

From Slavery to Servanthood
in
Five Easy Doctrines

Reflections on the Five Points of Calvinism

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PREFACE

This text has been adapted from a series of sermons that I presented to the congregation of Village Seven Presbyterian Church in the spring of 1980. Hopefully it presents the doctrines of Calvinism in an understandable and acceptable form for the layman without ignoring the broad Scriptural basis for the doctrines.

When we can accept that sinners are saved by the Grace of God and not by their own works (Eph.2:8,9), the necessity, and in fact the unavoidable impact of each of these doctrines should become abundantly clear. They are so interwoven and so mutually dependent, that together they comprise one great body of truth concerning the process of salvation that God has freely provided for each of us in His son Jesus Christ.

I pray that you will find this text useful, informative, stimulating and rewarding as an aid to understanding the basic principles of Reformation Theology. But more than that, I trust it will also be an enjoyable experience as you more fully appreciate what a truly wonderful and marvelous thing God has done for you. If this text encourages you at all to become a more able and faithful servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, then I will have been amply rewarded.

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IS IT REALLY IMPORTANT WHAT WE BELIEVE?

There are many brands of Christianity. There are liberal Christians and there are conservatives. There are fundamentalists, and there are modernists. There are denominational distinctions such as Lutheran and Presbyterian, Baptist and Episcopalian. There are organizational differences such as those that generally distinguish the Congregationalist from the Roman Catholic. There are all kinds and brands of brethren, coming from all kinds of directions. Yet I believe all who belong to the same specific biblical faith, should be received as our brothers and sisters in Christ. However, we do not receive those who deny the truth of God, who deny the reality of Jesus, who deny that he is the Son of God. We cannot walk alongside people like that, because they do not have the truth of God. But what is the Truth of God as Scripture reveals it? What is our specific biblical faith?

In the world too, as we confront people who come from differing beliefs and religions, we find that we must ask ourselves, “What is the truth that we profess?” and “What do we believe?” We are asking partly to distinguish ourselves from all the others but mostly to affirm the foundation of our faith, so that in time of trial we can stand firm on the Rock of our Salvation and not waiver in the sinking sand of doubt and indecision. Potential new members continually ask us what we stand for. They, too, want to know what sets Presbyterians apart from other Christians or even other beliefs in general. We must be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

Well, we live in a world where what we believe doesn't seem to matter very much. You've heard it said, “It really doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.” That, of course, is not in the Bible. Praise God that it's not in the Bible because its not the truth! Nazis were very sincere. Communists are very sincere. I know homosexuals who are very sincere. But they are all wrong just the same. Billy Graham likes to say, “they are sincerely wrong.” Then you have those who say, “No one knows the truth anyway. Who can know the truth when all truth is relative?” They are still quoting Pontius Pilate from two thousand years ago. He asked Christ himself, “What is truth?” as if the very embodiment of truth were not standing before him. But he was blind to that truth. Many organizations today actually teach that *nobody* knows the truth. They are just as blind as Pilate was in his day.

I came across this little booklet that belongs to the library of a local men's organization. It says essentially that we should always tolerate opposing opinions and thoughts to avoid dogmatism and bitterness. It is the brotherly thing to do in a world where it is so difficult for even the wisest to find their way alone. We are all in the dark like armies that clash by night. Well although this is very fashionable to say today, and although it sounds very magnanimous, it is very wrong! Let's read what the Scriptures have to say about what is Truth in God's eyes.

Jesus said, “*I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 14:6; 8:12). Not in times to come, but he says we *have* the light of life now! He *promised* that. So we are not like armies in the dark who clash into each other, but instead we are called the children of light (Eph.5:8). Therefore, you can no longer be in darkness, though you once were. You are no longer groping around, though you once did. Now you are a child of the Truth and of Light, and you have been commanded by Christ to let your light shine before men (Mat.5:16). There is an absolute truth; that truth is Christ himself and you are duty-bound to declare him to the world as the only Truth.

So then, do we really need dogma? Do we really need theology? Is it really important that we be specific about what we believe about Christ? Can't we just be Christians and love each other, help each other and be nice to each other and leave sleeping dogmas lie? Sorry. I saw in the paper that an evangelical church claimed that it had no doctrine but Jesus. Well, that's very difficult to accept. You cannot lead a consistent Christian life that way. There is a body of truth that you must believe to live the Christian life. That's why there are a series of theological questions we ask all potential new members. When we say that Jehovah is God, we express theology. We are being dogmatic and very specific theologically. That statement is the very foundation stone on which we rest our faith. All our other beliefs flow from that fundamental one. The tool we use to formulate our beliefs is called "systematic theology." It means being very specific about what we believe and why we believe it.

If you say Jesus is the Son of God, you are expressing "Christology." Christology is the theology of Jesus. And by saying that, you have increased your dogma. Now you not only believe in fundamental theology (Jehovah is God), but you also believe in Christology. When you say that Jesus died for our sins, you are engaged in Soteriology. Soteriology is the theology of salvation. So, you embrace a dogma of salvation every time you say that Jesus is Lord. When you say that man is a sinner, you are expressing a belief found in anthropology, the study of the behavior and the fall of man. This also belongs to theology. If you say the church is the body of Christ then you are expressing a principle of Ecclesiology, the study of doctrines about the church. If you say Jesus is coming again, then you are expounding Eschatology, the theology of the Second Coming of Christ.

These are all wonderful, beautiful words but you must realize that they are merely labels that describe the body of Truth that you claim to believe. This body of Truth is in fact, your theology. And so without theology you cannot live the Christian life or walk the Christian walk. Now the problem is to decide how specific we should be in our theology. What should we believe? What should we uphold? What should we really take notice of and what can we let go by the wayside?

Well, I think we should know all the theology that is clearly directed to us in the Scripture. We should know the Bible well and we should know the Truth that it contains. The church in Galatia in the first century was in trouble because its people did not know their doctrine. Consequently, they left themselves open to an attack by Satan who sowed seeds of discord and doubt. The devil is always at work trying to sidetrack people, trying to teach them something that may not be altogether true, hoping to drag them away from the center of theology, which is of course Christ our Lord.

In the book of Galatians we find described one of those wonderful New Testament churches that you hear so many people clamoring for today. If New Testament churches were that enviable, then why did Paul have to spend so much time trying to re-teach them the truth (as you will see in a moment)? Forget it! I don't want a New Testament church. But what I do want is a 20th century church that has the faith, the trust, the belief and the dedication of those New Testament churches. Paul says,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned (Gal.1:6).

The word translated as condemned is really ‘anathema’ which means simply to be held up before God without the help of Jesus, to stand before Him as you are with your dirty, sinful garments on. It means to be alone and condemned before God, because the only way that you can stand before God is when Jesus in his grace has taken your filthy rags of sin from you and has replaced them with his own garment of righteousness. Then you can stand before God cloaked in Jesus’ splendor and the Lord will say, “*Come ye blessed of my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Mat.25:34, KJV). That’s staggering isn’t it? It’s absolutely wonderful! But for Paul to wish someone to stand before God without Christ is frightening indeed.

Let me ask you, what terrible doctrines were taught in Galatia that got Paul so upset? Were they saying, “Forget it! God is dead?” No, they were not. Did you know that this concept did not come out of some den of iniquity but out of a liberal Methodist Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia? Dr. Thomas Altizer said, “The most important evidence that God is dead is the hopelessness in today’s world.”¹ Perhaps the world is hopeless because it cannot accept the absolute truth of Christ and his Word. But that wasn’t being said in the church in Paul’s time.

Maybe they said that heaven is really meant to be on earth and what life is all about is to have a nice world for people to live in where everyone loves each other and the rich share with the poor. Was that it? No. Not at all. Was it that man has to suffer for his sin? This is being taught today even in churches that are supposed to proclaim the good news that our sins are forgiven in Christ. No, that wasn’t it either. Some people actually believe the opposite, that if you are a Christian and you are born again, you can live the way you want because you will be saved anyway. Is that in the Bible? No. Is that what the problem was here for Paul? Again, no. What on earth could it be for Paul to get upset enough to tell those who taught it that they would go to Hell for it?

Well the answer is that there were some people among the Gentile Christians at Galatia who were converted Jews. After they had become Christians they went to the church in Galatia and said, “To really be a Christian and go to heaven you must become a Jew first.” So the men were to be circumcised, and they were to uphold all the Laws of the Old Testament. They were to go back to the elementary things that Paul said had been nailed to the cross. Only then would all the promises that were made in the Bible come true for them. Paul said this was so false and so wrong that the people who taught this came right out of Hell and he was praying to have them sent straight back to where they came from in the first place. You can see that what we believe can be crucial to the way we live our lives, and crucial to our salvation as well.

How do we determine what we believe? Very often we come to the Bible with our theology already made up and we put on our Calvinist glasses and see all those nice phrases that uphold Calvinist doctrine. And an Arminian puts on his Arminian glasses and finds all those nice phrases which uphold his own doctrine. Someone else would wear his particular glasses and see only what would be pleasing to him. I want us to go to the Bible and read what the Scripture says and then formulate it as a body of truth and live by that. Now when you do that you will end up being a Calvinist...but you don’t go to the Bible as a Calvinist beforehand. You wait for the Bible to make you a Calvinist. You think I’m a little bit biased don’t you? Well, in subsequent chapters we will explore a little more closely just what the Bible has to say about God and our relationship to Him. But as a sample, we will look briefly at some of Paul’s opening remarks in his letters that reveal the great doctrines of the Bible in just a few short sentences.

¹ Peter’s Quotations For Our Time, Dr. L.J. Peter, (William Morrow and Co., N.Y., 1977), p.182.

We will begin with the premise that wrong believing leads to wrong behavior. Right believing leads to right behavior. Paul, in each of his letters, tells us something about Jesus, about who he is, about what he did, something about ourselves, about being born again, and something about Christianity and the Christian life. We will look at these perspectives on the Christian in his opening statements to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians, and then we'll look at some again from another Apostle's viewpoint in Peter's first epistle. When we are finished, we will know something very basic and fundamental about our beliefs concerning these important things that guide how we live. They are being attacked from all quarters today. Let's begin with Paul's letter to the Romans.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God - the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1-7).

Notice that Paul says that he has been 'called' to be an apostle, i.e. he has been chosen by God and not by Paul's own will. This is a central point in two doctrines: Predestination and Limited Atonement. Jesus said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...*" (Jn.6:44). Paul repeats this theme when he says, "...*you are among those who are called to belong to Christ*" (Rom.1:6). By implication, there are some who are not called to belong to Christ. Therefore we are Elected by God to come into His grace (another major doctrine is revealed here). To be set apart means to be sanctified or consecrated for a particular purpose, and each one of us, like Paul, will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit and cleansed of his sin so that he can serve God (Heb.9:14). Paul mentions that the Gospel had been foretold through the prophets in the scriptures. The Old Testament foretells the coming of a Messiah who would rescue God's people (1Pet.1:10,11). The Messiah was to be born from the physical line of David and yet be declared by the Spirit of God to be God's son. By this, Paul describes the Messiah's dual nature: fully God and fully man. Then we find that Jesus, by being raised from the dead, was proved by the power of God to be that promised Messiah. So, we see that the Resurrection is a crucial foundation for the Gospel and cannot be argued away as some have tried to do (1Cor.15:12).

Paul says that it is only because of Christ that we can receive grace (the forgiveness of sins). That is, we cannot approach the throne of God except by our declared faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice. When Paul says that we also receive apostleship, he means that we are given authority in Christ's name by our "adoption" into sonship (Rom.8:15). We are saved not by works but through faith that leads us to obedience. Paul settles very quickly the riddle of the relationship of works to faith and shows us that works don't lead to salvation, but salvation leads to a life of holiness. He says that God now loves us! He doesn't just put up with us but He loves us. Having been forgiven, God's love pours over us without any condemnation. And as "saints" we are called to be holy even as God in heaven is holy and as a result we receive grace and peace, the fruits of God's Holy Spirit which flow from accepting Christ as Lord and Savior.

That's a pithy opening statement isn't it? Paul had a gift for putting great depth of meaning in just a few short phrases as you can see. Let's go on to Corinthians.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed [here is the expectation of the Second Coming]... ...He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful (1Cor.1:1-9).

We have now found out that Christ himself will keep us strong to the end. This is the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. It promises that we will succeed in overcoming the Devil through the strength of Christ. We will not be found lacking on the Day of Judgment. This concept is sometimes corrupted into a false belief that “Once saved always saved” leads to a life of complacency and sin without true repentance. It does not. It is a call to uncompromising obedience by the strength of Christ.

Before Paul begins to lecture about the problems in the church, before he begins to outline what they should and should not do, he begins with a statement of faith: this is what he believes; this is what Jesus has done on their behalf. These opening statements are full of deep, significant theological truths that you should know. In the book of Galatians we read, “*Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers with me...*” Within a breath, one sentence, he tells us about Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. He wanted to make sure that the people who would read these letters would know that he was not compromising on any of these fundamental, biblical truths about Jesus. “*To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you...*”

Let me tell you something about this magnificent phrase. In the New Testament, Grace and Peace are wedded to each other. Before we knew God, the Bible says we were dead in trespasses and sins. We were enemies with God. We were at war with Him. There were people who raised their hands to Jesus and said, “*We will not have this man to reign over us*” (Luke 19:14, KJV). Now when God grants us mercy and forgiveness He is displaying an act of His favor towards us which is His Grace. You can’t buy it . You can do nothing to win it. God gives it. It is His Grace. And what is the outcome of it? Peace. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. We are no longer at war. We have fellowship with Him. He looks down from heaven and says, “Son, give me thine heart.” There is a dialogue going on. We fall before Him in prayer and He answers our petition. He’s alive! We see Him at work.

...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:1-5).

Now, how much are we doing in all this to obtain the rescue that Paul speaks of? Nothing. We are just accepting it. Then Paul says that this has not even been according to our will, nor our decision, nor our commitment of ourselves, but according to God’s will. God begins it. God continues it. God completes it. From beginning to end, it is God’s will. I asked a group of

Christians once, "What is it that we give to God?" and someone answered, "Our love." Well that's true but only afterwards. What do we originally give to God? Then someone else correctly answered, "Our sins..." Isn't that pitiful? That's the only offering that you and I can make to God. But isn't it glorious that God still wants to receive us? Now finally in Ephesians we read,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory (Eph.1:1-12).

If there was ever any doubt whether Predestination is taught in Scripture, this little section of Ephesians should set it to rest. There are some who say that God could see what we would do through his infinite foreknowledge and therefore He chose those who by their own plan would accept Christ. But that isn't so. The plan was God's, made according to his own will. Every time I think about this, I'm so glad that God is in charge, that he hasn't surrendered his sovereignty, that he can accomplish the things that he wants to accomplish. And there is nothing that can frustrate or change his plan and purpose. They existed before the foundation of the world, when all the names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Hallelujah!

Some people might object that this is all from Paul's viewpoint. What do the other Apostles have to say? For the moment let's leave the intellectual, the theologian named Paul and go to a fisherman named Peter. When Jesus called him, he was cleaning 500 mackerel. Jesus said, "Leave that. I'm going to make you a fisher of men," and so he wiped his hands and went to be with the other disciples. It is significant that Paul writes in the book of Galatians that after he was converted, he went to Arabia and studied for three years by himself, and then went up to Jerusalem where he spent two weeks with Peter. Isn't it amazing that this man could learn something from the rough, uncouth, uneducated fisherman named Peter? And where did Peter get all this information? From Christ himself. He was taught by God. He writes,

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, [Again, Election] strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, [Again, Predestination] through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood [Again, the Atonement]: Grace and peace be yours in abundance [Again, the fruit of salvation].

Praise be to the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ! [Again, the Dual Nature]. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [Again, the physical Resurrection], and into an inheritance [Again, Adoption] that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time [Again we see the Perseverance of the Saints]. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1Pet.1:1-6)

Here we have Peter making statements about Jesus Christ , about why he came and about us. So each one of these things was essential to the Apostles and to the first century church, and they are just as essential to us today. With each one of these things, we wholeheartedly agree. We don't reinterpret them. We don't try to give them different meaning. We don't try to bring them into line with man's thinking and man's ideas. But we believe them from beginning to end to be the truth of God. Now how does this issue of doctrine apply to us today? A liberal Presbyterian minister was recently examined to be a minister of a local congregation. They apparently liked him because he was a clever man with a good personality and he could speak very well but he believed nothing. He said, "The greatest blasphemy in the world is to think that you know the Truth." This man does not believe that Jesus had a virgin birth. He does not believe in Hell. He does not believe in miracles or many other things. Yet, Jesus said that he came to this world so that we would *know* the truth, and that truth is laid out for us in Scripture.

So what is this man doing? He is denying everything about Jesus as revealed in Scripture, and yet maintaining his status as a minister of the Gospel. His theology of course has become a humanistic philosophy where the rich share with the poor. By man's own hand, society will somehow be reshaped to a point where everyone looks after each other without the need or the help of God. Let me try to rephrase his statement. I believe that the greatest sin that we can commit as Christians is to have the truth and not know it. You will be accountable to God for the Bible you have in your home unopened. And the difficulties and the problems and the mistakes that you will make in life are solely because you do not know what the bible teaches. You must open your bible, make notes in your bible, and put dates in its margins when the Lord speaks to you from a verse. These are very practical things that you ought to do. Get in a Sunday school class. Don't just go to the service in church. *Learn!* The time may come when you are no longer free to have a Bible, or to conduct a bible study in your home.

Some legislators in California tried to have bible studies in the home banned because the homes were not zoned as churches. I hope they make some more blunders like that so that the Christians in this country will be shaken from their complacency, and rise up and make a definite statement against the things that are so bad in our nation. I think you should give the whole of Sunday to your worship of God, not just an hour. Very few people have a valid excuse before God why they cannot attend evening services, or take the time to worship and glorify Him. Instead the time is spent watching a football game on TV or is spent in some other unimportant activity. Get into a bible study during the week. You need to know what it is like to be a man of God. What are the identification marks? Become wise unto salvation. Be fully equipped.

During Jesus' temptation in the desert, when he was hungrier than any man had ever been, then and only then did Satan come and tempt him by urging him to turn the rocks into bread. And what did he fall back on to fend off Satan's trap? The Word of God. It is your strength and your refuge in times of distress and weakness. To let it sit idly on a shelf, without study and without application, is to leave yourself open to attack and defeat. To reject God's Word or treat it with

disdain is to reject and disdain God Himself! Christ, God's Word incarnate, said that his flesh, God's Word, is the bread of life and, “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you*” (Jn.6:53). God's Word is life itself to you. Don't neglect it! Don't be a fragile Christian who doesn't know what he believes or why he believes it. You may find your faith shattered one day, or just as bad, you may be unable to help someone else find the Truth in a world of deceits, delusions and false gods.

MAN'S TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Have you heard the term, “Day by day, in every way, we are getting better and better?” There are those who teach that if we will just keep on educating ourselves, if we will just sit down and talk with others, listen to others, or minister to the needs of others, then day by day we and the world around us will become better and better. That sounds very nice doesn’t it? It sounds like the Christian thing to do. Unfortunately, it is the Bible in reverse, because the Bible teaches that man was given a perfect start and a perfect world but he fell from that plateau. These people teach that man had a terrible start but he is now somehow falling upwards, back toward that original lost plateau, by his own efforts. This not only sounds impossible but the Bible declares that it IS impossible. *“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him”* (Prov.26:12).

But surely, deep down in the heart of every man there is the Spirit of God who, like a smoldering ember, only needs to be blown on to be kindled into a flame. There must be some good in every man, something that makes him of infinite worth, something of himself on which to place his hope for a better future. The Bible says that perhaps there once was but now there is nothing. That is so hard for us to swallow that most of us refuse to accept it; we feel compelled by our own pride and our lofty self-appraisals to reject such a notion without further thought.

We declare blindly that there is something inside each one of us that is patterned after the image of God that just needs to be nourished or encouraged a little by other people. The Bible says that is absolutely false. What about a brand new baby? Isn’t there something good inside that tiny child? These are questions that have hard answers to them. And they are not just rhetorical questions. In our criminal justice system, foul criminals plead their cause to the jury by telling the jurors that they cannot compare themselves with or hold accountable such a poor, unfortunate individual who has not had a chance in life, who came from a bad environment. Is it really the environment that makes a man evil? Can we really change man by changing his environment? Is there just the smallest bit of hope from which a man can begin to build himself anew expecting to change himself from bad to good? The Bible says no; that would be a blatant lie and an outright rejection of God.

A guest lecturer at our seminary tried to teach us that you must look at a criminal like a frog that is only waiting for the right kiss to turn him into a prince among men. As Christians, we must show them our outward Christian love and this then will be the needed ‘kiss’ that will turn them into productive and caring individuals. Now that’s a real fairy tale. I don’t believe that lecturer has ever been invited to return because Scripture has something different to say on the subject. They don’t need our outward displays of affection. They need the inward love of Christ and renewal by the Holy Spirit which come only by the grace of God! Not by seeing our love in action, nor by any desire of their own to change, but only by the infinite grace of God Himself which changes men by the power of God’s Spirit working from within.

In Romans 3, we find that Paul is dragging the Old Testament into the New Testament to assess man’s fallen nature. This is a description of an individual without the purifying, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is how God sees mankind. We are not concerned with how men look at themselves or assess themselves because we know that it won’t be long before other men come along and contradict the previously held theories. If you listen to men, you will never get anywhere. You will never know anything. What is truth today will not be truth tomorrow. What

we are interested in is how God sees unregenerate men, unconverted people, people who are not born again. Paul writes,

As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Rom.3:10-20)

There is no exaggeration here. This is how God sees unregenerate man. As He looks down from heaven, He gazes on those who have not called on Christ, who have not been washed with his precious blood. He says, “There is not one who is righteous, not even one.” ‘Not even one’ leaves no room for negotiation or interpretation. There is not one who understands. When God looks down from heaven at unregenerate, unconverted, hopelessly lost, dying people, God says, “There isn’t one of them who seeks after Me. They have all turned away. They have all become worthless. There is not one who does good. There is not one who will do anything of value in my eyes. Their throats are open graves that reek with the stench of death. There is no fear of God in them!” Is that really true about everyone in the world? Are there no exceptions? Now, because of Jesus, we can thankfully say there are exceptions in the eyes of God: those who wear the cloak of Christ’s Atoning Sacrifice. That’s how Paul can draw such a great contrast in the eighth chapter of Romans between those who are materially minded or fleshly-minded (i.e. carnal, controlled by the sinful nature) and those who are spiritually minded (guided by the Spirit of Christ).

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Rom.8:5-9)

Paul continues this contrast in the book of Galatians:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension’s, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things, there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Gal.5:19-25)

The man who still has his sinful nature and has not been renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit lives according to that nature. He has his mind set on gratifying his flesh. This is his practice. This is his way of life. This is how he speaks, and thinks and acts. Ask your children who are going to junior high and high school what the kids are doing and you will find that they are mimicking exactly what Paul condemned in Galatians. We have a junior high school right next to our church in a very nice upper middle class neighborhood. We try to minister to the children on their breaks as they walk past the church to the 7-11 store across the way. We have the doors open in the middle of the week and a couple from the congregation spends time teaching the bible to those who are interested and serving them refreshments and so on. Many of them, of course are not interested and they sit on our lawn and smoke, and leave their trash and broken bottles in our parking lot.

One day I found one of them with a glass pipe that they use for smoking marijuana; he was just thirteen years old! Another day I found some of the girls and boys fooling around together, and one of them again was hiding something. The children were on church property so I asked to see what was being hidden; suddenly I was assaulted with a barrage of foul language and cold defiance. I found a cheap bottle of whiskey, and as I took it from the boy, one of the others had nerve enough to try to grab it from me! They have no respect for authority , no fear of God, no regard for others; they are living to satisfy their own sensuality, ruining their bodies and their minds at the ages of twelve and thirteen.

The reason they are like that is given in Scripture. It's wonderful how you can go to Scripture, even if you are a non-believer, and see the warnings written there fulfilled before your own eyes. Why is it that these children behave like this? Why is it that grown men and women behave the way they do? We find the answer again in Romans 8:5. The reason is their minds are "set" on what their sinful nature desires. They cannot help themselves. In fact, they are just being themselves. The Bible speaks of them as totally depraved and without any ability to reach out from their sinful state to God. They not only lack the *ability* to reach out, but they lack the *desire* to reach out. The unregenerate man *is* himself. In Jer.17:10 we read, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*"

Think of the drunkard who promises over and over again to his faithful and loving wife that he will never touch another drop, that he will never steal the house-keeping money again , that he won't sell the next car just to pay for his drinks, never, never, never! But a week later he is at it again. The immoral individual, the adulterer, is no different, promising never to look at another woman or never to look at another man, never to do it again. They never do it until the next time.

This is the nature of the unregenerate man. His mind is set. Why does he continue to be in this state? Because his mind is set. His mind has been programmed by his totally depraved nature, and his body will continue to do what his depraved mind tells it to do. Are these extreme cases? Is it any more satisfying to think about a Christian mother who opposes her son's desire to become a preacher of the Gospel rather than the lawyer she wants him to be? This woman has her mind set on earthly things. She should have rejoiced; she should have thanked God; she should have put her arms around her son. The son's greatest enemy, the one who is seeking to stop him from answering his call to serve God, is a member of his own household! His mother's mind is set and fixed on her own desires, not the desires of God.

Scripture diagnoses the fatal disease that afflicts sinful man. Paul says, in contrasting the sinful man with the spiritual man, that the mind of sinful man is death itself (Rom.8:6). He is void of

Spiritual life. God said to Adam, “*You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die*” (Gen.2:17). Right in the Garden of Eden, the seed of death was planted. Sinful Man is incapable of spiritual impulses or responses that are pleasing to God because he is dead. He cannot make God happy. The Bible doesn’t say that the mind of sinful man “is like death” or “is on the way to death” or “is threatened by death.” But it says that it is death itself. Sinful man is cut off from God. He is a stranger to God. Paul says that he is *dead* in trespasses and sin (Eph.2:1).

Scripture describes the attitude of sinful man. He is hostile to God. In other words, he has his fist raised to God. He is in a continuous state of hostility towards God. He is hostile to Christ and says, as Christ described, “*I will not have this man to reign over me*” (Lk.19:14). I believe every Jewish synagogue around the world represents this refusal to accept Christ as the reigning Lord. It is an affront to the grace of God. They say, “No. We will keep the old ways. We will not have your Messiah.” This attitude is hostile toward God. It is falsifying the life of Christ. They hate him without cause. If only sinful man were just an enemy of God who makes war today and peace tomorrow; then he could make peace with God. But he is not just an enemy. Instead, he is in a continual and unalterable state of hostility toward God.

Scripture finally discloses the terrible plight of Sinful Man. The carnal mind “does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” Sinful man “cannot please God.” That means that he does not have the ability to please God; he does not have the ability to reach out to God. A young child might ask his mother, “Mommy, can I go to the moon?” And his mother might answer, “No you cannot, even though you may.” She means that she would permit it, but her child is incapable of getting there. Sinful man is incapable of pleasing God. He is dead! That is the plight of sinful man in a nutshell. In Ephesians we read,

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph.2:1-5)

- Some say that man is merely “ill” and what he needs is some medicine.
The Bible says, “No. He is dead in trespasses and sins.”
- Some say that man just needs some help.
The Bible says, “No. He is dead in trespasses and sins.”
- Some say that man just needs educating.
The Bible says, “No. He is dead in trespasses and sins.”
- Some say man just needs a different environment.
The Bible says, “No. He is dead in trespasses and sins.”

When we really understand what Scripture says about man’s fallen nature, we will truly appreciate the work of God’s grace revealed to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. When a man finally realizes that he is without any value in the eyes of God, without any spiritual ability to bring himself to God, and without one good thing inside him of any worth to God, then he also realizes the full extent of God’s grace in taking him out of his sinful state. God’s Spirit comes to him

even while he is dead in sin and without any desire or ability of his own to seek God. And afterward, that same person who was dead takes on the new life which comes from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit living in him. This person becomes alive. He is transformed into someone infinitely valuable in God's sight because he is being conformed to the image of God's only son, Jesus Christ. That's why Peter could say not to have a low opinion of yourself. You were not bought with silver and gold, but you were bought with the precious blood of Christ (1Pet.1:18).

That's the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that we have explored what Total Depravity is, we will go on to Unconditional Election. What does it mean? What is involved in becoming alive? How does a person receive the Spirit of God and come to know the peace and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Next.

DOES GOD HAVE ANY FAVORITES?

Does God have any favorites? The theological term covering this question is actually Unconditional Election. This means that before the foundation of the world, God had the right, according to the will of His own heart, to choose from lost mankind a certain number of people to receive salvation. The question to be resolved is not whether God has this right. Rather, it is whether His word reveals that this is the method by which we are chosen to receive salvation. When we examine Scripture, we discover that He not only declares this right, but He also exercises this right on behalf of His Church. He has given His favor to those He has chosen beforehand. "*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy...*" (Ex.33:19).

This Doctrine of Election is repugnant to many, many people, certainly to the unconverted, but curiously, it is also repugnant to many Christians. They think that the concept of Election is terrible, something that Calvin thought up on his own, something that goes against the grain of man's own nature. They may be perfectly correct about it going against his grain, because this doctrine attacks the very basis by which man tries to stand unashamed before God without the need of Christ. This doctrine attacks the very roots of Humanism and the very core of man's autonomy which both begin in the assumption that man is the maker of his own destiny, the creator of his own salvation.

As we found out in the last chapter, we are nothing; we are hopelessly lost; we are dead in our trespasses and sin. There is nothing from within the individual that enables him to come to God or even to reach out to God. Now we return to the question, "Does God have favorites?" And the answer is, "Yes. Of course!" The Bible teaches that indeed He does. We read in the bible that God says, "*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*" (Rom.9:13). Jacob was clearly God's favorite. Now God didn't make this statement after He saw how Jacob lived, nor after He saw how Esau lived. Because if He had waited until after he saw how Jacob lived, He would have had to say the same thing about Jacob that He said about Esau. Somebody once came to Spurgeon, that great and marvelous Baptist preacher (and thoroughly reformed Calvinist by the way), who also taught this doctrine of Election. The person complained to him that he could not understand why God hated Esau." And Spurgeon answered, "What I have difficulty with is why God ever loved Jacob." Yet the Bible says that God had already separated these two before they were born, before either had an opportunity to do anything either good or bad. God said to their mother while they were still in her womb, that the older, Esau, would serve the younger, Jacob, thus showing quite plainly that Jacob would be favored over Esau (Gen.25:23).

There are many people that God favors in the Bible, and He deliberately states either that He loves them or that He doesn't love them. For example, God favored Abel but not Cain (Gen.4:4,5), He favored Noah (Gen.6:8), Abraham was called the friend of God (James 2:23), Joseph was favored (Gen.39:4), and Moses was favored (Ex.32:11). Don't think that these men were any super-heroes or pillars of perfection. Noah wasn't blameless before God. He wasn't entitled to salvation. He only seemed more upright in the eyes of his fellow men who were so corrupt themselves that anything would seem more righteous by comparison. Simply put, Noah found favor in the eyes of God. Abraham was a liar; Joseph was disrespectful; Moses was a murderer. Yet, God favored each. Others drew down the wrath of God on themselves like Ahab and Jezebel (2Kg.9:8-19). Why the difference? That's the real question we want to explore in this chapter. Perhaps we can get a glimmer of the answer by looking at some people that God doesn't even want to know. In Matthew 7:21 we read,

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

What an appalling passage of Scripture! It seems that even wonderful and beneficial deeds done in the name of Christ himself will fail to save these pitiful people.

Some people say that we are elected because God foreknew who would be obedient and elected them to salvation. But in this passage we see that Jesus *never* knew these people who did evil. How can that be true? He doesn’t say that he knew them once but then they fell away from grace and were lost. He says that he never knew them at all. What is the relationship between Christ and this Doctrine of Election? Perhaps what these people should have said was, “Lord, Lord, we’re so glad we came into the hearing of the Gospel and we repented of our sins and we accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.” Then the Lord would have had to say with his arms wide open, “Enter.”

But they relied on what they did in Jesus’ name for their salvation rather than relying on Jesus himself. They substituted their own works, even though done in Jesus’ name, for the work of atonement that Jesus did for them on the cross. They rejected him and his Lordship and tried to buy their way into heaven by what they did on occasion in his name. So Jesus said that he never knew them. Never once did he really know them in a saving way, because they did not rely on him to save them. They didn’t rely on Christ because they were never called by God to rely on him. If they had been called, they would have come, and understood, and relied, and Jesus would have known who they were. We read in John 10:3-4,14 *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. [The shepherd] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”* In Greek the name for church is ‘ecclesia’ which means the assembly of those who have been called out. And Jesus tells us who he calls: his own and no others. I will return to the relationship between Christ and Election a little later. First, I would like to examine how God calls us out. To paraphrase the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter X, we find that Effectual Calling is,

...that call of God which actually becomes effective, to which people respond. All those whom God predestined to life, and only those, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time to effectually call [How?] by His Word [that is, the preaching of the Gospel] and by the Holy Spirit, to come out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature to be found, and to come in stead into God’s grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. God enlightens their minds spiritually and savingly so that they will understand the things of God. God takes away their heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh, renewing their wills and, by His almighty power, predisposing them to that which is good and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ. Yet God does all this in such a way that they come most freely, being made willing by His grace and not by coercion.

There are those who have some objections to this and I would like to deal with those objections before moving on. Some say that they believe in Election and in Predestination but this is how it works: God knew beforehand how an individual would respond to the Gospel, and knowing this God chose those who would make a positive response according to that foreknowledge.

Unfortunately, that is not what the Bible teaches. If it were so, then man makes the first choice. And if man makes the first choice, then there must be something within that dead and degenerate man that is still alive and can respond to the Gospel without the help of God. If that is so, then the Bible should use different words than those we have seen so far which describe man as absolutely dead to God spiritually. Man, in the circumstances described by these detractors, would choose God instead of God choosing man. Predestination would lose its common meaning. There would be no Election but only Selection. God would select only those who would choose of their own volition to make a good response to His offer. They choose. God separates them from the others.

If this were so, man would become the originator of his own religion. When he got to heaven, he would say, "Boy, I'm glad I was smart enough to make my decision. So many other people were dumb." He sounds pretty proud of himself doesn't he? Well let's see what Paul says about whose choice it is:

...Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph.2:4-5,8-9).

This is how God acts. You see, if the choice is our own then salvation is not by grace but by works. We have done the required act and earned our reward. Neither can it be by our own choice because Paul says that we were dead in our transgressions and dead people cannot choose anything.

Another major objection is that it is not "fair" for God to choose some and not others. You no doubt have heard this or even thought it yourself. The Gospel doesn't teach about fairness. The Gospel teaches about forgiveness. We would be in deep trouble if God were ever to be "fair" to us. The only fair thing we deserve is death. But thankfully, God doesn't deal that way. He deals instead in grace and in forgiveness. What is the alternative if God is not to be the one to choose who will and will not be saved? The alternative is for man to choose. And that would have much wider biblical and theological ramifications than the doctrine of Election. You can be pretty sure that with man involved in the choosing something would go wrong with it, something would have to be twisted and abused. But in the last chapter we concluded that man is incapable of choosing God, so this alternative is not a valid biblical possibility.

So then, how else could we make a fair system for choosing who will fall into God's favor? Well, let's try an equal opportunity approach: First, everybody will need to hear the Gospel. Second, everybody will need to hear the same amount of the Gospel. Third, to be absolutely fair, everyone will need to hear the Gospel from the same preacher, because some preachers are good and some are not so good, some are clear and some are vague, some preach with authority and some have no authority at all. Next, everyone should attend the same church. There are churches that are really good and alive, where you come into the fellowship of the church and really feel the presence of God and then there are some churches that are dead, and not only dead but deadly. We saw that with Jim Jones and how vile his "church" became. I know of people who have attended a church for years and years and yet acknowledge that they have never truly and clearly heard the Gospel before.

Everyone should have an equal opportunity by being born into a Christian home, because that's where God's influence first comes into play, where mothers begin teaching their little ones to

say, “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so.” Let me go further and suggest that we must all be women. Does that surprise you? Well, the best time to preach the Gospel is to approach a woman the moment after she gives birth, when she has her tiny new baby handed to her for the first time. Even though screaming and wrinkled and coated with mucous, when that little child is placed in the mother’s arms and is drawn to her bosom, the first thing that mother says is that it is a miracle, and she feels closer to God than probably at any other time in her life.

Do you see how silly all this would be? We would all have to have the same understanding, and intelligence, and whatever other advantages come to mind. That’s not what the Bible teaches. One marvelous aspect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that a totally uncivilized man in the middle of some jungle can be as easily saved by hearing just one verse of Scripture as some college professor who has struggled with the whole body of Scripture for 25 years. God saves them both through the work of His Spirit no matter how different their backgrounds and advantages may be.

The third common objection is that Election does not give anybody a chance. If you were not elected, if you were not chosen before the creation of the world, then it doesn’t matter how much you pray. It doesn’t matter how often you read the Bible, or how strongly you repent of your sins, or how often you go to church. Nothing will gain favor for you in God’s eyes. Well, that’s exactly right. The only point I would like to make is that in reality a person who is not elected will not pray, will not repent, will not hunger and thirst after the things of God, he will not burn with a desire to know the Truth of God. Oh, there are those who will pray mechanically, who will come to church now and then, who will read an occasional verse of Scripture and even relish the opportunity to argue about it. But these are not the kind of people who will turn from their evil. They will not abhor their sin or see Jesus Christ lifted high and exalted above all. The carnal mind is at enmity with God and the man with a carnal mind will not and cannot desire the things of God.

The fourth common objection is that if Election is true then why bother to preach the Gospel? If God has already determined who will be saved then why spend all these millions of dollars to send missionaries throughout the world? Why let medical men spend money to build hospitals so that they can share the Gospel with some Arabs or Indians or with some other nationality? First, because Jesus himself told us to go and preach and that alone is a good enough reason (Mat.28:19). Second, we know that people are won by the Word and the Spirit, and not by some internal, independent source of knowledge that, like an instinct, will drive them to a full and effective apprehension of the Gospel of Christ. People are called to Christ by hearing his Word from others, by the teaching, guidance, and encouragement of other people who were called in the same way.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 we read, “...God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through OUR gospel, that you might *share* in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Why did these people who were ordained to be saved turn from their lives of sin and actually become saved? Because Paul and Silas and Timothy and Peter and all the others went out and preached the Gospel to them; because the true Church of Christ was obedient in the proclamation of the Word of God. We are saved through hearing the word and then by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. That’s why we preach; that’s why we are messengers of the Gospel.

The second reason we preach the Gospel is that there are apparent Scriptural objections to the Doctrine of Election that need to be properly taught and properly understood. It is one thing to have people objecting to the doctrine, but there are passages of Scripture itself which tend to indicate that Jesus died not just for some but for all, and that God wants all men to be saved. But these are only apparent. For example in 1 Timothy 2:1-6 Paul says,

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants ALL men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for *all* men..."

How can this be true if Election means that only *some* will be saved? Well it's that tricky little word "*all*." You need a proper understanding of biblical interpretation like reading passages in context. "All" very rarely means every single person. For example we read that "All" Jerusalem came out to hear Jesus speak (Mark 1:5). I guarantee that every single individual in Jerusalem was not there to hear Jesus preach (e.g. the crippled, dying, and newborn undoubtedly stayed behind), but a large number did come out. How else could we read that God sends a powerful delusion so that many will be unable to believe the truth (2Thess.2:11) if He really intends every single person in the world to be saved? That's contradictory. It doesn't make sense if we interpret all to mean every single one. And if it does mean every single one, then every single one will be saved, because God's will cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything. If He indeed means everyone to be saved then they will be saved, and hell will be empty. If hell will be empty, then God must have been joking every time He mentioned it in His Word.

There are people who do think that we have a choice about our salvation. I have heard preachers say that the devil is on one side of you and God is on the other side of you and you are caught in the middle. Each tries to woo you and you must choose between them. But praise God that is not what the Bible teaches. Do you know how the Bible describes the process by which we make a choice? When I am dead in trespasses and sin, then somehow by the grace of God I come into the hearing of the Gospel. My heart begins to pound louder and louder. I begin to recognize that I am a sinner and I become frightened by what the preacher is saying about *me*. I become aware of God's existence, and when I start to engage in something that is wrong my heart begins to beat louder and faster and for the first time I sincerely question whether I should be doing this. This is the process of awakening that is going on within the sinner as he is being made alive by the Holy Spirit as he is being enabled to accept Christ and the Gospel. Then after a while the sinner realizes that he is indeed a sinner and only then can he make his commitment to Jesus Christ. We'll deal more with this in the next chapter.

In John 3:16 we have another example of God apparently loving the whole world enough to send His only son to die for it. But looking closer, we see that it does not say that He sent His son to redeem the whole world, but only to redeem those who believe in him so that *they* will not perish. This isn't so hard to accept and it certainly does no injustice to the text of the Scriptural passage. I can say that I love America, but there are many people in America that I do not love, who scare me to death. When you understand what is involved in the process by which a person becomes a believer, you will realize that this verse merely teaches what I have been saying: that only believers will have eternal life, and that only those who are favored by God are capable of hearing and believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In John 5:25 Jesus says,

"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and **those who hear** will live." Then Jesus says to the Jews who persecute him, "You have never heard [the Father's] voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent" (Jn.5:37,38).

Jesus tells them that if they could hear the message of the Gospel then they would have believed it, but Jesus tells them they *never* heard the voice of God speaking through him. Why never? In John 8:42-44,47 we find the answer:

If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here... Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are *unable* to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil... He who belongs to God *hears* what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

If you still have any doubts, Jesus says point blank in John 15:16, "*You did not choose me but I chose you...*"

Election is not to make us despair but to help us understand the blessing that has come to us through Jesus Christ. Paul says, "*Praise be to God who has blessed us...for he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight*" (Eph.1:3,4). Isn't it wonderful to know that if you believe in Jesus, then since the foundation of the world God has had his eye on you? And this isn't some rhetorical or obscure point. What we believe affects us in our daily lives. There was a minister who did not accept the doctrine of Election. He ran to a hospital waiting room to comfort the parents of a little girl who had just been run down by a car. He told them that God had nothing to do with that accident.

What a horrible thing to say! I want to know, God, that every second of my existence your eye is on me and your eye is on my children, and that nothing in this world will ever surprise you or happen without your knowledge or permission. In our own church, we have had the inspiring testimony of two parents who lost their own child in the same way as those two in the hospital waiting room. But instead, they willingly acknowledged that God was in charge even of that. They draw great comfort and solace in that knowledge. "*I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things*" (Isa.45:7). What possible comfort can there be in the idea that Satan can snatch us, or snatch our loved ones from God's grasp while God stands helplessly or ignorantly to one side? Satan is not equal and opposite to God Almighty. Only Satan himself would try to perpetrate such an atrocious lie.

Now to return to the relationship between Christ and Election that was begun earlier. Can we be elected apart from Jesus Christ? Absolutely not! Election is only in Christ Jesus. Jesus said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (Jn.14:6). Never once did we exist in the mind of God apart from our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus also said, "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me*" (John 6:44,45). Who can listen except those who can hear, and who can hear except those who belong to God? No one. The Bible says, "*If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!*" (2Cor.5:17). Do you know what it means to be in Christ? That means that the seed of salvation was in Christ with your name on it, your social security number, your color eyes and hair, everything about you was in Christ before the foundation of the world. To be in Christ means to be kept secure within the almighty Son of God who will never be surprised by anything.

Election has holiness as its purpose, as we read in Ephesians 1:4, “He chose us...to be holy and blameless in His sight.” Paul is talking about adoption in this section. Imagine adopting a little fellow I knew in the jungles of New Guinea. This boy was named ‘vomit’. There’s a choice name for you, but we can hope he did not live up to it very often. He was named vomit because of an unusual belief that the natives have in New Guinea. They are completely terrified by what they believe are evil spirits. As darkness comes, the sound of the evening breezes begin to rustle through the leaves of the jungle trees, something we might consider beautiful and enchanting. But the natives are convinced that this rustling is really the sound of evil spirits flying past to torment them or steal them away into the hidden recesses of the jungle. They cannot shut their eyes because of their unreasoning fear and they tremble uncontrollably as they huddle together in the dark. These people name their children the most ugly and disgusting things they can think of so that the evil spirits will have nothing to do with them and they will be left in peace.

Imagine this little boy living up in the highlands about 7000 feet above sea level, having only one article of clothing (and it’s cold in those mountains). He is probably suffering from some lung disorder like most of his neighbors. He has never seen soap in his life and he never washes because the water is too cold. Now just imagine that you put this little boy on a plane just as he is and fly him to America to live in your own home as your adopted son. The first thing that will probably happen is that he will be so nervous that he will use the corner of your living room for a toilet, because he’s never known any other way. His manners would be filthy, one horrifying incident would follow another and it would simply be repulsive and embarrassing to have him around. What would have to be done beforehand? Obviously, he would need training, teaching, washing, and preparing before coming to live in your home.

This is what holiness is all about. This is what God does to us to prepare us to live in His Holy Temple, His Palace, as His adopted children. To go from a carnal mind to a holy mind, we must be cleansed, set aside, and changed. This is what was missing in those people in Matthew 7:21 who claimed to have performed deeds in Christ’s name and yet who Christ declared He never knew. They never submitted themselves to the cleansing of their souls through the work of the Holy Spirit because they never submitted to Christ. They relied instead on their own corrupt and degenerate nature that is a stench in the nostrils of God. What a distinction Paul makes for using 2 Corinthians 2:14-15,

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

To sum up, Election is a preliminary to adoption. It is the means by which God begins His process of cleansing and sanctifying us by the work of His indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the way He prepares us to take our places as His adopted children. We have been appointed from the dawn of time to become members of the household of God. We were predestined by Him to become His children through Jesus Christ alone, and this is all to His Praise and His Glory. There is no reason for us to have been chosen out of the world rather than someone else, so this is no cause for pride in ourselves. Rather, Election should lead to an overwhelming sense of humility. It is a cause for diligence, and for a greater love for God because we are favored in His eyes. We have fallen into His Grace through no effort of our own. It causes us to delight and to rejoice because we know that all things in heaven and on earth are in the hands of God Almighty, and no one can ever thwart His will or take us from Him.

FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

For decades now, we have been fed the mere opinions of men about the message of God's Word, so-called biblical truths. I believe we have not been given a true picture of Scripture. We have learned to live with this distortion, to make it part of what we believe is our "Christian experience." Our denomination has taken a stand against this revision of the Bible along with many other conservative bible-believing denominations in this nation and around the world. Together we have declared that we cannot and we will not accept this watering down of God's Word to accommodate the bland palate of the world. We need to go back to when the Bible was first interfered with and the Truth of God was first reinterpreted. We ought to take a step back before we come to accept and embrace Humanism and Man's Autonomy as our own theology, indistinguishable from the philosophies of the world. We need to go back and see what the church taught 100 years ago, 200 years ago, and 2000 years ago. And the only way to do that is by going back to what the Bible itself says without any distortions of meaning or rearranging of facts to suit a preconceived notion of its message.

The Bible in the King James Version says that you must "*study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2Tim.2:15). That means that you cannot obtain solid biblical knowledge just by reading a little bit. It doesn't say "read" the Bible to show yourself approved; it says *study*. Search it, re-search it, and then re-search it again. We need to analyze the Scripture and then to take notice of such things as literary styles and forms, figures of speech, and the use of words in context. There are phrases that are not meant to be taken at face value. For example, the Bible says that, "*the trees will clap their hands*" (Isa.55:12). Trees do not have hands, so we must interpret this phrase to derive its true meaning. The Bible says that the little hills rejoice (Ps.65:12). How do little hills rejoice? You must ask yourself what the writer is trying to say. You have to determine who is speaking and who is listening. You must distinguish the things that apply to the people of God from the things that do not.

Now we come to the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John. This is the true Lord's Prayer. The other one, found in Matthew 6:9 ("Our Father which art in heaven..."), is not the Lord's Prayer. That's the disciple's prayer, our prayer. However, in his own prayer to God, Jesus said,

I have revealed you to *those whom you gave me* out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word...I pray for *them*. I am *not* praying for the *world*, but for *those you have given me*, for they are yours...While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled...I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are *not of the world* any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one...For *them* I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for *those who will believe in me* through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them. (Jn.17:6,9,12,14,15,19,20,26)

I hope you will excuse all the supplied emphases. It is important to note the use of two broad categories of people in Jesus' prayer: those who have been given to Christ and are *not* of the

world, and those who have not been given to Christ and *are* of the world. This distinction forms the core for our discussion in this chapter.

The question that I am dealing with here is, “For whom did Christ die?” In the last chapter, we saw how the word “all” can be misunderstood and how such a misunderstanding can lead to a contradiction of God’s real message. In this chapter, we will look at several other examples to determine whom this “all” refers to when we speak of those for whom Christ died for. First let’s examine who is in control of God’s children while they remain in the world. The Bible says that the world lies in the lap of the evil one, because he is called the “Prince of this world” (John 12:31) or the “god of this world” (2Cor.4:4, KJV). Wait a minute.

He may have dominion over this world but I do not sit in his lap. Why not? Because when God wrote my name in the Lamb’s Book of Life before the foundation of the world, He planned right from the start that one day I would come into the hearing of the word of God, He planned that the life-giving, resurrecting Spirit of God would bring life to a soul that was dead in trespasses and sin. He knew that by His Spirit I would realize my sin, realize my need for Jesus Christ and cry out, “Lord, what must I do to be saved?” He knew that with penitent heart I would accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and Jesus would open his arms and take me in saying, “Welcome, enter in. For I have freed the prisoners, and defeated the Lord of this world. Come to me.” (See Jn.16:33; Lk.4:18; Gal.1:4; and Jn.8:36). That is why I do not sit in the lap of Satan. Because I do not belong to Satan but to Christ who destroyed Satan’s grip on the flock of Christ.

Is it possible to move back and forth between Satan’s dominion and Christ’s flock? Can Satan steal me from Christ and draw me back into his lap? Paul writes,

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38, 39).

So, the two categories are fixed and mutually exclusive. How can Paul be so convinced? Because he has already declared that, *“those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified”* (Rom.8:30). That being true, anyone who knows the Lord Jesus Christ cannot sit in the lap of Satan. Although we know that Satan is lord of this world, we also know that Jesus said we do not belong to this world (Jn.15:19). The “world,” as used to describe the domain of Satan, cannot mean every individual person in the world. It refers to this cosmos, this body, this planet on which people live. Satan is in charge of this world but he is not in charge of Christians. Be careful not to read phrases out of the context of a clear teaching of Scripture.

Just as the Holy Spirit illumined those who wrote our Westminster Confession, I believe He illumined those who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism, and those who laid the foundations for the Lutherans, the Episcopalians, the Anglicans, and the original Baptists. I believe Scripture teaches us also that before the foundation of the world, God in His grace chose for Himself, according to the pleasure of His good will, the number that should be saved out of all those who will go to hell. To rescue them He made a plan of salvation by which His son Jesus Christ would spill his blood on the cross for the elect only. I believe that the Bible does not teach that Christ died on the cross for every single human being who ever lived or will ever live.

There are some scriptures which appear to support the concept of what is termed “Universal Atonement,” and we will examine some of them. But I believe a full and close examination will

show that the Bible teaches there was only a “Limited Atonement” made on the cross at Calvary, a ransom paid only for those who were given to Christ before the world began, and no others. If the Bible teaches differently, then the Confessions and Articles of Faith should be changed to bring them into line with the Truth of God. Let us remember that we do not place our faith in the writings of men, but only in the Word of God Almighty.

Many people believe that Jesus Christ died for everyone in the world. They believe that salvation only becomes effective when people accept him as their personal Lord and Savior. Sometimes, when we speak of this concept, we say that sinners are not *saved* by Christ’s Atonement, but merely made *salvable*. That is, some further condition must still be met, e.g. choosing Christ or obeying the law. If sinners are merely made salvable through Christ, then that means hell will contain billions of people for whom Christ died, and for whom Christ was already punished. This cannot be. If the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is what the Bible teaches it is, then not only does the Lord Jesus take away our sins, but he also takes away the wrath of God. We call this act “propitiation.”

If God’s wrath is pacified, propitiated, and the punishment meted out, then under universal atonement no one can go to hell. This is because God would be unjust to send people to hell if the reason for sending them is gone. If we accept this idea that Jesus died for everyone in the world merely to make them salvable, then either hell is empty or Jesus was a failure. This would have to be true, because if he was successful in saving everyone he died for, then no one is left to condemn. Otherwise, hell is unjustly filled because God the Father refuses to acknowledge that his son paid the penalty for everyone’s sins. I don’t believe the Bible teaches any of that. However, let’s look at the Scripture some rely on to support this idea that we are merely made salvable by Christ’s sacrifice.

In John 1:29 we read John the Baptist’s comment about Jesus, ““Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the *world!*”” Please note the context: this is a Jewish prophet talking to Jews who have always believed that the only god is their god and if anyone is going to get to heaven then they had better become a Jew first. It was not until the Gospel was preached that they were told that the good news was for all people and not the Jews alone. It was to be proclaimed to all the world, to those in Philippi, and Galatia, even Rome, and eventually Europe, and from there to every corner of the earth. So, John the Baptist’s message of repentance, originally given to the Jews but now complete in Christ Jesus, will be given to the whole world. The sun will never go down on the preaching of the Gospel because all through the world there are those people who love Jesus and who will serve him and obey him and come to newness of life through him. Not everyone in the world will come to Jesus, but those who do come to Jesus will be drawn from every corner and every nation of the world. That is what John proclaimed to his listeners.

In 1 John 2:2 we find another verse that is subject to misinterpretation. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sins of the whole world.” This time it is John the Apostle speaking to Jews and telling them that salvation is not only for them but it is for the whole world. What is more interesting here is that we see the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice revealed. It was an atoning sacrifice. Christ did not just spill his blood. He spilled it to atone, to make amends, to satisfy all claims of wrong done, and thus to reconcile the wrongdoer to the One wronged. Christ accomplished what he had come for; he turned away the wrath of God.

This redemption was applied to God's elect so that there was no more sin for them, no more need for the wrath of God, because the injury done by sin was repaired, paid in full. If sin is removed, then there is nothing left to separate the sinner from God. I might suggest a rebuttal here that such a payment can only be made if it is received by God or appropriated by the sinner. If that is true then we have not been truly redeemed, but we have only been made redeemable (this is the necessary counterpart to being made merely salvable). The Bible rejects this interpretation of the Atonement. It says that we were in fact fully redeemed, and therefore we were fully saved.

In the Old Testament, there was a provision for removing sin and cleansing the people so that God could forgive them and draw them back into His favor. In this way, the people were "bought back" or "redeemed" by God. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the high priest would make a sacrifice of a goat as a sin offering to God. Then a scapegoat would be selected and all the sins of Israel as a nation were pronounced over the head of the goat and it was sent out of the city, taking away the sins of the nation (Lev.16). Notice the scapegoat is a type for Jesus. That is, it foreshadows what will be done for us by Jesus' sacrifice. Yet, Jesus is never spoken of in the New Testament as a goat, but only as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn.1:29).

The world that was atoned for cannot mean every single person in the world because the wrong sacrifice would have been offered. If Jesus was the Lamb of God, and not the sacrificial goat, then it can only mean that his sacrifice was individually made for each person who had been given to him by God. How can I say that? Because in the fourth and fifth chapters of Leviticus we find the sacrificial lamb used to atone for the sin and guilt of the individual as distinct from the nation. And what was the effect of this sacrifice? Did it merely make the individual potentially redeemable if he obeyed some further rule? No. It was effective in and of itself to restore him to God. Scripture says, "*In this way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be forgiven*" (Lev.4:26,31,35; Lev.5:16,18). Even if we consider his sacrifice to have been for the nation as a whole, that nation is only the spiritual nation of Israel, and not all nations on earth, though all nationalities are represented in spiritual Israel.

Other Scripture in the Old Testament refers to this sacrifice of atonement when it speaks of God as the Redeemer of Israel. It means it is a completed act of Redemption, a full and effective rescue, true salvation for the people of Israel. "*God will redeem my soul from the grave; He will surely take me to himself*" (Ps.49:15). "*O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins*" (Ps.130:7,8). In Isaiah 43:1 we read, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you,*" or in Isaiah 52:3, "*...without money you will be redeemed.*" Did Christ serve this identical function of a sacrificial offering in the New Testament? Yes. "*...he has come and has redeemed his people*" (Lk.1:68). "*It was not with ...silver or gold that you were redeemed, ...but with the precious blood of Christ*" (1Pet.1:18). Further clarification can be found in Hebrews 9. Now let's continue with who was redeemed by Christ.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*" On the surface, it would seem that everyone in the world will be made alive and hell will be empty. But we know from some of Paul's other letters that he does not mean that at all. Paul is simply saying that in the same way that the children of Adam died in their sin, so shall the children of Christ live through Christ's righteousness. In Gal.3:29 we find that "*if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*" that God made to him. "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to

seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ” (Gal.3:16).

Therefore without Christ you cannot inherit the promises made to Abraham and be drawn into a covenant relationship with God. It cannot be that everyone has been drawn into that relationship by Christ’s sacrifice because that would mean that everyone has been predestined to life, as we saw in the first chapter of Ephesians. Yet in the very same section in which we read that “ALL will be made alive” we go on to read, “*But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruit; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.*” If there are those who belong to him then there must surely be those who do not belong to him. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 shows very clearly that this is a correct assumption. Romans 5:17, also comparing Adam with Christ, says,

If by the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man, how much more will *those who receive* God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

If there is a designated group of those who receive the gift, then there must surely be another group of those who reject it. And those who reject it will do so because they *cannot* accept it.

We established in the second chapter that carnal man cannot reach out to God. Then how can he accept this gift of grace? We discover the means in Acts 16:14, where a lady named Lydia has been worshipping God all along, but now after hearing the Gospel, she is baptized and becomes a believer in the Lord. How? Has she consciously made the decision? Could she hear the message, accept it, and believe it of her own volition? Scripture declares that would be impossible. Indeed, we find that “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”

This confirms our previous conclusion. If that seems too obscure an example for you, then you should take the time to read Paul’s full explanation of election in Romans 9:10-33. How can we conclude that Christ died for everyone in the world if we know that not everyone in the world is capable of accepting him as Lord and Savior? How could God possibly hold them liable by failing to accept His own son’s payment in full for their sin? The answer is that He does not refuse the payment, because the payment was never made or offered for those who were not in Christ from the beginning. God does hold accountable those others who were not in Christ, not because they have failed to receive Christ, which they cannot do, but because they themselves have sinned and the penalty for their own sin is death (Jer.31:30; Rom.6:23). Why this should be so is given in the ninth chapter of Romans cited above. “...*He did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory...*” (Rom.9:22).

The famous verse in John 3:16 says, “*for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” That seems to favor universal rather than limited atonement, until we consider who is able to hear his words and by hearing believe in him. Is everyone able? No. Unfortunately not. There is a limitation in the verse that is fatal to everyone who will not and cannot believe. God looked down on this hell-bound world, teeming with billions, and He said “I love my creation, and I am going to show my love by pulling out of the world those whom I have chosen.”

The preparation that God has made for his elect is much like an expectant new mother who is very excited about her future baby. She may not even know if it will be a boy or a girl or whether to paint the nursery pink or blue. But she is sewing and knitting in two colors of thread and yarn, and two colors of paint, pink and blue, stand ready in the closet for dad to paint the nursery while

the new mother is in the hospital. The wallpaper and the curtains, the dolls and rattles, have all been laid out just so in a room specially prepared for the already loved newborn-to-be. The parents do all these things in preparation for the little baby, and then, quite passively, the little one finally comes into the world, into new life, to see all that has been done for him or her before birth even occurred. That's why Jesus used the term "born again" to refer to his siblings to be - they are expected and their rooms in the Father's mansion have been prepared and are waiting for them (John 14:2).

Now let's examine Ezekiel 18:30-32.

Therefore, O house of Israel, I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!

A person in the congregation called me one day after I had preached on this subject, and he said, "Here! This verse shows you that it is up to the individual to repent, to change his heart, to choose God, and to choose either life or death." Well, there is a story that seems appropriate here. It tells of a spinster named Rebecca who was walking along the road one gray autumn day. She was never particularly attractive in her life, never particularly charming or outgoing, and now she was getting along in years. The aching loneliness she felt inside draped over her withered form like a heavy shroud. She had always wanted to be a wife but no one had ever even bothered to ask her for a date. As she walked along the empty road, she spotted a note lying to one side. She picked it up and began to read, "My darling, I love you. I'll do anything for you. I'll give my life for you. I think of you every moment of the day. I don't want to be without you. I want to be by your side, to feel your touch, to smell your perfume. I need you. I want you. Please come back to me soon. Your ever-loving Bill." And as Rebecca finished reading the note, tears streaming from her eyes, she shouted excitedly, "All I need to do is find Bill! Nobody has ever talked to me like that before! He loves me!" Then, farther down the road she found the first page to this letter of love, the one preceding the page she just finished. It began, "Dear Suzie..." And then Rebecca came to her senses and realized that the letter was never really meant for her at all.

We need to determine to whom Ezekiel was addressing this verse. And it is clearly addressed to the house of Israel. It is a message of love sent from God to His people. It is as well a message to the church today, because we have become the Spiritual house of Israel. It is not addressed to the Assyrians or the Amalekites or the Egyptians. It is not addressed to those who are outside the elect of God. It is addressed to those who are within the grace of God. It was given so that, knowing the law and God's will, they might also know the full extent of their sinful nature and God's grace. It was given so they might better appreciate the fact they can only be saved by faith, through the grace of God, and not by their own works (Romans 3:19,20,23; Eph.2:8,9).

When they do come to that appreciation, then they will receive that new heart and new spirit not of their own making, but as a gift from God Himself and they will then be enabled to conform to His will through Christ Jesus (Ezekiel 36:26,27; Romans 8:1-4). God was not demanding that they repent so they could boast that they had saved themselves. God asked them to repent to demonstrate their love and devotion to their Savior who alone could keep them from damnation.

They would never be able to keep the whole law by themselves (Gal.2:16; Gal.3:10; Acts 15:10). God therefore offered them His grace freely, an offer He made to no other people.

To help resolve whether Christ died for the elect only or for the world as a whole, we might ask why Jesus died. When we know the purpose of his death, we will know for which group he died. We've touched on this in part already. In Isaiah 53:4-6 we read,

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us ALL.

Who is the “all” here? It is obviously all the sheep who have gone astray. All sheep everywhere in the world? No. Isaiah is talking to Israel. To confirm this interpretation, we can read Jesus’ analogy about the shepherd in the Book of John,

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (John 10:11,14,16)

Now, either this means the whole world with every single person in it is in his flock, or else he refers only to God’s elect. The controversy is settled in verses 24-26. “The Jews gathered around him, saying, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my father’s name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.’”

Now we can confidently assert that the 53rd chapter of Isaiah is written to the flock of Christ. It is written specifically to the church and not indiscriminately to everyone in the world. Why did Jesus die? He died to take up the infirmities, sorrows, transgressions, and iniquities, of all the sheep of *Israel* that have gone astray, and to bear *their* punishment. Therefore, for which of these sheep that have gone astray did Jesus die? He died only for those in His own flock, even though other flocks have also gone astray. If it were otherwise, then it would be difficult to determine what, if anything, Jesus had accomplished on the cross.

Is it possible that Jesus died for everyone in the world, but many have fallen away from that salvation which had been won for them by Christ? Jesus tells us,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. (John 6:37)

That may be His will, in the sense that it is what He would like, but will it be so? Jesus finalizes the promise in John 10:29: “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” So, what is it that Jesus finally accomplished? Returning to Isaiah 53:10 where the promise of the Messiah is most clearly stated, we discover exactly what God intended to accomplish for His son and faithful servant:

...though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied;”

If Christ died for all but saved only a few, where is his satisfaction? If the Father willed that all be saved but Christ succeeded in redeeming only a few, where has the Father's will prospered? If those for whom Christ died are his seed, his offspring, then how is he to be fulfilled and prolong his days when most of his offspring will be burning in hell because his sacrifice was insufficient in itself to save them? If his life was meant by God to be given as a guilt offering to atone for the sins of all men, then how could God ignore that offering and sentence someone to eternal torment anyway?

God intended to fulfill the purpose for which His son was sent, and fulfill it to the letter. The purpose for which he was sent was to redeem all those God predestined to salvation. "*Scripture cannot be broken*" (Jn.10:35). Christ did not waste one drop of his precious blood by dying for someone who could not or would not come to the Father through him. That is because every single person who comes to him is drawn by the Father; and all who come are kept safe in him. They have been given to him for the glory of the Father and they cannot be snatched from his hand; not by Satan, not by default, and certainly not by their own rejection of God's grace. Jesus' final statement on the cross is the sum of all that he accomplished by his sacrifice on our behalf. He declared: "It is finished." In Greek, the word for finished is "tetelestai" which is a commercial term. It was placed on a bill of lading to indicate that all goods and services had been 'paid in full.' Christ paid everything that was owed by us in full. Nothing remains to condemn those for whom he died; and those for whom he died are his own sheep who know his voice because God has enabled them to hear it. All others remain deaf. Deafness here is a spiritual condition. It is the unavoidable consequence of their sinful nature, a nature that is not imposed on them by God. God is not the author of their sin.

God laments through His prophet Jeremiah, "*To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are uncircumcised so they cannot hear*" (Jer.6:10). Circumcision is the sign of the covenant given to Abraham and his heirs only. The church today, as the seed of Abraham, has been spiritually circumcised to receive the Word of God and the Spirit of Christ. Those who cannot hear have not been consecrated by God. Their free will, their own choice, has nothing to do with their salvation. If it did, then we would be wasting our time praying for the salvation of anyone, because God would not interfere with their freedom to either choose Him or reject Him. Yet Paul tells us that he prayed for the Israelites that they might be saved (Rom.10:1). It certainly could not have been his understanding that God had nothing to do with the salvation of Israel's people, and that the matter depended entirely on their own choice. Limited Atonement for God's elect is what Scripture teaches. It is not the teaching of men, but the teaching of God Almighty. Christ died for his own flock of sheep, given to him by the Father and made separate from the rest of the world, so that the glorious riches of God's grace would be made evident to His entire creation, ...without *any* exceptions.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

In the preceding chapters, I have tried to explain the role of the Holy Spirit in the processes of conversion and sanctification. Now I would like to explore just how successful the Holy Spirit is in bringing us to God. All of this relates to the work of salvation accomplished for individual believers by God's Holy Spirit. And we should not be surprised by the ways in which God works His will, nor should it surprise us that He enables us to come to Him quite apart from our own efforts. God is not to be measured or judged according to man-made standards.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed. (Isa.55:8-13)

Theologians like to use the term "Irresistible Grace" to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the salvation of God's elect. "The Five Cardinal Points of Calvinism" by Thomas and Steele, has a little section that states very concisely the definition of irresistible grace:

Each member of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, participate in and contribute to the salvation of sinners. As was shown before, the Father, before the foundation of the world, marked out those who were to be saved and gave them to the son to be his people. At the appointed time, the son came into the world and secured their redemption. But these two great acts, Election and Redemption, do not complete the work of salvation. Because included in God's plan for recovering lost sinners is the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. He is the means by which the benefits of Christ's obedience and death are applied to his people. It is with this face of salvation that the Doctrine of Irresistible or Efficacious grace is concerned. Simply stated, these doctrines assert that the Holy Spirit never fails to bring salvation to those sinners whom He personally calls to Christ. He inevitably applies salvation to every sinner whom He intends to save, and it is His intention to save all God's elect. (Thomas and Steele, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, [Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., Phila., 1963] p.48)

Now all that remains to be done is to prove that Scripture supports and expresses such a statement of God's enabling grace. We will again begin by examining Scripture that seems to refute this effective grace. It seems to indicate that although God's Spirit is at work on earth, men are so rebellious and obstinate that the Spirit of God appears to be losing the battle. The first such section of Scripture is in Genesis 6:3, "*My Spirit will not contend with men forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.*" This is the part of Genesis where the Lord has decided to wipe out all mankind except for one elect family: Noah's family. But this verse is often quoted as an example that God's Spirit will at some point give up on us, that God's Spirit is losing battles, that God is not absolutely sovereign, and that the Holy Spirit must stand helplessly by when he sees men mired in sin. But this verse does not speak to the strength, ability, or irresistibility of God's Spirit at all. It speaks instead of the difference between God's Immortal

Spirit and the mortal bodies of men. It speaks of the fact that God's Spirit is opposed to or fights against the desires and behavior of man's sinful nature, his flesh. This is nothing new. Paul says as much in the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans that we reviewed in the second chapter. But the verse has nothing to do with the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Acts, we find a verse that implies that the Holy Spirit is not even involved in the process of conversion and regeneration. Rather, the persuasion of the evangelist is what brings others to Christ:

Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' Paul replied, 'Short time or long - I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains'" (Acts 26:28,29).

There are those who argue that this shows the grace of God and the working of His Holy Spirit are indeed resistible by the individual. In reply, there is no indication that the Holy Spirit was working in the life of Agrippa to begin with, so we cannot assert that the Holy Spirit was either impotent in his case or was resisted by him. The most we can say about this verse is that it shows that the Apostle Paul, though probably the greatest of all the Apostles, a man filled with the Spirit and with power, was unable by himself to persuade Agrippa to accept Christ. If anything, this buttresses our argument that apart from God's grace and the working of His Spirit, no one can be brought to Christ. It is not the clever man, or the mighty man, or even the man most able and persuasive in the Word of God who can turn others into Christians. Something else must happen first to enable them to receive the Word. As Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus, you must be "born from above" before you can enter the kingdom of God (Jn.3:3). So again, this verse has nothing to do with someone who has been touched by the Spirit of God and enabled to come to Him and to receive His Grace.

In Hebrews 6:4-6 we have a difficult problem to overcome as far as the doctrine of Irresistible Grace is concerned.

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Apparently, this verse asserts that it is possible to fall away from God's Grace and to return to our sinful ways, unable to again receive the forgiveness of sins. It seems that we can never rest secure in Christ or be finally saved, but we must fret and worry from one moment to the next whether our next sin will be our last sin to be forgiven. But is that really true? Who is the writer of Hebrews talking about here? He is talking about people who have received enlightenment about God's plan of salvation, but have rejected a lasting and complete commitment to Christ. These people perhaps received information about the nature of Christ. They may even have received the entire gospel. They have somehow "tasted" the heavenly gift without permanent effect. Let me illustrate what this tasting is like.

Imagine a policeman in his patrol car one night following a car that is swerving from left to right and back again. The policeman pulls the driver over and asks him to step out of the car. The man looks like he is drunk but he doesn't smell like it. Usually when someone is drunk, the aroma is unmistakable, like Lazarus after 4 days, but this man has no aroma of alcohol. The driver is

having trouble focusing however, and the policeman suspects that the man is on drugs. He asks the driver to open the trunk of his car. Inside he finds several little bags of white powder. To verify the contents, the officer breaks open a packet, wets his finger, touches his finger to the powder and then to his tongue, and spits it out again. The officer has had a little taste of it. The difference between the addict and the officer is that the one lives by it and the other has only had a taste of it. The true Christian is addicted to the Word of God; he is “hooked” on Christ. He doesn’t just take a little taste of the Gospel. He lives by it! Christ reigns through him and consumes him and drives him on. This is not true of the “taster” who goes on about his own business instead of being about the business of God.

The verse also says that the individual who falls away from God’s grace has first been able to share in the Holy Spirit. But sharing in the Holy Spirit and being a reservoir of the Holy Spirit are two different things. Those who know Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and who have been filled with the Spirit of God, will also have rivers of living water flowing from them (John 4:14). The Holy Spirit goes out from those who are temples of the Holy Spirit, so that in a church service it is possible for outsiders to come into the presence of the Holy Spirit because He emanates from the true believers who have gathered in the name of Christ. The person who comes into that service and senses the influence of the Holy Spirit, without anything more, has shared in the Spirit but he has not become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Although he may have witnessed wonderful miracles and seen the goodness which comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ, he doesn’t know Christ. He has not been a participant in the kingdom of God, but only an observer of the participants.

What the verse from Hebrews does not say is far more important than what it does say. It does not say that it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who have been “born again” to a new and living hope. It is not speaking about those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, those who have been adopted into the family of God, those who have experienced the mighty work of God in their own lives, those who have been feeding on the Word of Life, those who have been quickened by the Holy Spirit, or those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Instead, it is speaking about those who are at the fringes of the Christian community. They come now and then to church. They don’t want too much religion in their lives. They are samplers of the Christian life but not partakers of the life in Christ. It is no wonder they fall away, no wonder they drop out, no wonder they give up, and no wonder that it is easy for them to part with it. They are under the hearing of the Gospel but there is no personal involvement. They neither want much nor give much. While they remain in this condition, they will find no other access to God, no second alternative, and no other way to renew themselves to repentance. So you see, this verse, too, does not concern true believers or those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. It addresses those who have not really been called by God.

The Eight Cannot’s.

Now let’s look at some verses which do have something to say about the successful working of the Holy Spirit and about His effectiveness in making us acceptable to God. There are eight cannot’s in the Bible that describe the situation in which an unregenerate individual finds himself, a person who does not know the Lord Jesus, who has not been born again. These will help us to understand the necessity for irresistible grace. The first is where Nicodemus has come to learn from Jesus, thinking that Jesus was a teacher who had come from God; what he did not realize was that Jesus was God who had come to teach. Jesus said to him that he could not learn any of what Jesus had to say unless he was “born again” because “*Unless a man is born again*

[or born from above] *he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (Jn.3:3-5). When the word cannot is used in Greek, it means that an individual is without the necessary power or ability to do something. Nicodemus was incapable of seeing or understanding the kingdom of God unless God enabled him to see and understand from above.

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 we find that, "*The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.*" In Romans 8:8 and Hebrews 11:6 we discover that we "**cannot**" please God, in fact, it is "*impossible*" to please God, if we are "*controlled by the sinful nature ...and without faith.*" Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews in John 8:43, "*You are unable to hear what I say.*" Speaking of the Spirit of truth, Jesus said, "*The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him...*" (John 14:17). In John 6:44 we find another cannot: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...*" We can infer then that the rest of the world cannot come to him. "*No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit*" (1Cor.12:3). Because this is the phrase by which we accept Christ, we know that without God's Spirit helping us we cannot accept Christ. "*For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts...'*" (John 12:39,40).

So, a man who is without the help of God, who is dead in trespasses and sin, and who is not saved, **cannot** see the kingdom of God, **cannot** understand the things of the Spirit, **cannot** please God, **cannot** hear Jesus' calling, **cannot** accept Jesus, **cannot** come to Jesus, **cannot** say "Jesus is Lord," and he **cannot** believe the Gospel. That is the situation we are in without Christ. That is why we emphasize the great and irresistible work of God's Holy Spirit.

It is absolutely essential for God's Spirit to succeed in bringing us to God for this one reason: we are totally incapable of doing anything for ourselves to obtain the grace of God, and therefore we are totally dependent on what He does for us. If God's Spirit is not successful, then there is no alternative way to obtain it. It is as if we take a lump of clay and fashion it into the likeness of a person and then say to it, "Jump!" but it remains fixed. We say to it, "Call!" but it remains silent. We say to it, "Move!" but it remains still. That inanimate object cannot obey the commands. It hasn't the power, the will, or the capability to obey. That is how we are in the eyes of God without a new birth, without the life-giving operation of the Holy Spirit. When this really sinks into our hearts and our minds, then we will see how positively wonderful God has been in saving us. All of this is to the glory of God!

How then does God operate? How does regeneration come about? Well, God operates in two ways. He calls us and He "quicken" us. Within the call of God, there is the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. He calls us externally through the Word, and that's why we, as Christians, continue to witness and to preach the Word because God uses His Word to make dead people alive. God also calls us externally through the testimony of others sharing with us how God works in their own lives. Then there are providential circumstances which call us to God, those times when people call out to the Lord in their distress, overwhelmed by the burden of such calamities as accidents and sickness, the horrors of war and even death itself. God uses these times to bring people to their senses and to begin His process of quickening, that is, of making them alive through His Spirit so that they are enabled to call out to Him. But the most important way God calls us externally is by His Word. The author of the second birth is the Holy Spirit, but the instrument used to draw people to Himself, the instrument used to ensure the safe delivery of a new babe in Christ is the Word of God. As we saw in Isaiah 55:8-13, God's Word will not

return to Him empty but will accomplish what God desires and will achieve His purposes. However, not everyone who hears or experiences the external call of God will respond to it for reasons that have already been made clear in the “eight cannot’s.”

God also calls us internally from within His family through the covenant promises, through the Christian home, through the life of the church. Many of us cannot remember when our parents held us up to the Lord and dedicated us to Him, or when they knelt beside our bed and taught us how to pray. Little toddlers just two years of age will sing, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so...” They have been taught and trained in the things of Christ. Within the covenantal context of the Christian home there is no saying when a child will be converted. There will be a time when the child makes a public confession of his or her faith, but very often the child will have been in Christ for some time before. My second youngest was converted at the age of three in the bath. His older brother had just been to an affair at church where he learned how to become a Christian. My wife, who was washing Mike in the tub, asked him if he was a Christian and he said, “No.” So his older brother Paul, aged five, asked him if he wanted to be and Mike said, “Yeah.” He was up to his neck in the sudsy water. “Well,” Paul told him, “shut your eyes and say, ‘Dear Lord Jesus, come into my heart.’” So he repeated, ‘Dear Lord Jesus, come into my heart.’ and Paul said, “Now you can open your eyes. Now you’re a Christian.” You know, he still remembers that and refers back to it as the time he accepted Christ. He’s the only Baptist we’ve got in the house.

Whether we respond to an external call or an internal call, God’s Spirit is effectually calling us from within ourselves. He brings us to the brink of conversion through godly sorrow over our sinful state, a sorrow that will drive us to repentance (2Cor.7:10). God’s Spirit works in us “*to will and to act according to his good purpose*” (Phil.2:13). In John we read about the new birth in response to God’s calling:

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. (Jn.1:12,13)

God is the one who does it. God is the one who chooses. It is not man nor any decision made by man that draws him into God’s favor. It is God who bestows his favor on someone who cannot receive it by any decision of his own. And when God chooses to regenerate you, you then will acknowledge Him, you then will believe in the salvation offered through His son Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he talked with Nicodemus about being born again or being born from above before entering into the kingdom of God.

In the Book of Titus we read,

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Tit.3:3-7)

Ezekiel 36:25-27 is a section we mentioned in passing in chapter four. It shows that God’s ministrations on our behalf produce such a change in our corrupt nature that we are induced to

follow His commands. “I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols [this is justification]. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh [this is regeneration]. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” [this is sanctification]. It is through the Holy Spirit that the dead sinner is given a new heart and a new nature. Nothing in this process of quickening comes from the sinner. Everything comes from God. God knows that there is nothing within us that can cause us to desire to do His will. He therefore gives us the desire to do His will through His Holy Spirit. *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.”* (2Cor.5:17,18)

The Holy Spirit raises the sinner from his spiritual death and makes him alive. *“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it”* (John 5:21). And how does the Son do this? Through the work of the Holy Spirit, because when we are no longer controlled by the sinful nature we are controlled by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in us. *“And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”* (Rom.8:9). So, there is an identity between Christ giving us life and the Spirit giving us life. This identity results from the triune aspect of the Godhead. We can be given life because we have been justified through Christ’s sacrifice. But the effect of this justification on the individual comes about by the operation of the Holy Spirit living in that individual, and revealing to him the true nature of the Father and the Son who also live in him by God’s Spirit. In this way the individual can be remade into the likeness of Christ by becoming complete in Christ, which makes the individual holy and pleasing to God.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, MADE us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. (Eph.2:1-5)

Having been made alive with Christ even while we were still dead in sin, we were enabled to hear God’s Word and accept it, drawn by God Himself to the life which flows to us from His own son and His everlasting Word.

The faith and repentance that result from the quickening process are divine gifts, brought about in the soul through the Holy Spirit. They are not conclusions that we arrive at from hearing the Gospel, or responses that we offer to God to pay off outstanding debts from our past disobedience. God Himself induces them in us. *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Eph.2:8-9). Critics sometimes dispute whether the pronoun ‘this’ refers to faith or to grace. But when we turn to the Book of Corinthians we find that,

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, ...to another faith by the same Spirit (1Cor.12:4,7-9).

This does not mean that some are without faith because they have not been given that faith, or they have been given some other gift instead. Rather there are those who are given a double

portion. Even so, the apportionment, to whatever extent, comes as a gift from God. This is clearly revealed in the book of Acts, 13:48, where Paul and Barnabas have finished making a Gospel presentation to the Jews and now compare for them the effect that the Gospel has had on Gentiles. The question we want to answer is who among those listening will have heard and believed the Word of God? “*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*” (Acts 13:48) So is the act of believing an act spawned by an individual’s conscious will, or is it an act begun by and fulfilled in the Will of God? The Word of God says that we have been chosen by God and drawn to Him by His Spirit, enabled by Him to hear and to believe His Word.

The application of Salvation is all by grace and it is solely accomplished through the almighty power of God.

It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (Rom.9:16-18).

That’s difficult to accept isn’t it? We deal here with an almighty God, who from the goodness of His own heart desires for no other reason than His own pleasure to call you to Himself. In Titus 3:8, Paul encourages Titus to “stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good” and thus bring honor and glory to God. This doctrine should not discourage us, but it should encourage us. We can say to God, “Why me Lord? I know that your power is within me. I have received the Word gladly. You have called me to Yourself. Now I pray that all my days and all my hours, all my will and all my being’s ransomed power shall be Thine dear Lord, shall be Thine.” (Hymns For the Family of God, “All for Jesus,” Mary D. James(Paragon Assoc.’s, Inc., Nashville, 1976) no.459, paraphrased)

I want to be the best possible Christian I can be so that I can do the most good for this world. I want it so that my life may count for Him. I want it so that through my testimony people may listen to the Word of God, and through His Spirit be awakened to life. I want my little ones to be taught about the truth of God in my home. I will know the Word of God because it will be the Word of God that goes out from me and it will not return to God empty. “*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ*” (Phm.6). Let God’s call ring out through all the earth so that those who belong to God may be brought home to Him, led by His faithful servants in Christ.

WILL THE SAINTS REALLY GO MARCHING IN?

You have patiently read the previous five chapters as I have expounded to you, by the Grace of God and the ability that He has given me, the truth of the five cardinal doctrines of the Reformed Faith. I believe that this is a biblically founded faith. To review the points briefly, I have taught you the Sinfulness of Man: the utter impossibility for anyone who is dead in trespasses and sin to “rebirth himself” without the help of God, or to do anything that is pleasing to God. I taught you about Unconditional Election: that God before the foundation of the world, according to his own pleasure and by His own will and power, saw fit to redeem from lost mankind some whom He called to Himself. I taught you about Particular Atonement or “limited atonement”: that Jesus Christ laid down his life for the church, for his sheep, for all those who through faith would call on him. And I taught you in the last chapter about Irresistible Grace: that God does what He wants to do and that there is nothing that can stay His hand, or frustrate His plans and purposes so that He effectually calls to Himself those whom He wishes to call. This final chapter will concern the Perseverance of the Saints, hence my title, “Will the Saints Really Go Marching In?” Is there any assurance in Scripture that the saints will definitely go marching into heaven? I believe that the Bible unconditionally teaches from beginning to end that those who belong to God will walk through those gates by the power of God and by the faith that He gives them.

In His great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can *never* perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are *shielded* by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1Pet.1:3-5).

Let's look a little more closely at the section of Peter's first letter from which this quotation is taken. Who is in this group that is to be shielded by God? Who are the saints who will go marching in? Peter addresses the letter to God's elect who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood (verses 1 and 2). Notice that choosing and the sanctifying by God precede the *purpose* of His choosing, which is obedience to Jesus Christ. The individual cannot be obedient without the cleansing influence of God's Spirit renewing him from within. So, the group is comprised of those who were chosen by God, who are being sanctified by His Spirit, and who are being obedient day by day to the claims of Christ. These are the saints. These are the ones who will march in.

We are not talking about the people we encountered in Matt.7:22 who cried “*Lord, Lord, have we not done this in your name or that in your name.*” Jesus never knew them. It is not the people who boast about the things they do in the name of Christ who enter the gates of heaven, but those who acknowledge what was done for them by God. It is not the people who had a little taste of the life of the Christian who enter the gates of heaven, but those who have their life in Christ. It is not the people who introduce destructive heresies to the church, the false teachers of the faith, who will enter the gates of heaven but those who stand firm in the faith that was first taught them when they accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Hypocrites have an outward appearance of godliness but inwardly deny the power of God. They are not the ones who will enter the gates of heaven, but those who personally testify to the truth and the power of God in their own lives. Hypocrite is the Greek word for an actor, who presents himself to the world as something that he really is not. Therefore, those who are shielded by God are those whom God caused to be born again. Those who are shielded have a living and not a feigned Christian faith

to present to the world. It is their testimony to the power of the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of God Almighty.

Now, why does God shield these people? Why is it so important that God keep his people, that they not fall away and be lost? First, when you are born again to a new and living hope, you have confessed your sins and belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. You have been adopted by God and introduced into His family. Surely, you must know that you are very, very precious in the sight of God. No born again believer should ever have a low opinion of him or herself. You are a child of the King of Kings, a member of His royal household. You are of infinite worth to God because you were not bought with silver or gold but with the precious blood of His son Jesus Christ (1Pet.1:17). All five of the doctrines of grace that have been presented reflect our infinite worth in the eyes of God, a worth that keeps us protected eternally, consecrated to God for His good purposes. All five fit together into one harmonious whole, and this final doctrine of Perseverance is the summation of all the others. It gathers them together to form one great body of Biblical Truth.

It is through the power of God that we were made alive. It is by His own will that we were begotten. It is according to the pleasure of His own heart that we were chosen. It is by the blood of His own son that we were redeemed. Let those who think that a redeemed sinner can again fall into the lap of Satan ask themselves what payment Satan could possibly make to God that would make God forget the payment that has already been made to Him by His own son. There is none! Those who have been purchased individually by Christ belong to him. No other purchase can be made. Satan cannot bribe God to release from His grasp those whom He chose before the foundation of the world. God made a tremendous investment in His elect and that is why He is very emphatic about keeping and shielding them.

We have explored in the other chapters, in other contexts, the foundations of Scripture on which the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints rests. But let's restate a few to refresh our memory. In John we read,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose NONE of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day

(Jn.6:37-39).

And in John 10:27-29 we read a similar promise,

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall *never* perish; *no one* can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul tells us that he is confident of one thing: "*that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" (Phil.1:6). Paul also tells us, "*He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1Cor.1:8).

And what effect did Christ's sacrifice on the cross have on us that relates to our ability to persevere? Since Christ sat down at the right hand of God, "*he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*" (Heb.10:13,14). His sacrifice led to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us who will make

us holy through an ongoing sanctification by the power of God. And the indwelling power of God's Spirit ensures that we will overcome the world, "*for everyone born of God overcomes the world*" (1Jn.5:4). Having overcome the world, in fact, having been set apart from the world (Jn.17:14), there is no possibility that we can again become part of it but only that by being tested in the domain of Satan we can become stronger in Christ. "*Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him*" (James 1:12). Notice James does not say that if we stand the test we will receive the crown, but when we stand the test. James is absolutely confident of our strength in Christ to withstand any test. The writer of Hebrews echoes this same belief when he writes,

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined ..., then you are illegitimate children and not sons...God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness..It produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Heb.12:7-8,10-11).

Peter also tells us that the world cannot lure us back again but can only strengthen us in Christ:

The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (1Pet.5:10).

And again in Romans, Paul writes,

If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Rom.8:31,35,37).

What a wonderful thing to know, that when we know the Lord Jesus Christ we are not saved today and lost tomorrow! We are not in the hands of God today and in the hands of Satan tomorrow. We are kept and shielded until the day of Jesus Christ. Now we must ask ourselves, "*How are we to be kept and shielded until the day of Jesus Christ?*" Let's return to first Peter. The promised inheritance is kept in heaven for those who "*through faith are shielded by God's power*" (1Pet.1:4-5). We are kept in the power of God through *faith*. We are not zombies or robots or automatons who have been programmed to perform in a certain way. Rather God has given us an active and living faith. We put this faith into operation to maintain ourselves as those who belong to him. We don't talk about the preservation of the saints, although God does preserve us. But we are not preserved like peaches that are kept in an airtight container, or like some lab specimen that is kept in formaldehyde. These are sheltered from the air and from decay by removing them from anything that might contaminate them.

When Christ prayed for us, he did not pray that we would be removed from the contamination of the world, but that we would be protected from the evil one (John 17:15). That is why we do not talk about preservation, but about perseverance. We remain in the world. This means that in the midst of sin, temptation, hardship, sickness, death, frustration, worry, fear, calamity, pettiness, lovelessness, wars, and rumors of wars, we are preserved by the mighty and powerful hand of God. Through it all, we can stand victorious. Therefore, Paul says, "*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes*" (Eph.6:11). That means that if I wear the armor of God I can stand, I can be counted on. I am wearing the uniform of God's army. I am equipped to fight His cause. And when the day of evil comes, I can stand my ground, and after I have done everything, I will still be able to stand and stand firm, my shield of faith

intact. We sing, “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day*” (2Tim.1:12, KJV).

Some people have asked me what the effect would be if through some physical ailment, like hardening of the arteries or stroke, the mind no longer functioned normally and an individual thereby became incapable of continuing in his faith. My wife and I came out of a religious organization that believed that continuing in a state of salvation depends on the individual’s continued obedience and faith in Jesus Christ. Each sin leads to a loss of salvation that must be recovered each time. That is bordering on blasphemy! Because it produces a terrible situation in which faith is necessarily insecure, in which by some accident or illness I may be mentally deranged or incapacitated to such an extent that I cannot be obedient and must fall into damnation because of that incapacity to obey. What would happen to those in concentration camps who suffer for the Gospel’s sake? What would happen to those who are tortured and forced to do hard labor in mines in Siberia? What would happen to those who have been persecuted for years and years, until the weak human frame and weak human mind break and collapse? The person has perhaps lost his senses, even his ability to pray. The Bible tells us that our salvation is more secure than the stability of our minds. We are kept in the hand of God, shielded by God through faith.

We put our faith to work, and we put it to work through the means that God has established. God has established means whereby we are built up. We must read the Word of God. We must worship God’s holy name. We must praise the majesty of God. We must pray for forgiveness and strengthening and obedience to the will of God. We must rely on God and not on ourselves, because God is the one who truly knows what is best for us. Jesus came to Peter one day and told him, “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers*” (Luke 22:31-32). Peter’s reaction was not what it should have been. He should have fallen on his knees and said, “Thank you Lord! You know what evil forces are doing in the world while I do not. Thank you for praying for me.”

But instead Peter said that he would be right behind Jesus even to the point of death. It was then that Jesus told him of the three denials to come. Jesus had not prayed that Peter would uphold him. Rather he prayed that, having failed to openly declare his relationship with Christ, Peter would not be so ashamed that he would abandon his faith. With his faith intact Peter would return to Christ, stronger than before and able to encourage the others to stand firm. If Peter for one moment had thought that there would be no forgiveness, that his salvation in Christ had been lost, how could he have maintained his faith?

It was not his strict adherence to obedience that saved him, but his strict adherence to his faith in Christ. That is why Jesus prayed for Peter’s faith. That is also why the writer of Hebrews in the 11th chapter, and Paul in the 4th chapter of Romans, emphasize repeatedly that faith was accounted to the men of God as righteousness. Faith maintains our salvation and faith is a gift from God, kept alive and active by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given to those who belong to God as a deposit *guaranteeing* what is to come, guaranteeing our inheritance (2Cor.1:22,5:5; Eph.1:14). And He guarantees that inheritance by moving us to follow God’s decrees and to keep his laws, as we saw in Ezekiel 36:27. We put our faith to work for Christ, because faith without works is dead (James 2:17), and men without faith are dead as well. We declare our life in Christ by what we do in the world.

What difference does all this make to us in our day to day lives as Christians? Why should we care how God goes about bringing us to Him. Why should we care about these five doctrines of grace? Are they good only for discussions at a party to keep us entertained, or worse yet, do they just lead us into controversy without any useful purpose? If God did for us what the Bible says He did for us, if these doctrines clearly lay out that Biblical truth, if we are really nothing without God, if we are merely lumps of clay unable to respond, then surely we owe everything to God. We should be climbing over each other to learn more, to do more, to teach more, to be more for God. In the workplace, we can be told what to do and we obey without question. But in the church, we need to be begged to volunteer to do the work of God. Perhaps it is because we have not really addressed how we have come to be in God's family. We have not absorbed the doctrines of grace into our hearts and minds. We have not fully realized the hopeless state we were in before God's quickening hand touched us and drew us to Him. We seem to be willing to do more for money than for Jesus. For money, we are willing to be told what to do. There is something wrong, isn't there? Are we still so proud that we think we owe God nothing? "*Suppose one of you had a servant...would he thank the servant because he was told to do? So you also when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'*" (Luke 17:7,9-10). Perhaps we appreciate what God has done only on the surface, while deep down we don't take it too seriously.

A man was standing on the gallows awaiting his execution for a vile crime. The noose, already prepared, was lifted to his head. A priest standing behind him was reading from a book of prayers, although the man to be hung was himself an atheist and brutal by nature. The criminal turned around to the priest and asked him what he was reading and the priest replied, "I am giving you some consolation of religion." The man told him to shut up. He said, "If I really believed that God cares for people, if I believed that Jesus died on the cross for me, if I believed that there is an eternal life, I would crawl all over England on broken glass to let people know that there is a way of salvation. Your problem priest is that you don't really believe it yourself." I pray to God that we will become a team of people who are really concerned for the truth of the Gospel ourselves. That way we understand our commitment to Christ, our obligation to others to preach the truth of God's word, and the need to present the truth of what God has done for us. "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1Jn.4:10).

George Matheson was engaged to a beautiful girl, but one day he noticed that his eyesight was failing. Soon it was gone completely and when she discovered that he was blind, the girl that he was to marry broke off the engagement. There he was, the picture of the beautiful woman he wanted to be his wife and the mother of his children still fresh in his mind. But now, because of his blindness, his hopes and dreams had been dashed to pieces. Broken-hearted and sobbing, crying over the love that had disappeared, he took his pen and wrote this hymn: "Oh love that will *not* let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean's depths its flow may richer, fuller be." (Hymns For the Family of God, [Paragon Assoc.'s, Inc., Nashville, 1976] "Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go," Geo. Matheson, no.404).

There are people in this world who have no idea what it is like to have love that will never let them go. It's up to us to give them the message that God has entrusted to giving us a "ministry of reconciliation" (2Cor.5:18). It's up to us to begin sharing our faith, declaring the great truth of the Gospel to those who are still lost. And as God in his grace enables us to persevere, we pray that we may be used by God to bring His people back to Him.