Job will pray for them. Later, Job prayed for his friends, and God restored Job's fortunes twofold.

Our prayers are part of God's predestined plan. The difficulty sometimes lies, when we pray, not knowing what God's future plan is until it unfolds. We know His preceptive will and His moral commands through the Scriptures. Our focus should be to follow those, be prayerful at all times and for the future, and then rest in His loving arms as He guides us through this life. His word is all we need, as it is both necessary and sufficient for holy living.

10.7 Summary

The doctrine of predestination logically flows from the fact that God is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe. After the Fall of man, the only free will left to us was to choose to sin. Since nobody seeks for God, the only way people can come to Christ for salvation is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Because of God's great love, grace and mercy, He has provided a path to reconciliation through Christ and will use us in His plan to accomplish His election of others. His election is sure, and those He has chosen will persevere to the end. It is impossible for one of God's elect to lose their salvation. Those who make a profession of faith and later fall away from the faith, never to return, were never actually saved in the first place and were not one of God's elect.

It grieves our hearts when our family members and friends refuse to accept the gospel. Sometimes they make fools out of us and laugh at us. I have heard many false characterizations of the gospel. If you love people and really care about them, continue to pray and ask the Lord for an opening in their lives. Success in sharing your faith is not determined on how many people you lead to the Lord. It is God's responsibility to draw people to Himself. Success in sharing your faith is staying faithful to the Lord and His commands—loving God and people and sharing your faith. As long as people remain alive there is an opportunity to accept Christ. At the end of the day, we leave the outcome of sharing the gospel in the hands of the Lord. He will do according to His perfect will, planned long ago before we were born.

In closing, remember the words of Daniel, the prophet, speaking about the end of the ages:

Daniel 12:1-3

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”

There is a terrific promise here. Those who have insight in God's word and those who lead the many to Christ will be shining stars for all eternity. Go in God's name, and lead many to Christ. Be a shining star in the new Jerusalem for all eternity, Amen!

11. The Doctrine of the Resurrection

Memory verses: *Mark 16:6, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

Some people say that there are two things that are certain in life—death and taxes. As long as there are governments, there will be taxes. The tax rate on property varies widely across the United States. Northern Illinois has some of the highest property taxes in the nation, upwards of 3% of the value of the house. So when the time came to retire from the corporate laboratory, we left the high taxes behind in Illinois and came to live in sunny Queen Creek, Arizona in the Phoenix metro area. The weather is warmer, much lower property taxes and more affordable living for people on a fixed income. The Valley of the Sun has only three seasons instead of four in Illinois: Fall, Spring and the Furnace!

Death, unfortunately, will also come to all people, and this fact is an observable one, tracing back to the fall of Adam:

Genesis 2:15-17

“Then the LORD God took man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.’”

The Lord’s command was very clear. You may eat from any tree except one. Unfortunately, the serpent entered the garden and tempted Eve to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree.

Genesis 3:4-6

“And the serpent said to the woman, ‘You shall surely not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

Sin entered the world and so did death. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden by the Lord and later died. The imputation of Adam’s sinful nature to the human race led to his descendants also sinning and dying. This cataclysmic event in human history was then followed by God’s wonderful story of redemption through the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Death and taxes are certain. But there is also a third thing that is certain for all people—life after death, the resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ, as the promised Messiah,

died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead. In addition to Jesus, all who die will be raised from the dead. The nature of this bodily resurrection depends on whether you are a Christian or not.

11.1 The resurrection of Jesus Christ

As we saw from the previous chapter on predestination, God had a redemption plan in eternity past to deal with the consequences of the Fall of man in Adam and the sin and death that resulted. Right after The Fall, the Lord God announced His plan to the serpent:

Genesis 3:14-15

“And the LORD God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.’”

The seed of the woman would deal a fatal blow to the serpent. The prophet Isaiah announced the birth of this seed:

Isaiah 7:14

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

Immanuel in Hebrew means “God with us.” God the Son would be born of a woman through a virgin birth. Isaiah reveals more details:

Isaiah 9:6

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”

God is coming in the flesh, the arrival hundreds of years later, confirmed by Matthew’s Gospel:

Matthew 1:18-23

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.’ Now all this took place that what was

spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL;’ which translated means ‘GOD WITH US.’”

The prophet Isaiah foretold the mission of the Servant of the Lord in amazing detail:

Isaiah 52:13-15

“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted. Just as many were astonished at you, my people, so His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men, thus He will sprinkle many nations, kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand.”

The Servant of the Lord will be exalted and then humiliated, suffering like Israel. His appearance would be so marred that He would not appear to be a man, and His blood would sprinkle many nations, not just Israel.

Isaiah continues:

Isaiah 53:4-6

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

Isaiah 53:9

“His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death; although He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.”

The Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, is a sin bearer. The servant of the Lord was executed by piercing, a Roman form of execution not practiced by the Jews in Isaiah’s day. Individuals who had committed capital offenses under Jewish law were executed by stoning. His death would bring healing for the wayward sheep. He was buried in a rich man’s tomb.

Isaiah 53:10-12

“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in his hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured

out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”

The Servant of the Lord will be a guilt offering and will be resurrected from the dead. He will make intercession for the transgressors (imperfect Hebrew tense in *Isaiah 53:12*) through His death and resurrection. All of this was predicted 700 years in advance. His death and resurrection was also confirmed by Matthew’s Gospel:

Matthew 27:45-50

“Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘ELI, ELI LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ that is, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?’ And some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’ And immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink. But the rest of them said, ‘Let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.’ And Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.”

Matthew 28:1-9

“Now late on the Sabbath, as it began to dawn to the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his garment as white as snow; and the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come see the place where He was lying. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you.’ And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.”

Jesus then ascended into heaven, having completed His redemption mission on earth through His death and resurrection. He lives to make intercession for us and will return again to earth someday.

Acts 1:6-11

“And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’ And after He said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on,

and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’”

While Jesus is gone, our mission is to be His witnesses. We were reminded of this when we were married in a local Baptist church. The church recently held a Bible conference, and a large banner was still hung in the front of the church, which appeared in many of our wedding pictures:

YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME

Acts 1:8

Not a typical banner you will see displayed at a wedding, but a vivid reminder that as a married couple, the mission is still the same—bring people to Jesus.

The importance of the bodily resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the gospel. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

1 Corinthians 15:1-8

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even has Christ been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain; your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.”

Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave, as observed by over 500 eyewitnesses. His physical bodily resurrection was absolutely essential for forgiveness of our sins. Without His resurrection, we would still be in our sins. Recall that Jesus bore our sins on His body on the cross and died. His resurrection proves that He was able to pay for our sins and satisfy the requirements of the law that sin must be atoned for in order to secure forgiveness.

The resurrection body of Jesus

The Scriptures have recorded descriptions of Jesus after His resurrection. After the disciples encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus, Luke's Gospel states:

Luke 24:36-43

“And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And while they still could not believe it for joy and were marveling, He said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ And they gave Him a piece of broiled fish; and He took it and ate it in their sight.”

Recall the prophet Isaiah's description of the servant of the Lord following His humiliation. His appearance would be so disfigured that He would not appear to be a man. Jesus was scourged, a crown of thorns was placed on His head, His head was beaten with a reed, and He then carried His cross to Calvary where He was nailed to the cross. He then suffered for three hours on the cross to atone for our sins before He died.

Jesus now appears fully alive and recognizable. This is not an apparition of Jesus. THIS IS JESUS CHRIST, BODILY RAISED FROM THE DEAD! Jesus had flesh and bones and could be recognized by those who saw Him before His crucifixion. He spoke, moved His arms and legs, and ate a piece of fish. All of this was in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

We also read from John's gospel:

John 20:19-20

“When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”

Jesus was severely wounded beyond recognition during His humiliation. All of those wounds apparently were healed, except the nail imprints and the sword scar on His side. Our Savior will bear these nail imprints and sword scar for all eternity as a lasting reminder that He died and rose on our behalf. This physical evidence of the crucifixion on the body of Jesus was important for a man named Thomas:

John 20:24-28

“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

Jesus invites Thomas to examine the bodily evidence for His crucifixion. This removed all doubt in Thomas’ mind.

It is also noteworthy that Jesus, in His resurrection body, was able to appear in a closed room without walking through a door. He later ascended into heaven without a visible means of transport. Since Jesus is God, He can travel how He pleases.

Jesus is now in heaven

Ephesians 1:18-23

“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Jesus is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father and is Head of His church.

Jesus intercedes for believers

Romans 8:33-34

“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

Jesus lives in heaven to intercede for us.

11.2 The resurrection of the righteous

As believers, we will all leave this earth someday at a time known only to God. The following verse from Psalms has this encouraging word for us:

Psalms 116:15

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.”

Our demise may be sadness for those we leave behind but going home to be with Jesus is precious in God’s sight. It is a special time. We can look forward to this, as Christ has purchased our salvation, and the Holy Spirit has sealed us until the day of redemption. As you reflect on this for a moment, you may have mixed feelings, like the Apostle Paul:

Philippians 1:21-24

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”

Paul expresses the tension that exists within him between departing and being with Christ versus staying behind to minister to others. Since we do not know the day or the hour of our departure, keep serving the Lord faithfully until He calls you home.

I remember the story told by a man who later became an evangelist, after his conversion to Christ. He grew up in a Christian home and his Dad was a pastor. He received a call from his brother that his Dad passed away. His father was preaching a sermon on a Sunday, and thirty minutes after the sermon, he left for glory. He was faithfully serving the Lord to the end. He was an example to all of us.

Home with the Lord

The good news is that, upon our departure from this earth, we are with Christ. Paul writes to the church in Corinth:

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

Believers who die before the resurrection of the righteous will go home to be with the Lord. Theologians call this the “intermediate state,” namely, this is the time when our spirit is with the Lord prior to being given our new resurrected bodies.

Glorified bodies

Every believer in Christ will receive a new glorified body just like Jesus. Paul writes:

Philippians 3:20-21

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

Jesus will use His power to transform our bodies into conformity with His glorious body.

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

The great news is that we do not have to live forever as fallen human beings with a corruptible, disease-prone body. We will be given immortal bodies, never to be corrupted or filled with disease and suffering again. Death can have no victory over us,

as we will live forever. The Scriptures are silent on what age we would appear in our resurrected bodies. We will be recognizable to others just as over 500 eyewitnesses could recognize Jesus. As we saw with Jesus, we will be able to walk, talk and eat. This transformation will occur at the last trumpet, the resurrection of the righteous.

There will be some differences once we are in our new resurrected bodies. Luke quotes Jesus in his gospel:

Luke 20:34-36

“And Jesus said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given into marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.’”

Resurrected believers will not marry or die. We will be like the angels.

The resurrection of the righteous is also known as the first resurrection:

Revelation 20:4-6

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

The second death has no power over the first resurrection. The first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, is for all believers who will live forever with the Lord in heaven.

Revelation 21:1-4

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain: the first things have passed away.’”

Resurrected believers will no longer experience death, mourning, crying or pain. Praise the Lord for that wonderful truth. No more earthly joy mixed with wormwood in our mortal bodies. Pure joy will be experienced.

When will we receive our new bodies?

1 Corinthians 15:50-52

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

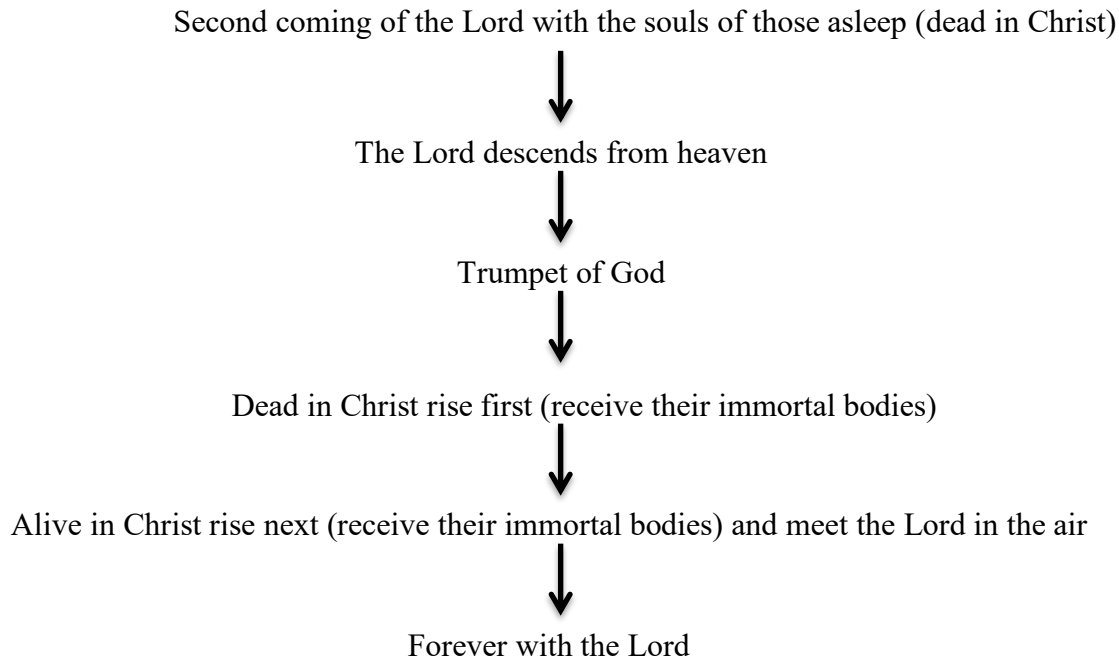
At the resurrection of the righteous, the Lord will give us our new bodies. This appears to be an instantaneous process. This will occur at or near the last trumpet. More details emerge from Paul’s Epistle to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen sleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

The flow of this passage is diagrammed on the following page.

Resurrection of the Righteous



We receive our new bodies when the Lord bodily returns to earth at His Second Coming. Those asleep in the Lord receive their new bodies before those alive in the Lord. Once we have all risen, and have our new immortal bodies, we will be with the Lord forever. The intermediate state of being with the Lord, as a spirit only, is now replaced forever with the permanent state of being with the Lord with a glorified body.

The Apostle Paul tells us that we should comfort one another with these words. This is something we should all do. The loss of a loved one is difficult for those left behind.

My Dad passed away a few years ago, and, thankfully, trusted Christ before his departure. My Mom was thrilled that my Dad made it to heaven by the grace of God, but it has been very hard on her to lose him. My Mom met my Dad when she was a teenager and married him at the tender age of nineteen. They were married for 66 years until my Dad passed to glory. The departure of our loved ones is hard to accept, as you feel, at times, lost without them. The best thing you can do is simply be with those who grieve

and say very little. Remember all the good times and memories, and comfort them with these words from this passage in Thessalonians. This separation from our loved ones in Christ is only temporary. We will be with them and the Lord forever. Amen.

Since we are still here, we have work to do. God is not finished with us yet. Please be about the Master's business and rejoice in the Lord always.

11.3 The resurrection of the unrighteous

Man was created in God's image. Therefore, it should not surprise us that all men will live forever, as God is eternal. Unfortunately, the Fall of Adam led to sin and death entering the world and, therefore, all die because all have sinned. Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead provided for the payment of sins for those who would repent and believe the gospel. Believers, when they die, go home to be with the Lord. They will receive their new immortal bodies at the resurrection of the righteous.

There is also a resurrection for the unrighteous. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, is for those whose names were not found in the Lamb's book of life. This is a resurrection to judgment as we see in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 20:11-15

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

This second resurrection also results in the second death, an eternal living death in the lake of fire. This is absolutely terrifying but it is true—all of God's word is true. This should serve as a motivation for us to share the love of Christ and the gospel with others.

People may laugh at us and make fun of the gospel. Some people call the gospel a crutch. Others say the gospel is a ticket. If you do not get the ticket, you do not go to heaven. Regardless whether you call it a crutch or a ticket, the Apostle Peter, in his sermon in the book of Acts, urges you to get one.

Acts 4:8-12

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands before you in good health. He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED BY YOU, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE VERY CORNERSTONE. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.’”

11.4 Summary

Death is as certain as the resurrection that follows for all men. Everyone will live on for all eternity. The destination depends on whether you repent and accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

As the years roll by and you grow older, your perspective on life undergoes a seismic shift. In the early years, you were preoccupied with finishing college, getting a job and finding a mate. Then you raise a family, and the process repeats itself with your children. Meanwhile, your parents are getting older and have or may soon pass away. Soon you will find yourself all alone at the top, the next generation to pass away. As you reflect on all the work you have done to raise a family, getting your kids through college and then finally burying your parents, you realize that only one thing on this earth is really of eternal value—people. I recall hearing a very wise evangelist named Jack Murray make the following statement:

“Soon this life will be gone and past, only what is done for Christ will last.”

Instead of filling your lives with stuff and pleasure, fill your lives with people. People last forever and need the Lord. The Lord’s work can be hard at times, as it is natural for people to resist the gospel. I did. But I am thankful for those who continued to pursue me for the gospel’s sake. Thanks to them I came to know the Lord. In closing, remember the word of encouragement from the Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:58

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

12. The Second Coming of Christ

Memory verse: *Acts 1:10-11*

As we saw in the previous chapter, after Jesus was raised from the dead, He ministered for approximately forty days (*Acts 1:3*) and then ascended to heaven:

Acts 1:9-12

And after He said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.’ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath’s day journey away.”

Jesus ascended from Mount Olivet, just outside Jerusalem. Two angels provide commentary that Jesus will return to earth in the same way He departed from Mt. Olivet. Jesus will return to Mt. Olivet (see *Zechariah 14:1-4*). However, Jesus will not be coming back alone.

12.1 The return of Christ with His church

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen sleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

When the Lord returns with the saints at the trumpet of God, those who died before His Second Coming will receive their immortal bodies first. The saints alive on earth when Jesus returns will be caught up in the air and receive their immortal bodies as well. This is the first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous. The entire church is in the air with Jesus ready to return to earth for His millennial reign. At this time, there will be no Christians on the surface of the earth.

Revelation 20:1-3

***“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.*”**

Just prior to the millennial reign of Christ with His saints, Satan will be bound for a thousand years. This will make for a smooth transition, as Satan will be prevented from deceiving the nations.

Revelation 20:4-6

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.”

The first resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous, has occurred. When Jesus and His church return to earth, the current inhabitants present on earth were not part of the first resurrection, and, therefore, were not Christians. After the 1,000-year reign of Christ with His church, Satan will be released.

Revelation 20:7-10

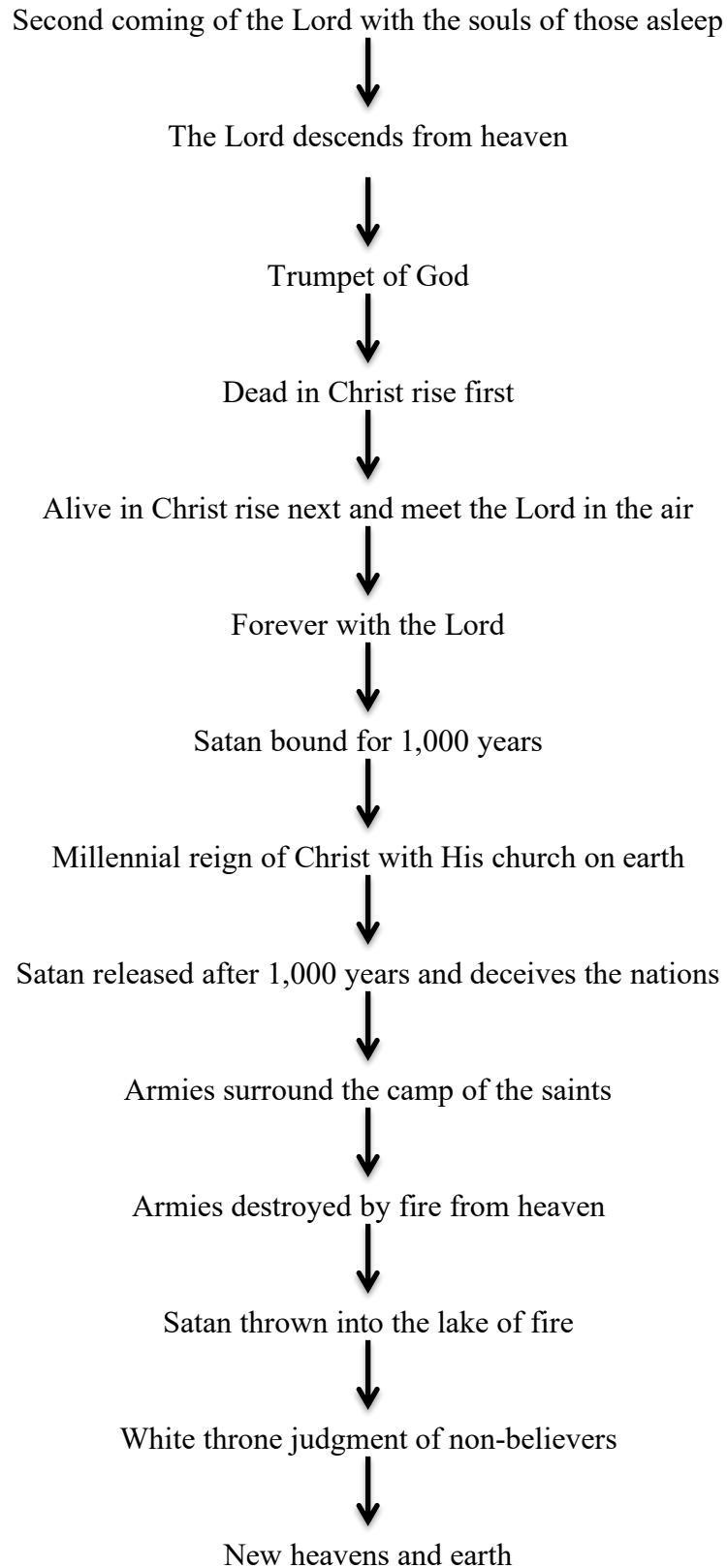
“And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came upon the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

Satan is then released to deceive the nations, to attack the believers and the holy city. Please note that Satan did not escape, he was released. The Lord destroys Satan and his army. Satan is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone to be tormented forever and ever. The second resurrection then occurs, followed by the white throne judgment of non-believers and the new heavens and earth:

Revelation 20:11-15; 21:1

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. And I saw a new heaven and earth; for the first heaven and earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea”

Compilation of the sequence of events from the 1 Thessalonians and Revelation passages is shown on the next page.



This is the sequence of events we observe from the Scriptures. The question that is often asked is this: when will the Lord return? It has been 2,000 years since Jesus walked on earth. This will be discussed in the next section.

12.2 The timing of the Lord's return

After two world wars and the terrorism that continues to occur around the earth, the return of our Lord Jesus Christ to set up His millennial reign cannot happen soon enough. Maranatha—O Lord come! When will Jesus return?

Jesus said:

Matthew 24:36

“But of the day or hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, not the Son, but the Father alone.”

Jesus, speaking from his human nature, states that only God the Father knows the day and hour of His return. Jesus will return, the date has been set, but we do not know when. There is considerable debate among Christians about the timing of Jesus' return and whether or not the church will be on the earth during the period known as Jacob's distress (*Jeremiah 30:7*), the Great Tribulation. Some people believe Jesus could return today or tomorrow whereas others are less sure when He will return.

The Olivet discourse, as recorded in *Matthew 24*, *Mark 13* and *Luke 21*, provides valuable insight into the sequence of events that must occur prior to the Lord's return. In reviewing this eschatological data from the synoptic gospels, it should be noted that Luke is focusing his gospel on the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., whereas Matthew and Mark focus on the destruction of Jerusalem at the consummation of the age. Hence, we will carefully review Matthew's account and related Scriptures to ascertain the series of events leading up to the return of Christ.

Matthew 24:1-3

“And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.’ And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and the end of the age?’”

Have you ever experienced a beautiful sight and shared it with someone who was also present? Part of the joy of seeing a beautiful sight is to share it with someone. My wife and I visited the Grand Canyon on our honeymoon. It was the first time for both of us to see the Grand Canyon and it was amazing. We later brought our children to share the experience and took one of the off road tours. Our guide knew exactly where to be on the

canyon rim as the sun began to set. All of a sudden, the spectrum of canyon colors were on brilliant display and continued to change as the sun slowly sank towards the horizon. We were blessed to see God's beautiful creation in action.

The Jewish temple in Herod's time was beautiful. The view of the temple from Mt. Olivet was a sight to behold. The disciples wanted to share the joy of this beautiful view with Jesus. Much to their surprise, Jesus said the temple buildings would be leveled to the ground! Ouch! They must have felt a huge shock of sadness. The disciples later privately asked Jesus three questions:

When will the temple be destroyed?

What will be the sign of Your coming?

When will be the end of the age?

Jesus only answers the second question.

As for the first question, we know from history that Titus and the Romans leveled the temple buildings approximately 30 years later in 70 A.D. Some of Jesus' disciples probably lived to see this tragedy.

As for the third question in *Matthew 24:36*, Jesus said no one knows the day or hour except our Father in heaven. The disciple's query was very helpful to us, as Jesus proceeds to answer the second question, describing a series of events of unknown timing and duration that will precede His Second Coming.

The birth pangs of Jesus' return

Matthew 24:4-8

“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many. And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.’”

Jesus begins His Olivet discourse by addressing the birth pangs of His coming. Whenever there is a big event in the world, e.g., weather phenomena, earthquakes, conflicts among nations, acts of terror, potential for a nuclear conflict, etc., the media hype machine goes into overdrive. Language is used like, “This is an event of biblical proportions” or “This could be the end of life as we know it.” Jesus says these things must take place but that these are **not** signs of His coming. Even if the frequency of these events was increasing, this still is **not** the sign of His coming. Hopefully, these events

will drive people to repent and accept Christ. Nevertheless, events such as these have been occurring for 2,000 years. Jesus calls them “birth pangs.”

Matthew 24:9-14

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and mislead many. And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, it is he who shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come.”

Jesus reveals that persecution of the church will occur; false prophets will arise and mislead many. These are **not** signs of His coming. The reason these and other events we saw earlier are **not** signs of His coming is that the gospel must be preached in the whole world prior to His coming. The Triune Godhead is executing the plan of election, and until all God’s elect are born and saved, the gospel will continue to be preached to all nations. Completion of election is not a sign, as we have no way of recognizing when God’s election is complete. But once it is, Jesus says the end shall come.

The signs of Jesus’ return

Matthew 24:15-22

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing IN THE HOLY PLACE (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; for then there will be a great tribulation, such has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.”

The first sign of His coming that Jesus has revealed is the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation that will stand in the Holy Place. For this event to take place, there has to be a temple with a holy place in Jerusalem. Herod’s temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., and since then, the only buildings currently on the temple mount are the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. It is hard to imagine the third Jewish temple being built anywhere else but on the temple mount on Jerusalem. It is even harder to imagine how it could be built with the Muslim holy places occupying the mount. The return of the Jews to their homeland back in 1948 and the establishment of the nation Israel bring us closer to the temple being built. The timing of the third temple being built is unknown but is a necessary prerequisite to the temple’s desecration by the Abomination of Desolation.

After the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation in the Holy Place, people in Judea are told to flee to the mountains, as there will be the Great Tribulation (also known as the time of Jacob's distress, *Jeremiah 30:7*), to follow. It will be the worst time ever on earth, eclipsing even the first and second world wars of the 20th century. The days of this tribulation will be cut short by the Lord to preserve life and for the sake of the elect. This would indicate that the elect, and therefore the church, would be present on earth during the time of the Great Tribulation.

Excursus: The Church and the Great Tribulation

There is debate among theologians as to whether the rapture of the church occurs before or after the Great Tribulation. My personal view is that the church will go through the Great Tribulation and be raptured after the Great Tribulation but prior to the period known as God's Wrath (*Revelation 6:12-17*). This is called the post-Tribulation, pre-Wrath position. This position is consistent with the statement of Jesus following His Great Commission to the Church:

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Jesus said He would be with us even to the “*end of the age*” (Gk. *suntelia aionos*), which is better translated “*consummation of the ages*.” This term is used four other times in the following passages: *Matthew 13:39, 40, 49* and *24:3*. Two of the four other uses of this term occur in the interpretation Jesus provides to the Parable of the Tares.

Parable of the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30

“He presented another parable to them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ And the slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; lest while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares; and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

In the Parable of the Tares, Jesus says that the slaves asked the landowner if they should gather the tares before the wheat harvest. The landowner tells the slaves to wait until the harvest, then gather the tares and separate them from the wheat. The disciples of Jesus then ask him to explain the Parable of the Tares.

Matthew 13:37-42

“And He answered and said, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age (suntelia aionos); and the reapers are angels.

Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age (suntelia aionos). The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all STUMBLING BLOCKS, AND THOSE WHO COMMIT LAWLESSNESS, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Jesus states that it is at the harvest, the end of the age (*suntelia aionos*), when the tares (non-believers) will be separated from the wheat (believers). The tares (non-believers) will be gathered and burned up at the end of the age (*suntelia aionos*). The usage of this Greek term in Matthew 13 is consistent with the time of the white throne judgment. The usage of *suntelia aionos* in both Matthew 13 and Matthew 24 is consistent with the view that the church (God’s elect) will be present on earth during the Great Tribulation.

For those pastors and elders who would hold a different view, please be a good shepherd to your flock and prepare them for this possibility. Since this will be the worst time ever to be alive on earth, we need to prepare for it regardless of one’s personal eschatological convictions. Since it is always wise to prepare for possible natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, *a fortiori*, it is wise to prepare the flock to go through the Great Tribulation.

It is good to know the Holy Spirit has sealed us until the day of redemption, so that we have nothing to fear, as our salvation is secure regardless what trials we experience on earth, including the Great Tribulation.

Abomination of Desolation

Who is the abomination of desolation? Let’s turn to the prophecy in the book of Daniel and other collateral Scriptures to understand who is this individual, the nature of his abomination, and the sign of the sure return of our Lord.

Daniel 9:24-27

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy

place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

Chapter 9 of the book Daniel opens with the prophet observing from Jeremiah’s prophecy that the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem would last seventy years. The term seventy weeks literally means seventy sevens, and, in the context of this passage, seventy sevens likely is a reference to seventy weeks of years. This is what is called the seventy weeks of Daniel. After the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah the Prince will come in 69 weeks ($69 \times 7 = 483$ years), after which the Messiah will be cut off and the city and sanctuary will be destroyed. There is a debate on which decree of several actually starts the clock ticking on the seventy weeks of Daniel. All of the possible dates (537-445 B.C.) plus 483 years place an approximate range of dates from 54 B.C.-39 A.D., which are well before 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed the temple. The later part of the range is more likely, as we know Jesus was born around 6 B.C. The 70th and last week of Daniel was paused until right before the coming of our Lord, during the period known as the Times of Gentiles (*Luke 21:24*). In the last verse, it mentions this person, likely a world leader, who will make a covenant with the Jews to allow for establishment of sacrifices at the start of the 70th week, only to put a stop to it in the middle of the week, 3.5 years later. A reference is made to this leader as the prince of the covenant (*Daniel 11:22*). More details emerge regarding this prince of the covenant and the Great Tribulation:

Daniel 11:31-39

“And forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. And by smooth words he will turn to godlessness those who act wickedly toward the covenant, but the people who know their God will display strength and take action. And those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by the sword and by the flame, by captivity and by plunder, for many days. Now when they fall they will be granted a little help, and many will join with them in hypocrisy. And some who have insight will fall, in order to refine, purge, and make them pure, until the end time; because it is still to come at the appointed time. Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god, and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done. And he will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any god; for

he will magnify himself above them all. But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor him with gold, silver, costly stones, and treasures. And he will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him, and he will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out the land for a price.”

The prince of the covenant is referred to as a king in this passage. He commands a substantial army. In addition to being an idolater, the king exalts himself above all gods, including the Lord God. He has no desire for women. His forces will set up the abomination of desolation, which Jesus said earlier will be standing in the holy place. The final piece of the puzzle, as to the identity of the person standing in the holy place, comes from Paul’s second Epistle to the Thessalonians:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come until the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”

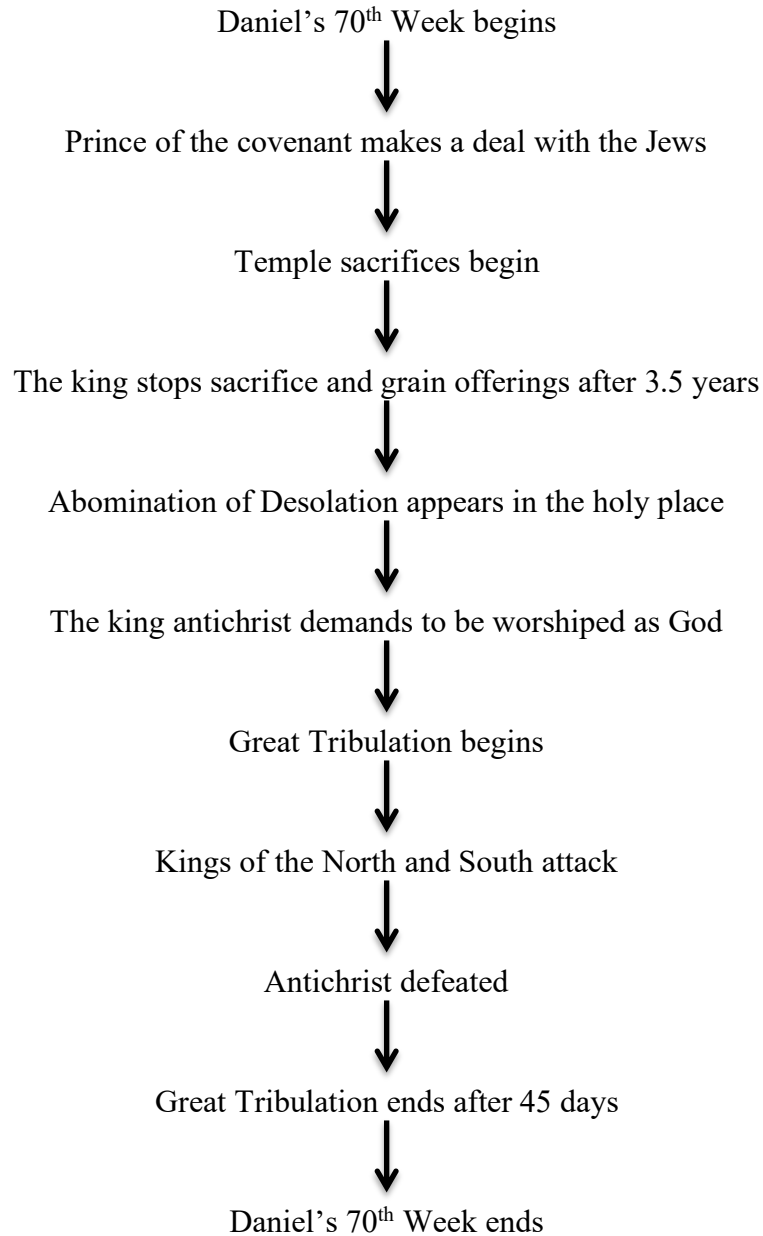
The abomination of desolation is the king, prince of the covenant, who enters the temple, takes his seat in the holy place, and demands to be worshiped as God. Theologians often refer to this king as the man of sin or the antichrist (also mentioned in *1 John 4:3*). At some point after this, a massive battle ensues between him, the king of the North and the king of the South, and the Great Tribulation is now underway. The antichrist will come to his end (*Daniel 11:40-45*). Additional data can be found regarding the possible length of this period of time known as the Great Tribulation:

Daniel 12:11-13

“And from the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1335 days!”

If our understanding is correct, the sacrifice was abolished sometime in the middle of the 70th week, or roughly 1278 days. Then, near the end of the 70th week, the abomination of desolation is set up, and the Great Tribulation begins. The Great Tribulation lasts for a period of 45 days (1335-1290 = 45 days) and concludes the 70th week of Daniel.

Here is a summary of the events on the next page:



The Lord returns

Matthew 24:23-36

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go

forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the POWERS OF THE HEAVENS WILL BE shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect FROM THE FOUR WINDS, FROM ONE END OF THE SKY TO THE OTHER. Now learn the parable FROM THE FIG TREE: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation shall not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But of the day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

After the Great Tribulation, a series of astronomical signs occur, and the heavens will be shaken. The Lord appears in the sky, and all tribes will see Him. The elect are gathered at the resurrection of the righteous. Even though we do not know the day or the hour, the parable of the fig tree indicates that we can tell it is near when we see these signs that precede His return.

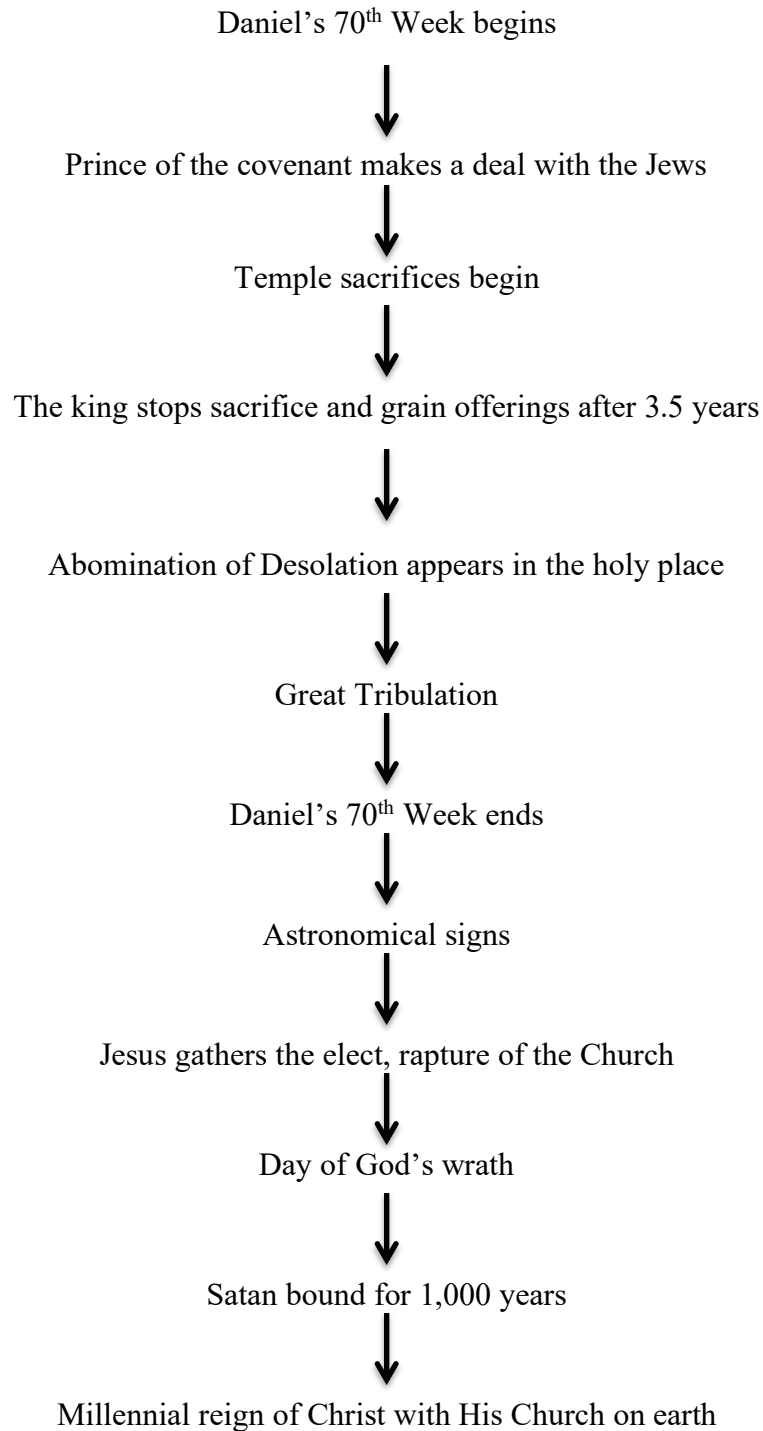
Once the elect are raptured; the period known as God's wrath begins:

Revelation 6:12-17

"And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'"

Following the rapture, the day of God's Wrath arrives. Once this is complete, Satan will be bound, and the Lord Jesus will land on earth with His Church, and His millennial reign will begin.

These events are summarized on the next page.



12.3 Summary

The Lord, in His providence, has given us a look into the future. We do not know the time or hour of the Lord's return, but we do know the sequence of events that will precede His return. This sequence of events that precede the return of our Lord rules out the belief of some Christians that Jesus could return at anytime, perhaps even today. That is simply not going to happen as Jesus said previously, "The Scripture cannot be broken" (*John 10:35*). Neither can this sequence of events, as understood correctly from the Scriptures, be broken. The Apostle Paul writes:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

"Now as to the times and epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober."

The Lord's return will catch many by surprise but not His children. It is incumbent upon every Christian to be reading and studying the Scriptures daily. We should be prepared for the Lord's return by staying alert and sober. The Lord will return at His appointed time, foreshadowed by Daniel's 70th Week.

The regathering of Israel as a nation in 1948 brings us one step closer in the sequence of events to His return. Perhaps the next event to look for is the construction of a third temple. The antichrist has to stand in the Holy Place in order to desecrate it. This Holy Place, to the best of my knowledge, currently does not exist.

The Second Coming is great news to look forward to. While the Lord tarries, please keep living the Scriptures as the Apostle Paul writes to Titus:

Titus 2:11-15

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; who gave Himself for us, that HE MIGHT REDEEM US FROM EVERY LAWLESS DEED AND PURIFY FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

We are a people of God's own possession. Walk in the good works God has prepared for you beforehand. Amen.

13. The Doctrine of the Judgment

Memory verse: *Ecclesiastes 12:13-14*

Have you ever been in court before with a judge presiding? I had this experience many years ago in traffic court. After a car accident, I received a traffic citation and decided that I wanted to have my day in court. When the day came, the judge entered the courtroom and we were told to “please rise” out of respect for the judge. I could tell this was serious business, even if it was only a traffic court.

Several cases, including mine, were on the docket. I had no idea how this was going to go down. Would the judge hear my case and say “guilty as charged” or “not guilty?” My case was buried down in the docket so I had the opportunity to watch the other cases adjudicate. I recall a young man and his father being called to the judge for the young man’s case. This young man, at age 14, had been charged with driving a motor vehicle without a license. In the State of Illinois, you have to be 16 years old to be eligible for a driver’s license. The young man entered a guilty plea. The judge was not pleased and pronounced sentence upon him: “You will not be eligible for a driver’s license to drive a car in the State of Illinois until you reach 21 years of age.” The gavel came down and so did the sentence. Soon it was my turn. I nervously made my way to appear in front of the judge. I realized it was all up to him to decide my fate. The judge reviewed my case, and it was duly noted that the other driver involved in the accident did not appear in court. Therefore, the judge declared, “Case dismissed.” I was very fortunate to escape without a guilty verdict or fine.

I was later served a summons from the Sheriff and was sued for damages by the other driver involved in the accident, which led to depositions and more court drama. Thankfully, by the grace of God and after three years of litigation, my insurance company lawyers and the plaintiff were able to settle out of court. My liability insurance was able to cover the settlement amount. This was not an experience I would recommend to anyone.

All of our lives belong to the Lord. He made us in His image. He desired that we should love Him and obey His commandments. Unfortunately, we all have all chosen to sin and go our own way. Our Lord is a loving God, but He also is a just and righteous God. The Scriptures plainly teach that God will hold the entire human race accountable for their lives spent here on earth. There is a Judgment day coming, as we read in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 9:27

“And inasmuch it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment.”

We have only this life to decide how we want to live and what to do with Jesus Christ. Judgment comes after we die. After we die, we enter the intermediate state before Judgment day. This is the time after death where we have conscious existence as a spirit prior to the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous. The destiny of the intermediate state depends on whether or not you are a believer in Christ. This is well illustrated by the Parable of the Dives that Jesus taught:

Luke 16:19-31

“Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man’s table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, there is a great chasm fixed, in order that those that wish to come over from here to you may not be able, and that none may cross from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father’s house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ But he said, ‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

The rich man was not a believer and was in torment while Lazarus was in heaven. All of a sudden, the rich man was concerned for others and asks Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them of this place of torment. In this parable, Father Abraham says his brothers should listen to Moses and the prophets to be persuaded to avoid the flames. Unfortunately, the rich man never listened to Moses and the Prophets when he had the chance on earth, and his fate was sealed for all eternity. The rich man was not given a second chance to repent during the intermediate state. He cannot even help his brothers, still on earth, to repent and believe the gospel.

Meanwhile, for believers, we are in the presence of the Lord during the intermediate state:

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

“Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good

courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

Believers who die before the resurrection of the righteous will go home to be with the Lord. This is the time when our spirit is with the Lord prior to being given our new immortal, resurrected bodies. There is a Judgment day coming; who will be the judge?

13.1 Jesus Christ will be the Judge

John 5:21-23

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

Jesus is not only our Savior and Redeemer; He will also be our Judge. What is unusual about this for believers is that the judge is also the one who paid for our sentence. He paid the fine, the penalty for our sins. For Christians, this is wonderful, as we do not have to worry about another third party judge involved in deciding whether Jesus paid for all of our sins and paid our debt in full. The eternal destiny of all men resides with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Judge. If you know what is good for you, you will honor and fear the Judge. Jesus made this very point:

Luke 12:4-5

“And I say to you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: Fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”

Since Jesus will be the Judge, He will be the one who will have authority to pass sentence. I was afraid of the human judges I encountered. I cannot imagine Jesus being my Judge and not my Savior, as man cannot justify himself before God.

In Paul’s address to the Athenians, he makes the following statement about Jesus:

Acts 17:30-31

“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

The resurrection of Jesus validates His claim to be the Messiah and Judge. Our faith has evidence, proof that it is true—all of it is true. Men need to repent or face the consequences of their judgment.

Matthew 25:31-46

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and cloth You? And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to you?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even to the least of them, you did it to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not cloth Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ Then they themselves also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

We see here a picture of judgment in this passage, with Jesus on His throne, where the sheep (believers) are separated from the goats (non-believers). What is interesting is that the sheep had a living faith shown by works, whereas the goats had no works to validate any faith they may have had. The sheep were given the kingdom of heaven, and the goats were given eternal punishment.

Matthew 8:28-29

“And when He had come to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs; they were so exceedingly violent that no one could pass by that road. And behold, they cried out, saying, ‘What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?’”

We see from this passage that even the fallen angels (demons) know Jesus will judge them. All judgment being given to Jesus includes the fallen angels.

Since Jesus will be the Judge, what will Judgment day be like? As we saw, in the passage in Matthew, the sheep (believers) and the goats (non-believers) will be separated prior to judgment. Clearly, Judgment day will be different for believers and non-

believers. We will examine the basis for judgment in general and then see how it applies specifically to non-believers and believers.

13.2 The basis for Judgment

All men will be judged for how they conducted their lives here on earth. Men will be judged by their deeds.

After Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons, he rebuked them for this and later said:

Matthew 12:34-37

“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil. And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”

Even though, in this passage, Jesus is talking with the Pharisees, the passage teaches a general principle. Namely, we will all be held accountable for what we say and do as it reflects our treasure, that is, our heart. If we are truly believers in Christ, with a living faith, this will justify us before God. Those who have left this life without Christ, or have rejected Christ, will be condemned. May our treasure always be in Christ, and in Christ alone.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

John 5:28-29

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds, to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

God sees everything you say and do and knows your innermost thoughts. You cannot hide from God what you may have successfully hidden from others. King David, after he went into Bathsheba and she became pregnant, first tried to pass the child off on Uriah, her husband (2 Samuel 11). When Uriah would not go home and lie with his wife, King David saw to it that Uriah was killed in battle. David tried to hide the sins of adultery and murder from God but was not successful. The child so conceived died as a result.

I can still remember browsing items in a Christian bookstore. Even Christian bookstores have to be concerned with theft and shrinkage. This particular store used an interesting deterrent against shoplifting. The sign in the store read as follows: “We are not always watching, but God is.” God is always watching and recording. How would you like your recorded life and thoughts played out on the big screen? I doubt any of us would. Keep in mind that God is going to review your life. How that review in Judgment day will play out depends on how you lived your life and whether you are a Christian.

13.3 Judgment day for the non-Christian

Since individuals will be judged by their deeds, it necessarily follows that the Judgment day will not be the same for every person. For example, in our criminal justice system, certain crimes carry mandatory minimum jail sentences. The length of the sentence varies with the severity of the criminal offense. This also appears to be the case in God’s judgment, as revealed by Jesus:

Matthew 11:20-24

“Then He began to reproach the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ‘Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon, which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless, I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall DESCEND TO HADES; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom, which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.’”

Jesus performed many miracles on earth, which were used to provide proof that He was who He claimed to be, namely, God the Son, the promised Messiah. Those miracles were performed alongside of the gospel that Jesus preached. Not everyone who saw Jesus perform miracles believed. Surprisingly, many rejected Him and His gospel, including the Pharisees.

It was interesting that Jesus stated that if His miracles were performed in Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, Tyre and Sidon would have repented, and Sodom would still be here. It seems that the level of resistance to the gospel was lower for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom than for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. A consequence for this is that judgment will be more severe for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum than for Tyre, Sidon and Sodom. Rejection of the gospel is a serious sin and carries a stiffer judgment!

White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-15

“And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Revelation 21:8

“But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

This is Judgment day for unbelievers. Those who died without Christ are now resurrected and stand before the Divine bar. Several books are opened, including the book of life. Judgment begins with their deeds, according to what is recorded in the books. There are no lawyers present. There are no pleas entered into the court record. All are guilty as charged. Then sentencing is passed. If your name was not written in the book of life, you are tossed into the lake of fire for all eternity.

We can only speculate where the Christians will be during this proceeding. We are always in the presence of the Lord after we die on earth. Some have suggested that the Christians will be standing near the Lord, perhaps next to or behind the throne. This is a terrifying spectacle, and all we can say is that if it were not for the grace of God, we would be standing before the white throne. Thank you Jesus for forgiveness of our sins. Thank you for your grace, mercy, sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead that has purchased our redemption. Thank you for your great love for us.

13.4 Judgment day for the Christian

Judgment day for the Christian will be a very different experience. Why? Because we have forgiveness of sins secured by faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross:

Hebrews 10:14-22

“For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, ‘THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS SAYS THE LORD; I WILL PUT MY LAWS ON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,’ He then says, ‘AND THEIR SINS AND LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.’ Now where there is forgiveness of these

things, there is no longer any offering for sin. Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our body washed with pure water.”

Since our sins have been paid for, He will no longer remember our sins. Therefore, we cannot be judged for our sins, as Christ has already paid for our sins, having perfectly and completely performed the atonement on the cross, followed by His resurrection from the dead. God’s justice has been satisfied fully by Jesus Christ our Savior.

We will not be judged for our sins. He has forgotten them. However, we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5:10

“For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

The Fire Test

We will all clearly stand before Christ and be judged by how we have lived our lives without reference to sin. The following passage provides more insight into this Christian Life Performance Review process:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one, which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive an award. If any man’s work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Christ is the foundation upon which we build our lives and serve the Lord. The quality of our build will be revealed by fire:

Fire retardant

Gold, silver, precious stones

Fire consumable

Wood, hay, straw

How do we know the quality of our work? Is it gold, silver or a pile of hay? Can our works withstand the purifying fire of Almighty God? The following passage sheds some light:

Romans 12:1-2

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Our lives and bodies are an offering to God as we serve the Lord. Whatever service we perform has to be done in love for God and people, in obedience to His commandments. Our minds should be transformed by God and not be compromised by the world. Our motives and hearts should be pure as we minister to others, not seeking our individual glory, but all glory to God. We read in the book of Malachi:

Malachi 3:2-4

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.”

Unfortunately, the book of Malachi describes how the priests dishonored God by offering defiled food on the altar with blind, lame and sick animals. There was complete disregard of God’s commandments for what was an acceptable offering. God is like a refiner’s fire and says He will purify the sons of Levi. Why? So that they will present to the Lord offerings in righteousness, according to His commandments. Gold, silver, and precious stones represent the presentation of a righteous offering before God—a life living in obedience to God’s commandments.

The judgment-seat of Christ will not be the same for everyone. This is true in at least two ways. First, we read in the Epistle of James:

James 3:1-2

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.”

Pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday school teachers and basically anyone teaching the Bible will all be held to higher standard. This not only includes the standard of doctrinal purity but also includes living a pure life as a living example to others. We want to be judged having led people faithfully to the Lord and not astray, either by impure doctrine or by wayward living. When people hear you, do they hear Jesus? When people see you, do they see Jesus?

Jesus illustrates the second way the judgment-seat of Christ is not the same for everyone in the Parable of the Talents:

Matthew 25:14-30

“For it is just like a man about to go out on a journey, who called his own slaves, and entrusted his possessions to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. Immediately the one who had received five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. In the same manner, the one who had received the two talents gained two more. But he who received the one talent went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money. Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. And the one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.’ The one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted to me two talents; see, I have gained two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours.’ But his master answered and said, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has ten talents.’ For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does shall be taken away. And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Jesus said the kingdom of God was comparable to a man who went out on a journey, entrusting his slaves with possessions. In this parable Jesus is the slave owner and we are the slaves, entrusted with a differing number of talents based upon our abilities. Upon the master's return, the slaves were held to account. The first two slaves were able to serve the Lord faithfully, according to their ability, and each provided a 100% return on the Master's investment. The wicked and indolent slave provided zero return on the Master's investment. He was cast into the outer darkness, and his talent given to the slave with ten talents. The slave with zero return was possibly a slave with faith but no works—a dead faith. He was not a Christian, based upon his judgment from his Master.

The Lord has entrusted all of us with His gifts. Everything we are and own belongs to Him. God has provided us with gifts, talents and good works so that we will walk in them (*Ephesians 2:10*). The Lord expects a return on His investment.

As you reflect on your life at this point, what will you hear the Master say? Will he say *“Well done, good and faithful slave, you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your Master?”* Or will he say something else? Have you taken inventory of your life, gifts and talents and surrendered them to the service of the Lord? Or have you wasted your life on your own selfish ambitions and indolence? Now is the time to take stock of your life and make the necessary changes to serve the Lord with a whole heart. God loves you and wants your heart.

Here is the bottom line. Are you going to live according to God's word and wisdom, or follow the wisdom of the fallen world? Are you going to be filled with the Holy Spirit, or are you going to quench the Holy Spirit? Are you going to give the Lord your best offering every day, or a blemished offering? Are you going to learn, live and teach others the doctrines of Scripture, or the wisdom of man?

The next page contains a quality summary checklist for your future Christian Life Performance Review with the Lord. You can still make changes and get back on course. Now is the time—go do it.

Christian Life Performance Review

Your Name:

Judge: King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Jesus Christ, The Lamb of God

Fire retardant

Gold, silver, precious stones

Doer of the Word

God's wisdom

Righteous offering

Living faith

Doctrinal purity

Filled with the Holy Spirit

Serves the Lord with their gifts

Loves God and people

Others first

Gives God the best

Diligent

Godly living

Controlled tongue

Return on God's investment

Fire consumable

Wood, hay, straw

Hearer only

Man's wisdom

Blemished offering

Dead faith

Doctrinal compromise

Quenches the Holy Spirit

Serves themselves

Loves self

Me first

Gives God the leftovers

Sluggard

Wayward living

Wild tongue

No return on God's investment

As a personal exercise, please review your life and bucket items in the appropriate column. Items for improvement need to be placed in the "Fire consumable" category. An action plan should be drafted to remediate those items.

Judgment day for a believer appears similar to a rewards ceremony following a graduation. All have graduated and will be going to heaven. Some will receive rewards. Rewards are based upon the quality of their work, building upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures do not tell us how these rewards play out in heaven. They must be important since the Scriptures mention them and should serve to motivate us to live for the Lord and not for ourselves.

13.5 Summary

God will judge all men for how they lived their lives here on earth. Like our justice system in the United States, which follows federal, state and local laws, God's justice system follows His laws, His commandments. Nevertheless, people continue to sin and break government laws and God's laws. Not every criminal is caught, let alone prosecuted by the government. For some who have been victims of crimes, justice may never be served in this life. This is painful for many.

The good news is that God's Judgment day is coming. Those who managed to escape the justice system of the United States or other country will not escape the justice system of God. He is ultimate judge and will judge righteously. The buck stops with Almighty God.

The key question to ask yourself is this: do you want to appear before the white throne judgment or the judgment-seat of Christ? If you are not a Christian, I invite you right now to repent and accept Christ as your Savior. You do not know the day or hour of your death. God desires that you repent and be saved by faith in Him. Once you die eternity is fixed and Judgment day with Christ awaits you.

I personally resisted the gospel before I finally accepted Christ. Many years ago, when I was a young man, my friend and I were driving home from work. My friend was so kind to give me a ride home so that my parents did not have to pick me up from work. We took an unfamiliar route to my home and went through some road construction. Normally, when you reach a T-intersection, there is a stop sign plus another double-arrow sign indicating that the road has come to an end and you need to turn right or left. Both of these signs were missing as we approached the intersection. We went through the intersection, across the road and into a ditch traveling about 10 mph. The car came to an abrupt stop. I did not have my seat belt on and my head hit the windshield and I cracked the windshield. Thankfully, all I had was a nasty headache and bruised head from the accident. But if we had been traveling faster, I could have gone through the windshield, out of the car, and into hell for all eternity. God was merciful and I am thankful he spared my life long enough for me to come to Christ. Now is the time for you to come to Christ.

If you are a Christian, I exhort you to keep living for the Lord and review your life with the performance checklist shown above. As long as you are alive, you can make improvements in your walk with Christ.

As I look back on my life, I was reminded of a song that was sung at our wedding. This song came from an album from Christine Wyrzten entitled “Christine—My Best To You.” The song that was sung during the wedding was entitled “What will I hear My Master say?” The best lyrical line in the song was this:

“When the fire removes the dross, will my life reveal the cross?” Think about it.

14. The Role of the Local Church

Memory verse: *1 Timothy 3:14-15*

I have been attending church as long as I can remember and even before then. My parents always attended a local Catholic parish, and I was baptized as an infant and later confirmed as a young man. My exposure to Christ began in the Catholic Church, and later on, I attended an all-boys Catholic high school. I had plenty of exposure to church and religion but never really knew the Lord. I was not a Christian. I never heard the true gospel. I was told I had to believe in Jesus and be a good boy to get to heaven (faith + works = salvation), and that salvation was through the sacraments and the priest of the church (Sacerdotalism). Seems simple enough—faith plus be a good boy, go to church, do the sacraments, i.e., confess your sins to the priest, take communion, and you’re in the kingdom. Unfortunately, I was not a good boy.

When I went away to college as an undergraduate student, I began to question my Catholic faith. I knew I was in trouble, especially with my behavior on the college campus, so being a good boy was not going to get me into heaven. As an undergraduate student, I received some invitations to go to a Bible study and met some real Christians. I rarely pursued those invitations, as my life of sin had a pretty strong hold on me. I also thought as a Catholic, I had the Pope in Rome pulling for me. I was very good at rationalizing sin, but I was so lost it was not funny. I then moved on to graduate school.

Thankfully, the Lord never gave up on me. While in graduate school, He sent more believers my way. I attended a campus talk entitled “Five Astronomical Evidences for the Existence of God” sponsored by a campus group and The Faith Bible Church of Ithaca. I met some Christians from the church and made the mistake of giving them my name and address.

A few days later, the Fishing Club from the church arrived at my campus apartment to proselytize me. I answered their questions but did not want to go to their church. I was relying on the Pope in Rome to pull the strings in heaven for me. I was a Catholic. I was good. I had never been in a non-Catholic church before in my entire life.

Then the seismic struggle began to occur in my soul as I wrestled with the fact that I was not a good boy and had zero assurance I was going to heaven. These Christians knew they were going to heaven. Sort of presumptuous of them, I thought. All of a sudden, I kept running into these Christians from this local church on campus. When I saw them heading in my direction, I would cross the street to avoid them. As the Lord would have it, soon my living in sin and running from God days were over.

One of my fellow graduate students in biochemistry, a Chinese woman born overseas, invited me to go to this same local Bible church with her. She was not even a Christian at the time but was seeking the Lord. The Pastor always recommended inviting people to church, and I was the least of the swine in the research group. So I was invited. I went to the local church and met a lot of nice Christian people. I then went to a harvest party at the church near the end of October. After the party, the entire group gathered together and began to sing hymns. I realized I was a real outsider to all of this. These people were so kind and loved God. They had something that I did not have, and I wanted it.

After another campus Christian talk followed by ice cream, I stopped by my research laboratory to check on some experiments and then headed home. I realized, on a crisp November evening, on my way home, that I needed to repent and accept Christ. So I did. My life changed over night. I quit the swearing and drinking and replaced it with prayer and Bible studies. Anytime the church doors were open, I was there. The Pastor preached through the Bible three times per week, so I was being fed a feast. I never read the Bible before, and I was on track to finish it after the first six months of my conversion. This was one amazing church. They had two Sunday school courses, which I took several times with different teachers: The Christian Living Class and the Doctrine Class. The doctrine notebook from the Doctrine Class serves as a template, for some of the source material for this book you are now reading.

The Pastor's preaching from the Bible and the doctrine notebook from this church provided the biblical doctrinal foundation in my life. I would still be lost if this church had not reached out to me with the gospel and then taught me the Scriptures. People in the church provided living examples of faith. It is one thing to know the Scriptures and quite another thing to learn how to walk in faith. I came to the university to obtain a doctoral degree in biochemistry. By God's grace, I left the university with a newly minted degree in my hand and Jesus Christ in my heart, filled with knowledge of His word. I thank God that He used this local Bible church and the believers there to be on my destination to heaven.

The local church is God's ordained institution for proclamation of the gospel and fulfillment of the Great Commission. This chapter examines the role of the local church in the world.

14.1 The local assembly of believers

In my world travels, I have seen some beautiful church buildings: St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel in Rome, the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, cathedrals in Cologne, Germany and Reims, France. I even visited the church of the great reformer John Calvin, Saint Pierre's Cathedral, located in Geneva, Switzerland. They were amazing buildings filled with a lot of history and beautiful architecture. When people talk about the church,

the normal reference is to a building. Biblically speaking, the church is not a building. The local church is the local assembly of believers in Christ.

The Greek word, *ekklēsia*, is translated by the New American Standard Bible into English as church (74), churches (35) assembly (3), congregation (2). The most general definition of the term is an assembly of persons. We see three uses of *ekklēsia* in Acts Chapter 19 during the riot at Ephesus, regarding the shrines of Artemis. The Artemis tradesmen, quoted the Apostle Paul as saying, “*That gods made with hands are no gods at all.*” (Acts 19:26) This brought the city into an uproar.

Acts 19:32

“So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly (ekklēsia) was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together.”

Acts 19:39

“But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly (ekklēsia).”

Acts 19:41

“And after saying this he dismissed the assembly (ekklēsia).”

In these passages, we see the general use of the term as the gathering of persons. A review of the usage of *ekklēsia*, as translated church or churches (109) in the NT, reveals that the term means a local assembly of believers (83) or the assembly of believers in general (26).

Examples of a local assembly of believers:

Acts 20:17

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church (ekklēsia).”

Colossians 4:15

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church (ekklēsia) that is in her house.”

Philemon 1, 2

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow-worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church (ekklēsia) in your house.”

In these passages, you can clearly see these churches are local assemblies of believers. There were no church buildings in the early church, so believers assembled in homes,

much like small group Bible studies meet in homes today; hence, the usage of the phrase “church in her or your house.” In the NT, the Greek term, *ekklēsia*, never refers to a building. Even though it is common in English usage to refer to the church as a building, biblically speaking, this is not accurate, as the church is a local assembly of believers.

14.2 The local church mission

It is common today for individual local churches to adopt a mission statement for their church. A local mega church in Queen Creek, AZ has the following mission statement: “Celebrating Jesus and helping you win.” The local church in Gurnee, IL, where I had the privilege of serving as an elder for many years, has this mission statement: “To worship Christ in all things as we share Him with all people.” Mission statements are succinct statements that capture the heart and vision of the local church. They are never intended to be comprehensive, but as you review them, some are more biblical and others less biblical. Thankfully, the Scriptures have given us clear direction on how a local church should function and what a church should be doing.

The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth

1 Timothy 3:14-15

“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one should conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

The local church—not the seminary, not the online videos or sermons, not the para-church organizations—is the pillar and support of the truth. The statement “*I am writing these things*” refers to the qualifications of elders and deacons mentioned in *1 Timothy 3:1-13*. Elders are men of character that meet the qualifications stated in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1*, and are responsible to be “*holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict*” (*Titus 1:9*). The Elders are responsible for the doctrine of the church and to be sure it is kept pure, defended, taught, and lived by themselves and the congregation they shepherd.

The church is to teach the whole will of God

From Miletus, the Apostle Paul called the Ephesian elders and wrote the following:

Acts 20:27

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Paul's expectation is that the Ephesian elders would follow his example and teach the entire Scriptures. This would include the entire OT as well as the NT when it became available to them. Some people in the local church may struggle with the doctrine of predestination, the doctrine of the judgment, or the role of women in the church. Pastors and elders must strive to teach all the doctrines of Scripture regardless of their palatability to their congregation. They must ensure that these doctrines are followed and incorporated into their lives. Orthodoxy must become orthopraxy.

The church is to preach and guard true doctrine

In addition to teaching all the orthodox doctrines of Scripture, false doctrines and other erroneous teachings or beliefs must be exposed, confronted and not be taught:

1 Timothy 1:3-7

"As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on in Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering God's provision which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."

The pastors and elders must be ever so vigilant to guard the doctrinal purity of the church and corral any maverick teachers. Even if a teacher communicates well and has a charismatic style, every word proclaimed must be sifted through the lens of Scripture. Since we are sheep, a mix of truth and error can easily lead us astray. Paul, later on in this passage, identifies these "certain men" Timothy must deal with:

1 Timothy 1:18-20

"This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme."

These individuals appear to be heretical teachers, confusing faith in the gospel with works of the Law. This leads to a shipwrecked faith. In an amazing statement, Paul says he has delivered them over to Satan. This may be another way of saying they were put out of the church, so that their protection from Satan within the church was removed. The goal of church discipline is to bring about the fruits of repentance and restoration to the faith.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

“I solemnly 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, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Paul encourages Timothy to faithfully preach the word of God even when people resist and want to hear something else that tickles their ears. Paul also encourages Timothy to do the work of an evangelist; something Jesus encourages all of us to do.

The church is to evangelize the world

Matthew 28:18-20

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

He has commanded us to go make disciples of all nations. We are to bring people to Christ, baptize them, and teach them to observe the Lord’s commands. This is the responsibility of the local assembly of believers.

Wisdom of God known through the church

Ephesians 3:8-10

“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

This is a fascinating passage, in that, through the church, the wisdom of God will be made known to the angels in heaven. The mystery of Christ was revealed to the angels through the church, that Gentiles are fellow heirs of eternal life through preaching the gospel. As the church executes the mission, both heaven and earth are blessed by the wisdom of God.

The local church brings the gifted body together to grow and serve one another

The local church is a diverse mix of highly talented and gifted individuals who work together as a team serving the Lord and others. The Holy Spirit decides which gifts are given to people in order to serve the church and the local community.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

In this passage, we observe that the Holy Spirit distributes the gifts to individuals as He wills, not as we decide. Some of these gifts can be developed further (wisdom, knowledge, and faith through the study of the Scriptures) whereas; others are given miraculously and are not learned (prophecy, tongues, healing). These gifts are given for the “common good” to the glory of God and not man. Since no one individual has all the gifts, the church is essential in order to gather believers together with their range of gifts and talents to help one another further the kingdom of God (*1 Corinthians 12:12-31*).

Ephesians 4:11-16

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

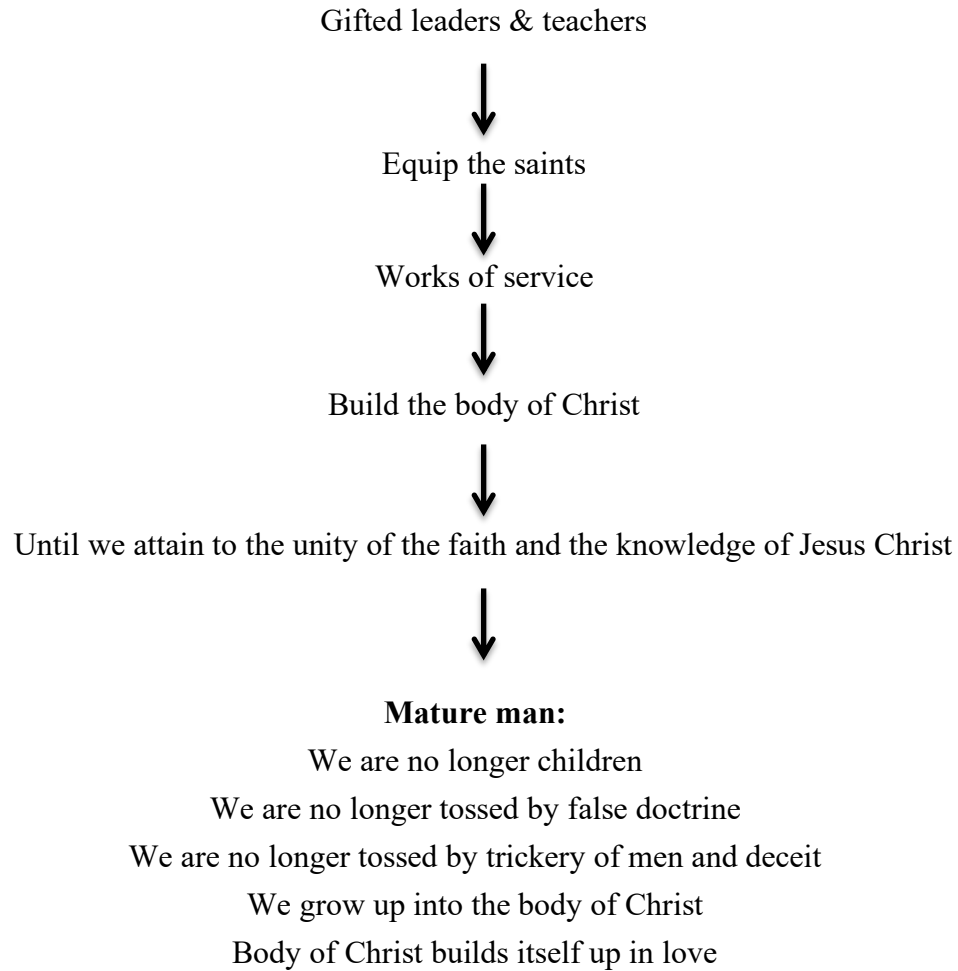
The Lord gives the local church gifted leaders and teachers to equip the saints for the work of Christ. As each member of the body of Christ is equipped, each member is to do their part to grow in the knowledge of Christ, in the unity of the faith and in love for one another. Truth is important and should be shared in a loving way with those who may be

in opposition. The local assembly of believers is a dynamic body. The overall health of the body requires 100% participation of all team members (see below).

Attending church and living for Christ is not like attending a football game in a stadium where you sit in the stands and watch the game. The pastors and staff are not the only players on the field who do ministry. Everyone in the stands is to leave their seats and get on the field and play. There is no first, second or third string. The game is only played well when everyone is on the field with their gifts, actively participating and caring for one another in love and unity. The game is also only played well when everyone abides by the rules—the pure doctrine of Christ. And, as the body of Christ grows, the players on the field improve their game. Before you know it, new fans appear in the stands when they see your love and unity and quality of play. They then leave the stands to join the winning team on the field—God’s team. The world watches in wonder as people from different countries and different races work seamlessly together to execute God’s plan for their lives. No doubt about it, diversity is strength for God’s team. The team credits its success to their head coach and leader, Jesus Christ.

The flow of *Ephesians 4:11-16* is diagrammed on the next page.

***Ephesians 4:11-16* flow diagram**



Regular church attendance required

The world we live in can be distracting with so many activities competing with church on Sunday mornings and other days of the week. If you give the world your foot, before you know it, the world will have your heart. Unfortunately, it has become common that some people, as a matter of practice, do not attend church every Sunday. Some attend every other Sunday or once a month. Others only show up at Christmas and Resurrection Sunday or just for weddings and funerals. Escaping the valley heat during the summer in the metro Phoenix area leads many to spend weekends in the mountains and away from church. This is not healthy for the body of Christ.

The early church observed the Christian Sabbath on the first day of every week, in honor of our Lord's resurrection:

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

“Now concerning the collections for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.”

The early church gathered every first day of the week. We read in the book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:23-25

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

Even in the early church, there were those who had slipped into the bad habit of skipping church. The health of the body is only as healthy as its individual members. We are to stimulate one another to love and good deeds by spending time together. When I was a new believer, I was at church whenever it was open. Now it is my turn to serve others. Fellowship at church has always been a great encouragement to me. Be there!

Philippians 2:1-11

“If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming

obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

We should humble ourselves like Christ by looking after others’ personal interests first. This can easily be illustrated by the following acrostic:

J **J**esus
O **O**thers
Y **Y**ourself

Many years ago, we lived for a brief time in Bartlesville, OK. There were churches everywhere; it seemed, even outside of town in the sticks. I recall driving down a state highway, heading towards the Will Rogers Turnpike, where a church had placed a sign to help you take the correct turn towards the church. Below the name of the church, on the sign, the following quotation was displayed:

“Visitors welcome, members expected.”

I am forever grateful for the members of The Faith Bible Church of Ithaca who helped me get grounded in the Scriptures. They came faithfully every Sunday, even in the cold and snow in the winter, to help me grow in Christ. Whether you realize it or not, there are people in your church who need you. Be there for them, as others were there for you. You cannot grow in Christ, being alone on your own. You need the exemplary life of Christ lived by others to help you:

Hebrews 13:7

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith.”

The Scriptures teach us to remember those who taught God’s word to us. Depending on the outcome of their way of life, we should imitate their faith. A healthy local church should contain, in addition to elders, godly men and women who can be examples of faith to us. The difficulty lies in how to put faith into practice during the hard times. This is where the body of Christ comes in. God has always provided people, over the years, in my life and my wife’s life, to help us navigate life’s trials through faith. Raising a family is no small task and having our church behind us, praying and supporting our family, made all the difference.

The Apostle Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

As God has comforted us through trials, using others, so we can also comfort others in times of need. A diverse body of Christ with a solid mix of younger and older saints is very helpful in navigating this life for Christ. Whether you are young or old, God wants you on the field for your local church and community.

14.3 Leadership structure

When you visit various churches around the country and around the world, you will see a range of leadership structures and titles. Most churches have pastors and additional staff, depending on size. Women pastors are becoming more common, especially in charismatic churches. Some churches also have elders and deacons. Other terms for church leaders include bishop, priest, ordained minister, reverend, clergyman, and layman. Churches that belong to denominations may have additional leadership over and above the local church. Before we begin a discussion of the leadership of the church a definition of terms is needed.

Biblical terminology for church leaders

The NT uses two terms to describe church leaders/shepherds: elder (*presbuteros*) and overseer (*episkopos*). These terms are used as synonyms in NT, as can be easily shown in Acts chapter 20, when Paul summons the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:17

“And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders (presbuteros) of the church.”

Acts 20:28

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopos), to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Comparison of these two passages demonstrates that Paul calls these individuals by both terms, hence synonyms, and perhaps the term “elder” is more a title of the position, whereas the term “overseer” is more a working definition of the position.

When the qualifications for the church leader/shepherd position are described in *1 Timothy 3*, *Titus 1* and *1 Peter 5*, overseer (*episkopos*) is used in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1*, and the term elder (*presbuteros*) is used in *Titus 1* and *1 Peter 5*.

We also see the Apostle Paul refer to overseer (*episkopos*) as more of a title.

Philippians 1:1

“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (episkopos) and deacons:”

Therefore, the terms elder (*presbuteros*) and overseer (*episkopos*) are synonyms according to NT usage. For purposes of this chapter, I will use the term “elder” to describe the church leader/shepherd. The term, elder, in my opinion, should be synonymous with the term “pastor”, the distinction to the term “pastor” being that the local church pays him. The “pastor” may or may not serve on the elder board but is required to meet the qualifications of an elder as set forth in *1 Timothy 3*, *Titus 1*, *1 Peter 5*.

Qualifications for elders

The qualifications for elders can be found in three passages of Scripture:

1 Timothy 3:1-7

“It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside of the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.”

1 Peter 5:1-3

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

These qualifications are summarized on the next page.

Elder Qualifications

I. Personal Qualifications	Scripture	Commentary
Aspires to the office	1 Tim. 3:1	Work of the Holy Spirit
Temperate	1 Tim. 3:2	Clear mind
Prudent	1 Tim. 3:2	Clear thinking
Respectable	1 Tim. 3:2	Good behavior
Not addicted to wine	1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 1:7	No substance abuse
Not pugnacious	1 Tim. 3:3, Titus 1:7	Controlled emotionally
Gentle	1 Tim. 3:3	A healing spirit
Not contentious	1 Tim. 3:3	A peaceful spirit
Free from love of money	1 Tim. 3:3	Not in it for the money
Not a new convert	1 Tim. 3:6	Seasoned believer >5 yrs.
No dissipation	Titus 1:6	Not a party goer
No rebellion	Titus 1:6	Respects authority
Not self-willed	Titus 1:7	Seeks God's will
Not quick tempered	Titus 1:7	Slow to anger
Not fond of sordid gain	Titus 1:7, 1 Pet. 5:2	Noble man
Loves what is good	Titus 1:8	Moral man
Sensible	Titus 1:8	Sound judgment
Just	Titus 1:8	Guided by truth
Devout	Titus 1:8	Surrendered to Christ
Self-controlled	Titus 1:8	Cool temper
II. Public Qualifications	Scripture	Commentary
Above reproach	1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6	No accusations
Good reputation outside the church	1 Tim. 3:7	Godly example to the world
Hospitable	1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8	Cares for others needs
III. Family Qualifications	Scripture	Commentary
Husband of one wife	1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6	One-woman man
Manages household well	1 Tim. 3:4	Runs a tight ship
Children under control	1 Tim. 3:4	Obedient children
Children who believe	Titus 1:6	Faithful children
IV. Ministry Qualifications	Scripture	Commentary
Able to teach	1 Tim. 3:2	Necessary for ministry
Holds fast to the faithful word	Titus 1:9	Doctrinally sound and firm
Exhort in sound doctrine	Titus 1:9	Proclaims the truth
Refute those who contradict it	Titus 1:9	Defends the truth
Shepherd voluntarily, eagerly	1 Pet. 5:2	A joy to serve others
Do not lord over others	1 Pet. 5:3	Does not pull rank
Example to the flock	1 Pet. 5:3	Faith worth imitating

These are some very sobering and challenging biblical qualifications for the office of elder. As you review them, they are primarily based on character and ministerial aptitude.

The husband of one wife qualification and the absence of any reference to women teach that the office of elder is for men only. Unfortunately, some churches have succumbed to the feminist movement and an egalitarian view of the roles of men and women in the church and have installed women pastors and elders. In my opinion, women pastors and elders are not biblical and are in violation of the scriptural qualifications listed in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1*. Women pastors and elders are also inconsistent with the following Scriptures:

Genesis 2:7

“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:18

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him.’”

Genesis 2:21-23

“So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in that place. And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’”

1 Timothy 2:11-15

“Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But woman shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self restraint.”

1 Corinthians 11:1-3

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

Ephesians 5:22-23

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”

Colossians 3:18-19

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them.”

Titus 2:3-5

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored.”

1 Peter 3:1-2

“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

Returning to the elder qualifications, it is not necessary for a man to be married to be qualified to be an elder, but if you are married, the family qualifications must be met. I encourage the men reading this chapter to strive to live according to these holy principles. God may have plans for you to serve in this important office. Your family, your local church and even you stand to benefit from your commitment to holiness.

Anyone under consideration for the office of elder in the local church needs to be thoroughly vetted using these criteria by the current elders. It is important to realize that all we can do is recognize those who are doing the work of an elder. The Holy Spirit makes elders, as we read in Acts:

Acts 20:28

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

God raises up godly men to be elders, we merely recognize them. How is this done?

My previous church in Gurnee, IL had a very thorough elder recognition process that was conducted every 2 years. The senior pastor was exempt from this process as he was always an elder, *ex officio*, as senior pastor until he was to resign or be found in violation of elder office qualifications. An elder nominating committee, consisting of members of the congregation and two current elders, was charged with bringing nominations for the

office of elder to the current elder board. The committee would then contact all current members and regular attenders of the church and ask them a few questions. For example, “Who do you know, who, in your opinion, is doing the work of an elder in the church?” “Please describe how you see this person doing the work of an elder, in terms of character qualifications and ministerial aptitude.” “Do you have any feedback or concerns with any of the men on the current elder board?” The committee tallied their results and also considered elder nominations from the current elder board. The current elders have the responsibility of perpetuating the elder leadership of the church. Even though this church had no term or age limits for elders, various men have rotated on and off the elder board over the years. The current elders were always looking to groom men whom they saw as qualified, now or in the future, for this important office.

The elder nominating committee would then meet with the current elder board, and provide their list of men they see doing the work of the elder. The current elders would then contact the potential elder candidates to see if they were interested in serving and willing to begin the elder vetting process. The current elders, by unanimous vote, would then submit a list of qualified men to be recognized by a vote of the congregation at a future church business meeting. This process has continued this way for over 30 years, and has ensured that a plurality of elder leadership has always been in place to shepherd the flock of God. I know God is pleased, as this church has always strived to follow the Lord in obedience to His word.

It is of interest to note that the constitution of this church required that for every pastoral staff elder, there had to be two non-pastoral staff elders. This ensures that the leadership of the church has diverse congregational representation on the elder board. Over time, godly men in the medical, legal, science, finance, and counseling professions have served on the elder board. I had the privilege to serve with various men on this board for 27 years. I thank God for the wonderful opportunity I was given to serve. Unfortunately, in some churches today, non-pastoral elders are absent and the leadership is restricted to the paid, ordained pastors. The biblical qualifications for elder leadership do not require an earned college or seminary degree or that you have to be an ordained minister to be an elder. These are man-made requirements that, unfortunately, would deny men like myself the privilege to serve. This ultimately can limit the effectiveness of the local church in proclaiming the gospel and serving the local community.

Elder’s role

The elders do the work of the ministry, shepherd, and rule over the church and oversee the appointment of elders.

1 Peter 5:1-3

“Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but

voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

Hebrews 13:7

“Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the outcome of their way of life, imitate their faith.”

The elders of the church are exhorted to “*shepherd the flock of God*” while “*proving to be examples to the flock.*” As we learn doctrines from God’s word, the elders of the church are to be examples to us of holy living; hence, the importance of the character qualifications of an elder. Oftentimes, learning God’s commandments is the easier part. Putting God’s word into our daily lives is so much more difficult. The church body needs godly men to teach the Scriptures and then live by example.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

“But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”

1 Timothy 5:17

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

Titus 1:5

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,”

Hebrews 13:17

“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

The elders are the leaders of the church and should be honored for their work. The elders are also to be submitted to and obeyed. In the early church, Timothy was charged by the Apostle Paul to appoint elders in every city, following the qualifications that were given by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures do not give directions for appointing elders after Timothy and the Apostle Paul passed on to glory. As rulers of the local church and implicit in their job description, the current elders later assumed this responsibility.

Qualifications for deacons

The other office in the church mentioned in the Scriptures is the office of deacon.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding the mystery of faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate and faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

There are two views on this verse on whether the reference to “women” in *1 Timothy 3:11* refers to women in general or wives of deacons. The former view would admit female deacons to the church, and the latter view would exclude women from the office of deacon. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans:

Romans 16:1

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.”

The Greek word *diakonos*, which is translated “servant” in the NASB, is a general term and does not necessarily mean that Phoebe was a deaconess. Doug Moo, in his commentary on Romans (Douglas J. Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018, p. 930) makes the following adroit observation:

“Nevertheless, by calling Phoebe a *diakonos* ‘of the church,’ Paul suggests that she had a recognized position among the ministers of the church: probably what we know as the ‘deacon’ (*Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-12*).”

In my opinion, Paul’s recognition of Phoebe tilts the argument in favor of women assuming the ministerial role of deacon, with the provision they function under the leadership of the elders (see Deacon’s role below).

The character qualifications for deacons are similar to elders, but note the complete absence of doctrinal type qualifications for deacons, i.e., able to teach, exhort in sound doctrine, etc.

Deacon's role

The fundamental difference between elders and deacons, in terms of roles in the church, is that elders rule and set policy, whereas deacons implement policy. The deacons serve under the leadership and at the pleasure of the elders. Deacons help them implement the ministry of the local church. Typical deacon roles in my previous church in Gurnee, IL included church treasurer, women's ministry leader, men's ministry leader, children's ministry leader, growth group leaders, etc. The elders appointed the deacons and deaconesses to their office as needed for the ministry of the local church.

In summary, biblical leadership in the local church is composed of a plurality of elders. The elders shepherd and rule the church, are recognized by the congregation, and employ the resources of the deacons to implement policy. The qualifications for elders and deacons are set forth in the Scriptures. Over the years, various man-made titles and requirements have been added for church leadership, leading to a distinction between clergy and laity. The Bible makes no such distinction.

The following two books are excellent resources to drill down further on the role of men and women in the church.

Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*: (Littleton: Lewis and Roth, 1995)

John Piper & Wayne Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*: (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006)

14.4 Church membership and discipline

Psalm 122:1

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.'"

It is a great blessing to be part of a local church. The local church is the God ordained institution to proclaim the gospel and shepherd people. Becoming an active member of a local church is one of the most important steps you will take after becoming a Christian and is essential for your spiritual growth and development. The NT does not require that Christians sign a covenant to become full and possibly voting members in a church. The only requirement is that you are Christian, as the local church is a local assembly of believers. However, given the fact that we are sheep and prone to wander, in my opinion, church membership and the signing of a church covenant provides accountability for your commitment to Christ and to His church. This ensures a smoother walk in Christ. It also makes the job of the elders easier when significant problems appear, requiring intervention and possible church discipline.

Biblical support for church membership and the signing of a church covenant comes from the book of Nehemiah. The Lord had exiled Israel into captivity for their idolatry and their failure to follow the commandments. Upon Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem to begin repairing the wall, there was a day of fasting in sackcloth and worship set aside. The word of God was read, and people confessed their sins before the Lord. It was evident that the conviction among the people was strong because they had not been following the Lord's commandments. Something had to change for the people to move forward in their walk with God. The leaders and the people decided to enter into a covenant to follow the Lord and hold one another accountable.

Nehemiah 9:38

"Now because of all this we are making an agreement in writing; and on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

Nehemiah 10:28-33

"Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes; and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt. We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house our God: for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God."

It was beautiful to see people coming together and committing themselves to the Lord in a covenant. In the passage above, the people agreed to:

Walk in God's law
Keep God's commandments, ordinances, and statutes
Marry only in the Lord
Keep the Sabbath holy
Forego the 7-year crops
Forego exaction of debt
Contribute financially to the house of God

Everything the people committed to is verifiable for accountability. Accountability before the leadership and shepherds of the church is essential for staying on the narrow

way, especially when you encounter various trials in your life. It has always been comforting to me to know that I have people praying for me and holding me accountable. The church is not a museum for saints. It is a hospital filled with sick people on their road to recovery, growing into the likeness of Christ.

Are you a member of a local church? I really encourage you to prayerfully consider moving forward and becoming a member of a local church.

Church membership benefits

Hebrews 6:10

“For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

God remembers what you have done in His name and will reward you for your faithfulness.

Recall what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts:

Acts 20:35

“In every thing I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Serving in a local church is a blessing. Before a major ministry task, you feel the weight of the effort and commitment required to follow through. Then, after the task is completed, you realize that you were the person that was blessed by the effort.

Another blessing of the church is that it is a safety net that you can rely on in time of need—even without asking.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”

When I was a graduate student at Cornell, I became ill with a severe respiratory infection. I lived in a rented room in a house at the time, and I was really too ill to leave to get something to eat. All of a sudden, there was a knock at my door. It was the Chinese woman from church, who was born overseas, that helped me come to the Lord. She had made a batch of hot chicken soup and brought it in a pot for me to eat. What a blessing!

After that chicken soup I could finally breath again. I didn't even request a meal. She saw the need and came through.

I can tell you many stories of sacrificial acts of service that I have either watched or was a part. People are loving people. That is what God's people do in love for Him and the brethren.

As churches grow larger, it is really important to become a member of a small group or growth group at church. This allows for the body to get to know one another and minister to each other's needs. I can recall a time when one of the members of our church was ill and was hospitalized. Our senior pastor was one amazing man, and despite the size of our church, made every effort to see people in the hospital. Our senior pastor arrived at the hospital room to minister to one of our saints. What did he find? The small group was already at the hospital, ministering to the saint. Ministry is not something only the pastors and elders do. Everyone should do ministry in the local church as the body cares for one another. Everyone is out of the stands and on the field in the game of life, loving their neighbor.

Acts 2:42

“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

This passage in Acts captures the excitement of the early church when many people came to Christ. The early church focused on teaching, fellowship, taking meals together and prayer. The prayer support of a local church is an amazing blessing. In my career as an employed scientist for 34 years, by God's grace, I successfully navigated through four job layoffs with two companies. I can recall one layoff, which was particularly hard for me. I sent an email to the church to get on the church prayer chain. After that, I had the peace that surpasses all understanding, knowing that over 100 people in my church were on their knees before God's throne praying for my family and me. In a couple of months, God provided an answer to prayer with a new job with the same company so we did not have to move. In all my years of work, I never missed a paycheck. God has always provided, and it was great to have the prayer support of my local church. Prayer makes a difference—take it seriously. When you have prayer support of your local church, you can leave that anxiety bag in the garbage can.

Protection from Satan

In the early church at Corinth, there was an immoral man that was having sexual relations with his father's wife. The Apostle Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind that does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.

And you have become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst.”

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for tolerating immorality in the church. This incestuous man should have been excommunicated from the church until he repented.

1 Corinthians 5:5

“I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters; for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

Removal from the church is to be done so that the man may be delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved. Apparently, by being a member of the local church, this sinful man was protected from Satan’s schemes. The Apostle Paul commands his removal from the church so that Satan’s attacks would lead to his repentance and restoration back into the church.

Church discipline

There come times in the life of a church when serious problems arise among people that require intervention by the elders. All Christians sin from time to time. Until we are with the Lord, we will fall into sin. When we sin, we should repent and ask forgiveness from the Lord and those we have sinned against. Membership in a local church provides an accountability structure to prevent problems from becoming more serious. And if problems become serious and repentance of the sin is a problem, the Scriptures provide a procedure for dealing with this situation.

First and foremost, if you have sinned against someone, become reconciled as soon as possible. Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:23-24

“If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Repent and ask forgiveness from the Lord and the person you have sinned against. Someone sins against you or you see your brother in sin, please follow the Scriptural procedure below:

Matthew 18:15-17

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.”

Step 1: Privately meet with your brother and reprove him. If he listens, done.
If not, proceed to Step 2.

Step 2: Privately meet again with the brother with 1 or 2 witnesses. If he listens, done.
If not, proceed to Step 3.

Step 3: Privately meet again with the brother and church elders. If he listens, done.
If not, removal from the church may be the next step.

Each of these steps is not necessarily a one-time meeting. We should be patient when attempting to restore a brother. It is absolutely essential that confidentiality be maintained and that no gossip should occur during these discussions. If there are safety issues involved, contact the elders immediately for wisdom and counsel. At times, one or two elders may be involved in Step 2. Step 3 involves the full elder board, who make the final decision regarding the status of the brother in question. The elders will inform the church when church discipline has been taken, and how the body should respond to the brother who has been disciplined and/or put out of the church.

Church discipline is a very serious matter, especially when it results in the removal of a brother from the church. The scriptural admonition of “let him be to you as a Gentile and tax-gatherer,” means that when the elders decide on removal of a brother from the church, they have judged him, *prima facie*, a non-believer. As was seen in the church at Corinth, the goal of church discipline that results in removal is repentance and restoration back in the faith. It is simply not a quality of a Christian to refuse to repent of sin. That is the way we were before we became a Christian.

Church discipline is more difficult if the individual involved is not a member of the local church. The brother in question can simply take the approach, “I am not a member and refuse to go through this process.” He may simply leave and go to church somewhere else. This would be unfortunate, as a member is more likely to go through this process and repent before Step 3 is reached. The other difficulty is if the brother who is not a member goes to another church and decides to engage in this sin again. At least in the

state of Illinois, the elders cannot contact the new church to warn them about this individual unless he was a member of the previous church.

In summary, church membership affords a biblical form of accountability to help your walk with Christ and provides wonderful opportunities to serve the Lord. The first church covenant I signed was with the Bible church where I became a Christian back in Ithaca, NY, 40 years ago. To this day I can still remember two key phrases in that church covenant:

“I will give this church sacred pre-eminence of my time over all other institutions of human origin.”

“When I leave this church, I covenant to become a member of a church of like faith and principles.”

By God’s grace, I have kept these promises and have been so blessed by the Lord. Praise the Lord who bought the church with His blood to redeem a people for Himself. Amen.

14.5 Ordinances of the local church

I was raised in the Catholic Church and attended several catechism classes and religious classes during my early years. I was taught that there were 7 sacraments of the church and that these sacraments were a “means of grace.”

The 7 sacraments:	Baptism
	Reconciliation (Penance)
	Communion
	Confirmation
	Matrimony
	Holy Orders
	Anointing of the Sick

After my conversion to Christ, I did not find any sacraments in the Bible. God’s grace comes directly through Christ and not the church. After studying the Scriptures, much to my surprise, there were only two ordinances in the church: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. An ordinance is “an outward sign of an inward grace,” and is not a requirement for salvation. This terminology is used to avoid confusion with the “means of grace” and other mystical connotations associated with the word “sacrament.”

Believer's baptism

I was baptized as an infant in the Catholic Church. I never recalled the event and the only proof I have of it is in my parent's photo album. I was not a Christian then, and I did not become one until I was 24 years old. Frankly, I wished I had repented a long time ago. When you get older and look back, you wish you could have had a few more "mulligans," as they say in golf, or "do overs." At any rate, I have asked the Lord if I could be granted a lifetime as a Christian, having wasted my previous 24 years as a lost soul. Assuming a lifetime of around 70 years or so, I hope to live to be 94, serving the Lord all the way to the end. I am not sure how many years I will have, but every day I wake up I thank God I am still here.

Meanwhile, after becoming a Christian, I was faced with the dilemma of wondering whether my previous infant baptism, by sprinkling in the Catholic Church, was valid. After consultation of the Scriptures and speaking with the church elders, I concluded my previous baptism was not biblical because I was not a Christian. It was with great joy that I walked into the baptistery of a local Baptist Church in the summer of 1980 and was baptized by immersion. It felt good to be finally ordering my life in accordance with the Scriptures after leading a wayward life for 24 years. There is joy to be found in obedience.

Commanded by Christ for believers

Matthew 28:18-20

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

The ordinance of baptism came from our Lord Jesus. He said we should make disciples from all walks of life and baptize them in God's name. Disciples of Jesus are baptized, not infants, who are clueless to what is going on in the world at their age. The earliest events in my life that I can remember were when I was about 5 years old, my wife about 2 years old. My wife and I were both baptized way before then, were not disciples, and do not remember it.

Acts 16:29-34

"And he called for the lights and rushed in and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought

them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.”

This is an example of believer’s baptism in the early church. Upon a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and in obedience to Christ, believers should be baptized.

Symbol of baptism

Romans 6:1-5

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Colossians 2:9-12

“For in Him the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Two symbols of baptism emerge from these two passages:

First, burial of our old self with Christ in a watery grave followed by resurrection from the watery grave to the new self.

Second, circumcision of the heart, removal of the flesh and burial with Christ in the watery grave, followed by resurrection from the watery grave through faith in Christ in the working of God.

Baptism symbolizes the outward sign of an inward grace. Baptism does not take away sins; only Jesus can take away our sins, as He bore our sins on His cross and died.

(1 Peter 2:24) Baptism symbolized what Jesus did when He died on the cross and rose from the dead for our justification. After we pass on to glory and through the intermediate state, we will receive our new resurrection bodies at His coming.

Baptism by immersion

Acts 8:35-39

“And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more; but went on his way rejoicing.”

Matthew 3:16-17

“And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him; and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

John 3:23

“And John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there; and they were coming, and were being baptized.”

The passages above support baptism by immersion, as there would be no reason to go down into the water just to receive a few sprinkles on the head. Baptism by immersion also preserves the imagery in the *Romans 6:1-5* and *Colossians 2:9-12* passages.

The Lord’s Supper

Our Lord Jesus asked us, in addition to baptizing disciples into God’s name, to remember Him as we read below:

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

This is a very solemn time when we remember Jesus’ body was broken for us and His blood shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. A time of reflection and confession of sin is appropriate before one eats of the bread, representing His body, and drinks of the cup, representing His blood. The Lord’s Table is open to all who believe. Our salvation came

at a great expense to our Lord, and we should be mindful of His great sacrifice and amazing love for us. *Soli Deo Gloria.* Amen.

14.6 Financial support

In the OT, the people who brought offerings and sacrifices to the Lord supported the Levites, the spiritual leaders of Israel. The priests would eat a portion of the sacrifices and offerings that were offered on the altar. In like manner, the Apostle Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 9:11-14

“If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”

It is biblical that the members of the local church financially support those who do the work of gospel ministry. The Apostle Paul says he did not make use of this right. Paul supported himself as a tentmaker (*Acts 18:3*). It is not uncommon for pastors to work in another profession until their congregation can support them for full time ministry. This is very common among church planters.

The local church and people in need should be your first priority in giving. Giving to Christian ministries and other institutions of human origin should be secondary. There is some debate on how much a person should contribute to the church. Regardless of the amount, we should be cheerful givers:

2 Corinthians 9:5-7

“So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness. Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

The pastor of the Bible church in Ithaca, NY told a story of a man in the church that gave 10% of his income. As God prospered him, he gave more. When 10% didn't take a bite out of him, he gave 20%. When that didn't take a bite out of him, he gave 30%. As long as this man could feel “the bite” of giving, that was the amount he gave.

R.G. LeTourneau, the founder of LeTourneau University, made an important decision when he was 30 years old to make God his business partner. This man built a manufacturing empire and held 299 patents. This decision, made at age 30, led this man to give 90% of his personal income and wealth to the Lord's work. See the following weblink for this inspirational story: (www.centerforfaithandwork.com, accessed 6/25/20).

These men were cheerful givers and gave well beyond 10%. What a man sows, that he will reap. What are you giving to your local church?

The concept of the tithe usually comes up, which can be 10% of your gross or net income. I have always tried to follow Jacob's vow as a starting point for giving:

Genesis 28:20

"Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee.'"

The concept of a tenth was never drilled into me by pastoral pleas or personal guilt. It was shown to me by example. Remember the Chinese woman who was born overseas who invited me to church earlier and helped lead me to the Lord? We both became Christians and worked in the same research laboratory at Cornell in our doctoral degree programs. The Department of Biochemistry at Cornell, through a training grant funded by the Federal Government, supported graduate students in the program with paid tuition and fees and a monthly stipend of \$400 per month. Back in the late '70s and early '80s, you could live on \$400 per month. This monthly stipend was the same for all graduate students.

She and I, on occasion, would sit together in church. During the worship service, the plate was passed to collect tithes and offerings for the Lord. Since I was a starving graduate student I pitched in a few small bills. I watched as this woman next to me pitched in two \$20 bills for a total of \$40. I was astonished. She gave a tenth to the Lord, even on such a small salary. Her example set the bar for me giving to the Lord the rest of my life. I will be forever grateful for her example, even though she had no idea I learned it from her.

There were times in response to needs that we gave beyond 10%. I can recall a time when I was involved in helping a pastor plant a church. The church plant needed to raise \$120,000 to build out a leased facility for the church. This was an important step, as the local school was sometimes not available on Sundays, and it was important to secure a reliable meeting place for this new body of Christ in Spring Grove, IL. One day, while at work, I was sitting at my computer reflecting on this need for the church plant. I had some company stock I could sell to help the church plant. That stock was planned for

future college expenses. College was still future, but this need was now! All I can say is that the Lord moved my heart to sell some of the company stock. There was no compulsion; I just knew I had to honor the Lord and help plant the church. Approximately half of the proceeds from the stock sale went to the church. I never missed it though, as God continued to bless the work of my hands, and I made over and above the amount I gave. By God's grace and His provision, my two children were able to obtain a debt-free college education. Thank you Lord, for your abundant provision.

14.7 Summary

The church is the God ordained institution for the proclamation of the gospel and fulfillment of the Great Commission. The church should always have sacred pre-eminence of your time over all other institutions of human origin. Regular church attendance, serving in the local church, using your gifts, and sharing your faith with others, is essential for the growth and the health of the body of Christ. People need the Lord. Your gifts, talents and financial support of your local church will make it possible for many people like me to come and know the Lord.

Finally, the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ, who purchased her with His blood.

1 Corinthians 3:10-11

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

15. Keeping the Heart

Memory verse: *Proverbs 4:23*

After studying 14 chapters of Christian doctrine, the next step is putting it into practice in your life. The Apostle Paul warns us about knowledge:

1 Corinthians 8:1-2

“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.”

The Scriptural admonition that *“knowledge makes arrogant (puffs up), but love edifies”* is an important consideration. Are you going to use your knowledge of Scripture and Christian doctrine in a loving manner? Or are you going to become critical of others who know less and use your knowledge as a weapon of intolerance and superiority? A true understanding of Scripture will lead to humility. Our goal should be to live biblical doctrine in a loving way before a fallen world. But how exactly do we do this?

The book of Proverbs is filled with many pithy sayings and practical wisdom from the Lord. There is a key proverb that every Christian needs to implement in their lives and is one of my favorites:

Proverbs 4:23

“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.”

There is a vigilance all believers must maintain over their heart. We have to keep our hearts pure, holy and free of sin. Prior to our conversion to Christ, our heart was the seat of iniquity. We read in Mark’s gospel:

Mark 7:20-23

“And He was saying, ‘That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.’”

At our conversion to Christ, God sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and begin this process of washing and renewal:

Titus 3:3-7

“For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

It is so amazing to me that God lives in us. And yet we are still tempted to sin as formerly lost people living in the fallen world around us. I thought the following illustration would be helpful here to understand how subtle it could be to have your heart drift away.

Rain is a rare event here in the Valley of the Sun, and it is a welcome sight to see rain. When the summer monsoon kicks in and the humidity levels rise, you know the rains are coming. There is also something else coming before the rains—dust storms. The technical term for dust storm is “haboob.” They are the result of strong downdrafts and outflows generated by towering thunderstorms far away. Sometimes you get the rain and sometimes you get these blowing dust storms. We experienced a haboob one sultry early evening in July when it grew so dark you could not see across the street. The wind blew a steady 30-40 mph for an hour and a half and there was dust everywhere. Even though our home is an energy star home and sealed tight, dust made its way in. You could see piles of dust near the door entrances and the garage doors. Unless you keep up with it, eventually you will have this dust all over the house and your furniture.

We live in a dirty world. You have to keep sweeping your life clean on a daily basis or you will be dusty and dirty again. Unless you make an effort to keep your heart clean and pure, sooner or later the haboobs of life will defile you. The world is not your friend and neither is the devil. The evil one knows your heart is your nerve center and is always looking for an opportunity to fill you with dust, corrupt you and stop those springs of life. So how can you keep your heart, so as to live biblical doctrine in a loving manner? Take the five steps toward a healthy heart below.

15.1 Heart step 1: Pray Scripture and purify the springs of life

Psalm 119:9-11

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word. With all my heart I have sought Thee; do not let me wander from Thy commandments. Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee.”

God’s word is like cleanser in the bathroom. Cleanser can deal with tough bathroom stains; God’s word deals with the sinful stains and proclivities of your heart.

God's word is also like a filter. Filters prevent contamination as they trap dirt, pollen and other allergens. Since our energy star home is sealed tight, there is a system that brings in outside air on a regular basis. This air is passed through a filter before it enters the ventilation system. Every three months I change this filter, and it is black after three months. If I simply skipped the filter, it would take awhile before you would notice the dirt on the furniture. But even if you cannot see at first, it would be there, causing problems.

It is the same with the dirty world we live in. Without God's word as a filter, you can get dirtier and blacker every day. You may not notice at first but over time you will begin to gradually behave no differently than the non-believers. When people see you, do they see Jesus? When people spend time with you, have they been with Jesus? We are to be conformed to the image of Christ. Is that a bright image or a dull and dirty image that reflects more the person you used to be than the person you are supposed to be? Get the filter on!

Praying Scripture into your life is a very important activity. The senior pastor from our former church in Gurnee, IL highly recommended it. During your daily devotions when you see a Scripture jump out at you, (perhaps you have read that passage of Scripture many times before, but now all of a sudden it has captured your attention) pray that Scripture into your life. This is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives; He works through the Scriptures. I never hear voices, but just His quiet moving of my heart and convicting me of sin in my life.

15.2 Heart step 2: Recite Scripture and protect the springs of life

Reciting Scripture is another way to guard your heart when under temptation. This is the strategy Jesus used when tempted by the devil in the wilderness:

Matthew 4:1-4

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’”

Satan tempts Jesus to break His 40-day fast by using His powers as God to turn stones into bread. Jesus refuses this temptation by quoting Scripture appropriate to the situation. This only works if you know your Scriptures. There is a very interesting lesson for us when we examine the passage in Deuteronomy that Jesus quoted:

Deuteronomy 8:1-3

“All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore

to give to your forefathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has humbled you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what is in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.”

Jesus was fasting 40 days in the wilderness to experience as a man what the Jews experienced for 40 years in their wilderness. For the Jews, the wilderness was a test to obey God or obey the flesh. The manna was used to demonstrate that man does not live by bread alone but by everything that proceeds from God’s mouth.

Jesus was obeying the Father’s will during His 40-day fast, and it was up to God the Father, not Jesus, when that fast would end. True living is not sustained just by eating food, but by being fed by, and living, the word of God. When Jesus was tempted to break His fast by the devil, He reminded the devil that man does not live by bread alone, but according to God’s word and commandments. So when we are in the midst of temptation, recite the Scripture or the moral command that applies and flee the temptation prayerfully. God the Holy Spirit, the Helper, is always near, right inside your heart.

Lastly, feed your heart with God’s word. It will keep your heart pumping for Jesus.

15.3 Heart step 3: Empty yourself and open the springs of life

Because of our fallen nature, we are great lovers of ourselves, naturally, and less so of God and others. The world is in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. People here in the United States are deeply divided over whether or not to wear a facial mask to protect others from Coronavirus. It seems simple enough to do in the spirit of “love your neighbor.” My wife and I bring our masks and hand sanitizer whenever we go out in public buildings. My daughter lives in Japan where mask wearing is standard operating procedure. This is no big deal according to her. She has to wear a mask and face shield when she is teaching the little ones at her English phonics school in Tokyo.

The debate rages on, even among Christians, sadly enough, while hundreds of thousands of people have died from this terrible disease that can destroy your lungs.

This may be a heart problem in some people and may stem from who or what is more important. Is my freedom more important than another man’s life? Do I want the government telling me what to do? What may be missing from some Christians is the second greatest commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This may be a symptom of a heart, lacking humility and love. The Scripture has the cure.

Philippians 2:1-11

“If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

A healthy heart is always looking out for the interest of others first and loves sacrificially. This requires you to empty yourself of the concept “it is all about me.” Everyone is always more important than you. How do we follow the example of Jesus?

We are exhorted to have the same attitude Jesus had when He humbled Himself to become a man and die on a cross for our sins. Jesus took on a lowly position on our behalf to be our Savior and Lord. The Apostle Paul is telling us that we should humble ourselves and be sacrificial in our love for others.

I realize, when I am at Sam’s Club, Walmart or Safeway, most people are not Christians. I do not want to pass an infection to another person, especially to a non-believer. I do not want my freedom to result in the death of a person without Christ as their Savior. I pray that the Lord will use this COVID-19 pandemic to bring people to Himself. The least I can do is help keep others alive longer to receive Christ.

So do your heart and everyone else a loving favor—empty yourself.

15.4 Heart step 4: Control your tongue and maintain the springs of life

The Lord has given us wonderful bodies that have the ability, through language, to communicate with one another. In the early days of human existence you had to be present in the same room to communicate with someone. With the explosion of technology in communication, we can literally communicate with anybody in the world, anytime and anywhere. Even groups of people can communicate with one another by on-line video conferencing and social media. It would be difficult to be a monk these days.

As wonderful as all these tools of communication are, we live in a fallen world and sometimes we say things we may live to regret. As we read in the Epistle of James, we can tame animals but we cannot tame the tongue.

James 3:3-10

“Now if we put the bits in the horses’ mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.”

Controlling the tongue is essential if we are going to put forth springs of life from our hearts and not springs of poison. We must guard our tongues and resist the impulse to strike out at others, especially when we are wronged. This is especially true when in the presence of non-believers:

Psalms 39:1

“I said, ‘I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle, while the wicked are in my presence.’”

Simple questions to always ask yourself before you say something questionable is “how would you like what you want to say to someone to be said to you?” “How would you feel?” “Is this a spring of life or a spring of poison?” “Will this build this person up or will it tear them down?” “Do I need to listen instead of speaking?”

I heard a good Sunday school class on filters for the tongue many years ago and I jotted down some very helpful points to consider before you open your mouth. I have carried this in my Bible for as long as I can remember. These points are helpful when providing criticism to someone.

Filters for the tongue

Filter #1: Know something about the person and their situation before you criticize. Be timely.

Proverbs 25:11

“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances.”

Proverbs 12:18

“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Proverbs 15:28

“The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.”

Proverbs 17:27

“He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”

Proverbs 16:24

“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”

Instead of tearing others down with your tongue, bless others with your tongue and be a vehicle of God’s grace towards them.

Filter #2: Has this person heard this criticism before? The second time is nagging.

Proverbs 17:9

“He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.”

In general, criticism does not need to be repeated unless it is part of a process of remediation via counseling or church discipline via the three steps of *Matthew 18:15-17*.

Filter #3: Can the person do anything about it? Can he or she change it?

Filter #4: Is my commitment deep enough to this person to help change this person? If not, do not criticize them.

Filter #5: Am I criticizing my own defect in this person?

Filter #6: Is it possible that this person needs encouragement and not criticism?

Lastly, the Epistle of James makes the following statement:

James 1:26-27

“If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless. This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

The tongue is a window into a man's heart. If the tongue is not controlled, the man's religion is worthless. A religious man is one who loves God and his neighbor, and who controls his tongue. Everything we say and everything we write in social media, email, etc., should love God and our neighbor. Eschew the poisonous springs of life.

15.5 Heart step 5: Remember life has a purpose and sustain the springs of life

One of the central questions cosmologists and biologists are trying to answer is how the universe and life originated. It is generally accepted that both the universe and life had a beginning. The first natural cause continues to be elusive to scientists, because the first cause was not natural; it was supernatural, as we read:

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Jeremiah 33:1-3

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is His name. ‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’”

It is difficult to see a purpose in life apart from our God, our Maker. In a materialistic worldview, we are just organized organic matter, here for a season and then gone. Even Solomon noted the vanity of labor in humanistic terms:

Ecclesiastes 2:18-19

“Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.”

For some people, their philosophy of life is “he who ends up with the most toys at the end wins.” The problem is that you have to leave it all behind and then face Judgment day with your Maker.

If we are going to lead productive and fruitful lives for the Lord, we need to be reminded that this life has a purpose. The Apostle Paul reminds us of the purpose of our lives very succinctly:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

We are to live for Him. At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon states:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

Life has a purpose and our purpose is to live for God’s glory, keeping His commandments, making disciples of all nations, and teaching them all the doctrines of Scripture contained in the Bible. This journey was just the beginning; keep studying and living the Scriptures and doctrines and teach them to others.

15.6 Summary

Keeping the heart is essential to remain a productive Christian throughout the time God has given you on this earth. These five steps toward a healthy heart are practical ways you can keep on mission and stay on target for the Lord:

Heart step 1: Pray Scripture—purify those springs of life

Heart step 2: Recite Scripture—protect those springs of life

Heart step 3: Empty yourself—open those springs of life

Heart step 4: Control your tongue—maintain those springs of life

Heart step 5: Remember life has a purpose—sustain those springs of life

16. Practical Theology and the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic

Memory verse: *Proverbs 22:3*

During the writing of this book, the world continues to be in the midst of the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. As of October 2020, the United States has reported over 7,300,000 cases of COVID-19 with over 200,000 deaths. After a complete shutdown of the U.S. economy in March 2020, various states have begun opening their economies in May with the result of a second surge in COVID-19 infections followed by the re-closing of various businesses to contain the spread of the virus. Many churches closed their services to the public and have offered on-line prayer and preaching services. To the chagrin of many people, the government has allowed public protests following the death of George Floyd, while churches remain closed. Some churches in California have defied state orders and have reopened for worship services.

The United States remains extremely polarized along political ideology and, unfortunately, this has affected the public's response to government measures to contain the spread of the virus through wearing of facial masks, hand washing and social distancing. During the course of the pandemic, research has shown that the wearing of masks, hand washing and social distancing can be effective measures in reducing the spread of the virus. Health care workers would be dropping like flies without these measures. Even so, some are not convinced and refuse to wear a mask or social distance. They see this as an infringement of their civil rights.

What is of particular concern to me is some of the public's refusal to accept the scientific and medical approaches to contain the pandemic. This is understandable at some level, as the various models used to predict the course of the pandemic throughout the U.S. were not accurate, due to the use of assumptions in the model that turned out not to be valid.

This is a novel RNA virus that is highly contagious and is able to mutate during the course of the pandemic. Scientists and physicians are studying the epidemiology and transmission of the virus to better understand it and develop improved patient therapies. Significant progress has been made with medical treatments for those with the disease, and several vaccine candidates look promising in the near future. A vaccine may be available by year-end 2020.

Given the public pushback against the wearing of facemasks and social distancing, I wanted to offer my viewpoint, both from a scientific and Christian point of view. The virus does not care whether you are a Democrat or Republican, Christian or non-Christian, rich or poor. Recently, the President of the United States tested positive for COVID-19 and was hospitalized. He later was released from the hospital and has now

tested negative for the virus. Other individuals close to the President have also tested positive for COVID-19. This is in spite of the fact that the President and those close to him were tested daily for Coronavirus. However, facemask wearing was not strictly enforced at all times.

The only way this virus can continue to propagate itself is to find a suitable human host to infect. Then, during the course of infection, the virus will utilize the infected host to spread the disease to others. Given the highly contagious nature of this virus, it is likely that the entire human population will eventually be infected. This is why it is essential that an efficacious vaccine be developed as soon as possible to vaccinate the entire population. This is also another area of concern, as the desire by some to take the vaccine in the United States is becoming divided along political lines.

16.1 Scientific viewpoint

I have had the privilege of working in infectious disease diagnostics for 27 years, developing improved diagnostic assays for the detection of infectious diseases. During the course of my research, I have worked with production levels of viruses and parasites in order to isolate DNA and RNA for research. This work was done in a Biosafety Level 3 laboratory where extreme precautions were taken to prevent the escape of these infectious agents. Rigorous training and signoff were required before admission to this production laboratory that is completely sealed off from the rest of the building. Everyone who worked in this laboratory was fully trained and gowned in protective PPE “bunny suits.” Strict protocols were followed to contain any aerosols or spills generated during the course of the manufacture and handling of these infectious agents. The virus and parasite counts inside the production containers of this laboratory were very high; hence, the need for extreme precautions for containment and the use of fully gowned bunny suits to protect the workers. This was as close to an astronaut I ever became.

How is all of this relevant to COVID-19? It is relevant in this way. The ability of a virus to develop an infection in a human host is dependent on a number of factors. One of them is the viral load exposure, i.e., the number of infectious virus particles the host is exposed to in order to establish an infection in a non-immune individual. We do not know what this number is for COVID-19, but it is known for other viruses. For example, a single infectious virus particle for Hepatitis B can establish a fulminant hepatitis infection in a healthy individual. One single Hepatitis B virus particle introduced into the bloodstream can establish an infection. Given the contagious nature of COVID-19, the viral load required to establish an infection is also probably low.

Recently, as reported in the Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com accessed 9/25/20), scientists in Houston have released non peer-reviewed results from a study sequencing strains of the Coronavirus. Patients with a strain of the virus, which contains the D614G mutation in the spike protein, which substitutes the amino acid aspartic acid (D) with the amino acid glycine (G), had higher viral loads in their upper respiratory

tracts. Presumably, higher viral loads in the respiratory tract of infected individuals augment the spread of the virus. In the Houston area, over time, the prevalence of this mutation in viral isolates from infected patients has increased from 71% to 99.9%. It appears that Darwinian natural selection is occurring, whereby a strain of the virus is selected that is more efficient in overcoming the barriers of facemasks and social distancing, to spread the virus throughout the population. Increased viral load in patients with this viral strain appears to be the driver for the spread of the disease.

The human body has a first line defense system for foreign invaders called the innate immune system. This system can rapidly clear low doses of infectious agents before the establishment of an infection. If this system is overrun, the humoral or adaptive immune system kicks in to develop antibodies and T cells that aid in the neutralization and removal of the virus from the host. Hence, any mitigation measures that can be taken to either prevent transmission of the virus or lower viral load exposure to the host would be helpful. It buys time for the immune system to clear the COVID-19 virus before the infection becomes well established and possibly life threatening. I expect a number of asymptotically COVID-19 infected individuals may fall into this category.

As it turns out, in some individuals, the COVID-19 infection becomes life threatening, resulting in destruction of the patient's lungs. Some patients have received lung transplants as a consequence of COVID-19 infection. I recently attended an on-line seminar on COVID-19 sponsored by the American Association of Clinical Chemistry. Some physicians have seen severe illness, and even mortality, in young, healthy individuals with no comorbidities such as heart disease, obesity or diabetes. Early research indicates that there may be a genetic predisposition in some individuals to severe illness resulting from immune dysfunction. At this point, the immune response to infection is causing lung damage. This can lead to pulmonary dysfunction and coagulation. It is not just the elderly and people with co-morbidities that are at risk for severe illness; even normally healthy individuals can succumb to severe illness and death.

Obviously, we cannot all wear bunny suits and go about our daily business. But we all can wear a facemask coupled with improved hygiene procedures and social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. Having worn a bunny suit before, a mask is not, and should not be a big deal. Someone's life may depend on it. Your life may depend on it. Wear it.

16.2 Christian viewpoint

We should always pray for wisdom before embarking on problem solving of any kind, whether it is related to scientific research or understanding from the Scriptures (see *James 1:5-6*). The issue at hand is whether the wearing a facemask and social distancing measures should be followed in public gatherings or in church.

Jesus told us that the two greatest commandments were to love God with all our heart, soul and might and love our neighbor as ourselves (*Matthew 22:36-40*). Starting with these two great commandments, we need to drill down further to discover the appropriate Scriptures that can help us.

Loving God

Loving God entails keeping His commandments. In the OT various laws of hygiene were given to Moses. The Bible is not a scientific textbook, and yet, consulting the Scriptures, we see the Levitical laws on personal hygiene and cleanliness, including the quarantine of a person with a communicable disease, e.g., leprosy (*Leviticus 13, 14*). This was written long before the germ theory of disease, and the implementation of modern quarantine procedures, as currently seen in the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Moses writes about leprosy:

Leviticus 13:3

“And the priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean.”

This was a positive diagnosis for leprosy. The infected individual was placed in quarantine outside the camp (see *Leviticus 13:46*). Quarantine procedures for communicable diseases are both medically necessary and biblical. The germ theory of disease (late 1800s) was unknown at this time (1400 B.C.). Moses continues:

Leviticus 13:4

“But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and it does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days.”

This was an equivocal result for leprosy. The patient was put in isolation for seven days.

Leviticus 13:5-6

“And the priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed, and the infection has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days. And the priest shall look at him again on the seventh day;

and if the infection has faded, and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean.”

This was a negative result for leprosy after a 14-day quarantine. The patient was released from quarantine.

If the patient was positive for leprosy at this point, as we read later in this Leviticus passage, the patient would be put outside the camp in quarantine until the infection was resolved.

It is interesting to note that the same 14-day self-quarantine procedure found in Leviticus is used for persons who have had a possible exposure to a patient positive for COVID-19. Some states are requiring a 14-day self-quarantine, if you travel from a state with a high incidence of COVID-19 infection.

So far, this Scripture establishes that quarantine procedures are biblical, even when it is unsure whether the infection is leprosy or not. In my opinion, the same applies to COVID-19 infection, a highly contagious and communicable disease like leprosy.

One of the challenges we have with COVID-19 infection is that individuals with an asymptomatic COVID-19 infection can transmit a symptomatic COVID-19 infection to another person. We can only know this through contact tracing of a symptomatic COVID-19 infection. So there is the potential to acquire a symptomatic COVID-19 infection from a healthy COVID-19 infected individual. What should we do? The following Scripture provides insight from God’s word:

Proverbs 22:3

“The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive go on, and are punished for it.”

By any measure, the COVID-19 Coronavirus is evil. This virus has already killed over 200,000 Americans, and over 1,000,000 globally. Some have been left permanently damaged by the virus. The Scriptures say we should hide from evil, and yet this virus is an invisible enemy. How do you hide from an invisible enemy?

Initially, the U.S. government locked down the country for 45 days, which has caused undue hardship for many. This was not a sustainable strategy. We have to learn how to live with this invisible enemy in an open economy. Quarantine of COVID-19 infected individuals will continue to be employed as needed. How do healthy individuals hide from this evil? How do we protect ourselves from those who are healthy but also infected with COVID-19? We must follow the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines by wearing a mask, social distancing and washing your hands. This should be followed anywhere you go, even to church. This is not a political issue. This is a biblical

issue that simply involves the wisdom of God as revealed in the books of Leviticus and Proverbs. Either protect yourself or suffer the consequences, the choice is yours, and it does affect others.

Loving people

Loving people is the second greatest commandment according to Jesus. The key to loving people is having the attitude of Jesus, as the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Philippi:

Philippians 2:1-11

“If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Contrary to popular belief, it is not all about you and your civil liberties. We should empty ourselves for others, putting them first, above ourselves. We are generally great lovers of self but struggle with loving God and others. Think about it. Jesus left heaven's glory to do the Father's will and died a horribly painful death on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. Proof that our sins were paid for was demonstrated at His resurrection from the dead. Only the amazing love of Jesus could motivate such suffering, such a sacrifice.

The only weapons we have at our disposal to contain the spread of this evil virus is a facemask, social distancing and personal hygiene. Compared to the suffering of Jesus on the cross for us, putting on a mask seems like a simple task. Perhaps it is too simple. But it could save someone's life and maybe your own.

Romans 13:1-2

“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he

who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

The Apostle Paul, while in Corinth, wrote this Scripture to the church in Rome in 57 A.D. Nero was the Roman Emperor at the time and a persecutor of Christians. The Roman government was not exactly a friendly government. Unless following the government's orders violates Scripture, this passage in Romans states we should follow federal, state and local laws. Otherwise, we are opposing the Lord.

As a scientist who has worked in infectious diseases for many years, the CDC recommendations are reasonable and should be followed. The federal government is in no way trying to restrict the worship of Christians. The U.S. President has indicated that churches should be open. At the state level there have been some difficulties. This has led some churches to open their doors in California in defiance to their governor's executive order. Recently, a superior court judge in California ruled that Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA could hold indoor services provided they wear masks and social distance. The elders of the church are ultimately responsible for the decisions they make regarding compliance to the governing authorities.

In Arizona, some churches have opened their doors and have made mask wearing optional, citing that the Arizona governor's executive order does not cover churches. Granted, they are not violating the letter of the law and are in compliance with Romans 13. However, the spirit of God's law, the second greatest commandment, may be in violation, that is, love your neighbor as yourself and prevent the spread of the disease. The practice of mask wearing and social distancing only works well if everyone joins in and follows the rules. The local churches should be leading their communities in this practice as an act of sacrificial love for their neighbor.

16.3 Summary

The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic has rocked our world in so many ways. Many people are divided on how to live responsibly during this time. The only way I know how to fight this Coronavirus is to follow the Scriptures and the CDC guidelines for mask wearing, social distancing and personal hygiene. Please pray that the Lord would be merciful and remove this virus from our world, and provide us with a vaccine that will protect lives and prevent many more from dying. The Lord is good and will see us through this.

Soli Deo Gloria, Amen.

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Maine became a Christian during his graduate studies at Cornell through the ministry of the Faith Bible Church of Ithaca. He has taught in the church on several occasions and has been an invited preacher at churches in Northern Illinois. He served as an elder for 27 years at Lakeland Church in Gurnee, IL and chaired the Lakeland church planting committee for LifeSpring Community Church in Spring Grove, IL. He and his wife Nancy have been married for 37 years, have two children and currently reside in Queen Creek, AZ.